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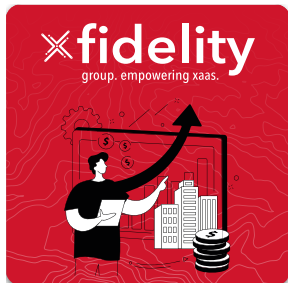


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This month's movers and shakers



Industry cohort takes green lead

A GROUP of major industry players have joined forces with a Government advisory body to tackle Scope 3 challenges and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from within the connectivity supply chain.

SPECIAL REPORT

The Digital Connectivity Forum (DCF) and a group of connectivity providers are working together via the DCF's Climate & Sustainability Work Group (CSWG) following a meeting of minds that identified six priority areas encompassing elements of the value chain where the telco industry can collectively make the greatest impact.

These include Scope 3 categories 1 and 2 (purchased goods

and services and capital goods), and Scope 3 categories 11 and 13 (end-of-use of sold products and downstream leased assets).

The 12 signatories (listed on page 3) aim to build an industry consensus on these key areas with specific proposals to drive positive action ahead of COP28.

Will Ennett (pictured above), CSWG Chair and Head of Sustainability, TalkTalk, stated: "We've identified an opportunity for a body that is specific to telecoms in the UK and Irish

markets to collaborate on reducing the environmental impact of our industry.

"Individual companies within the telecoms sector have long-established net zero commitments at a company level, however the UK telecoms industry is a complex and inter-linked ecosystem.

"It is therefore essential that the sector works together to address these challenges and achieves industry-wide transformation." **Continued on page 3**

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

I CLEARLY remember the days when people who voiced concerns about the environment were seen as strange and living on the edge of what's normal thinking. But now we know that those environmentalists, and the private talks the then Prince

Charles held with potatoes on remote Scottish Islands, were in fact the way forward – the truth and reality. He'd opened a dialogue with the natural world and today we all realise that we are living on an overheating planet that is out of control because the vast majority of us didn't listen to the warnings put forward by the prophetic 'weirdos'.

It is mind-boggling, near impossible, to reconcile just how far those green thinkers and environmental champions were ridiculed and just how right they were.

Today, our fragile Pale Blue Dot has been severely put out of joint and environmental tragedies of all kinds from across the globe are daily news whatever the time of year. It is no longer a stretch to imagine a small sea level rise flooding parts of the UK many miles inland. Think about the impact and when that might become a headline.

These are known facts. But not so well understood is how long it will take to restore the planet's natural dynamic equilibrium and prevent the Pale Blue Dot from looking more like Mars. We can only hope that our Earth will be responsive to remedial measures once they reach a critical watershed.

Therefore it is encouraging to see business leaders from major telcos in the channel taking determined steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from their supply chains (see page one and opposite) working with the Government and Ofcom. This will be a significant boost for reseller partners as they themselves will be more able to assess and reduce their own carbon emissions.

And of course, the climate crisis and environmental predicament may seem more personal if next time you handle a humble earthy potato – you lend an ear.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor



Stephen Warburton

Continued from page 1

THE group will meet four more times before the end of COP28 and intends to collaborate with other telecoms groupings and bodies that prioritise action on climate change.

The meeting that kick-started this trail-blazing green initiative was convened by Ofcom and Accenture in May this year. Ed Leighton, Director of Strategy & Policy, Ofcom, stated: "Better understanding the supply chain is as critical for sustainability as it is for security, so this is the right focus."

Toby Siddall, Sustainability Lead, Accenture UK & Ireland, commented: "We will continue to support the members of the DCF with insights on embedding sustainability as a core objective in the communications industry."

Members of the green action group that have signed up to the statement of commitment are: BT, Energy Systems Catapult, Cellnex, CityFibre, Hyperoptic, Openreach, Sky, TalkTalk, techUK, Three, Virgin Media O2, and Zen.

Stephen Warburton, MD for Consumer and Partner Divisions at Zen, stated: "It's great to see our industry take positive steps towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions, not just directly but also throughout the supply chain.

"Significant change can only come if we do things at scale, so while we might be competitors on one front, when it comes to the planet we need to leave competing priorities behind."

The CSWG began life in January 2023 with a mission to bring about UK telecoms collaboration and accelerate the sector's journey towards net zero. The CSWG will collaborate, source evidence and provide recommendations to Government, regulators and the industry via the DCF executive. The working group's first priority is to develop a net zero action list for the UK telecoms sector focusing on three main themes – e-waste, supply chain and operational efficiency.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

OWNER managed comms and IT services provider BDR Group has snapped up Colchester-based reseller Loop Voice and Data (Wireless Telecom) which has a recurring revenue rate of over 90%. BDR MD Malek Rahim said: "Wireless provides a huge white space within its customer base where BDR can promote additional IT and cloud products and services. Wireless is also strategic as it joins our current business hub in Colchester."

AIR IT has extended its reach in Yorkshire and the north east with the acquisition of Wetherby-based IT service provider Vital Technology Group. Air IT now employs almost 500 people and operates across eight regional UK offices serving over 2,300 clients. The transaction also boosts Air IT's Microsoft cloud solution play, with both companies holding Microsoft Gold Partner Status.

CROFT'S MSP arm has added muscle following the acquisition of Boldfield Computing, which provides IT support and cloud services out of offices in Cambridge, Peterborough and London. Boldfield Computing's client base has a broad scope, ranging from small businesses to large corporations.



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NEWS ROUNDUP

WITH eight acquisitions in 12 months under its belt Flotek is set to build on the consolidation of these deals with a renewed focus on its buy and build strategy. CEO Jay Ball attributes the group's readiness for its next growth phase to the quick integration of acquired businesses across multiple sectors (including IT, comms and data infrastructure), largely through culture alignment. "Our focus when approaching potential targets has always been to create win-win deal structures," he commented. "By establishing trust with sellers from day one we facilitate smoother and more successful integration processes."

NODE4'S acquisition of ThreeTwoFour strengthens its cybersecurity play and expands its presence in the finance and banking sector, as well as boosting Node4's credentials in public sector and government frameworks for cybersecurity solutions. ThreeTwoFour in particular brings security and transformation capabilities for enterprise level clients, with its M&A Cyber Due Diligence process being a key addition to Node4's portfolio. The acquisition is Node4's third in 18 months and follows the Risual and Tisski transactions.

Midwich witnesses strong H1

IN AN UPDATE for the six months ended 30th June 2023 Midwich Group reported strong H1 2023 trading with record first half revenues and adjusted profit before tax.

Revenue is expected to exceed £610m, an increase of over 7.5% versus H1 2022, with overall gross margin of circa 16.3% (up from the 14.9% posted in H1 2022).

Adjusted profit before tax for H1 2023 is expected to be over £21.5m compared to £19.2m in the first half of 2022, an increase of over 14%.

Revenue in the UK and Ireland was marginally below H1 2022, but strong gross margins and overheads management led to an increase in operating profits in the region.

Trading in EMEA was stronger with revenue around 14% higher than H1 2022.

Adjusted net debt increased by around £7m from the prior year end to £103m mainly as a result of M&A spend.

The Midwich board expects the momentum seen in H1 2023 to continue throughout the rest of the year.

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Redsquid in double deal



Sohlin Raithatha and COO Vince Mignacca

REDSQUID'S credentials in the education and public sector have been boosted by the acquisitions of MSP Covue and comms provider Connect2.

The transactions follow a funding deal with Triple Point that sees Redsquid co-founders CEO Sohlin Raithatha and COO Vince Mignacca remain sole shareholders of the business they established 17 years ago.

Raithatha stated: "The acquisition of Covue and Connect2 strengthens our market presence and expands our reach in crucial areas of the education sector through Covue's proprietary technologies and network.

"We've had a close relationship with Connect2 for years and followed its growth journey. Redsquid will introduce its technology portfolio into Connect2's customer organisations and give them one unified

partner to work with through the digital transformation."

Raithatha also noted that additional transactions will be completed as he seeks to scale the business across the UK.

See page 16 for the full story

NEWS ROUNDUP

ADVANTECH plans to create up to 50 new roles during the coming 24 months, doubling its current workforce. The positions include additional electricians and data cabling engineers together with project engineers and operational and support staff. The move comes as orders worth more than £12m have been won for the 2023 financial year. The company expects to see sales revenue increase to £10m next year and continue growing during the coming three years. Dave O'Connell, Operations and Finance Director (and co-founder), said: "We are investing to support growth and increase our footprint through additional resources and skills."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

BT GROUP has kicked off a succession process following CEO Philip Jansen's intention to step down at some point over the coming 12 months. Chairman Adam Crozier said: "All appropriate candidates are being considered and we expect to update the market on progress over the course of the summer."

BUILDING on its Ethernet relationship with CityFibre, Giacom has added the altnet's FTTP services to its broadband portfolio, enabling partners to offer full fibre in areas outside of the Openreach network. Giacom CEO Terry O'Brien said: "CityFibre FTTP offers symmetrical bandwidth which will help partners to develop business opportunities and differentiate in the market."

MDEE'S investment in additional business development staff has paid off with a 32% increase in connections over the past six months versus the same period in 2022. The mobile airtime and services distributor's headcount has grown by 18%, doubling staff numbers in the BT Business Manager and Sales Support teams. Mdee has operated in the mobile arena for over 35 years and is part owned by BT/EE.

IT arm set up by Bluecube

COMMS provider Bluecube has advanced its evolution as a digital MSP with the launch of managed IT services.

The Midlands-based company, which began life in 2008, recently changed its name from Bluecube Telecommunications to Bluecube Cloud Services to reflect its development.

"There have always been parallels between what a comms provider and an IT company do for their customers," said MD Paul Reames.

"Most of the time this just led to confusion for the client as they weren't sure who to contact when there were problems.

"We did some research within our own customer base and it became apparent that they wanted one technology partner rather than getting their communication and IT services from multiple carriers.

"Once we made the decision to launch managed IT services and support it was about getting in the right people. It was important to launch with a strong proposition as we worked hard to gain our reputation over a decade and a half and we weren't taking any chances."

The IT services proposition includes IT support and



Paul Reames

managed IT services, cloud computing solutions, network support and performance monitoring, security, email, backups and recovery solutions.

"We sold our first cloud services back in 2014," added Reames. "Expanding our team and offering high level IT and communications services and support seemed like a no brainer when we sat down and evaluated it.

"Our customers wanted a single support team for technology services and now we can guide them through the digital transformation that inevitably lies ahead of us all."

See page 14

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Distributor acquired by Chiltern

CHILTERN Capital's acquisition of Intec Microsystems has put the IT distributor on track to hit £100m-plus revenue within 12 months. The growth plan will be led by incoming Exec' Chairman Alan Cantwell; and a key element of his strategy is to boost the current 2,500 customer base by targeting the 8,000 VARs operating in the UK.

"Our management team and staff have the knowledge and expertise for growth," he stated. "We'll fill any gaps by recruiting more expertise and with the investment we can be more competitive in the market."

The business will continue to be run by directors Andy Russell, Ian Whatton, John Lester and Stuart Hall.

Chiltern Capital Investment Director Joe Bennett added: "Intec Microsystems has delivered impressive growth and the combination of the management team supported by Alan's experience positions the business well for the future."

Cantwell, who's worked in the IT distribution channel for more than 40 years, commented: "We don't want to be the best kept secret any more. We're moving up the value chain and our goal is to deliver growth."

NEWS ROUNDUP

THE monetisation of FullFibre's wholesale fibre network is to be underpinned by Strategic Imperatives' Elevate billing platform which streamlines and automates billing processes, enhances revenue assurance and manages subscriptions. FullFibre Chief Sales Officer James Warner said: "Selecting the right billing and monetisation partner is crucial. The Elevate platform is a key part of our systems strategy."

VECTOR Capital has completed its acquisition of Riverbed Technology and instated Dave Donatelli as CEO. He previously served as Executive VP of the Cloud Business Group at Oracle.

SPITFIRE Network Services' core network is to interconnect with BT's EE 4G and 5G Radio Access Network following an MVNO agreement. Spitfire MD Harry Bowlby said: "Adding this to our service offering completes the jigsaw by enabling our customers and partners to access one unified network solution." Spitfire has worked with BT Wholesale for more than 20 years and holds Elite Partner status.

WESTON-super-Mare located First Class Comms is claiming a milestone having achieved B Corp status. "Staff spent the past year on a journey towards the certification which assesses the governance, employment standards, community outreach, environmental values and customer service levels of the business," said MD Mark Burland. "Fortunately, we had already incorporated many of the values into our practices, particularly in terms of staff management and customer services. The challenge for a small company like ours is to formalise those values into coherent policies that can then be assessed."

Industry vets kick off buy-and-build

AN IT managed services buy-and-build platform has been launched by Alex Heslip and Chris Earle (ex-Group Sales Director and CEO of Verastar) in partnership with Independence Capital, kicking off with the acquisition of Microsoft partner RISC IT Solutions and its 750 client base.

The group, which carries forward the RISC IT name, will be headed up by Heslip as CEO with Earle taking a non-exec Chairman role. The pair scaled Verastar from £16m EBITDA to



Alex Heslip

£40m in under 10 years before exiting via a secondary buy-out led by Vitruvian at a valuation of over £430m.

Heslip stated: "When we left Verastar we spent a period

of time assessing the market and identified an opportunity to build an alternative service provider that specialises specifically in SME businesses.

"Our acquisition of RISC IT forms the bedrock from which the group will accelerate."

RISC IT founder Paul Roberts and co-owner Joanna Stewart exit the business but remain as founding shareholders in the group.

Risc IT MD Jeremy Keane and Business Development Director Mark Lawton remain

in post and are also founding group shareholders.

"This is less of an acquisition in the traditional sense and more a partnership focused on future growth plans," commented Heslip.

Independence Capital MD Max Ward added: "Alex and Chris have a proven playbook and we have constructed a structure that enables autonomy and incentivises.

"With a full M&A pipeline already built we will soon report on additional deals."



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Connexin on V-Hub shows upskill drive IT insight gap



Adam Rhodes and Heidi Greaves

HULL-based Connexin has acquired Encompass Training as part of its bid to ‘upskill the nation’s workforce’.

The deal sees Encompass merge with Connexin Academy – Connexin’s training and development arm – adding 30 staff and extra courses, bootcamps and apprenticeships.

The venture aims to boost employment opportunities for over 600 learners each year.

Connexin Academy was launched in 2021 to boost digital skills and enhance employability for the community.

The Academy provides a number of development programmes on digital and IT skills alongside bootcamps in advanced fibre engineering.

Encompass was founded in 2009 and is a Centre of

Excellence with The Leadership Pipeline Institute (LPI). A number of Fortune 500 companies work with Encompass and LPI and adopted its leadership model for selecting and developing leaders across all levels.

Connexin Academy MD Heidi Greaves said: “Connexin Academy shares the same values as Encompass for transforming lives through learning.

“This alignment in ethos and culture will bring benefits not just to learners but to employers across the region.”

Adam Rhodes, Director of Commercial Operations, Encompass, said: “Digital skills are vital in today’s economy and keep our businesses thriving.”

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THE growing popularity of Vodafone Business’s V-Hub exposes a significant knowledge gap among SMEs keen to learn about digital technology.

V-Hub was launched as a free service in July 2020 to help SMEs and SoHos understand the evolving digital landscape and has more than five million users across 14 European and African countries.

Amanda Jobbins, Chief Marketing Officer & Director of Strategic Partners at Vodafone Business, commented: “Many SMEs are starved of personalised digital advice and services and by 2025 we aim to support seven million users.

“V-Hub aims to make a difference to the SMEs that comprise 90% of all businesses,

and employ between two thirds and 90% of workers in Europe, Egypt and South Africa where the service is available.”

In a service update Vodafone Business stated that V-Hub now gives every user access to a bespoke action plan and ongoing one-to-one advice at no extra cost.

During the first three months of 2023 more than 35% of SMEs and SoHos returned to the site. Statistics about their motivations show clear differences according to country. For example, in Germany and the Netherlands broadband speeds and 5G are topical. On the other hand, UK firms want to know more about how digital tools can help them manage the rising cost of living.



Amanda Jobbins

NEWS ROUNDUP

MICROSOFT partners who violate their contracts or break the Partner Code of Conduct are to face tougher sanctions including the loss of incentives, being forced to repay incentives or having to undergo remedial training. In a statement the company said that repeat offenders may be forced to participate in the Partner Accountability and Remediation programme or face possible expulsion from Microsoft’s partner programmes.

THE philanthropic arm of Focus Group, known as Focus Foundation, has released details of its biggest cross-country event so far, with its supporters set to skydive in three locations (Perthshire, Lancashire and Wiltshire) this autumn. The jumps aim to raise funds for grass roots charities covering three main categories – underprivileged children and young people, mental health initiatives and charitable projects. “Focus staff consistently show their commitment to engaging with our charitable foundation, but I’m blown away by just how many people are willing to throw themselves out of a plane to support our work,” commented Chris Goodman, co-founder of Focus Foundation and Focus Group.

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CloudClevr mobilises gro

MSP CloudClevr launched in November last year backed by a £50 million investment from the Rigby Group. Here, CEO Steve Harris provides a business update and strategic overview following the acquisition of NGC in June, including plans to become a £50 million-plus group within three years.

Harris' credentials as a growth orientated business leader are well known having established Siphon Networks in 2009 and exiting to Nuvias (Rigby Group) in 2016. He stayed on to lead the business post-transaction through a period of rapid growth and left in April 2021. "Siphon was a key technology enabler in the early years of cloud communications and it's great to continue the journey in this high growth market and reunite with Rigby Group," stated Harris.

Immediately after the launch of CloudClevr Harris set about building the group leadership team and assessing target acquisitions that will provide a springboard for his ambitious expansion plan. "The comms channel M&A market is still active and there are businesses for sale, but we are taking our time to find the right fit for where we want to take

CloudClevr," commented Harris. "The fit will be critical to us. This is about bringing together the right businesses for high organic growth."

Key acquisition

In June CloudClevr invested significantly in NGC Networks to kick-start a series of strategic deals. It will support NGC with an expanded cloud-based proposition, investment in sales and marketing and shared services. "NGC is one of a number of businesses that we were in discussions with and was the first across the line," stated Harris. "With a solid base NGC will be our northern regional hub to support expansion. CloudClevr will provide an additional layer of experience, capabilities and firepower that will help NGC accelerate growth."

Harris noted that his strategy is not driven by cost synergies in these initial acquisitions. "We will invest in businesses



Steve Harris

We have an ambitious growth target to exceed £50 million revenues in three years. By then we expect to be fully established in the UK and exploring new opportunities in Europe

that show deep capabilities and leadership in cloud, communications and IT, and we will then leverage these across the group," he added. "We expect to close another two or three acquisitions by the end of 2023 and will continue to grow through acquisition and organically in 2024."

While pursuing this acquisition strategy

CloudClevr has at the same time been scoping and building its software platform. "It's time to make technology smarter so we are creating a platform that provides measurable business value to customers," added Harris. "There's an insatiable appetite for better insight and data from our customers. They will be able to easily manage their technology estate, and track and adapt

to key performance metrics. Using our insights they can make informed decisions quickly, increase productivity and maximise the return on their technology investments. As we grow the group company we will launch our digital platform and systems and demonstrate our thought leadership in the converging marketplace. The reaction from key vendor partners has been positive



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and we are confident we will outperform the market."

Harris noted that CloudClevr's software will be pivotal and that the investment will amount to several million pounds in order to give customers the right data insights to ensure a positive RoI. "The platform will enable companies to truly drive adoption and productivity," added Harris. "We play in both a booming and converging market with many players and it is highly competitive. We need to be different and will always invest to provide our companies with the firepower to execute on our plans."

Growth forecast

By the end of this year Harris forecasts revenue run rate of at least £20 million and a 120 headcount. "We expect to achieve double digit organic growth in 2024 and add further acquisitions to take us above £35 million revenues and over 200 people," he added. "We have an ambitious growth target to exceed £50 million revenues in three years. By then we expect to be fully established in the UK and exploring new opportunities in Europe."

Harris says CloudClevr's biggest opportunity is to leverage the skills across the group and maximise the revenue potential of installed bases within acquired businesses. "Many of these customers need support in moving to the cloud and in digital transformation," he said. "We will also invest in organic growth through new business acquisition and will be highly focused on building our team in this area."

Key to CloudClevr's success will be Harris' proven

leadership approach. For example, he always sets transparent objectives that are cascaded throughout the company. "I'm a big fan of Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) and my experience is that the most capable leaders embrace these and love the accountability and sense of direction," he added. "This enables the team to be focused on what's important and to deliver results. I also believe that the thirst for thought leadership and bringing expertise needs to be a major motivation for every one of us at CloudClevr."

"I have always looked to build long standing relationships with customers, partners and staff. Strong relationships through delivering great service will deliver high growth. That's our objective over the next few years. Being a good corporate citizen with meaningful ESG credentials is also a growing priority. We are committed to taking a responsible approach to everything we do."

Ultimately, Harris thrives when part of a team of people who want to grow – and he's worked in high growth businesses during his whole career. "I've always looked to create a circular model where people work collectively to grow the business – and they grow personally and professionally too," he commented. "I've seen some truly great people in previous businesses go on to achieve incredible things and it's satisfying to have been part of their journey. You are never too old to learn new things and I'm as determined as ever to drive this period of growth at CloudClevr."

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FuseGenie launch boosts automation and API integration

Software integration and automation platform provider FuseGenie has launched to help the UK ICT channel meet the challenges and opportunities of integration and automation across emerging Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) and application portfolios. FuseGenie is the new venture and brainchild of Managing Director Vincent Disneur and follows his successful leadership and development of Union Street Technologies.



Vincent Disneur

"Today, every business depends on software to run, improve and grow," he stated. "Sales, logistics, finance, marketing, HR, all use software to achieve their goals, increasingly via the fast growing SaaS model. In this fast moving, interconnected world there is high demand for applications to integrate with each other, across teams and between businesses. When software is better integrated it speeds innovation, accelerates time to revenue for new products, improves the customer experience and reduces latency in business processes. These are the goals that FuseGenie is being launched to address."

Disneur also noted that modern business partnerships are forged digitally and whether they already have an API strategy or are just starting an integration journey for better partnerships, FuseGenie aims to help channel businesses run better,

grow their partner network faster and deliver more value. "For SaaS, software, platform and Marketplace businesses, getting to scale is crucial," added Disneur. "The FuseGenie platform and rapid delivery model integrates the widest range of apps, workflows and partners to foster growth. Furthermore, the technology stack that VARs and MSPs have to operate is ever-wider and increasingly software-centric. FuseGenie allows them to take control and optimise the value of customer relationships."

Opportunities

Disneur pointed out that FuseGenie was formed in response to his personal experience of leading one of the UK's most successful software and channel businesses at Union Street. "I see the proliferation of SaaS offering significant opportunities for the channel to develop new value propositions, partnerships and revenue streams through better, more integrated

experiences," he added. "But software integration is hard and the market knows it. The need for speed, along with overstretched developers and new competitors, all make this a major challenge.

"The business leaders I speak with are asking us to make billing platforms integrate seamlessly with accounting apps, or CRM solutions trigger collaboration workflows in their teams, or feed business intelligence solutions from customer facing apps. The list is endless – and we are only at the start."

The FuseGenie platform is no-code, has 100-plus off-the-shelf connectors and a visual integration workbench, reducing development resources and time needed to meet the challenges and opportunities of software integration. FuseGenie also supports in-platform Marketplaces allowing partners to monetise and track the performance of their integration portfolio. ■



Keith Mabbutt and Kelly Carver

Calling all footballers!

If you can put together a five-a-side football team, this is your chance to play in the biggest tournament the ICT industry has ever seen!

The Big Goal is an exciting new channel initiative that will give industry resellers the chance to compete in regional five-a-side football tournaments to take place at Premier League and EFL venues nationwide. This will culminate in a national finals day to be staged at St George's Park, the iconic home of England football, next summer.

Importantly, every channel team that commits to paying the tournament entry fee will also become a sponsor of a Street Soccer Foundation Academy within their area. This will give up to 10 vulnerable young people the chance to learn valuable skills and build confidence in a football-based environment. At the end of the programme, sponsoring companies can then offer opportunities to their academy members to gain further experience within a place of work.

With the support of Giacom as main sponsor, The Big Goal is all hinged on the sterling work being carried out by visionary ex-footballer

Keith Mabbutt who successfully founded and launched The Street Soccer Foundation (SSF) in 2015. This inspirational organisation seeks out young people who have lost their way in life. During their time at the SSF academies, through workshops they learn discipline, essential life skills and improve their health and wellbeing by playing football.

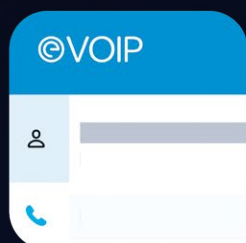
Kelly Carver, Head of Engagement at headline sponsor Giacom, said: "This is an amazing initiative to bring the channel together on a collective goal. I get goosebumps when I think about the positive impact this will have."

Further details will be announced at the official launch of The Big Goal at St George's Park, the home of England football, on October 4th. This is a must attend event for industry leaders keen to inspire their teams and build something very special in their community. ■

Register at www.giacom.com/events/the-big-goal without delay as places will be limited.



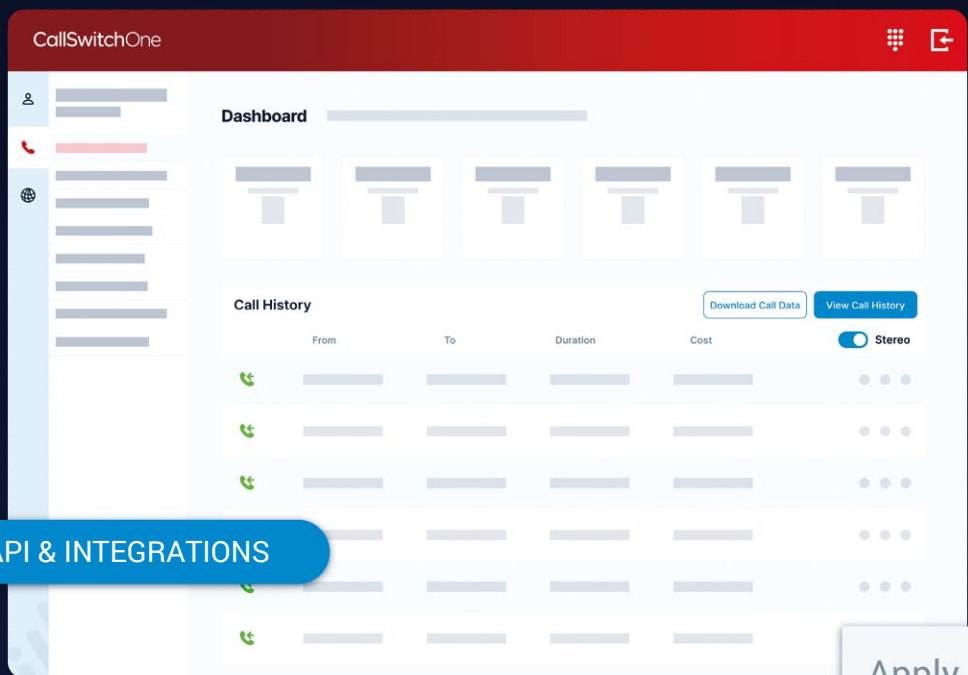
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Five minutes with...

Paul Reames, Managing Director, Bluecube

Embracing the full suite of IT services can bring many benefits to resellers – from upselling existing customer bases to winning new deals with far greater value – and according to Bluecube Managing Director Paul Reames his launch of an IT services division creates a true business partner that plays a key role in helping organisations achieve their goals. So let's spend five minutes finding out more about Bluecube's evolution into a digital MSP.



Paul Reames

What got you into comms and IT?
I started working for an independent service provider called Project Telecom back in 1999. It sold to Vodafone a few years later and I spent several years in Vodafone's sales team before moving to T-Mobile in 2007. This experience inspired me to start up my own business and Bluecube was established in 2008 to provide independent advice and management of mobile services. Bluecube has evolved from a mobile provider to an ICT managed service provider during those 15 years. Our end game is to become a technology partner that can provide and manage all SME tech requirements.

What have been the main turning points?
Bluecube started selling hosted telephony in 2013 – that was a huge turning point. We realised that on-premise equipment wasn't the way we would grow and succeed so moved to a cloud model. About 18

months ago we decided that, based on feedback from customers, we would broaden our proposition to include managed IT services and support. We then spent time building a team and infrastructure to deliver those new solutions. Now we receive strong feedback from customers using the full suite of services.

What is your growth outlook?
Bluecube's strength has always been in identifying partners that offer our clients a good balance of resilience and price. And having analysed our existing base we expect a 150 per cent increase in turnover before the end of 2025 – not taking into account writing new business. We have an exciting opportunity to grow.

What are your immediate priorities?
To seek out new talent and grow our team. Recruiting good people is an ongoing challenge but we are slowly winning the battle. Also,

security within our own business and protecting our clients is the number one steer around the products we roll out to our customer base. We're constantly encouraging our clients to work with us on reviewing the security policies they have. Protect, detect and contain is becoming a mantra at Bluecube and something we are constantly challenging our clients to think about.

What market trends interest you most?
Like everyone, we're keeping a close eye on AI and how we can utilise that internally to improve our own efficiency. Also, native mobile UC solutions are very much on our radar and under review.

What is your biggest opportunity?
Our diversity: We are already in a position to offer UK businesses most of the tools their people need to do their job. But we want to develop our product suite to an even broader range

of managed technologies. We have a fluid plan that is constantly reviewed as technology and the economic environment that we operate in changes. Building a great team is super-important to achieving our goals.

What are today's leadership priorities?
My priority as a leader is ensuring that as we grow we don't lose that 'in this together' attitude. We go the extra mile for each other and for our customers, that's what makes us successful.

Where do you see Bluecube in three years time?
Our focus will be as much on developing IT services throughout our existing customer base as it is about new business. We don't think it's unreasonable to expect a 200 per cent growth in sales over the next 36 months.

What is your biggest career achievement?
Bluecube: We've built an organisation that supports hundreds of businesses

across the country and has a growing team. Everything before Bluecube now feels like training for the main event.

What would you have done differently with the benefit of hindsight?
I'd have listened only to the positive people around me. Negativity can get inside your head and hinder your performance. I stopped letting that happen a long time ago.

What industry change do you most want to see?
I'm proud of our sector but still look around events I attend and think to myself that we need more women in the industry.

Top tip for resellers
The market is constantly changing and any smart technology company needs to stay agile and change with demand. We are about to see the impact of AI and I would suggest we all carefully embrace its power to create positive change. ■



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Redsquid's double deal

Redsquid's intent to hit circa £50 million revenue and £10 million EBITDA within three years has been strengthened by the acquisitions of Covue and Connect2, a double deal that signals much bigger things to come, according to CEO Sohini Raithatha.

Having secured a facility with investor Triple Point, Borehamwood-based Redsquid wasted no time in acquiring two right-fit businesses that bolster its financial position, increase its regional footprint and elevate the group's standing as a single point of contact to facilitate digital transformations. The deals also adds 250 customers, 12 new heads and boosts group revenues to almost £10 million with £2 million EBITDA. "By completing two acquisitions at the same time we have expanded our presence in the Oxfordshire and London areas and entered new sectors," stated Raithatha.

After bulls-eyeing two immediate targets Redsquid is now more able to maximise opportunities in the education sector, and according to Raithatha the timing and synergism of these acquisitions could not be better. "In the immediate term, Redsquid's top priorities revolve around capitalising on the opportunities presented by these transactions," he

said. "We are planning for a third acquisition within the next six months that will fill gaps, expedite growth in education and later in the public sector. We are also looking for geographical expansion across the UK."

Balancing priorities

With multiple acquisition efforts underway, prioritising seamless integration becomes crucial, noted Raithatha. And to balance out time spent on competing priorities Redsquid's management team focuses on short and long-term objectives simultaneously. "While pursuing immediate priorities the leadership team works to ensure the long-term growth and sustainability of the business," added Raithatha. "By empowering our team and fostering an engaged workforce Redsquid seeks to strike the right balance between integrating acquisitions and steering the company toward future growth."

The short-term challenges Raithatha is facing include managing people and ensuring their engagement



Sohini Raithatha

Nothing fires me up more than being told something can't be done. I am determined to prove naysayers wrong and am motivated by their scepticism

and development. Meanwhile, uncertainties around inflation and interest rates, particularly as the economy approaches a potential recession, also creates challenges related to customer confidence. Looking further ahead, Raithatha anticipates challenges linked to financial stability, talent acquisition and maintaining a strong balance sheet. "However, we approach these challenges with resilience and an entrepreneurial mindset, aiming to turn adversity

into opportunities for growth," added Raithatha.

"Nothing fires me up more than being told something cannot be done. I am determined to prove naysayers wrong and draw motivation from their scepticism and my belief that positive changes can be made, and that Redsquid has the potential to achieve remarkable success. I am committed to making a lasting impact and create a positive change in the industry."

In this context, Raithatha's current priorities include finance raising and meeting the targets he sets. This means securing the necessary financial resources for ongoing growth and focusing on product development. "Developing the team and enhancing their capabilities with AI are also critical considerations for Redsquid's growth trajectory," added Raithatha. "We're looking for AI that can complement existing services, and AI that can drive operational efficiency."

He is also keeping a close eye on penetration testing and software-based solutions that enhance security. From a voice perspective, Raithatha expects Microsoft integrations to dominate the market. "By maintaining a granular vision and revising our view every quarter I work to ensure that Redsquid stays agile and adaptable to the fast evolving market conditions," he commented.

"Aligning the efforts of the leadership team with our overarching vision and goals is crucial for success. Through leadership, I aim to empower the team, steer their focus and foster a shared commitment towards achieving our objectives."

Raithatha firmly believes that today's primary leadership priorities revolve around fostering an engaged workforce and nurturing an environment of collaboration, along with empowerment and ongoing professional development. "Effective leadership also entails regularly reframing the vision, keeping the team agile and maintaining a laser sharp focus on shared goals," he added. ■

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TelXL rises as CCaaS leader

The role of comms resellers in helping SMEs achieve a competitive advantage through the customer experiences they deliver has never been greater, according to TelXL CEO Aaron Fox who has made it his mission to create the UK's leading tech vendor of channel-focused CCaaS and CX solutions.

TelXL has a laser sharp focus on its big ambition and is striding into the spotlight following more than two decades of development and growth while waiting in the wings. Recent developments include the launch of Cxp, its primary proposition (more on this later), and a 50 per cent rise in staff numbers during the last financial year taking group headcount to over 80. Revenue increased by nearly 20 per cent in the same period to just under £8 million and Fox expects revenues to grow another 20 per cent this financial year fuelled in large part by an assiduous channel recruitment campaign. "Our target is to bring onboard a select number of new channel partnerships," confirmed Fox.

He says market forces and digital transformations are having a big impact on how businesses construct their technology stacks to achieve a competitive advantage

through the service they provide and their ability to respond to a fast moving market. "It's not just about flexible working it's also about doing more with less," he said. "Now more than ever channel partners need to understand this and align with the right solutions. The lack of a decent customer experience can be seen everywhere and we, as the collective channel, have a key part to play in addressing this issue."

TelXL's solution is focused on SME contact centres across all industries and verticals in the private and public sectors. But its largest implementation to date is over 500 concurrent agents. For the purpose of market segmentation and clarity, SMEs are defined as organisations with less than 250 employees and the private SME sector is the fastest growing part of the UK economy. There are 5.5 million businesses in this category employing 61 per cent of the population



Aaron Fox

The lack of a decent customer experience can be seen everywhere and the collective channel has a key role to play in addressing this issue

and generating circa £1.3 trillion turnover.

Opportunity

"The opportunity for technological improvement in this space is vast but it's been typically underserved," observed Fox. "To address this opportunity our approach and development must be flexible, modular and capable of adapting with self-service at its core. We are also assessing all areas of our product portfolio with the practical application of AI technology in mind.

Data analytics and insights is another factor. The more meaningful data we can surface for consumers and agents, the more personalised and efficient their interactions become, which in turn improves the customer experience and loyalty. We will likely accelerate product progress and enhancement through the acquisition of further external IPR or vendor businesses."

Also critical to success is raising TelXL's profile in the channel, noted Fox. "The

channel is crucial to our growth strategy," he added. "For many years our growth was driven by word of mouth, being good people to do business with and by being able to do the things other vendors couldn't. Today, we are proactively seeking new partnerships with channel businesses that want to bridge the SME sector technology gap."

Strong pedigree

TelXL was founded in late 2001 by Aaron's father, Nigel Fox, off the back of a 20 year tech industry career culminating as Operations Director for Totem. The seed was sown when Fox senior became frustrated by the widening chasm between large inflexible telcos and independent IVR houses, and the challenges faced by the channel and customers wanting to do something intelligent with their inbound telephony. "TelXL was created to address this challenge," stated Fox. "It combined the best of telco and IVR into a single independent entity and went to market exclusively through the channel. Critical to this was the independent real-time platform and in-house development team that together could do things for the channel and their customers that other vendors could not."

The company focused on intelligent inbound telephony until 2010 when it entered the CCaaS space after securing an opportunity to build a CCaaS solution for a call centre BPO. "We recognised the wider opportunity around CCaaS and took it to market through a small number of white label channel partnerships," explained Fox. "In early 2020 we

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Partnership contender

explored whether it made sense to merge with our largest channel partner. For all the right reasons the merger did not proceed but the experience was transformative in setting TelXL on its current pathway."

Another big development was TelXL's acquisition of a significant stake in In2tel in 2021, a long-standing strategic partner that operates TelXL's software on its independent Irish platform, alongside a range of other solutions. Then, late last year TelXL launched Cxp as a new proposition for the channel to specifically target small and medium sized contact centres. Cxp is built, owned and operated in-house, and where specialist functionality is required best of breed partners and integrations are leveraged. "I am focused on scaling the TelXL Cxp proposition in the channel," added Fox.

Key proposition

Cxp is TelXL's main proposition made up of core voice, digital and omni base licenses, enhanced by bolt-ons and features. It's also worth noting that TelXL is an independent UK telco and fully in control of voice quality. "The proposition allows partners and end customer businesses to take the things they need rather than being straitjacketed into expensive licenses for little or never used functionality," added Fox. "Bringing our new Cxp proposition to the channel market through our PartnerXL programme, wrapped in our long-standing heritage, is our biggest opportunity."

As we have seen, TelXL has a strong channel pedigree but for too long has flown

under the radar – until now. Today, Fox has the bit between his teeth and has given the megaphone to his ambitions, and he's ramping up the volume.

"Our mission is to be the UK's leading technology vendor of CCaaS solutions to small and medium contact centres delivered to market through the channel," he emphasised. "We need to keep driving our brand awareness and market presence and push the business on from being the channel's best kept secret."

Fox makes no secret of the fact that, as a younger man, becoming part of the family business was an idea he never entertained. Straight out of university he got a job in IT recruitment but soon realised that a long-term sales career wasn't for him. So he enrolled onto a three month intensive IT course leading to Microsoft module certifications, CompTIA+ and the beginning of a CCNA. At no point did Fox consider working for the family business until his father popped the question. "It was an easy decision to join as Product Manager and I've worked with TelXL and the channel ever since," stated Fox, who became CEO in 2020 following a stint as COO.

"I have worked closely with Nigel since the beginning and in more recent years my wife and mother-in-law joined the team. We are all in it for the right reasons and totally committed. At times we have different opinions on how to achieve things, but we all continue to make it work. The skills, passion and drive they bring into the mix is totally worth it." ■

Just a minute with Aaron Fox...

What do you fear most?

Conflict. But conflict is a necessary part of life and something I am always working on to optimise my ability to navigate. It's one of the reasons I took up kickboxing in my early 20s.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

In my late teens I fenced sabre for the Great Britain team at the European Championships in Hungary.

Your main strength and what could you work on?

I'm good at connecting the dots and solving problems, but I'm working on making quicker decisions.

Three ideal dinner guests:

Gary Vaynerchuck, I consume a lot of his content; Ant Middleton for his achievements; and Barack Obama, I admire all aspects of his approach and mentality.

In hindsight: I would have spent more time on learning and growing, particularly around finances, investing and business operations.

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

I would find a way to get into angel investing. Failing that, something with my hands like engineering.

Your biggest achievement:

Taking the CEO position at the height of Covid: We had just decided not to proceed with a merger. I had three kids under four, and I had to work through a huge learning curve – it was bumpy.

The biggest risk you have taken:

Stepping into the kickboxing ring for the first time. And from a business perspective, staying as a self-funded company in an industry seemingly filled with PE backed companies.

Top tip for resellers: Be genuine to all people and businesses you deal with.

CHANNEL CORNER

WITH

JAMES DRAKE



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

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

Q1. What's the next big smartphone innovation/killer feature?

Rory McEwan, Dunedin IT

A1. The immediate future is e-sims. No delay, no dispatch costs, multiple networks on a single device, no need for metal adaptors to open the sim slots and more waterproof as no need for sim housing! Beyond that, I think it will most probably be digital assistance with greater usage of AI.

Q2. What is SoGEA?

Rory Tuck, Connect1st

A2. A phone line. This will only be available when FTTP is not.

Q3. With the switch-off date approaching, what will happen if I don't make any changes to my services?

Mark Stevenson, Officefones

A3. Your current distributor or vendor should be reminding you of any major deadline dates and recommend the correct substitute products for your customers. Failing to switch any of your services by the final switch-off date will result in your services being terminated.

Q4. Eclipse is shortlisted all the time for awards. What value do Channel awards add?

Anonymous

In an overcrowded marketplace, we are all looking to add value and create differentials to our proposition. We find applying for awards and being shortlisted adds value for Eclipse Wholesale, our customers, and our hardworking staff. I thoroughly recommend being involved.

Q5. How does the channel prevent a race to the bottom and maintain profitability in the new alt-net full fibre landscape?

Michael Crawford, Aspect Voice

A5. Mass market products like telecom services will always be a victim of competition and pricing pressure, as vendors look to gain market share over their competitors. The only way to retain margin (IMHO) is to sell solutions and not products, creating value in the customer's eyes and not just allowing the products we sell to become valueless commoditised items.

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Charting the future of IT o

The MSPs best positioned to help end customers make holistic strategic decisions about which functions to outsource, taking into account a range of considerations including cost-benefit factors, emerging technologies, innovation and future requirements, will be the ones that truly succeed, according to Greg Jones, Vice President of Business Development EMEA, Kaseya.

Helping customers navigate the complexities of digital transformation is a significant driver for outsourcing. Furthermore, many businesses have not been able to innovate as fast as they would like, so they are looking to MSPs to help them identify which processes to transform and how to drive their digitalisation forward. "Leaving the technology, and the related security, to the experts takes the headache away from digitalisation and allows SMEs to focus on their core business," said Jones. "Furthermore, tech talent is hard to find and expensive, so many businesses can't recruit the technical resources they need, fuelling the outsourcing trend."

Outsourcing is taking hold across all vertical markets,

but more granularly, there is a particular type of business that is looking for outsourced services. "Typically, those organisations with ambitions to grow, want to do more with technology and leverage automation," commented Jones. "The pandemic has brought more technology awareness and the most ambitious businesses are striving to gain a real competitive advantage through technology."

Demand for security

When it comes to the services that are most in demand, security is at the top of the list because it's not only paramount for all organisations, but also hard to achieve, observed Jones. "Next are consultancy services, as businesses are seeking guidance around how to embed technology into their organisation



Greg Jones

Bridging the digital and physical world will be vital as we move forward with technologies such as AI, ML, Web3, the Metaverse and quantum computing

to boost innovation," he added. "There is also an element of having to adopt market leading technologies in order to become an attractive employer. The younger generation of employees especially have certain expectations when it comes to the tools they use in their daily work. Not just collaboration tools, but also tools specific to their profession. For example, case management platforms in the legal sector."

Jones has also seen more bespoke services being used, including a spike in demand for social media, web development, marketing, PR and design. "Businesses are outsourcing services across the spectrum as they need more scalability and agility," he said. "This is not limited to ICT outsourcing. We are seeing functions that used to be handled in-house such as HR, legal and finance being outsourced. Additionally, platforms like fiverr.com are

becoming popular among businesses wanting to work with freelance designers, copywriters and more."

More broadly, noted Jones, outsourcing is expanding into new functions like innovation and R&D. "Nowadays, it's possible to outsource almost anything and some companies are doing exactly that so they can focus on their core business," he added. "It's possible to claim research and development



Outsourcing

(R&D) tax reliefs but many SMEs don't know what they can offset under R&D. MSPs can provide valuable advice in that area, as well as advice on key innovation projects. It's worth bearing in mind that innovation doesn't always mean implementing a new technology. Some of the biggest results can come from transforming existing business processes. Again, partnering with an MSP can help SMEs drive this innovation forward."

Emerging tech

The biggest growth opportunities currently reside in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), automation and security, pointed out Jones. These are the spaces to watch, he says, noting that some MSPs are already leading with AI, integrating it behind the scenes into their own software and platforms, and their SME customers benefit from this indirectly.

"ML is increasingly playing a role in functions such as customer service," he added. "For example, you can use ChatGPT to write customer emails, and the skill is in how to brief ChatGPT to get the desired result. MSPs can play the role of educators here and will have to keep up-to-date with the rapid technological developments."

Outsourcing is changing the way businesses work as the focus shifts from completing tasks yourself to managing the outsourced relationship. In that respect, new and different skillsets are required to get the most from outsourced services. From an MSP's point of view, they should think carefully about how they procure, manage and deliver new services.

One key challenge is keeping up with the fast moving market and meeting new opportunities presented by outsourcing trends. "We're at the beginning of a new wave of outsourcing and I expect that in the future businesses will outsource most of their non-core functions," stated Jones. "MSPs will have to keep up with this demand and how they support their clients in making outsourcing work for them.

"Also, we are shifting into a more collaborative era where not only MSPs and their SME customers, but also third parties all work together. End customers will no longer just buy a product or a service. Instead, there will be several parties involved in any business process flow. Communication will be key. MSPs can support this with the right consulting services."

According to Jones, we are living in 'exceptional times'. "The evolution and convergence of technology and business is incredible, and it will become even more important for MSPs and SMBs to quickly embrace change as we enter the new digital era," he enthused. "Bridging the digital and physical world will be vital as we move forward with technologies such as AI, ML, Web3, the Metaverse and quantum computing.

"We are only just now seeing what is possible with technology. For businesses to thrive and succeed in the rapidly approaching new digital era they will need to allocate time for training, development and education – all of which represents a compelling opportunity for the channel's future-focused MSPs." ■

Channel Forecast Editorial Round Tables 2023

In the Comms Dealer round table sessions, ICT vendors can share their insights on the key challenges, strategies and technologies that channel partners will need to adopt in order to thrive in 2023 and beyond. The content of these high-level discussions will form a key part of our 2023 editorial calendar and provide a fantastic blend of editorial content in Comms Dealer magazine, online and via social media with the release of a series of 'Video Shorts' highlighting the key points/questions from the discussion.

Programme for Q3/Q4 2023

September 2023

- Women on Boards: Their experiences and what the ICT channel is doing to strike the right balance in the boardroom

October 2023

- Unravelling the growing staff welfare and preferences dilemma.

November 2023

- How will Next Generation Networks create new prospects for the channel?

Join the debate!

To participate in these editorial round tables contact: **Heather Miles** on **01895 454405** or **hmiles@bpl-business.com** for full details.

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Unified Giacom execs co-

The unification of DWS and Union Street brands under the Giacom banner in July also saw the creation of the Cloud Market platform with four tech categories spearheaded by a dedicated leader. Here, the chief strategists explain how they are empowered to make a vital difference to partners in a cloud-first world.

James Baker, Managing Director – Cloud



Cloud services have revolutionised the workplace, creating many opportunities for SMBs to leverage technology to their advantage. Business owners have now woken up to the benefits of a modern workplace incorporating flexible working, productivity boosts, collaboration tools and business continuity. “There’s no question that cloud presents massive growth opportunities for the channel, though it’s not without challenges,” stated James Baker, Managing Director – Cloud. “Customer requirements and expectations are evolving rapidly, varying considerably from one business to the next. Developing a robust cloud portfolio has proven to be a moving target for MSPs as technology continues to develop at pace. Specialist skills are also required to deploy cloud infrastructure in a way that is scalable, secure, and in accordance with best practice.”

Giacom has over 20 years experience of helping partners to implement cloud services and currently supports a community of over 2,500 MSPs. “We’re always ready to introduce partners to new products that

empower their customers with cloud technology, providing white labelled campaigns and training resources to help them get going,” added Baker. “Teams is one such area where we’ve created real distinction for our partners, leveraging our experience to develop a comprehensive offering with the full stack of Teams voice offerings. Emerging trends in AI will also have a transformative effect on the industry, and we’re investigating AI solutions that can easily be deployed and monetised by MSPs.”

Partner support

This portfolio is supported by a team of Microsoft certified technology specialists. They work alongside partners, enabling them to establish themselves in the market and see timely returns on investment. “This ensures partners are able to roll out cloud services in a way that is scalable and safe, with systems in place to control costs, manage billing and provide detailed reporting,” added Baker. “Our team also assists with pre-sales and tech support, identifying the best solutions to meet customers’ requirements and helping partners explore new opportunities.”

Ant Molloy, Managing Director – Cloud Market Tools



To complement Giacom’s portfolio of cloud, comms and connectivity products, the company also provides a range of software enablement tools to help partners streamline operational efficiency. Foremost among these are the billing platforms, Ability and Affinity. “These are used extensively throughout the channel, with close to 900 MSPs using our solutions to process over £2 billion of retail billing per annum,” explained Ant Molloy, Managing Director – Cloud Market Tools. “One-off and recurring charges for all our products and services can be combined into one bill for end customers. A range of automated features also helps to boost productivity and ensure every penny is accounted for, saving hours in operations while maximising profit margins.”

Molloy also noted that by integrating with Giacom’s Cloud Market ordering system, partners can also use its platforms to build quotes and provision services. “Once orders are placed a range of task automation features ensure that all orders follow a consistent process as they progress to fulfilment, with all charges added

to customers’ accounts ready to be billed once services go live,” he said.

“Using the billing platforms as the foundation, we can also provide white labelled billing portals for use by our partners’ end customers. From here, customers can view invoices, conduct reporting and perform service management actions. A range of visual customisations and advertising options make it easy for partners to tailor portals with their own branding while promoting special offers, new products and more.”

Simplification

Molloy pointed out that Giacom is developing integrations with other leading applications in the channel ecosystem to unlock increased efficiency benefits. “This will help to create assured repeatable processes for provisioning and managing our portfolio of services, and also extend out the self-service options already available in our customer facing portals,” he commented. “Not only will this make customers feel empowered and in control, but it will also drive down the cost of service for our partners.”



create new opportunities

Andrew Wilford, Managing Director – Mobile



The opportunity for channel partners to build mobile into their portfolio is significant, and Giacom's mobile offerings are provided in partnership with the UK's largest mobile operators including Vodafone, O2 and EE. "They enable experienced partners and those new to mobile to generate long-term high value recurring revenue while offering end customers differentiated mobility solutions," stated Andrew Wilford, Managing Director – Mobile.

Giacom offers two distinct propositions. The first is the low touch Network Billed Model where the network operator provides end user support, billing, collections and other assistance, but with partners managing the commercial relationships. The second is a fully customised wholesale mobile offering designed for those that want maximum control over their mobile propositions with full ownership of the customer contract and service. "With the number of IoT devices expected to triple over the 2020s there's enormous opportunities for business development," said Wilford. "IoT connectivity and the enhanced

feature rich offerings that come with it will play a huge part in the future of mobile. It's a huge growth area and we're actively working with vendors to develop robust and reliable IoT solutions for our partners."

Specialist teams

Giacom also provides dedicated mobile support and specialist teams, with mobile focused account management to support partner sales teams on special bids and opportunities. "Our mobile offering is also backed by a digital experience that ensures partners' mobile operations are as efficient as possible," added Wilford. "Cloud Market, our self-service partner platform, offers tools for building quotes and placing orders with APIs for those looking to integrate mobile into their own platforms.

"In addition, our billing platforms, Ability and Affinity, offer out-of-the-box integration with our ordering systems. These also feature customer facing portals that enable customers to perform mobile management actions such as barring and SIM swaps, boosting customer satisfaction." ■

Dale Parkinson, Managing Director – Connectivity



In a connected world built on cloud-based solutions and an increasing move to remote and hybrid working models, reliable, fast and agile connectivity solutions are essential for SMBs, pointed out Dale Parkinson, Managing Director – Connectivity. "Our connectivity offerings have been designed to empower partners to differentiate themselves and succeed in their target markets," he stated. "We offer a wide choice of FTTP, broadband, UCaaS and voice products across the UK's best networks and platforms, catering for almost any requirement a business may have."

PSTN switch off opportunities

Parkinson noted that no conversation about connectivity would be complete without mentioning the imminent PSTN switch off. "With over ten million lines still to be migrated to replacement services, it's critical that our partners have everything they need to overcome obstacles and capitalise on the Fibre roll out," he added. "One way we're doing this is by working with partners to enrich their portfolios with over-the-top solutions such as UC and Teams Voice. These significantly

increase the attractiveness of our partners' offerings, keeping their customers sticky and boosting profits in the process. We've also developed a range of white labelled content that partners can use to raise awareness and highlight the benefits of making the switch to fibre."

Another trend observed by Parkinson is the increasing popularity of 'as-a-service' models. "Supplying connectivity services is a great revenue generator all on its own," he said. "However, by cross selling associated services that can ensure business continuity and increase quality of life for end users, MSPs are able to differentiate and add value to their propositions while significantly boosting profits.

"Bundling Connectivity and associated services into an as-a-service wrap is the smart way to do this. Customers love having everything provided by one supplier for a cost-effective and predictable monthly fee. For our partners it offers a profitable and reliable source of recurring revenue that's unlikely to change short of a major disruption in service." ■



Giacom CEO Terry O'Brien

AS DIGITAL transformation continues to take hold, the opportunity for the channel is enormous. Small businesses are the backbone of the UK economy, but they're facing a challenge. Their productivity is stalling, they need to adapt to new ways of working, and they're increasingly expected to deliver customer service that rivals that of much larger competitors. Collectively, SMBs spend upwards of £10 billion per year on technology to address these issues, but only half is spent with the channel. Our mission is that every small business buys their ICT from a local expert technology provider. To achieve this vision, we're making it simple for our partners to provide technology solutions through our portfolio of cloud, comms, hardware and billing solutions all available from our Cloud Market digital platform. ■



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BT sustainability chief se

Last month's record breaking temperatures across regions of the world brought into even sharper focus the urgent need for action on climate change and wider sustainability issues. And as many channel companies look towards the big influential telcos for leadership, we sat down with Sarwar Khan, Head of Sustainability, BT Business, to spotlight the decarbonisation actions he is taking.

Khan's pre-BT experience (he joined in 2020) includes a near 12 year spell working for some of the world's largest utilities developing decarbonisation propositions and solutions, particularly in the Nordics dealing with large offshore and onshore wind farms through to on-site distributed energy solutions such as solar, heat pumps and storage. "I entered the ICT world because the only way organisations can successfully achieve their sustainability goals is through technology and connectivity, and there is an obvious convergence between the world of sustainability, energy and telco," he commented. Here, Khan shares deep insights into his decarbonisation strategy for industry giant BT...

What's your remit as Sustainability Leader?

The main focus of my role is to fulfil BT's manifesto commitment in helping customers save on 60 million tonnes of CO₂ by 2030 while also supporting best practice in this space. We have a target to be net zero for our operations (scope 1 and 2) by 2031. To achieve this we are focusing on the following three areas to pick up pace and scale... switching our fleet to low carbon alternatives, increasing the efficiency across our estate, and increasing the efficiency of our global networks. But these only account for six per cent of BT's overall emissions.

So a big focus area will be decarbonising the value chain, in particular working and collaborating with suppliers and partners to



Sarwar Khan

Decarbonisation is an imperative for the channel. Partners must have a credible net zero target in place and actively work towards decarbonising their own operations as well as their supply chain

reduce our scope 3 emissions to net zero by 2041.

Where are you on your journey in terms of Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions?

For Scope 1 and 2 we have achieved a 56 per cent cut in carbon emissions intensity since financial year 2017. We are working towards our 87 per cent target by

the end of March 2031. This includes powering our networks with 100 per cent renewable electricity. We recorded a 20 per cent cut in supply chain emissions since FY17, towards our 42 per cent target by the end of March 2031. Regarding our fleet, we've added over 1,000 electric vehicles this year, now numbering over

2,400. This fleet has travelled more than 7.9 million miles, saving over 2,200 tonnes of CO₂e. All of our in-building electricity worldwide is renewably sourced, powering our buildings estate, shops and networks. And we're decarbonising our estate through a workplace transformation programme, consolidating hundreds of



ts out net zero strategy

buildings to around 30. Furthermore, we're building more renewably powered networks while switching off our old networks. As well as saving energy, full fibre networks can better handle the effects of physical risks like flooding and higher temperatures. That means fewer faults or engineering visits.

How important is net zero becoming in terms of channel partnering?

For most organisations, including BT, the bulk of carbon emissions lies in the supply chain, so to successfully achieve net zero across the supply chain collaboration and partnerships are critical. The channel is a key part of this. As BT provides products and services into the channel we will form part of their supply chain emissions.

To help minimise BT's impact on the channel we also provide spend-based emissions data allocated to partners via the CDP Supply Chain Model (at the partner's request). We are also working to provide partners with product level carbon footprint data via our recently launched carbon dashboards, and solutions that can help partners cut emissions across their own operations.

How have you embedded a net zero mindset into company strategy and culture?

It's important to ensure everyone within BT has a firm understanding of the rapidly evolving ESG landscape, the impact on BT and our customers as well as their role in supporting the transition to net zero. This means driving cultural change and increasing awareness is

a key part of our plan. We're doing this in a number of ways, including internal and external communications, regularly sharing updates with colleagues and customers on social channels and via our Intranet and corporate website.

We've also set up a Quarterly Sustainability Community bringing in internal and

The channel has a huge opportunity to help customers achieve their own sustainability goals and accelerate decarbonisation

external experts to showcase the work that's being done across sustainability and to drive action. And we've incorporated a Product Stewardship course into our online training programme which encourages employees in the product development function to better understand the key principles of designing products sustainably.

How is BT approaching greater industry collaboration through a green lens?

The biggest opportunity to accelerate sustainability is through cross sector collaboration. We focus on building partnerships that drive action on sustainability. We're focusing on our biggest suppliers and partners to drive product development in a sustainable way so our end customers, including the channel, benefit when purchasing products

and services from BT. Additionally, the only way we can drive the transition to a low carbon economy is through technology and connectivity. We need access to near real-time data to run AI and applications over the top to drive meaningful emissions cuts. While we have expertise in connectivity and security we need synergistic partnerships with

organisations that are leaders and experts in their domain, and that have the right platforms and applications that can run over the top of BT's network to reduce energy, water and carbon

use across operations such as fleet, buildings, data centres and supply chain.

Is the task of decarbonising the comms channel ultimately achievable?

The channel is facing exactly the same pressures as the bigger players and end customers when it comes to driving sustainability. It can be difficult to raise capital, whether that's debt

financing from banks or private equity funding. And there are other commercial pressures. For example, 86 per cent of investors now use sustainability metrics to decide who they invest in.

Also, end customers now require the channel to have the right sustainability credentials in place. In fact, one in 10 channel partners are currently losing out in bids and RFPs due to not having the right credentials in place. So decarbonisation is an imperative for the channel, and partners must have a credible net zero target and actively work towards decarbonising their own operations as well as their supply chain.

By starting action now and having a concrete plan it is possible for the channel to decarbonise as well as accelerate the net zero transition for their end customers.

What role can the channel play in helping end customers on their net zero journey?

The channel has a huge opportunity to help customers achieve their own sustainability goals and accelerate decarbonisation. Most organisations will be

looking to the channel to help them with green IT, by selecting the most energy efficient low carbon ICT products whether that's for their core LAN/WAN network, servers or even co-location data centres.

It's also important for the channel to have sustainable options for greening solutions such as IoT sensors and edge compute. These will be key for organisations to collect data to optimise their operations for energy and carbon. Channel vendors that offer IoT and edge in their portfolio stand a better chance of creating new revenue opportunities as organisations explore these capabilities for decarbonisation.

End customers will look to channel partners to help them make informed sustainability choices when virtualising their environments, moving to a hybrid cloud solution with colocation services or fully migrating to public cloud. It's important the channel embraces this as an opportunity to support their customers in understanding the impact of this transition and the benefits it can have on their decarbonisation goals. ■

Khan's top tips on building a net zero strategy...

- Make sure you operate in an energy efficient office.
- Use low carbon modes of transport for commuting and travelling to customer sites.
- Understand your own ICT carbon footprint: Many partners are cloud based, and most of the cloud providers now offer carbon emissions data based on their own usage which can be accessed on an admin portal. Use this as data led insights to optimise your own cloud environments.
- Drive a circular economy by making sure you have sustainable end of life/ service processes in place for your own and customer devices.
- Ensure your supply chain partners have the right sustainability credentials including a credible net zero target, a 100 per cent renewable energy powered network and cloud services, and offer energy efficient device options all the way from routers, switches, servers and endpoint devices. Data centres with a low power usage effectiveness of <1.5 are also key, along with IoT and edge solutions that help deliver outcome-based solutions.

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Gaining a competitive ad

This year's gold standard Comms Vision Convention (8th-10th November, Gleneagles) will take a multi-faceted research-led approach to exploring why many organisations may only be scratching the surface of their competitive potential, and share insights into what is required to forge a long-term edge over competitors based on four key categories – Culture, Industry Collaboration, Technology and Leadership. Here, Comms Vision Platinum sponsors provide insights into the cultural enablers of competitive advantage and the extent to which business leaders may need to amplify them.

Having a distinctive competitive advantage is essential for business success, and turbo boosting the drive for growth through culture is critical to helping people be their best and engaged with the strategy. According to Sarah Kirton, Group Sustainability Director, Gamma, culture resides 'at the very heart' of competitive advantage. "It shapes how we operate, how we engage with each other and how we relate to our customers," she stated. "An empowering culture aligned with business strategy can drive innovation, enhance employee engagement, customer service and lead to superior performance – as well as the capacity to attract and retain talent."

On the flip side, she noted, a weak culture can manifest in poor communication, low morale and resistance to change, which can ultimately undermine a business by creating inefficiencies, high staff turnover and a loss of competitive edge. "Strong culture is not built overnight," she added. "It requires constant commitment, nurturing and alignment with the company's

mission and values. In this fast-paced digital age, culture is no longer a soft aspect of business, it's a strategic imperative. Embracing this truth not only allows organisations to navigate change successfully, but also to thrive amidst the complexities of the digital era."

Kirton also noted that appraising the current cultural state of a business and identifying areas of improvement are crucial in creating an action plan tailored to unique contexts. "It's not just a box ticking exercise but a strategic action to ensure a business's future relevance and success," added Kirton. "Gamma has created an environment where our culture and values are not just statements, but lived and breathed every day. This commitment has been a critical factor in our ability to simplify the complexities of technology and bring order to chaos, proving that a strong, well-aligned culture can indeed become a company's competitive advantage."

Three of the most important enablers of cultural change, believes Kirton, are strong



Sarah Kirton

An empowering culture aligned with business strategy can drive innovation, enhance employee engagement, customer service and lead to superior performance – as well as the capacity to attract and retain talent.

leadership that sets the tone, communicates expectations and models desired behaviours. Secondly, transparent and ongoing communication about the reasons for organisational changes and how they align with the mission and strategy. And thirdly, an investment in training and development to equip employees with the knowledge and skills to adapt to the evolving culture. "Involving employees in the evolution process and recognising and rewarding

behaviours that align with the desired culture can help facilitate cultural change," commented Kirton. "Providing ongoing learning and development opportunities can support cultural shifts by fostering the necessary skills and mindsets."

Cultural backbone

No surprise, therefore, that Kirton said culture is the backbone of Gamma. "To amplify this, we plan to reinforce our cultural traits

through consistent leadership behaviours, regular team building exercises and inclusive decision making processes," she explained. "Our culture is designed to be empowering and human-centric, making it a key tool in engaging our people and aligning them with our strategy. To amplify and reinforce our cultural traits we plan to invest more in initiatives such as our Gamma Groups that encourage and reward cultural alignment, as well as focusing on the recruitment of individuals who demonstrate their own personal alignment with our values."

Lisa Hewitt, People Director, TalkTalk Wholesale Services, shed light on how the company amplifies its key cultural traits, emphasising the values that define the organisation and reinforcing these values through various channels such as internal communications, recognition programmes and regular employee engagement activities. "By consistently showcasing our cultural traits we create a shared sense of identity and purpose, strengthening our cultural distinction and differentiation in the market," she stated.



Advantage through culture

Hewitt also underscored the extent to which culture can provide a differentiated lead in the market. "Culture plays a significant role in shaping a company's competitive advantage," she said. "It influences employee motivation, engagement and productivity, ultimately impacting customer satisfaction and business outcomes. A positive culture attracts and retains top talent and fosters collaboration and innovation, which enhances overall organisational performance."

"On the other hand, cultural weaknesses can undermine a business in several ways. A disengaged culture can lead to decreased productivity, increased turnover and diminished customer satisfaction. It can create silos, hinder effective communication and stifle creativity and innovation. We recognise the importance of culture in driving competitive advantage and understand that a strong culture empowers individuals to perform at their best

and aligns them with our strategic priorities."

Leadership matters

Hewitt agrees that the most important enablers of cultural change include strong leadership commitment,

By leveraging culture to empower individuals, align with strategy and create a distinct identity, organisations can drive innovation, engagement and performance

effective communication and employee involvement. "Leaders must demonstrate the desired culture, communicate it consistently and involve employees in shaping and implementing cultural initiatives," she said.

"Providing learning and development opportunities, recognising and rewarding desired behaviours and fostering a culture of trust and psychological safety are

also crucial. By leveraging culture to empower individuals, align with your strategy and create a distinct identity, organisations can drive innovation, engagement and performance. It is vital to address cultural weaknesses

promptly and proactively to ensure long-term success."

Virgin Media O2 Business has introduced a structural framework that supports its culture, which has inclusivity at its core. The company operates five Belonging networks, each supported by a member of the Executive Committee: These networks are categorised as Empower (which champions talent from underrepresented ethnic groups), Prouder (the LGBTQ+ network), Ultraviolet (which prioritises greater equity and equality for disabled people), Indigo (which supports neurodiversity) and Gender Equality.

"It's important we offer an inclusive and vibrant work culture that is backed by tangible initiatives," stated Raza Baloch, Head of Business Partners & SI, Virgin Media O2 Business. "To ensure people can feel engaged they need to know they can express who they are and that their individuality is embraced. It's when people are challenged or dismissed that culture



Raza Baloch

It's crucial for businesses to build workplace cultures that break down the hidden barriers that force people to suffer in silence.

becomes contaminated. It's therefore crucial for businesses to build workplace cultures that break down the hidden barriers that force people to suffer in silence."

Value alignment

Baloch cited global LinkedIn research that shows how important it is for people to work for a company that holds the same values as themselves. So it is important for employers to give the megaphone to their cultural priorities and be seen as culturally active. "By amplifying your company's voice and showing commitment to your people you can attract the best talent from every industry," stated Baloch.

"We all have valuable experiences and unique perspectives, and each person's difference is their strength. Therefore, to build a progressive company you have to elevate your

people and give their ideas a platform. The more effort put into this, the more attractive employment prospects become. Offering employees dedicated resources to support their growth and ambitions – from networks to mental health support – as well as opportunities to volunteer and bring their ideas for the company and its culture to life, are all important enablers of cultural change."

Virgin Media O2 Business's Matchbox learning and development initiative plays a key role in this, enabling people to pitch ideas to improve the company. "Whether its offering face-to-face time with execs or mentors and providing internal investment and team support to help people implement ideas, we've created an ecosystem to drive innovation and change," added Baloch.

Continued on page 28



Lisa Hewitt

Leaders must demonstrate the desired culture, communicate it consistently and involve employees in shaping and implementing cultural initiatives.



Hayley Duckmanton

Happy and engaged people provide a more attentive service. On this basis alone culture is absolutely a competitive advantage.

Continued from page 27

Normalising conversations in which people can vocalise any challenges they are facing is also key to facilitating a culture based on trust, transparency and belonging, noted Baloch. "Our Employee Voice structure facilitates constructive two-way communications between our people, ensuring an open and honest relationship and a flow of information," he added. "Your purpose and values should underpin everything you do, and if they are healthy, well communicated and prioritised, people will bring their best selves to work."

Hayley Duckmanton, Chief People Officer, Giacom, says cultivating an environment that promotes open communication has been essential to keeping Giacom's people engaged with the overall strategy. "We encourage team members to provide feedback in many different forms, whether that be in person, during a regular Team Talk session or through feedback forms, the company Intranet, or by joining one of our focus groups and forums," stated Duckmanton.

"Communication is also the foundation of any good

better, more attentive service. On this basis alone, culture is absolutely a competitive advantage. It's the foundation of almost every interaction throughout the partner lifecycle, the effectiveness of which arguably determines whether a relationship will be successful, or whether it even exists in the first place."

Duckmanton concedes that culture change is perhaps one of the most challenging areas of business transformation. "It's not like changing a logo or updating a process," she added. "It exists in the minds of your people, in how they react to and approach situations, in the way they feel about the organisation, sometimes even in the way they feel about themselves. So making sure people are involved in the process of cultural change is essential if they're going to buy into it.

"Avoid making arbitrary decisions wherever possible. To become embedded in the business, culture change must be a collaborative process that's fed into by people and teams from across the business. True cultural change also requires support from the top down and leaders need to exemplify the culture changes they expect their people to emulate. We don't want rigid corporate policies, we embrace a fun, enthusiastic and vibrant company culture that allows our brand personality to shine and our people to thrive without restraint. Having an ESG strategy that seeks to address the concerns and inequalities that affect your people outside of their working lives is also a great way to support their wellbeing, while benefiting society as a whole."

business relationship, so it's important to foster a culture of open communication, internally and externally. People should be encouraged to be informative and helpful, but also to speak their mind and say it how it is. When culture isn't right, this is just as noticeable. People will become frustrated and demotivated, and this will quickly become apparent in dealings with customers and the wider public."

Partnerships

Duckmanton reflected that the age old tenet 'people buy from people' is still true today, especially in the channel where forging the right partnerships is critical for growth, productivity and long-term success. "Sophisticated ordering portals and self-service options are indispensable, but they'll never be a substitute for having access to helpful people and the right expertise when you need it," she said. "Happy and engaged people provide a

It takes Vision to be a leader

Comms Vision (8th-10th November 2023, Gleneagles Hotel) is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. Places are limited and by invitation: If you would like to join us this year, please register your interest to attend at www.commsvision.com

Energy provides the ideal blend

Based in Cardiff and operating across South Wales, Blend Telecom has provided business services to many customers in Wales and further afield since 2018. The core part of the business

state of the economy and the world at the moment, energy's become more and more important for businesses and I have been referred into new customers as a result. On the back of that, I've been able to



"Before the pandemic energy wasn't a top priority for businesses, whereas now it is high on their agenda because of the soaring costs."

Jay Birch MD Blend Telecom

is wholesale mobile, VoIP & Broadband. Over the last three years the company has partnered with Fidelity Energy to offer its customers a wider range of services. Managing Director, Jay Birch, explains: "We signed as a partner during the pandemic and energy was a great addition to our portfolio - customers already trust us to provide other services so this was an added extra and a single point of contact for them.

"The big value is obviously having access to the Fidelity Energy team. Our dedicated Business Development Manager, Jason Fernyhough has joined customer meetings, so we can utilise his market expertise and have him explain the proposition. Jason provides insight into what is going on in the industry and what to look out for when comparing different quotes - it really gives our customers more confidence."

Since becoming an energy partner back in 2020, Jay explains how Blend Telecom has evolved: "One thing that's happened, which I didn't expect is I have generated telecoms leads on the back of energy, whereas I thought it'd be the other way around. The whole idea of being a partner was to sell this product into the existing base, however, with the current

sell our core products in to this new base.

"Before the pandemic energy wasn't a top priority for businesses, whereas now it is high on their agenda because of the soaring costs. One thing I have noticed is that customers are more educated on the proposition and they understand what we're sending them and can interpret quotes.

"Energy has also helped us support our customers more than we initially thought. Saving a charity money on their new rates and with Fidelity Energy we were able to consolidate their bills which was a key thing for them. Being able to have multiple sites come out of contract at the same time and from one supplier massively reduces their workload. We've also given them a little bit of a value as well, where we are consolidating the meter reads from all the buildings. That is something they're absolutely loving, which is just showing the value of going through Blend and Fidelity.

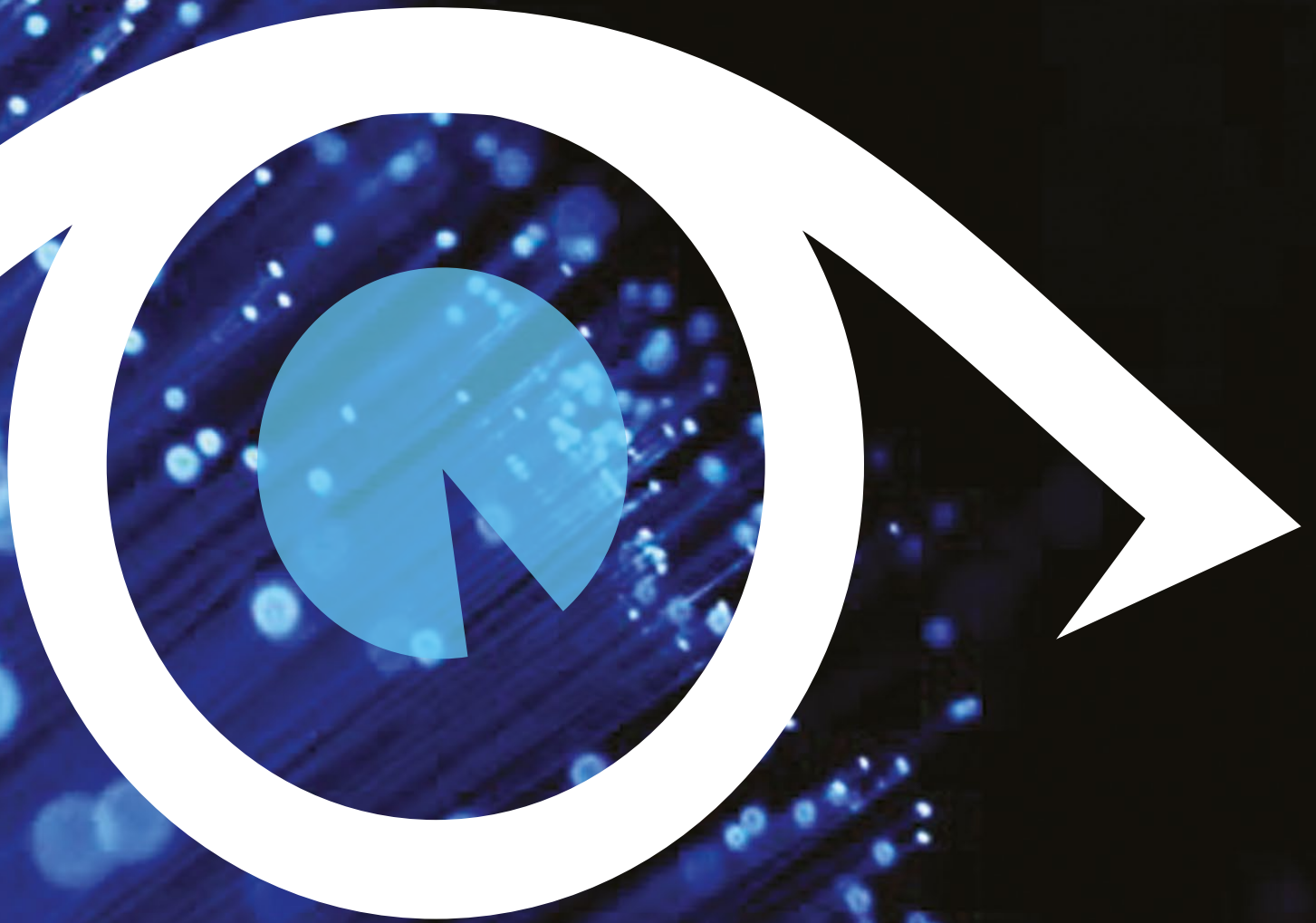
"We now have a dedicated energy page on our website and also feature energy on our bill run to promote it and to try and save some money for our existing customers that we haven't already managed to reach."

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The Comms National Awards, widely recognised as the UK ICT Channel's top awards event, is back and bigger than ever at our new venue at the Park Plaza Hotel in the heart of Westminster, London on the 28th of September 2023.

The 2023 finalists have been announced so now is the time to book your place at the ICT channel networking event of the Autumn.

Now in its 22nd year, the Comms National Awards is the ICT channel's most respected and coveted awards process, recognising the success of UK resellers and the suppliers who support them in providing top class solutions to public and private sector business customers.

Sponsored for the fourth year by

Giacom and independently judged by our selected panel of distinguished industry experts, the process rewards quality across the channel spectrum with awards in both reseller (customer solutions) and vendor (service to the channel) categories.

As ever, the entertainment at the CNA finalists' night will be top notch. Last year, broadcast and journalist, Jeremy Vine was the consummate awards host, and who could forget the 2018 event, when Spandau Ballet legend Tony Hadley provided a 'Gold' curtain raiser. Previous presenters have included Anton Du Beke, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre, Marcus Brigstocke, Vernon Kay, Gabby Logan, Stephen Mangan and James

Nesbitt, so guests can be assured the entertainment will be top drawer.

All these ingredients add up to the Comms National Awards being acknowledged as the evening the channel assembles in style to recognise success and network with industry friends and colleagues. "The Comms National Awards is the UK's leading awards process for the ICT channel and whether companies are winners or finalists, the prestige and PR they can gain from participating is huge. In these challenging times I would urge everyone in the channel to get involved and put their name into the hat," said Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent. The CN Awards is the ultimate channel celebration.

For all the finalists visit www.cnawards.com

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I'm thrilled to be announcing Giacom as Headline Sponsor of The Comms National Awards 2023. The CNA's are a highlight in the calendar year as they give the ICT industry a platform to get together for a memorable night of celebration.

2023 has been a year of evolution not only for us as a business as we've brought together our Cloud, Comms and Billing portfolio into one offering. But also within the

wider ICT sector especially now the Nationwide Stop Sell of WLR has taken effect. Our industry is now faced with incredible opportunity as we move towards the 2025 Switch Off, and I encourage you all to grab this with both hands and continue to make a positive difference as we move towards a digital future.

I'm sure you'll all agree with me when I say evolution and recognition is what motivates

us to do the best we can, and we should all be so proud of our contribution to the ICT sector.

The Comms National Awards evening is set to be one of the biggest yet, so let us raise our glasses and toast to another amazing year and the incredible efforts of our teams. We look forward to celebrating with you all - I hope you all have a fantastic time.

Terry O'Brien - CEO of Giacom

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It is a pleasure to be once again supporting the Comms National Awards. These awards are a key event in the channel calendar and it's wonderful to come together to celebrate the success and achievements across our community. Gamma is delighted to sponsor the UC Solution category and we wish all the finalists the best of luck.

Daryl Pile
Managing Director – Channel,
Gamma



At Giacom, there's nothing we love more than to celebrate the Channel's achievements, so it's a great pleasure to be sponsoring this year's Vertical Market Category. Success in any vertical demands dedication, with a strong unified strategy aligning all areas of the business. Winning this category clearly demonstrates the expertise a business has to offer, so on behalf of myself and everyone at Giacom, may we wish the best of luck to all this year's finalists.

Ant Molloy, MD – Cloud Market Tools, Giacom



"The Comms National Awards are the industry's most prestigious and hotly contested awards, that we are honoured to once again be supporting as hospitality sponsor. On behalf of Inform Billing, I would like to congratulate all the finalists and wish everyone the very best of luck. We look forward to coming together on what is always a fantastic night and a highlight in the event calendar!"

Ellie Allseybrook
Business Development Director,
Inform Billing



The Comms National Awards is always a highlight in the ICT Channel calendar and for good reason. It is a chance to celebrate and recognise the hard work, innovation and commitment to our customers. Nasstar Channel is proud to sponsor the Managed Service Provider category and we wish all the finalists the best of luck. I'm looking forward to spending a wonderful evening with you all.

Dave Hawkins
Sales Director – Nasstar Channel



At Sky, we Believe in Better and are committed to making a positive impact on our industry, our communities and the wider world. There are three areas in which we know we can make the biggest difference: leading on the environment, powering the cultural economy and addressing inequality. This is why we are supporting the Positive Impact category, to recognise those in the ICT channel who share similar values as ourselves and celebrate their successes. Congratulations to all of the finalists and best of luck to all of you."

Damian Saunders
Managing Director, Sky Business Mid-Market & Wholesale



"We are again thrilled to be sponsoring the Distribution Category at this year's prestigious Comms National Awards. As a prominent event in the industry, these awards honour the unwavering dedication and triumphs of the Channel. We look forward to joining the celebration of all accomplishments. We extend our best wishes to all finalists and can't wait to see you in September for this remarkable occasion."

Paul Taylor
Chief Commercial Officer, Voiceflex

To book your place at CNA Awards finals night contact Heather Miles: hmiles@bpl-business.com

Offering businesses an easier full fibre journey

TalkTalk Wholesale Services is harnessing its unique MPF technology to offer resellers a seamless one-step transition to full fibre when FTTP becomes available. Here, Managing Director Tom O'Hagan explains how the solution is tailor-made for channel partners looking to meet the digital requirements of the 2025 PSTN switch off without the move to SoGEA.



Tom O'Hagan

Everything we read in the sector at the moment is warning us that stop-sell is happening this September and that, in 18 months time, WLR and PSTN services will be retired. This means that any business still relying on those services will be left behind. Eighteen months is a short window for resellers to transition their services to a new product – and find the money to do so. Yet the narrative is that we must move away from these services, to SoGEA, or to FTTP, as soon as possible.

But, with FTTP not readily available in the majority of business addresses, many are faced with a 2-step approach to reaching a future fibre solution in the years to come.

Making the switch to SoGEA and then to FTTP requires implementing

new hardware for both technologies, so it isn't a seamless, straightforward process. It's also expensive to do which, in a cost-of-living crisis, raises concern for those businesses who don't want or have the money to spend implementing a brand-new IP solution, to then spend more money making the switch to FTTP when it becomes available later.

Bridging the FTTP provisioning gap

While FTTP will be the final destination for everyone operating in this market, there needs to be a product that fills the gap in between, that doesn't require a vast amount of capital to implement and cause a vast amount of disruption to telecoms businesses.

At TalkTalk Wholesale Services, we believe our MPF technology does just that.

As TalkTalk is a local loop unbundler, we can offer MPF services in 3000 local exchanges across the UK. While these services are copper based, they are not subject to the stop-sell timelines, so we can continue to connect our customers to those exchanges and deliver broadband and voice services – including TDM voice and IP voice – on top.

We can also migrate businesses on WLR and PSTN services to MPF with minimal disruption to their current operations and without the need for new CPE and technology. In doing so, they are not working to the WLR stop-sell timelines, and have the option to migrate their customers to a future fibre solution as, and when they are ready, in just one step. What's more, TalkTalk Wholesale Services can help them do that.

What are the benefits of switching to MPF technology with TalkTalk Wholesale Services?

Our approach to stop-sell helps ease the pressure on telecoms businesses by giving them another option. We have SoGEA, and sometimes it is absolutely the right answer, but if you move to SoGEA, you're required to move to an all-IP world which means changing the hardware at a customer's site to support it. Then, at some point in the future, changing that connection a second time to support an FTTP connection. So it requires businesses to implement new services twice, which is incredibly disruptive and not without overheads.

With us, you can switch to our MPF technology seamlessly, run your preferred voice services over it using the same hardware you

currently have, and then, when you're ready, or when your customer's ready, we'll help you move to FTTP, in one step – not two.

We live in a world where borrowing is expensive and businesses might not want to spend money on a brand-new IP solution. We can help businesses overcome that cost barrier.

How do I switch to MPF?

We've already invested in the technology, so we're unique in the capability that we offer. Switching to MPF is such an easy thing for customers to do because it requires no additional hardware. Openreach simply make the switch at the exchange with minimal disruption to services; it's a no-brainer, because it removes the cliff edge that's being driven by the WLR stop-sell.

Our solution offers partners more time to get their customers where they need to go, at a fraction of the price. It's a simpler, more efficient journey compared to those being proposed in the market, that also reduces a lot of the worry businesses have today. The doom-laden messages forcing companies to move to SoGEA as soon as possible simply aren't right; and our solution buys you time to take the best path for you.

I'm not saying don't get off WLR and PSTN lines. You can get off that network, just come on ours for an easier ride. ■



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CHANNEL CHAMPIONS

6th July 2023, Regents Park

Champions celebrate *al fresco*



Congratulations to the winners at this year's Channel Champions Awards, which saw a record number of entries. The ceremony was hosted by journalist, TV host and winner of Strictly Come Dancing 2009 Chris Hollins (pictured), following a celebratory garden party held in the sunshine at Regents Park on July 6th.

The event recognises the often-unseen teams in channel organisations across the business and management spectrum including sales, marketing, technical, sales



support, finance, executive leadership and culture. There were also special awards to recognise excellence in event management, apprentice schemes and charity work.

TalkTalk Wholesale Services scooped a hattrick of gongs on the day, including its HR, People and Culture Team being named Overall Team of the Year. ProVu Communications, Inform Billing, Global 4 Communications and Giacom all secured a brace of commendations at the event.

BPL Business Media MD Michael O'Brien said: "We have had

a 35% rise in the number of companies entering this year, underlining what a dynamic and inspiring industry we work in," said. Thank you to all our entrants, judges and sponsors for making such an event possible, namely Headline Sponsor Giacom. "

Giacom CEO Terry O'Brien adds: "That's a wrap for the 2023 Channel Champions Awards and what a great day it was, full of sun, networking and celebrations. We can't wait to see you all at Channel Champions again next year!"



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Roll of Honour



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Distributor Billing and Finance Team
(sponsored by Giacom) - ECLIPSE WHOLESALE



Distributor Executive Leadership Team (sponsored by Nasstar Channel) - PROVU COMMUNICATIONS



Distributor Marketing Team (sponsored by Voiceflex) - PROVU COMMUNICATIONS



Event Champions
(sponsored by Evolve IP) - GIACOM



Reseller Executive Leadership Team
(sponsored by Nasstar Channel) - EVOLVE



Reseller HR, People & Culture Team
(sponsored by IP Netix) - PRESTIGE TELECOM GROUP



Overall Team of the Year
(sponsored by Giacom) - TALKTALK WHOLESALE SERVICES HR, PEOPLE & CULTURE TEAM



Reseller Marketing Team
(sponsored by Voiceflex) - FOCUS GROUP



Reseller Sales & Account Management Team (sponsored by TalkTalk Wholesale Services) - START COMMUNICATIONS



Reseller/Service Provider Billing & Finance Team (sponsored by Giacom) - GLOBAL 4 COMMUNICATIONS



Roll of Honour (cont'd)



Reseller/Service Provider Sales Support Team
(sponsored by Gamma) - FIDELITY GROUP



Service Provider Executive Leadership Team
(sponsored by Nasstar Channel) - PANGEA



Reseller Technical Support & Engineering Team (sponsored
by BT Wholesale) - GLOBAL 4 COMMUNICATIONS



Service Provider Marketing Team
(sponsored by Voiceflex) - GIGABIT NETWORKS



Service Provider Technical Support & Engineering Team
(sponsored by BT Wholesale) - IP NETIX



Service Provider HR, People and Culture Team
(sponsored by IPNetix) - ANS GROUP



Service Provider Sales & Account Management Team
(sponsored by TalkTalk Wholesale Services) - VOICEFLEX



Vendor Executive Leadership Team -
TALKTALK WHOLESALE SERVICES



Vendor Marketing Team
(sponsored by Propel Finance) - FULLFIBRE



Vendor/Distributor Sales Support Team
(sponsored by Propel Finance) - GIACOM



Vendor/Distributor HR, People & Culture Team -
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Vendor/Distributor Technical Support & Engineering Team
(sponsored by Propel Finance) - INFORM BILLING

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Women on Boards

Moving the boardroom diversity agenda forward through greater engagement

Today, it is a widely acknowledged that a diverse boardroom brings broader perspectives and improved decision making to the table... so it's time to move the debate on from the benefits of having high-potential women on boards to how more progress can be achieved through greater engagement.

Join the debate!

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

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Mixed views on Ofcom's role

This month our panel of industry experts unravel the extent to which Ofcom should help co-ordinate and accelerate the comms industry's decarbonisation efforts, whether by creating an enabling environment or more directly through reporting and governance frameworks.



STEPHEN WARBURTON
ZEN

Facilitated by an Ofcom roundtable discussion, 12 major telcos, Zen included, have committed to build an industry consensus on how we can work together to reduce GHG emissions in our supply chain. Cross industry collaboration and knowledge sharing are crucial elements to ensuring transparency, so everyone can identify and tackle their Scope 3 emissions. There is an onus on these telcos now, with the support of Ofcom, to turn this commitment into action and lead the way on sustainability reporting as well as transparency on emissions in our supply chain. This will create a blueprint for others to follow for their own sustainability efforts.



STEPHEN MCINTYRE
NIMANS

I don't think Ofcom should be taking the lead. It is easy to sit back and say that is for the government or industry bodies to sort out but that is not true. We shouldn't abdicate this responsibility to the industry watchdog, we should all stand up and be counted. Each of our own small steps forward can add up to something much greater. Our One Plan approach to sustainability encourages everyone, employees, suppliers, customers and competitors to get involved in sustainable actions. There are plenty of partners out there that can help companies towards their net zero targets. The easiest place to start is with local councils and chambers of commerce as they have been given funding for exactly this kind of activity.



ALAN STEPHENSON-
BROWN
EVOLVE

Ofcom should not shoulder the responsibility alone - the entire sector must take a collective role in galvanising the industry around net zero priorities. Efforts may suffer from a lack of collective accountability and knowledge sharing, which calls for a joint commitment from all stakeholders. Ofcom can play a leading role by setting the stage for collaboration and providing guidance, but the industry should actively participate in enabling these changes. Ofcom can also facilitate greater transparency and reporting standards by implementing mandatory requirements for telecom companies and channels to report on their net zero progress. We are all responsible for driving positive change and building a sustainable future.



CAMILLA KARM
REDSQUID

To be truly committed to achieving net zero emissions collectively, it is imperative that the entire industry comes together and motivates one another towards a greener future. Ofcom does have a responsibility towards driving that change. The path towards ESG targets should be transparent and shared, as real progress can only be attained when we collaborate and support each other. The only way to do this is to be transparent and share the resources and knowledge we have. Doing so, we absolutely can lead the charge towards a more diverse, sustainable and responsible industry.

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e in driving net zero efforts



CHERIE HOWLETT
JOLA

Ofcom could drive sustainable practices, encourage green initiatives and collaborate with telcos to align the sector with net zero goals, ensuring a more environmentally responsible and sustainable future. Collaboration and knowledge sharing will foster sustainability, and we have partners that need us to have green credentials. Together, we can address sustainability challenges and drive positive change, but we need to make the process easy for businesses to take part in. Ofcom could help channel businesses by offering support and advice to help us focus on activities which have the greatest impact and help us to measure progress.



JAMIE HUGHES
EVOLVE IP

Ofcom should take more of a role, especially around providing advisory guidelines as currently the picture is fragmented. Most organisations are tackling this in their own way and we need all the dots joined to make a much greater impact. A focus on internal practices and processes leads to a lack of collective accountability and knowledge sharing. We are just one cog in the wheel with other companies further up the chain contributing a lot more. There needs to be more transparency in general and more businesses should highlight the carbon reduction activities on their websites, providing customers with the information about the emissions that they create and how they are working to reduce it.



JO BALLARD
MAINTEL

The environment is an area where regulators can assist by establishing clear reporting standards across industries and mandating appropriate disclosure frameworks. The vast array of regulations and voluntary reporting undoubtedly make it difficult for organisations to share knowledge and hold collective accountability across the supply chain. Our industry's efforts suffer from different approaches, many of which present information in a way that is difficult for other organisations to absorb when using an alternative framework. We are seeing a gradual coming together of frameworks and regulations. But this will take time and regulators can do more to assist, enabling telcos to focus on the transition to net zero rather than the myriad of differing reporting requirements.



IAN DUNSTAN
COLBALT

I can't help but feel that Ofcom is ticking boxes of what they should be doing. Its work on getting women into senior tech roles has been good but we are still way behind where it should be. Now Ofcom has moved to net zero and has a single page environmental policy. Aligning your strategy to the government's is not enough. 2050 is too late. Ofcom needs to educate others and get their own house in order. We are proud to be carbon neutral and can tell others how we did it. Ofcom should do the same and share their journey.



MARK BURLAND
FIRST CLASS COMMS

It's not up to the regulator to drive change in helping telcos to become more sustainable businesses. Change needs to come from the bottom up, by companies recognising the benefits of greater sustainability and by encouraging each other to do better. It can take a great deal of investment to implement schemes throughout a business, particularly for larger firms. A good start is to share experiences, providing a collective foundation which we can build on together. Adoption of a standardised assessment model for telcos would help companies work out where they are, see how the industry leaders are doing better, and discover how they can improve.



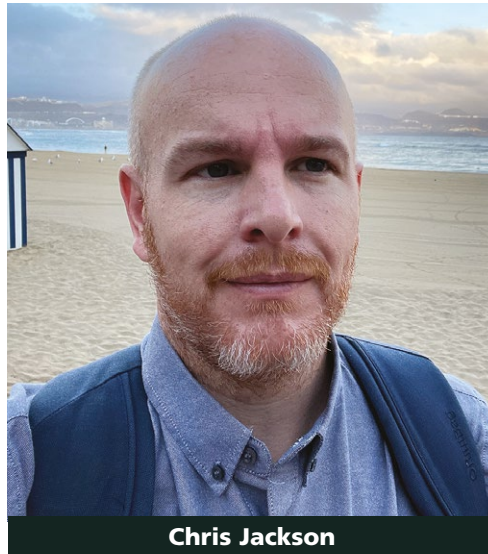
SIMON WOODHEAD
SIMWOOD

Ofcom's role is to protect the consumer and promote competition. It has plenty of work to do there. Net zero is not a sector-specific issue - it is a central government issue. Ofcom should focus on its remit. The biggest bang for the buck comes from fixing perennial issues around anti-competitive behaviour and such utterly broken processes as number portability. How much energy is wasted on a number port for a SME, or the inefficiency of onward routing? The regulator should know these answers and should itself be targeted to reduce them.



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Product chief hired



Chris Jackson

SIX Degrees' new product strategy and go-to-market timescales have been accelerated through the appointment of Chris Jackson as Chief Product and Technology Officer. He joins from online education provider Insendi where he was also Chief Product and Technology Officer focused on creating digital learning experiences for students globally. His previous senior leadership roles include stints with Thomas International, Pearson and Rackspace.

Jackson said: "Having spent the last 10 years working in precisely the kind of businesses Six Degrees exists to serve, I can bring these experiences to bear as we execute our roadmap of new cloud and security products."

CEO Simon Crawley-Trice added:

"Six Degrees continues to lean into new products and services, bringing together the latest in security and cloud technology. Chris' product and customer experience will enable us to bring offerings to market faster and with more impact."

Also on the move...

FORMER Arrow Business Communications' Chief Commercial Officer Simon Wort has joined Wholesale full fibre provider ITS Technology Group (ITS) as Chief Revenue Officer, a newly created position with responsibility for go-to-market functions including marketing, sales and business development. ITS CEO Daren Baythorpe said: "We have invested heavily in increasing our delivery capabilities to roll out full fibre where our partners need access for their end users. Simon's experience and people first approach will bring a lot to the table and drive further value into our go-to-market strategy and roadmap." Wort added: "I am joining at a pivotal time as ITS continues to scale at pace."



Simon Wort

MATRIX IT CTO Matt Faulkner has stepped into the MD role following a period of succession planning. Outgoing MD Nic Cronin stated: "Matt has the experience and drive to take Matrix to the next stage of its evolution." Faulkner joined Matrix in 2021 and has more than 20 years experience working in IT. His background is in engineering and solution design. During the past ten years he has held board level positions for a number of MSPs as well as providing virtual IT director support for SME businesses along the south coast.

PAULA Benoit has joined Glide Group as Chief Financial Officer. She brings 30-plus years experience including senior finance and operational leadership roles with network providers including KeyCom and Three. Her new remit also includes responsibilities across Glide's legal, regulatory, compliance and HR departments. Chief Executive Officer Tim Pilcher commented: "Paula will be a key asset as we continue along our ambitious growth journey."

A LEADERSHIP reshuffle at cloud comms provider NFON aims to put the German vendor back on track for growth and sees CTO Jan-Peter Koopmann released from his contract after 14 years with the firm while Patrik Heider assumes



Patrik Heider

the positions of CEO and CFO. The CMO role will be shelved and this function integrated into the sales department. "It's time to adapt NFON's corporate organisation to that of a modern software company and ensure that sales and marketing, product management and development, people and culture are given a decisive

and forward looking role in the organisation," stated Heider. "Only with the right structure will we be able to efficiently achieve sustainable profitability."



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If you would like to find out more about the Strategic Partner Programme please contact

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