



MIT's Andrew Lippman confirmed as Chair of Comms Vision p40

AV tech innovator thrives on visionary foundations p48



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CityFibre acquires Entanet for £29m

FAST-expanding CityFibre claims to have transformed the UK connectivity landscape with the £29m acquisition of wholesale comms provider Entanet.

SPECIAL REPORT

CityFibre's swoop on Entanet was accompanied by a £200m fund raise that doubles the firm's market value.

The all cash Entanet acquisition enables the alternative fibre infrastructure provider to offer wholesale fibre services and speed up the commercialisation of its fibre assets, while the funding enables it to ramp up its Gigabit Britain build-out.

CityFibre expects to realise synergies of over £3m per

annum within three years by combining its fibre infrastructure with Entanet's wholesale products, systems and relationships with channel partners.

Telford-based Entanet has amassed more than 1,500 channel partners which substantially increases CityFibre's broadening wholesale capabilities.

The deal gives Entanet's partners access to CityFibre's growing national footprints to deliver gigabit-speed services.

These will be offered alongside Entanet's existing connec-

tivity portfolio of fixed, wireless and mobile data connectivity services as well as hosted voice and telecoms.

CityFibre's Chief Executive Officer Greg Mesch (*pictured above*) said: "With Entanet now part of the CityFibre family, our combined offering will accelerate the take-up of services over our growing network footprints as we leverage Entanet's channel partner network and continue to transform digital connectivity for thousands of UK businesses." **Full story on p32**

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

IS TECHNOLOGY-centric talk past its zenith? Is the jargon wheel grinding slower than previous years? Are we entering a post-digital era that leaves behind abstract language like 'digitalisation' and 'cloud'? Perhaps we are: Industry change has brought about something far more tangible, something

more easily understood by employees and customers – the raw 'experience' of felt interactions, which is both dependent on technology and also a reaction to it.

In this ubiquitous experience landscape, what are the channel's challenges and opportunities, and how can we build a future-proof digital channel that delivers the promise of next generation 'experience' laden solutions? To answer these key questions Comms Dealer has introduced the concept of the Experience Defined Workplace, where an organisation is identifiable by the ICT experiences it provides to workers and customers.

With the 'experience' becoming the new differentiating battleground, the provision and management of experience-based outcomes has become the lynchpin of customer acquisition, client care and customer retention. It is remarkable experiences that burn into the memory, not the mechanisms through which they are delivered. If a customer has a great experience dealing with you they are unlikely to flit elsewhere.

This month we launch our editorial programme as part of the lead up to 2017's Comms Vision Conference, offering a platform to gain more insights into the Experience Defined Workplace, a theme that underpins this year's event (see page 40). Also in this issue is a round-up of last month's Margin in Voice & Data symposium where speakers put a spotlight on some of the strong market opportunities at hand, including WebRTC and the IoT (see page 50). Valuable insights were gained by delegates, and a wonderful experience was had by all.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

PSU nets Baikie via acquisition of Hub

CHELTHENHAM-based PSU Technology Group has bought in additional leadership expertise and technology capabilities with the acquisition of local rival Hub Business Solutions. Headline news from the deal is the appointment of Hub Director Stuart Baikie as PSU's Director of Telecoms Sales.

Baikie co-founded Total (now Bamboo) which he led as MD before leaving in 2014 having built a £12m business.

"Joining the PSU team was a no-brainer," stated Baikie. "We share the same ideas about it's not what you are using, but how and why you are using it. PSU is the right place for us to continue to create customer centric end-to-end solutions."



Glyn Evans, Stuart Baikie and Lorne Fry

Hub's Lorne Fry and Glyn Evans also take up lead roles as heads of departments for telco and mobile, reporting to Baikie.

PSU MD Michael Lounton commented: "Over the past year our customer growth and take up of multiple product lines has continued to flourish."

"Hub Business Solutions has built up a strong reputation for its mobile solutions, rapid site deployment, wireless networking and IoT deployments, making it the perfect fit for PSU."

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



FLUIDONE'S Bandwidth Bandits led by Chief Exec Piers Daniell conquered '10Peaks: The Lakes' in aid of charity Place2Be, which works to improve the emotional wellbeing of children and their families suffering from bereavement, domestic violence and bullying. The 10Peaks events are a challenge for the toughest competitors and include ultra-distance running and hiking across some of the UK's most rugged and mountainous terrain. The non-stop courses vary from 48km to 89km and must be finished within 24 hours. "We completed the 3-peaks challenge a couple of years ago so this was the next step for us," commented Daniell. "We covered over 50km across 3,500 meters of ascent in just under 18 hours. It was sheer agony. Having risen well over £20k since 2015 through various company activities, we'd really love to smash that figure in 2017."

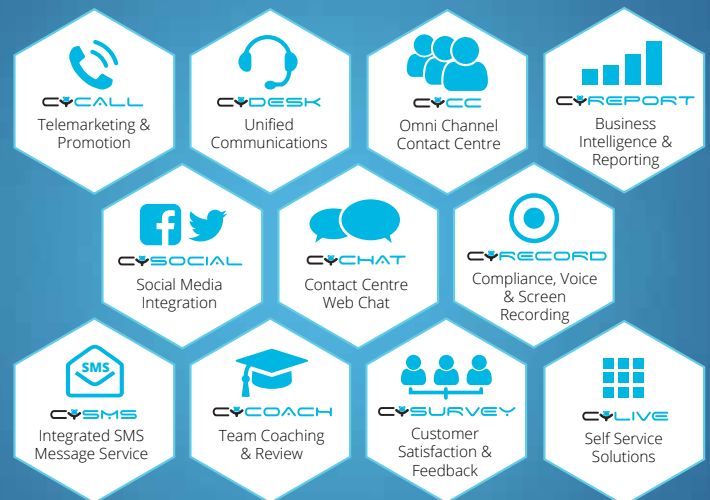
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COMMENT: TIME TO STAY STRONG



Richard Carter

RESILIENCE is one of the greatest strengths of any successful company, especially when times get tough and uncertainty appears. Following a monumental few months for the cities of Manchester and London due to the terror atrocities and the Grenfell fire, it's been great to see how local communities and businesses have pulled together in times of trouble.

Manchester has been our home for the last 36 years and it remains a dynamic, resilient and vibrant place, although it inevitably needs time to recover from the Arena bombing. The feeling that, despite all the foiled terror plots of the past, it could never happen here has sadly gone. There's been many tears along the way but the overriding emotions of love, spirit and pride are still evident everywhere.

Sadly, just a short time later London was savaged too which only worsened the pain, on the eve of the One Love Manchester pop concert which showcased the resilience of the city to a worldwide audience and reinforced how Manchester has come together.

It's fantastic how Manchester picked itself up. Visiting all the flowers in the city centre was a moving and sombre experience. Despite the big crowd it was quiet and peaceful but uplifting at the same time. We are living in uncertain times but must carry on. Manchester reinvented itself following an IRA bomb in 1996 and it will recover again.

The country has also witnessed a General Election which resulted in a hung Parliament as we prepare for Brexit talks to split from the European Union. More uncertainty lies ahead. But the UK remains in good shape with low unemployment and a powerful economy. Stay safe, stay strong and remain resilient.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

• Centile's renewed focus on the UK channel is playing into the hands of resellers, says Director General Bertrand Pourcelot (p26).

Daisy opens doors for mobile dealers

THE power of education as a door opener to adjacent markets has been emphatically underscored by the success of Daisy Distribution's Partner Academy launched in April.

The scheme has already seen scores of mobile-centric partners extend their reach into areas once alien to them.

Dave McGinn, Daisy Distribution MD, said: "Airtime was our bread and butter, it's our heritage and many of our partners' too. So to expect them to grasp connectivity, Wi-Fi and cloud etc overnight would be foolish of us. That is how the Partner Academy came about."

Six sessions have been completed by 64 partner delegates with a further 94 booked into the scheme.

The distributor has already seen 45 of those traditional mobile partners place orders for lines and calls, broadband, Ethernet, hosted voice, mobile and Wi-Fi.

"It's fantastic to see in such a short space of time how these sessions have helped our historically mobile-centric partners open up their businesses to new opportunities," added McGinn.

"It's about us connecting with our partners in a way that



Dave McGinn

allows them to connect with their customers and play a key role in their digital journeys."

Subjects covered by Daisy Distribution's Partner Academy so far include Daisy's hosted voice solution HV.Select,

Break-fix Maintenance, Daisy Wi-Fi and Intelligent Mobile.

McGinn also confirmed that two additional themes will be introduced later in the year – Connectivity for Productivity and the Digital Workplace.

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Cogent offers fresh options

WIRELESS networking distie Cogent Distribution has plugged a gap in the UK channel market with the introduction of an alternative set of wireless and mobile connectivity solutions, claims MD Jim Kernahan.

The company launched last month following a link-up with Peplink which provides SD-WAN, load balancing, VPN and proprietary bonding solutions designed to increase and secure wireless bandwidth.

“The rapid expansion and uptake of mobile and smart devices underscores the importance of delivering reliable high speed wireless connectivity,” commented Kernahan.

He also noted that the company has three core focus areas – high speed outdoor fixed wireless, indoor wireless and mobile data routing – and that technical expertise and fast product availability are also a priority.

“In the UK and Ireland there is a big opportunity to bring Peplink products to a wider audience,” said Kernahan. “We are well placed to do so and look forward to the challenge.”



Jim Kernahan

Cogent Distribution’s Peplink portfolio is supported by radio solutions from Siklu and Mobile Mark’s range of antennas that work with Peplink’s mobile data routing products, as well as covering other areas of wireless connectivity.

“Cogent Distribution is working closely with a number of manufacturers to deliver new products, consultancy and design services that integrate into existing customer infrastructures,” confirmed Kernahan.

Analyst forecasts indicate that spending on wireless telecoms worldwide will hit circa \$871bn by the end of 2017.

Stalwart bows out full-time

GAMMA’S Director of Business Development Richard Bligh stepped down on 30th June but will retain professional links as a part-time consultant for the firm’s Accelerate programme.

CEO Bob Falconer stated: “It has been a real pleasure to work closely with Richard over the last 13 years and he deserves much credit for his significant role in developing Gamma into the business it is today.”

Gamma Chairman Richard Last added: “I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Richard at Board level and welcomed his valuable counsel.

“While his presence will be missed by the team at Gamma, I am delighted that the company will continue to leverage his experience as a consultant in the future.”



Richard Bligh

ProVu names boss of sales

PROVU’S founder and Sales Director Ian Godfrey is to retire from the business paving the way for incoming Sales Director Craig Herrett who joins the distributor from VoIPon Solutions where he was COO following a stint as Sales Manager.

Herrett brings 20 years sales experience and was no stranger to ProVu MD Darren Garland who said: “Having known Craig for a number of years I have always admired his approach to work and his enthusiasm.”

Herrett added: “I will support the next level of growth while ensuring we stay true to ProVu’s core values.”



FOUR Directors from South West Communications Group have scaled the UK’s highest three peaks to raise money for the Prince’s Trust. swcomms’ MD Brian Lodge and fellow board members Jon Whiley, John Holdstock and Sean Doyle climbed Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon in 23 hours and 20 minutes to beat the Three Peaks Challenge 24-hour deadline. They also achieved this 29 mile, 3,064 metre feat on one of the hottest days of the year.

Lodge said: “It was an experience I’ll never forget. I was very proud of the total commitment shown from a great team who despite some serious pain never had it in their heads to fail.”

ICT Director John Holdstock added: “It was one of the most physically enduring challenges I have ever undertaken. However, it was also one of the most fun things I have done. There’s a thin line between pain and ecstasy!” Pictured: The team atop Ben Nevis.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Channel Telecom MD Clifford Norton is in a full swing of anticipation ahead of the firm's annual partner golf day, the ninth of its kind and this year staged at the dazzling RAC Club, Woodcote Park in Surrey, on July 27th.

"This exceptional course offers players the opportunity to enjoy one of the most superior golfing days available," he enthused.

Broadband provider Voneus has secured a £4.8m growth capital loan from BOOST-&Co alongside a £500k equity funding round raised by Jenson Funding Partners.

Voneus provides super-fast broadband to customers in UK rural and metro communities where alternative services may not be available.

Chess is offering a leasing option to over 600 partners for hardware products including mobile phones, PBX, tablets and iPads, along with additional commission.

The offer follows a link up with Henry Howard Finance, a pioneer in the mobile handset leasing marketplace.

Chess Partner MD John Pett said: "We are keen to expand the products and services we offer and leasing is a key part of our partner support growth strategy."

Purdicom in UKB buyout

DISTRIBUTOR of wireless communications kit Purdicom has gained a stronger foothold in the CCTV sector following its acquisition of UKB Solutions.

Purdicom says the move is the first in a buy and build strategy and it hopes to double business within 18 months on the back of the deal.

Purdicom will continue to serve UKB Solutions' customers, primarily in the CCTV and security space.

Hugh Garrod, MD at Purdicom, commented on the deal: "UKB Solutions is an excellent fit as we serve complemen-



Hugh Garrod

tary wireless markets and share many of the same vendors.

"This acquisition is significant as it provides us with both expertise and customers in the CCTV and security markets."

GCI disposes of Voda base

GCI is to focus on core business following the sale of its Vodafone mobile base to Connect Telecom.

The deal also sees Connect Telecom commit to a Skype for Business platform from GCI which in turn will leverage Connect's capabilities to fulfil smartphone requirements.

According to GCI's CEO Adrian Thirkill the move is a reflection of the MSP's streamlined strategy which has delivered in the year to May 2017 revenue growth of over 50%.

"This is a positive step for both Connect Telecom and

GCI," said Thirkill. "There are simple drivers behind our decision: It's about enabling GCI to focus on what we can be great at. That's our integrated suite of managed services – cloud, UC, security and compliance, network and infrastructure."

Scott Ritchie, CEO at Connect Telecom, added: "As one of only a handful of Vodafone Total Communications Partners in the UK and as part of a reciprocal arrangement Connect Telecom has partnered with GCI to support the growing UC requirements across our 45,000 strong customer base."

Energy paying off

FIDELITY Energy has secured over £50m worth of energy supplies under its management just three years after launch.

The Newbury-based business enables resellers to add energy solutions to their portfolios and build on established customer relationships.

MD John Haw said: "This is a significant achievement for the business and testament to the work that our team and partners have put in. The portal, exclu-

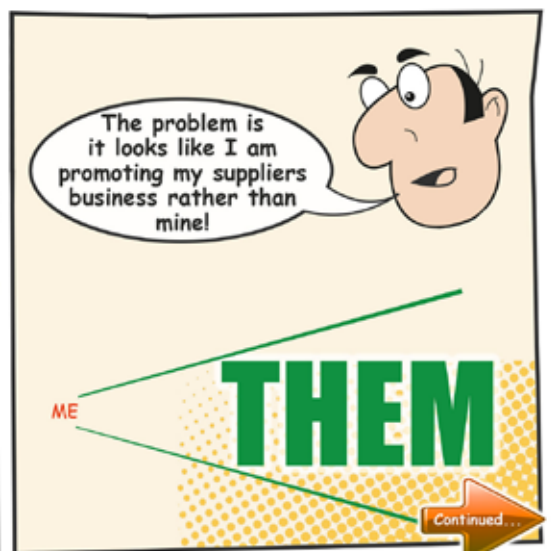
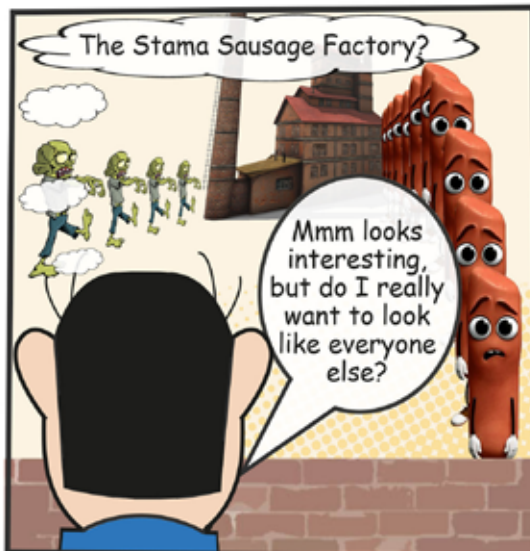


John Haw

sive renewable energy offers and marketing support are giving our partners an edge in the market. Couple that with their strong customer relationships and it's a winning formula."



BERRY Telecom has joined forces with distributor Pragma in a deal that sees the Salisbury-based reseller take to market Ericsson-LG's iPECS range of on-premise, cloud and UC solutions. Paul Hallam, co-owner of Berry Telecom, said: "In launching iPECS as our comms platform we are confident that with support from Pragma we will continue on our path of rapid and profitable growth." Pragma MD Tim Brooks added: "Berry is a phenomenal reseller and we look forward to supporting its business growth over the coming years." Pictured (l-r): Simon Langford, Berry co-owner; Jo-Anne Udy, Berry Finance Director; Tim Brooks; Paul Hallam; Helen Ranaghan, Pragma BDM; and Peter Marlow, Pragma Account Manager.



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COMMENT: MARKETING MATTERS



Neil Wilson

EARLIER in my career the focus was always on differentiation and answering the following questions: How do we stand apart from our competitors? What makes us unique? If we cracked those two, then like a Wayne's World concert customers would flock.

In recent years, however, I've started to look past this view. Especially when you consider that in the

channel stated differentiating factors can be the same as everyone else's. How many businesses use one or more of the following?... We have the best service, we deliver solutions not products, we provide the entire IT and telecoms suite, we have consultants, not sales people. So, in a world where all businesses are essentially saying the same thing, why are some more successful than others? Adept businesses will clearly deliver better on their differentiation than others, but often a customer doesn't find this out until they are on board.

To grow you need to attract new customers but in most cases differentiation won't work if target clients don't notice you in the first place. This is why you should park differentiation and focus on being distinct instead. To attract attention, building a strong and distinct brand that customers will recognise and remember is essential. When they come to consider the market, you are one of the first names that come to mind. There are some distinctive examples already in our marketplace, companies you recognise straight away, and it's no surprise that they are the more successful businesses.

While understanding what sets you apart is important, for me it's not as important as making sure you are always at the forefront of your customers' minds, which can only be achieved by prioritising your distinctiveness above your supporting primary differentiating factors.

Neil Wilson, Product and Marketing Manager, Virtual1

PMGC merges with Voda partner Pure

PMGC's acquisition of fellow Vodafone Total Communications Partner Pure Business Services for an undisclosed sum creates a combined entity that boasts over 70,000 connections and annual revenues of between £16m to £20m.

PMGC hopes that the deal will give it the critical mass and scale to become one of the largest independent telecoms and IT managed solutions providers in the UK, operating out of six offices (London, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Northampton and Manchester) and with an increased headcount of 110.

Shez Cheema will remain as CEO of the enlarged business. He previously played a key role at Azzurri Communications where, as CFO, he was involved in 16 acquisitions over a six year period that took the business to circa £150m turnover.

John Handley, CIO of Finance Birmingham and former Head of Lloyds Development Capital becomes Chairman.

PMGC's Sam O'Donnell continues as COO while Pure Business Services' Ricky Bayliss takes the Head of Converged Services position.

Cheema commented: "Growing the business organically and



Shez Cheema

moving us from a pure play fixed and mobile provider to a unified telecoms and IT fully managed service provider is now our sole focus.

"The acquisition gives us a springboard to enable some ambitious longer-term strategic aims that include IP voice, IT hosting and cloud computing.

"Further capability based acquisitions are being considered, and we are in discussions with a number of strategic IT, mobile and fixed line partners."

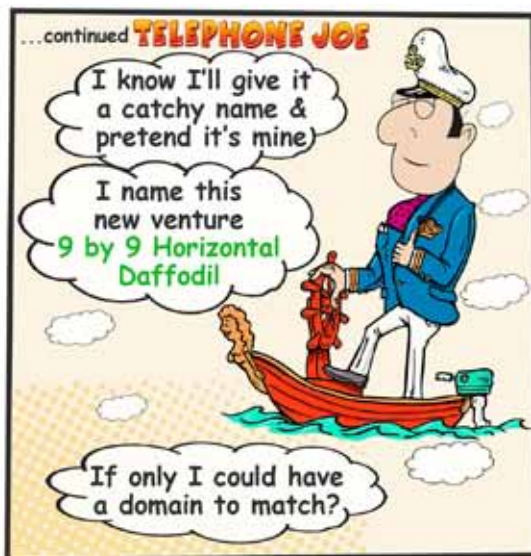
Helen Freestone, Partnership and Alliances Director at Vodafone UK, commented: "It's exciting news to see two strong

Vodafone Total Communications Partners coming together.

"Combining their range of skills in mobile, Unified Communications and IT services will be key as businesses increasingly look for fully integrated communications and technology support."

Pure Business Services was established in 2006 and has a head office in Northampton and satellite office in Warrington. The firm generates £8m-plus annual turnover and is also a Strategic Gamma Partner.

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COMMENT: INFORMAL MATTERS



Charles Aylwin

WHEN you think of a contact centre what do you see? An aircraft hangar sized space full of headset wearing agents? Or a handful of staff handling customer service enquiries within a busy office?

In reality, it's more likely to be the latter. Currently there are 766,000 people working in contact centres in the UK. However, there are more than six times this number (4.6 million) dealing

with customer service enquiries who don't work in a traditional contact centre. This 'secret army' represents a huge proportion of the customer service market in the UK. It also represents a significant opportunity for resellers.

Research recently carried out by 8x8 reveals that this group of informal contact centre workers aren't getting the same support as those who work full-time in a more formal contact centre environment. One area that has been identified as lacking in investment is technology. More than two fifths of informal contact centre staff say they don't have access to customer service technology that would assist them.

This is despite their jobs becoming more complex as businesses offer customers more channels to get in touch. Over half of these strained staff say there's been an increase in customers getting in touch via social media, email and webchat in the last 12-18 months. But only around a third are very confident when handling multiple service enquiries across different channels.

Resellers can help by understanding the customer service demands of these struggling businesses and offering the right solution, even for a small two or three person team. With the advent of cloud-based contact centre technology this doesn't have to be a huge investment for businesses, but rather a great weapon to improve overall customer service that can boost your bottom line.

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

IT projects stymied by ill-defined RFPs

THE outcome of most IT projects is stymied by the very process that brings them into life, according to KCOM, which has called for an urgent review of IT Request for Proposal (RFP) processes which are all too often tilted towards IT matters rather than taking into consideration the wider business goals.

KCOM claims this skewed approach stifles partner innovation and fails to meet an end user's future requirements.

KCOM bases its argument on an examination of RFPs it received in 2016 and 2017 for strategic IT projects.

The aim of the study was to determine whether the RFP process encouraged innovation and supported the overall business goals such as an improved customer experience.

The upshot is that just 14% of RFPs showed evidence of collaboration between IT and the wider organisation.

A lack of input from external sources such as suppliers is also a block to innovation, along with a reluctance to form strategic partnerships that might deliver better long-term results.

Only 30% of RFPs for consumer-focused projects required a measurement of how the IT



Stephen Long

project would improve the customer experience, with the rest focusing on IT metrics.

More than half of the RFPs examined failed to ask vendors how they would ensure their proposal was future-proof.

"Our analysis reveals that the overwhelming majority of RFPs were developed in 'IT isolation', with measures of success being IT-centric rather than focused on broader business or customer outcomes, even where project objectives were specifically to improve the customer experience or improve service delivery," commented Stephen Long, EVP at KCOM.

"This, combined with a common failure to encourage technology providers to propose solutions that are innovative and

future-proofed, has led KCOM to conclude that the traditional approach to enterprise technology projects needs an overhaul. It is a process that has barely evolved in decades.

"Business strategies that focus on collaboration, customer centricity and future proofing are remarkably rare in a typical RFP. The process is too rigid, restrictive and defensive for business ambitions to be reflected, or for the supplier to act as an innovative partner, jeopardising the ultimate success and commercial benefit of the project.

"For many industries, customer experience is one of the last differentiators available to them, so enterprises can ill afford to limit the potential of technology projects intended to enhance this service delivery.

"The current enterprise IT RFP process is not fit for purpose. Realistically, the process is unlikely to be replaced wholesale, but it can be improved.

"Over specifying technical requirements, restricting dialogue with prospective partners and an over reliance on a score-card procurement process does not demonstrate innovation and thought leadership."

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COMMENT: MAKING PROGRESS



Dave Dadds

AS OUR new Government scrabbles to get its ministerial portfolios in a row before everyone clears off on holiday, their job is hampered by the sheer number of business organisations filling their in-boxes with well meaning suggestions. So here's a simple one on behalf of the channel

– carry on as you were, please. The last nine months or so saw a huge political shift in favour of our industry. Organisations like FCS and INCA that have been banging on for years about infrastructure competition and business grade connectivity suddenly found DCMS was taking them seriously. The Minister even coined a new phrase, 'full fibre', to leave nobody in any doubt where the Government sees the future.

For the first time in British political history the word 'infrastructure' was used officially for something more than motorways, railways and runways. Broadband is now specifically included in the National Infrastructure Commission's terms of reference. To make sure it all happens we were given a cross-cutting Cabinet-level committee including heavyweights like the Paymaster General, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Universities Minister, Housing Minister and Rail Minister.

Within DCMS, a new Directorate of Digital and Media Policy was created, headed up by no-nonsense former ambassador Matthew Gould. All of this is a hugely encouraging direction of travel, not just for the channel, but for UK plc as it seeks to empower and equip British business with the connectivity necessary for post-Brexit international trade. It's also a vindication of FCS's efforts to influence the policy makers on the channel's behalf.

We should be encouraged to see Karen Bradley and Matt Hancock re-appointed to their old roles at DCMS. Let's hope they can rapidly pick up where they left off. More of the same, please.

Dave Dadds, Chairman, FCS

Watson sets out strategy

AURORA Kendrick James has confirmed that it will continue to trade under the Aurora brand name and remain independent of the Daisy Group which acquired Aurora's parent company Alternative Networks in November 2016.

Aurora MD Derek Watson stated: "With the Daisy acquisition now finalised we are investing heavily in our Affinity billing platform with a raft of new products set to be released."

Watson outlined that Aurora has put in place a long-term investment programme aimed at high end customers and a strategy to secure a greater proportion of its target billing market.

"Investments will enhance Aurora's supplier integrations to extend the single key provisioning to billing capability across a greater range of products and suppliers," added Watson.

"Affinity's cloud billing capability will also see further investment along with the product plan."

Aurora's data centre hardware is undergoing an upgrade that will triple the number of customers using Affinity's hosted bureau billing services.

Watson also emphasised that Aurora's largest customers



Derek Watson

should expect their call rating activity to be completed within a two hour window.

"Aurora has also introduced new capabilities that will increase customers' productivity and ensure they are able to get new products to market quicker," added Watson.

"Packages can be altered to best suite usage profiles while our revenue assurance and bill shock prevention system can be fine-tuned to the needs of the end user.

"This facility raises alerts on targeted usage via email and SMS and can also enact network bars to reduce further exposure to exceptional usage."

Aurora has also enhanced Affinity's reconciliation facilities to allow customers to match their supplier invoices to the charges they are passing on to their customers.

Centile to target UK with PaaS

FRANCE-based UC provider Centile Telecom Applications has signalled its intention to expand further into the UK market with the appointment of former 8el and Ultracomms Chief Executive Justin Hamilton-Martin as UK Business Development Director.

Bertrand Pourcelot, Director General, stated: "The UK currently accounts for about 10% of our global revenue and we see huge potential to grow that."

Hamilton-Martin will work with telecom service providers and resellers and also manage local Centile customer services.

He said: "The time is right for a challenger brand like Centile to grow in the UK. As well as carrier grade telecom services we will also be introducing a Platform as a Service (PaaS) offering in the UK based on our success in France.

"This will create an entry level solution for companies new to IP Centrex, or who don't want to run their own data centre assets and in-house technical expertise. We also anticipate interest in our FMC solution."

Centile supports around 100 service providers in 20 countries with its UC, IP Centrex and FMC products. See page 26

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GCI swoops on Blue Chip

GCI's acquisition of IT managed services giant Blue Chip marks another step towards a channel 'sea-change' according to CEO Adrian Thirkill.

Announcing GCI's third and biggest acquisition in 18 months for an undisclosed sum, Thirkill indicated that channel partnerships built by GCI Channel Solutions are likely to realign as the company continues its transformation programme.

This includes the absorption of the profitable £6m Channel Solutions division into the company's overall MSP model.

Director of Channel & Mid-Market Sales Mark Whitehead departed the firm last month, but Thirkill stressed it will be business as usual for certain channel partners.

"We have people in the channel business that will take on the responsibility, which is now wider and deeper within our organisation rather than being



Adrian Thirkill

stand-alone," he said. "The support will continue as normal but the type of partners we engage with will change.

"If you are an old fashioned partner wanting to buy connectivity at a cheap price, then go to somebody who does that as their core business.

"A channel partner that is sophisticated, wants to digitise themselves and deliver end-to-end business outcomes will understand how to engage with us and find it easier to do so.

"The acquisition also delivers a fifth service pillar, a consultative capability already inherent in GCI's DNA but now elevated to a whole new level."



NIMANS has collected Polycom's Distribution Partner of the Year award following a 20% uptick in sales driven primarily by shipments of RealPresence Trio and the VVX handsets. Ian Brindle, Nimans' Head of Conferencing and Telephony Sales, commented: "Like-for-like sales from 2015 to 2016 rose significantly not just in terms of volume but also percentage growth compared our rivals." Pictured (l-r): Jeremy Keefe, Area Sales Vice President UK, Ireland and Southern Europe for Polycom with Ian Brindle.

Node4 in database mgt deal

NODE4 has added database managed services to its portfolio following an investment in Nottingham-based Onomi.

Node4's Chief Executive Andrew Gilbert commented: "Onomi's capabilities give us an opportunity to introduce cloud database skills and management services to our customers."

Database managed services cover areas such as implementation, database administration, optimisation, support, maintenance and disaster recovery of business critical databases.

Julian Boneham, who is the Director and co-founder at Onomi, commented: "We've grown quickly and therefore needed to develop our back-office operations, but doing it on our own would have required us to slow down."

Andrew Slater, Director and co-founder at Onomi, added: "This investment enables us to scale the business without any disruption to our customers. We now have the ability to scale and invest in staff and technology to continue to innovate."

Jola adds to mobile offer

JOLA has added O2 SIMs to its JolaMobile portfolio, meaning that partners can now order voice and data SIMs for devices from either Vodafone or O2 and control them via one portal.

Lee Broxson, Sales Director, said: "At Griffin we launched 'ISP in a box,' a white label provisioning system for resellers to manage their own Internet connectivity from multiple carriers.

"Now Jola has developed a similar system for partners to manage mobile SIMs.

"With the increasing demand for 3G and 4G connectivity and 5G in the future, resellers need something to manage burgeoning mobile estates."



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Cloud security lifts off as SMBs adopt Inclarity adds licenses offer

THE rapid ascent of cloud-based security has been spotlighted by figures from Gartner which suggest that the global market value in 2017 is up 21% on last year at \$5.9bn.

Analysts have confirmed that the market will remain strong and they predict that the cloud-based security services market will hit \$9bn by 2020.

Security information and event management (SIEM) systems and identity access management (IAM) along with emerging technologies have been touted by Gartner as the fastest growing cloud-based security services segments.

"Email security, web security and identity and IAM remain organisations' top three cloud priorities," commented Gartner analyst Ruggero Contu.

The emerging technologies of note include threat intelligence enablement, cloud-based malware sandboxes, cloud-based data encryption, endpoint protection management, threat intelligence and web application firewalls (WAFs).

Gartner says SMBs are driving growth in the cloud-based security services market as they are becoming more aware of security threats and have noted

that cloud deployments can also reduce costs.

"The cloud medium is a natural fit for the needs of SMBs," said Contu. "Its ease of deployment and management, pay-as-you-consume pricing and simplified features make this delivery model attractive for organisations that lack resources."

Gartner also highlighted new security defences that it says should be considered in 2017.

These include cloud workload protection platforms, remote browsers, deception security to trick and confuse hackers, endpoint detection and response to pinpoint unusual behaviour, network traffic analysis, managed detection and response third party services, micro-segmentation to limit damage from a breach, software-defined perimeters and container security.

For more on security see p34

Comm-Tech snares local firm Fine Line

NORWICH-based Comm-Tech Voice & Data has bagged Great Yarmouth company Fine Line Communications following the retirement of its owner.

Fine Line will continue to operate under its own brand.

Comm-Tech MD Justin Millar stated: "With the skill sets and assets both businesses can bring together this is the natural choice to continue the legacy of both companies."

Former Fine Line owner Kenny Leak said: "Having decided to retire we have left



Justin Millar

the company in good hands. Comm-Tech will strengthen every aspect of the business and take the customer experience to the next level."

Comm-Tech was established 30 years ago and is a Vodafone Total Communications Partner.

INCLARITY channel partners can now make one-off purchases of licenses, own them outright and make more margin by selling them via a SaaS-based monthly subscription model.

"LifeTime licenses are a pre-purchase capex option that allows Inclarity's channels to purchase licenses up front giving them a permanent right of use," commented Enzo Viscito, Inclarity's MD.

Each license gives the user access to all subscriber features on the Inclarity Broadworks VoIP platform. They can be used with any type of supported handset or soft phone and any of Inclarity's bolt-on advanced features and services.

"When purchased these licenses become the property of the channel partner enabling reuse at the end of each customer term," added Viscito.

"We are making the deal more attractive to our channel partners by enabling favourable finance options for up to five years which allows partners to spread the cost of their licences over a similar term to an end user contract.

"We are taking a flexible approach with the services and models we offer to our channels,



Enzo Viscito

and welcome new channels that see the revenue potential in this lucrative license model."

In other news, Inclarity has added the full range of Polycom VVX handsets to its VoIP telephony bundles.

Viscito commented: "Businesses are demanding high quality, flexible and secure VoIP bundles at a keen price.

"This is why we are offering our channel the widest choice of Polycom VVX business media phones, along with the internationally recognised BroadSoft Enterprise License and virtually unlimited minutes.

"To help resellers sell our bundles we include number porting, DDI numbers and a quick migration turnaround."

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Distributors rack up sales

THE European IT market outstripped its American counterpart in Q1 2017 according to the Global Technology Distribution Council (GTDC).

Nearly all European countries registered growth in sales through distribution up 3% from January to 6% in March 2017.

The period saw a turnaround in fortunes for countries that not so long ago posted declines.

In March, Spain was up 13%, Portugal 19% France 4%, Belgium 12% Germany 7%, Norway 16% and the UK 12%.

"This shows that there is a real opportunity for growth in the industry," commented GTDC CEO Tim Curran.

"There is a bold new world in distribution, providing more than pick, pack and ship, and as a resource for vendors in their go-to-market strategies.

"We come from an industry based on inventory, cost and fixed assets. But greater integration between distribution and vendors has created an industry with lower inventory, which is more efficient and profitable.

"Distribution has widened as a model to touch every part of the supply chain, and by leveraging distribution vendors can grow their profitability.



Tim Curran

"Distribution can also help solution providers with skills shortages, particularly in the technology solutions around cloud. Vendors often say they need help to enable their partners to take advantage of the new ways of working.

"Distributors are doing this now but vendors are still not yet utilising their services to the fullest potential."

That said, Curran also noted that buying intentions among consumers showed some hesitation, especially in the UK where there are concerns over Brexit.

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BT ramps up channel play

THE launch of a new partner programme is clear evidence of BT reinvigorating its channel commitment, according to Steve Rathborne, BT Business Partner Channel Director.

The move follows the integration of EE and BT and means partners can sell branded fixed and mobile products.

"We're looking to extend more benefits to business customers that would prefer to source BT and EE services through channel partners," commented Rathborne.

"BT has committed to invest more than £6bn in improving the speed and coverage of UK

broadband and mobile services over the next three years."

The refreshed channel programme is supported by an enlarged partner sales team, a revamped service model, improved training and access to sales and marketing campaigns.

"These initiatives will make it easier for partners to work with BT to increase sales and deliver an improved customer experience," added Rathborne.

BT is planning to introduce the Business Partner Gateway in Q3, a portal that offers access to quote tools, customer service channels, management information and marketing collateral.



NIMANS' most dedicated staff who go the extra mile for customers and colleagues have been rewarded with a four day trip to Dubai, the culmination of this year's The Edge incentive scheme which is open to all employees who, if they win, can bring along their partners. Mat Weall, Head of Sales Operations, said: "The Edge recognises, nurtures and inspires the highest levels of performance and engagement. The winners had an amazing time in Dubai and I'm looking forward to seeing who rises to the top this year." The Dubai trip follows last year's New York break and this year Nimans has lined up Monte Carlo as the star prize.

Arista in push for partners

ARISTA has joined forces with Cloud Distribution in a partner recruitment campaign to bring its software-based data centre solutions to market.

Figures suggest that the global data centre switching market will grow more than 30% between 2016 and 2021.

Bruce Hockin, Director of Data Centre Solutions at Cloud Distribution, stated "We recognise the huge opportunity for partners to capitalise on data centre growth which is why we have created a new data centre infrastructure team purely focused on this market."

Arista Senior Vice President of Global Operations and Marketing, Mark Foss, commented: "Our partnership with Cloud Distribution will help facilitate the customer shift towards cloud networking."

Arista partner Flomatik's MD Ben Allwright anticipates forming stronger customer relationships following its link-up with the firm.

"Arista is a natural extension of our traditional network services offering, allowing us to drive value deeper into the data centre, creating a high performance end-to-end solution for our customers," he stated.



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NEWS ROUNDUP

Sennheiser and 3CX have formed a technology partnership to deliver compatibility between the headset maker's UC product portfolio and 3CX's software-based PBX including the latest 3CX v15.5 release.

Nick Galea, CEO at 3CX, said: "With Sennheiser's UC headset portfolio 3CX customers can experience our UC solutions to the fullest."

TelcoSwitch has added a new feature to its CallSwitch service, CRM+, which provides out-of-the-box integration with over 30 CRM platforms.

Paul Gibbs, Sales Director at TelcoSwitch, said: "Every call is automatically updated with the full call record, recording and outcome. New tasks can be automatically set while notes are stored and sent to colleagues."

The first phase of TeleWare's move towards offering an all-encompassing central control hub has been completed with the introduction of a single login for its TCM solution.

Daniel Hensby, Head of Product Management, stated: "TCM is the first to move over to a centralised control dashboard. In time, this hub will house all TeleWare services, communication recordings and reporting tools."

Ex-BT leader hired by ITS

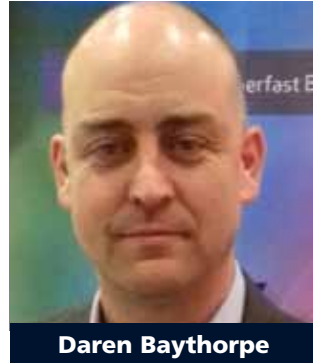
A FORMER Openreach top executive has joined ITS Technology Group as MD.

Daren Baythorpe was Openreach's MD for the Business and Corporate Delivery division.

He has also held a number of senior management positions and advised on the telecoms and utility sectors.

Baythorpe, who has spent the last six months advising ITS on strategy, commented: "I'm now working with ITS and the wider team more formally. The business has many qualities and has worked hard to establish itself as a major altnet provider."

ITS CEO Roy Shelton said: "Daren has transformed some of the largest and complex workforces in the telecoms sector.



Daren Baythorpe

"Plans are already in place and being delivered for the growth of our 21 networks throughout the UK.

"ITS goes from strength to strength and with Daren's focus and direction along with our additional investment from our first institutional investor there are some exciting times ahead."

Martino plans more growth

TOLLRING has set out plans to extend its Uxbridge-based office facilities and ramp up its partnering campaign across EMEA, Australia and the USA.

The move follows a year that saw Tollring notch up 42% turnover growth and a doubling of profits.

In 2016 the firm launched integrated cloud analytics, call recording and real-time fraud and credit management, onboarding over 50,000 endpoints across more than 2,000 business tenants on its hosted platforms.

This growth brings the number of monitored endpoints to over 250,000 across 11,000 business customers.

MD Tony Martino said: "To stay relevant and provide cus-



Tony Martino

tomers with the right information at the right time is a constant challenge as communication continually evolves.

"Full credit to our UK and international teams who have remained flexible, agile and dynamic throughout this period of exceptional growth."

Premier title for DMSL

DISTRIBUTOR DMSL has been appointed as a Premier Partner of BT, the telco's highest accreditation level.

The move sees BT invest in partner sales and gives DMSL access to exclusive support and resources. Under its new designation DMSL is able to offer BT Authorised Suppliers discounts and promotions, demonstration

and evaluation equipment, trials and pilots for new products, access to partner training and dedicated support from BT.

"As BT brings forward new products such as GFast and FTTP connectivity options and mobile devices and services, the opportunities for Authorised Suppliers are growing," stated DMSL MD John Carter.



ONECOM marked its 15th anniversary with a surprise party for staff and the launch of Onecom Employee Plus, a programme of

learning, development and rewards designed to boost positivity and productivity inside and outside working hours. The firm's 400 workers based at its Whiteley HQ and 11 regional offices also received £25 to spend on the celebrations. COO Aaron Brown said: "To mark this milestone we wanted to reiterate our commitment to the training and development of our people, to their health and wellbeing and to establishing a positive work-life balance. Pictured above: Aaron Brown celebrates with Onecom staff."





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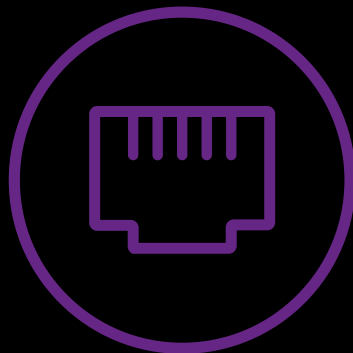
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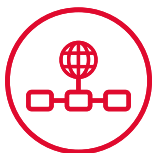
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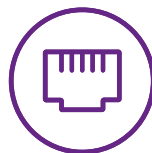
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NEWS ROUNDUP

Synnex has pocketed Westcon-Comstor's North and Latin American businesses in a deal that also sees the California-based distributor acquire a 10% stake in its international operations.

The transaction is expected to close in the third calendar quarter of 2017. Until the transaction is completed, the companies will continue to operate independently.

A new Automated Speech Transcription solution introduced by Liquid Voice helps contact centres and control rooms to more effectively locate and replay stored recordings when used in conjunction with the company's interaction recording and quality monitoring platforms.

Andrew Barrett, Technical Director, stated: "The system will also help organisations to comply with the stringent GDPR standards that become mandatory in May 2018."

Wavenet has bagged its second acquisition of the year, following up its purchase of Talk Internet in March 2017 with the addition of Norfolk-based Swains.

The deal follows a £30m investment in Wavenet by Beech Tree Private Equity.

Wavenet CEO Bill Dawson said: "Our increased scale and resources will strengthen supplier relationships, deliver a better customer experience and give Swains' customers access to our broader product sets in UC and IT services."

CityFibre has achieved full ISO certification in all core management systems.

The project was supported by certification body NQA and completed in 12 months.

Matt Gantley, MD at NQA, stated: "Certification requires a commitment to linking strategy with processes, as well as ongoing improvements in quality, safety, environmental performance and risk prevention and control."

Cresswell in new venture



Peter Cresswell

ALTHOUGH a start-up business, communications consultancy Springtel's founder and MD Peter Cresswell underpins the company with almost ten years industry experience, especially in the billing sector.

His father, Steve, was a founding director of Union Street Technologies and instrumental in writing the firm's aBILLity billing platform.

"I joined Union Street in 2008 and worked in a variety of roles, from first line support, second line support, team leader and Technical Support Manager," said Cresswell jnr.

Fours years later he joined Channel Telecom as Operations and Billing Manager and in 2013 decided to go it alone. He contracted for a number of comms firms including G3, Edge Solutions, Digiquip and Direct Response Group which he joined as Billing Manager.

"Within the first three months my team got the billing cycles for telecoms, call centre and Cirrus (a cloud contact centre provider) down to the first three working days of the month, instead of the two weeks it had always taken," added Cresswell.

"I was asked to work more closely with the Cirrus side of the business, helping to design its commercial pricing model and strategy ahead of a channel roll-out. I then worked more closely with the CEO on various other projects."

Having left Direct Response Group in February this year, Cresswell launched Springtel in May to make available his experience and services to comms companies, offering an outsourced service for billing runs, reporting, analysis of billing system configurations, advice on commercials, bespoke software development and help with migrations or acquisitions.

"We also offer cover for bill runs either as a one-off for holiday or sickness or on a longer-term basis," he added. "These services are more cost-effective than employing a full-time billing or commercial manager."

"Outsourcing the billing functions can also have a big impact on efficiency as well as enabling cost savings."

CompTIA sets out manifesto

IT INDUSTRY body CompTIA has targeted the Government and all other political parties with a manifesto that outlines recommendations on how to secure the UK's digital future.

CompTIA has called for cross party endorsement for all key parts of the UK Digital Strategy and argues that digital skills must be a core component of all apprenticeships, believing that the UK must avoid a 'one size fits all' approach to digital skill qualifications.

CompTIA also urges cross party scrutiny on how local SMEs can be involved in the careers advice process.

The industry has called on the Government to put SMEs at the heart of the digital agenda, focusing on two particular areas – regional tech eco-systems and specialist skill pipelines.

Graham Hunter, VP, EMEA at CompTIA, said: "The digital market is of vital importance to the economy, as highlighted in a recent report from Tech Nation which revealed that there are 1.64 million digital jobs in the UK, and new jobs are created at over twice the rate of the non-digital sector."

"It is important that the Government has a plan to guarantee

that the technology sector continues to grow and thrive.

"With monumental political negotiations slated to take place as the UK leaves the EU, it is vital that the Government takes into account what potential impacts these will have on the digital economy and have the tools and information available to make the best decision for the sector and nation as a whole."

"From digital strategy through to developing a world class technology workforce, the Government must look to work with bodies within the sector to secure a prosperous technology industry, and sustained job creation for a healthy UK economy in the future."



Graham Hunter

Bamboo holds charity day

A BIKEATHON and car wash fund raising event staged by Bamboo Technology Group at its Cheltenham head offices has raised over £500 for local charity Deaf Direct which gives support to the deaf and hard-of-hearing in Herefordshire, Oxfordshire and Worcestershire.

During the bikeathon, which took place on Cheltenham's hottest day of the year at the time, 32 staff members did nine minute stints each on a fitness bike clocking up 107 miles between them. Other staff washed their



Vicky Scofield

colleagues' cars in return for a £10 charity donation.

MD Lorrin White commented: "With one-in-six people in

the UK being unable to hear this was a worthy cause which affects us all in some way."

Deaf Direct CEO Philip Gerrard said: "Bamboo has helped to change the lives of deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Hearing loss is invisible, but we make sure the person isn't. This year is Deaf Direct's 90th anniversary and we are grateful that local businesses like Bamboo are supporting our work."

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Newing bags biggest buy



Matt Newing

ELITETELE.COM has netted Leeds-based Nexus Telecommunications, its largest acquisition to date, adding £16m revenue and 35 staff.

The deal is Elite's 15th since 2008 and boosts revenues to £50m-plus with underlying EBITDA of over £8m, representing growth of 37% and 43% over Elite's FY7/16 results.

The enlarged group will have in excess of 165 staff across seven locations and extends Elite's customer base and geographic presence.

Elite founder and CEO Matt Newing stated: "Nexus has a great reputation and we share a similar culture. The combination of our two companies' uni-

fied comms and IT products and services will deliver a stronger client offering.

"Nexus has some bespoke service wrap solutions for corporate and enterprise clients that we will offer to our wider customer base."

Nexus CEO Rob Sims, who is staying with the business, commented on the deal: "Our customers will benefit from Elite's range of services including hosted IT services, PCI compliance, SIP services, phone systems and numbering services, which will complement the Nexus offering."

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Rainbow's investing

NORTHERN Ireland comms provider Rainbow has added £1m to its annual £5m investment pot dedicated to customer support, adding 10 more staff to its customer service and engineering teams.

The company will also invest in cloud-based products during the next two years.

Stuart Carson, Sales Director, said: "This is a mobile world. Companies need to adapt to stay ahead. Unified communications are of paramount importance and relevance and this invest-



Stuart Carson

ment will allow us to develop our offering over the coming years for all our clients."

Rainbow has 10,000-plus clients across Northern Ireland and offices in Belfast, Dublin and Glasgow.

NEWS ROUNDUP

Highlight has awarded Daisy Group 'Most Effective Up-sell Campaign' recognition for a scheme that targeted SMB customers with the Highlight product as an add-on to their Daisy connectivity service.

Dave McGinn, MD of Daisy SMB, stated: "The analytics that Highlight provides is detailed, and as a result we were able to specifically target customers who were using 80% or more of their bandwidth and offer them the chance to upscale to ensure that their connectivity experience wasn't degraded."

Union Street Technologies has completed the northern leg of its Streets Ahead roadshow which kicked off at Glasgow's Grand Central Hotel before calling at Newcastle's Crowne Plaza.

The firm used both venues to demonstrate aBillity's latest developments including the billing platform's new web browser interface.

Head of Sales and Marketing Vincent Disneur commented: "It was great to share information on what we've been working on, what's coming soon and how our software can boost profitability and productivity. We look forward to visiting Bristol and London for the southern stage of the roadshow."

Streamwire has followed up its 2015 acquisition of Event Computer Services with the purchase of EACS, boosting revenues to almost £20m.

Kevin Timms, who co-founded Streamwire with Anne Stokes, will become CEO of the combined company which will trade as EACS.

Stokes will remain on the board and lead the transition while developing wider business interests.

Timms commented: "We now have a platform to take our business to the next level, expand into the cloud and cyber security spaces and take on established IT suppliers."

Chandler energy move paying off

MOVING into the supply of energy services is paying off for Northampton based Chandler Communications. Since partnering with channel energy specialist Fidelity Energy just a month ago, the comms and managed services business reports an astonishing success rate in offering existing customers savings on their energy bills.

"We're currently informing all our existing customers about the savings they could make and to date we have had a 98% success rate in terms of saving against renewal quotes," said Sales Director James Ryan.

The key to the success has been the ease of the sales process, as Ryan explained: "All the information we require is on a customer's bill and thanks to Fidelity Energy's help and support we have learned a lot about the process.

"We have very strong relationships with the business community in the region, enabling us to offer first class service, back up and support to all our customers. We decided to partner with Fidelity Energy due to their like-minded approach to customers, ensuring service and response times are at the levels we offer our customers. We also liked their approach to saving customers money and ensuring they are on the best possible packages available."

Chandler Communications learned about Fidelity Energy's

services via Comms Dealer. They felt the addition of energy was a natural addition to their services portfolio and valued Fidelity's simple approach to getting them up and running.

"We wanted to offer our new and existing customers a larger product portfolio under our managed services umbrella," said Ryan.

"We can now take the hassle and strain out of the minefield that energy can sometimes be. We like to be able to make things simple and painless for our customers but also ensure they are comfortable in the knowledge they are getting a competitive package with award winning customer service.

"Fidelity Energy have offered back up, support knowledge and, most importantly, patience to enable us to not only roll this out but hand hold us through the first few opportunities. From obtaining a customer's bill to processing a signed contract there are many other steps in the process, all of which the team at Fidelity have been a massive help with. They have expert, dedicated internal account managers, offering advice, taking things off my hands, quoting and explaining bespoke deals and ensuring they are locked in in time.

"In addition we have a great field based Account Manager who has helped us take the first steps, provided training and lots of support. I can't thank the team enough."



“ We decided to partner with Fidelity Energy due to their like-minded approach to customers, ensuring service and response times are at the levels we offer our customers.”

JAMES RYAN – SALES DIRECTOR, CHANDLER COMMUNICATIONS



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On the track with ex-Stig



Fastest 4 delegates on track with The Stig

TWENTY four of the channel's top sellers descended on PalmerSport's race track for KCOM's annual Fastest 4 racing incentive event on June 7th.

KCOM's Head of Channel Sales Henry West hosted the day which saw delegates put through their paces by Ben Collins, Top Gear's longest running Stig.

Collins said: "KCOM's 2017 Fastest 4 event produced a thrilling duel between two teams of tech-savvy speed merchants.

"They treated the brake pedal like the enemy and scorched around former F1 racer Jonathan Palmer's circuit like a swarm of cruise missiles.

"Driving the sporty Renault Clio Cup, twitchy Ariel Atom and bruising BMW M4 GTP cars was a new experience for

many guests, and one that will take some weeks for both the cars and the racing instructors to recover from.

"I always try to ensure that I have the last word, and taking the guests for a time attack as passengers aboard the Palmer JP Le Mans car was one way to guarantee they left with a smile across their faces and, in some cases, a little lunch too."

The day conclude with a prize giving ceremony that rewarded driving skills, racing etiquette and all else in between.

KCOM's Fastest 4 incentive continues to attract new partners such as Jackie Killiard, Sales Manager at Diva Telecom, who enthused: "What could top being driven around the track at PalmerSport by ex-Stig Ben Collins? Nothing!"

NSN kicks off buying spree

NEW Star Networks (NSN) has bagged hosted telephony provider iB2i and according to NSN CEO Mark Shraga the deal adds greater value to iB2i's customers and is the first in a series of planned cloud telephony provider acquisitions.

"The NSN service wrap will significantly upgrade iB2i's client experience," he stated.

iB2i MD Kamal Hussain commented: "We chose New Star Networks as a natural progression for our SME focused business offering.

"We aim to grow in partnership with NSN and ensure the personal touch is never lost."



Ryan Kersey

NSN Channel Director Ryan Kersey commented: "We're in the market and ready to move quickly when companies come to us and want to become a part of our success story."

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

Scorching sales run

CHANNEL Telecom has attributed a run of record breaking month-on-month Managed Internet Access Services sales to its commercial proposition and the launch of OPTIC, an online pricing portal.

Stuart Burdett, Head of Data Services, stated: "Demand for cloud-based services is also a driver for business grade connectivity. And since the launch of Nimbus UC in August our Ethernet orders have soared."

MD Clifford Norton enthused: "Successes like these motivate us to keep pushing the boundaries. As interest in Nimbus UC grows we're noticing a series of positive knock-on effects throughout the organisation – and it's fantastic."

Distie adds service

INGRAM Micro has opened up to the channel its expanded configuration capabilities following the launch of a new service that builds on its acquisition of Comms-Care in May 2016.

The services will be delivered from its facility in Crick.

Matt Sanderson, UK&I MD, commented: "After the acquisition of Comms-Care it was only a matter of time before both joined forces.

"In doing so we have been able to up-skill our configuration centre which now has dedicated Comms-care engineers on site, enabling a higher level of service through improved capabilities, where previously this was limited."

The Comms-care Configuration Service sits within the broader Ingram Micro service portfolio and supports its professional services offering.

CEO named

IT SERVICES provider NTT Data has appointed Simon Williams as UK CEO, taking over from Steve Mitchener who retired in May.

Williams, who was Head of Telco Media, Insurance Consulting and Digital at the firm, stated: "We have grown by over 20% year-on-year for the past four years and I am excited to take on the role of CEO as our business continues to go from strength to strength."



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Deploy and work anywhere!

Looking for a secure unified communications software solution that seamlessly streamlines work environments and can be deployed in the time it takes to brew a cup of coffee?

3 CX has recently launched Version 15.5 of its award winning 3CX software PBX, which collectively brings an assembly of new developments together with a vast range of rich features. What's more, with 3CX's 'Deploy Anywhere' strategy, the PBX can run on Windows, Linux and in the Cloud, giving resellers and their customers complete freedom of choice.

3CX's latest release not only aims to consolidate work environments through its unified communications system, but also strives to provide users with flexibility and control in terms of where and how they deploy. Alongside this, 3CX has also implemented new features to cater to the productivity and efficiency of its users, like that of the Click2call and the integrated web conferencing which is clientless for remote participants.

Deploy Anywhere

Those seeking an on-premise solution can optimise their PBX to run in VM environments on an existing server. Alternatively, smaller businesses that wish to deploy on-premise can still do so without investing in expensive and bulky servers and deploy on a MiniPC appliance, from Intel, Zotac, Shuttle and Gigabyte, which can be purchased for as little as 160 pounds.

However, cloud solutions are becoming more and more popular in terms of PBX deployment. 3CX gives partners and users the option to deploy from a mainstream cloud provider of their own choosing, such as Google, Amazon, Openstack, OVH and 1&1. Furthermore, resellers implementing PBX installations on behalf of their clients can possess complete control of their customer's installation through using their 3CX reseller ID to cater to the end users' post-installation management.

Apart from compatibility with popular cloud providers, 3CX recently developed the PBX Express tool that turns PBX deployment into



With V15.5, web meetings are a breeze



Click2Call makes office life so much easier

child's play, expediting PBX deployment down to eight straightforward steps. Additionally, deployment via the PBX Express tool grants partners and users a free 3CX PBX license.

Integrated Web Conferencing

Notably, 3CX is one of the first PBX vendors to include web conferencing as a free feature with no extra licensing or administration, for up to 100 participants

(depending on license edition). The integrated web conferencing is yet another outstanding feature of V15.5 and this vital communications component requires no additional downloads or plugins to function. A web meeting can be initiated with a single click from the web client. What's more, V15.5 web conferencing is clientless for remote participants, only requiring them to occupy an open standards web browser.

Brand new web client

Optimised for open standards browsers such as Chrome and Firefox, the brand-new web client allows for smooth call management directly from the web browser. With access to key 3CX features from the user-friendly interface, overall usability has been greatly improved when it comes to everyday tasks such as scheduling conferences, transferring and making calls, and managing chats and voicemail.

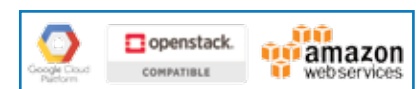
When facilitating a call through the Web Client, users can save time and enhance their productivity by using the Click2Call Extension for Chrome to dial numbers; a feature that is compatible with CRM systems, such as Office 365. What's more, web conferencing is instantaneous with the web client, allowing for coherent real-time communication with a single click.

Productivity Features

Apart from 3CX's new Web Client, cutting edge integrated web conferencing technology, 3CX also boasts other productivity enhancing features that certain users will appreciate.

Smartphone compatible, V15.5 supports the latest Android OS and sports PCI compliance for financial environments. When recording calls containing credit card information, calls can be paused and still stored on one single recording file. Additionally, V15.5 also possesses an integrated hotel module that does not require any additional software to function.

Moreover, for those working remotely or on the go, V15.5 allows for better remote phone control for desk-phones and smartphones, enhancing both productivity and efficiency.



NEWS ROUNDUP

Nimans is the first Unify distributor to offer the vendor's Circuit collaboration solution backed up by a 'try before you buy' offer.

Marcus Yates, Unify Solution Sales Business Manager at the distributor, commented: "With a free 100 user package to 'try before you buy', Circuit is an opportunity for resellers to drive their business in a new direction."

TeleWare has opted for Next Generation Data (NGD) to host its cloud-based call recording service.

The move follows TeleWare's decision to migrate all fixed line call recording solutions onto the new platform which is based on Microsoft Azure. TeleWare has already installed a number of racks at NGD to support its Cloud Call platform.

Distributor ProVu is offering free online training courses on how to sell and support VoIP hardware. Four courses focus on the Gigaset, SARK, Snom and Yealink brands.

Product Development Director Paul Hayes commented: "There's much more to supplying hardware than just the sale. Developing the ability to support deployments goes a long way in maintaining customer satisfaction."

Counting on reseller numbers

NEVER be stumped for an effective response to the needs of a customer, urges Number Supermarket Director Darren Hughes, who made sure his firm would not be left on the shelf when he established the company in 2014 having secured access to over a million numbers across every different UK range from the outset.

"The aim was to ensure that all clients always had their needs met," he commented.

"I've been in telecoms for over 20 years and in that time seen the shift towards more automation, but we insist on making service all-encompassing, personal and around the clock. It's what partners expect."

Number Supermarket has kicked off a reseller recruitment campaign and turned up the volume on what it believes to be key differentiating factors that will catch the attention of potential partners.

According to Hughes these include a customer-first strategy, white label web portal and management systems, rebate generating numbers and live cloud-based reporting.

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

SOS boss proposes an alternative way

SOS Communications has added Cisco's new IP phones to its hosted telephony solution Premier-Cloud.

According to SOS MD Colin Hepher the move brings 'greater differentiation' to his proposition as Cisco bids to claw back market share in the competitive IP phone space.

"Hosted telephony is no longer in its infancy even though penetration has only reached a small percentage of the potential market, yet most resellers are offering very much the same platform base and features," stated Hepher.

"Not so long ago Cisco had over 50% of the market share and intends to regain this space as soon as possible."

Hepher says SOS Communications will play a key role in helping Cisco advance its strategy believing that the infrastructure and methodology that supports Premier-Cloud along with attractive commercials will tip the balance.

"What really counts is resilience," added Hepher. "Most adopt a model where 'identical' servers are located in two separate data centres. One is designated as active and carries all the live traffic. The other is



Colin Hepher

either a hot or warm standby and is normally inactive.

"Failover between the two at network level is relatively straightforward. But there are a number of serious weaknesses to this approach that can lead to customers suffering long delays in the event of failover."

Following the Cisco distribution deal Hepher has grasped the megaphone and is amplifying his 'alternative' message to the channel. "There is another way," he said. "Our telephony service is supported by two data centres that are fully operational, always carry live traffic and have capacity to scale.

"Customers are evenly distributed between them and each facility uses the native IP ranges of the data centre provider. Since all data centres are active in the event of a failure the only thing that changes is the amount of traffic they carry."

It is not always possible to protect all calls in play during a data centre failover, but Hepher emphasised that IP phones such as Cisco's and resilient SIP trunks can failover significantly faster than BGP.

In what Hepher described as 'another attention grabber', SOS is offering free SIP trunks to channel partners.

Cisco's digital trends report

CISCO'S five year projection for the global digital economy predicts an increase of over one billion Internet users, rising from 3.3 to 4.6 billion.

The company also pointed out in its Visual Networking Index that 42% of the world's population will still not be using the Internet by 2021.

Trend spotters at Cisco say that the IoT will represent 50% of all connections by 2021, up from 5.6 to 13.7 billion.

Healthcare will be the fastest growing industry in this space,



Yvette Kanouff

expanding 30% annually due to a rise in connected applications such as health monitors and medicine dispensers.

Meanwhile, three trillion Internet video minutes per month are forecast, with video

representing 80% of all Internet traffic in 2021.

"As global digital transformation continues to impact billions of consumers and businesses, the network and security will be essential to support the future of the Internet," said Yvette Kanouff, SVP and GM of Service Provider Business.

"Driving network innovation with service providers will be key for Cisco to support the needs of their customers who want reliable, secure and high quality connected experiences."



INVOSYS has undergone a brand spruce-up following its acquisition of VoIP platform developer Telux HD. The new look reflects an enhanced product suite, new tech capabilities and broader customer offering which includes a hosted proposition. Co-founder Peter Crooks said: "The company is different so we felt it was important to communicate these changes to our customers by updating our branding. The new graffiti-style branding sets the tone and is a development of our existing logo."

Co-founder Rob Booth added: "Embracing change means taking risks, reinventing the status quo, having a vision and the courage to make it. We want to be bold and confident about how we challenge the channel to find a better way. The bold new branding perfectly reflects what we stand for."

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Centile chief points up U

Centile's renewed focus on the UK channel is playing into the hands of resellers who want to gain control of their own destiny by adopting a PaaS-led and mobile-first approach to market, according to Director General Bertrand Pourcelot.



Bertrand Pourcelot

Whatever blizzard of spin is applied to Brexit and 'economic uncertainty', the advance of Centile into the UK channel market shows no sign of hesitation. Its status here will be enhanced by newly appointed Business Development Director Justin Hamilton-Martin who is

already reinforcing the certainty that underpins Pourcelot's UK ambitions with new channel partnerships. "With Justin's experience in the telecoms market, including CEO roles at service providers 8el and Ultracomms, plus many consulting projects, he is well placed to engage with the UK service provider

community," stated Pourcelot. "Justin is already bringing new resellers on board to our PaaS platform and we are confident that 2017 is going to be a great year for Centile in the UK."

Centile's positioning as a viable alternative to BroadSoft is catching the eye of potential partners in the

UK, according to Pourcelot, who has high hopes for the success of the firm's channel push. "The UK market needs providers who can differentiate, make additional margin and gain control of their customer experience," he added. "We're well known in other countries, but not here. This year we're focusing on the UK."

The UK currently accounts for 10 per cent of Centile's revenues. Overall, the company is growing between 15-20 per cent in annual revenue terms and adding four or five new employees per year, building on its current headcount of 40 mainly based in Sophia Antipolis in France, Europe's largest technology park. They

K channel expansion bid

support circa 100 service providers in 20 countries. "While we do have some big service providers in our customer base we also work with many SMEs that realise the potential of services such as IP Centrex and FMC," said Pourcelot. "For example, we're seeing traditional PBX dealers move into cloud-based services. Platform-as-a-service is an opportunity for us to help market players who don't have the technical skills or bandwidth as part of their daily operations."

Platform for growth

Centile describes itself as a European developer of UC and fixed mobile convergence platforms for operators and integrators. The firm was established in 1998 when broadband connectivity was emerging as a market reality along with a number of small service providers. The idea behind Centile was to develop a telephony system that was easy for these providers to offer to their enterprise customers via broadband. Pourcelot joined the company as it was coming out of start-up mode and beginning to grow. His background is in software development and project management on international projects, including ten years working in the space industry.

"Developing software for the French army or image processing for meteorological satellites gave me a solid background in understanding what mission critical projects need," he said. "One of the common failings of many start-ups is that they struggle to have the rigorous processes needed to grow a company while keeping the agility and flexibility to move fast. I was brought on board to address those

requirements based on my experience in challenging software development projects and delivering mission critical products."

The company was later acquired by 8x8 which funded much of the R&D and led sales while the Centile team focused on developing software. But when the dotcom bubble burst 8x8 sold many of its assets including Centile. "Even though the first few years of this century were a tough time in the industry we already had some IP Centrex customers, especially in the Nordics," said Pourcelot. "In 2008 additional investors were brought in, the whole market turned around and we've grown ever since."

Centile made an early transition from a traditional capex pricing model to an opex one. The company name even refers to its adopted revenue share pricing model (Percentile). Another milestone was the company's early focus on the mobile market and the launch of its mobile platform in 2010. "Our first customer was Elisa, Finland's biggest mobile operator which was already on our books," commented Pourcelot. "With more than 250,000 subscribers that was a big step forward with full convergence delivered via an opex pricing model. Other customers include VozTelecom in Spain, Bahnhof in Sweden, Pace Telecom in the UK and many more in France such as Bretagne Telecom, Adista and VoIP Telecom."

Fixed mobile convergence will be key for Centile in the UK, pointed out Pourcelot. "There are some initiatives

but not as many as other countries such as the Nordics where the idea of mobile-first or even mobile-only is a reality," he explained. "Most of Elisa's customers only have mobile phones which they use for both their fixed and mobile numbers. France is also well ahead on FMC. We want to bring all that experience to the UK and see this as a market segment that has the potential to grow fast, particularly as the price gap between fixed and mobile minutes narrows."

As Centile presses ahead with its growth strategy and the development of new features it is also building a 'best of breed' partner ecosystem. Pourcelot added that the company is wedded to an API approach that will drive standardisation and openness across all kinds of technology markets. "Look at how Android caught up with its competitors with APIs that enabled an ecosystem to be built," he stated. "We believe in cloud-based integration and cloud APIs, which is much easier than on-premise integration."

In the pipeline

"More widely, we've continued to add new features, new web portals and user mobile apps. We've also seen Centile IstraCloud which provides all the flexibility and cost-efficiency benefits of a multi-tenant platform really take off. Another focus area is our own mobile application on iOS and Android which is designed to offer a better user experience via local contacts and simple tools such as push notification. This is a white label app that we've already introduced in Finland and will be launching globally later this year."

The challenge and the opportunity in this market, says Pourcelot, is to demonstrate to enterprise customers a future proof solution with high end features. "However, our experience is that enterprises aren't always ready to pay for all those advantages so there needs to be flexibility," he added. "Having a good price point for some stand-out services, such as the PBX-type offerings, is important, with the ability to up-sell even more advanced features such as collaboration tools and video."

Bring your own

"We also believe that our 'bring your own lines and networks' approach will enable resellers to move quickly with us and protect most of the long-term relationships already in place. Many resellers already sell private wide area networks and have SIP trunking relationships. We are proposing that they include the Centile PaaS offering to supercharge their core service and enable them to become Virtual Network Operators to compete with the larger providers."

According to Pourcelot the comms industry must leave tradition behind otherwise it will be vulnerable to the rise of commoditisation and less able to compete against new entrants, GAFAs and OTT players. "Resellers of products have a real opportunity to evolve into service providers, to drive new revenues and be more competitive," he said. "Mobile-first is one of the biggest movements in the industry. Some countries are already ahead, others less so. It's a huge opportunity, not just for vendors like us but also for resellers and ISPs." ■

Just a minute with Bertrand Pourcelot...

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I used to play a lot of soccer in the under 16 French National Championship where I met several future professionals

What talent do you wish you had? I'm an engineer, therefore logical and rational, so I'd like to have more creative ideas rather than be the one who makes them happen

Role models: Elon Musk, he has the energy and focus to drive his dreams. And Taïg Khri, a famous in-line skater of Greek-Algerian descent who relishes a challenge and has also launched a start-up that enables a temporary number to be attached to a mobile phone

What do you fear the most? Deep water

One example of something you have overcome: Public speaking. But now that I've done this so many times I really enjoy it

The biggest risk you have taken and why? Leaving Alcatel to join Centile when I'd just got married. We'd bought a house when the dotcom bubble was about to burst

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who listened to others and kept on learning

What possession could you not live without? Good quality traditional leather shoes, especially some of the lesser known French brands like Heschung

How do you relax when not working? In my garden with a good cigar

Top tip for resellers: Move up the value chain and get away from being box movers



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Big boys outperformed b

Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabuyte.com, reports on the recent performance of leading companies in the comms space during the last quarter.

This last quarter was a bad one for the UK telecoms big boys. BT further downgraded EBITDA guidance for fiscal 2017/18 (March). The £7.5-7.6bn EBITDA guidance compares with £7.654bn reported for 2016/17, and £7.9bn prior to the January profit warning – all due to the Italian accounting scandal and UK public sector and overseas corporate pressures. TalkTalk significantly undershot already reduced EBITDA guidance for 2016/17 (EBITDA rose 17% to £304m versus prior guidance of £320-360m), and Charles Dunstone marked his renewed involvement with a strategic shift towards growth over profitability that will impact EBITDA in the current year (guidance of £270-300m).

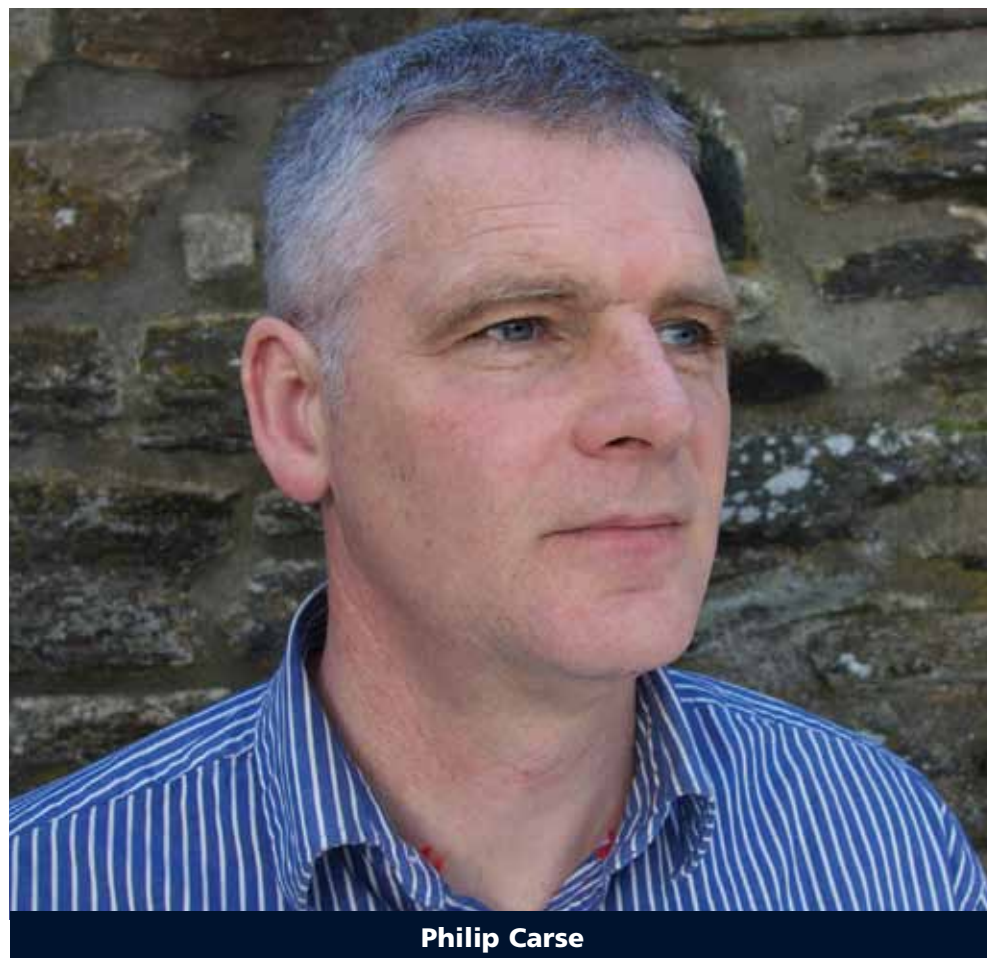
Weak ARPUs at Virgin Media led parent Liberty Global to downgrade EBITDA guidance, and following March's downwards revision of Project Lightning premises passed in 2016 due to misreporting, the company also said that the 2017 rollout will be below plan but refrained from publishing a new target. Vodafone UK continued to be a poor performer with fiscal 2016/17 EBITDA down 16% to €1,212m. The

company's reasons included the well publicised billing system issue, increased competition in enterprise mobile and the loss of two fixed line contracts. Notably, TalkTalk Business and Virgin Media Business have been less impacted by trading issues than their consumer-focused sister companies.

In contrast to the bigger player woes, smaller company reporting (public and private) has again been dominated by decent numbers from several connectivity and network infrastructure players including Exponential-e, M24Seven, Ask4, Arqiva and CityFibre, as well as from some business comms providers including Gamma, Maintel, Adept, Charterhouse and Focus Group. In contrast, multi-utility reseller Telecom Plus reported below expectations numbers and guided for flat profits in the new financial year due to customer acquisition costs.

Period of interesting corporate activity

This last quarter saw an interesting range of corporate activity including substantial funding for Gigaclear (of £111m which will fund its fibre to the premise build for about 30 weeks) and contact centre player



Philip Carse

Starleaf (£31m). The quarter witnessed strategically or sizewise acquisitions for M24Seven/Metronet (Venus Communications, adding a London presence), Chess (Foursys, adding security) and Elite Telecom (Nexus, adding a quarter to EBITDA), maiden post-MBO acquisitions for Sabio (of Rapport) and Wavenet (of Swains and Talk Internet, together boosting revenues by a third), and a strategic review by Arqiva's private equity backers. With more of an IT focus, Claranet Group raised £90m in new equity and completed three acquisitions in France, Portugal and the UK, boosting revenues by 40% to £310m.

Share price

In share price terms, CityFibre (+38%) and Gamma (+23%) had a good last

quarter which is more than can be said for BT (-13%). Over the last 12 months, Gamma has topped the charts with a 30% rise despite continued sales by a long term shareholder, followed by Telecom Plus (+23%) and Adept Telecom (+22). Major fallers included Redcentric (-54%) due to its accounting kerfuffle, BT (-29%) and TalkTalk (-17%).

Scorecard moves

Megabuyte has developed the Scorecard, which ranks company performance based on a mix of growth, margin, cash generation and FCF metrics. Student accommodation ISP Ask4 was a big gainer in the Scorecard this last quarter, jumping eight points to 82 (out of a possible 100, and versus a Megabuyte universe average of 59), into second

place in the peer group. Other gainers off the back of 2016 results included Gamma, Maintel and LoopUp, while contact centre player Sabio was a notable faller due to cash flows associated with its MBO.

Notable additions to coverage include business comms provider Bistech and conferencing numbering provider Numeric Futures, which both enter the peer group Top 5, while G3 Comms is just outside the Top 10, but Network Telecom comes in at a lowly 38th place due to low OCF and FCF conversion. ■

IS Research publishes www.megabuyte.com, a company analysis and intelligence service covering over 400 public and private UK technology companies.
philip.carse@megabuyte.com

by smaller rivals

COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

In line year for Telecom Plus – expects flat profits in current year

Multi-utility reseller Telecom Plus has reported full year results to March 2017 with revenue down 0.6% to £740.3m and adjusted pre-tax profits increasing 9.1% to £53.3m (the latter in line with the April 2017 trading update, although both were below consensus estimates). On the outlook, Telecom Plus will continue to focus on customer growth and expanding the number of services, although higher customer acquisition costs and investments will result in profits remaining flat in the current year. The company also scaled back the expected £71m share buyback using the Opus proceeds to £25m, reflecting increased uncertainty.

Wavenet gains King's Lynn seat with Swains buy

Business comms provider Wavenet has made its second acquisition (since last summer's Beech Tree-backed MBO) of Norfolk-based Swains plc. The most recent available accounts, to March 2016, show revenues and EBITDA of £4.9m and £0.66m respectively, thus adding similar revenues to that estimated from April's Talk Internet acquisition. This takes Wavenet to an estimated £24m revenues and £4m EBITDA, up about a third on the pre-MBO business.

Charterhouse breaks from lifestyle past

Business comms and office technology supplier Charterhouse Voice and Data (CVD) has reported a solid year to November 2016 aided

by the first-time consolidation with sister company Charterhouse Network Services, with EBITDA up 175% to £1.9m on revenues up 7.3% at £19.3m (estimated 1% organic). According to CEO Mark Brooks-Wadham and COO Matt Tyne, the significant jump in profitability comes despite investments in network capacity, systems and staff, as the company gears up to meet its £30m revenue target in the next three years, moving decisively out of its 'lifestyle' era.

Improved KCOM second half

Comms provider KCOM has reported an in-line year to March 2017 with EBITDA down 10% at £67.6m on revenues down 5.1% at £331.3m, both impacted by legacy declines, and EBITDA by increased network costs following the £90m sale of the national network to CityFibre in early 2016, as well as a £3.6m enterprise cost overrun. The better news is that the company's FTTP project is going well and target enterprise customers are spending more. Meanwhile, all the signs are that the company has pulled back from a potential sale of its commoditised £94m revenue SMB and partner business.

Elite Telecom connects with Nexus

Owner-managed business comms provider Elite Telecom made its largest acquisition to date with the purchase of Leeds-based Nexus Telecommunications, boosting revenue and EBITDA run rates by an estimated 47% and 23% to

£50m and £8m respectively. Founder and CEO Matt Newing re-emphasised Elite's continuing focus on organic development.

COLT faring better under private ownership

We were interested to read an FT interview with COLT CEO Carl Grivner who stated that 2016 revenues and EBITDA grew 8% and 20% to £1.5bn and £360m respectively, with more growth to come in 2017, alongside big plans to expand into the US and subsea cables, and in the UK. Against the backdrop of declining revenues and EBITDA, the company has clearly performed better since its take-private announced by major shareholder Fidelity in mid-2015, particularly in EBITDA margin terms. If one is being uncharitable Fidelity would have still made more money selling COLT at the height of the TMT boom in 2000 when its valuation touched £25bn.

Vodafone's good FCF work undone by India while UK remains poor

Vodafone reported an in-line year to March 2017 with flat EBITDA of 14.15bn euros on revenues down 4.4% at 47.6bn, which translates into +3.4% (versus guidance of 3-6%) and +1.9% organic growth respectively. FCF was much improved but net debt rose due to capital injections into the India business. The UK remains the problem child in Europe, the only operation to have seen revenue and EBITDA declines last year, of 16% and 3.3% respectively. Current year Group guidance is for 4-8% EBITDA growth and 20%+ FCF growth. ■



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

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

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

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

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

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



9 TAKE LEAD AGAIN IN RECOGNISING SUPERSTARS OF UK ICT INDUSTRY

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

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

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

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

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

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Adam Zoldan

Partner

Knight Corporate Finance



"We work with entrepreneurs daily and we know the value they place on industry recognition which is why we are proud to be sponsoring the Entrepreneur of the Year Award at this year's CNAs. On a more general note, as a finalist or winner of a Comms National Award your business receives a unique endorsement that will enhance the way not only customers, but staff, industry peers and potentially investors and buyers view your business – in our experience perception has a direct and tangible impact on business value. We wish all the entrants the very best of luck with their submissions."

Enterprise Reseller of the Year

Charles Aylwin

Director of Channel

8x8



"At 8x8, we're delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards again this year. The evening is always a great celebration of the best our industry has to offer. It's also a fantastic recognition of true excellence in communications, whether rewarding vendor solutions, resellers, innovative technology or outstanding customer service. The channel is essential to the continued growth of our industry and at 8x8 we will continue our rapid expansion with the unrivalled expertise of our channel partners. We want to wish the best of luck to everyone that has entered and we're looking forward to celebrating on the night!"

Service Provider category

Sara Brown

Head of Marketing

BT Wholesale



"BT Wholesale is once again delighted to be a sponsor of the 2017 Comms National Awards – Service Provider Category. The awards bring together the best of the industry – celebrating success, innovation and amazing capabilities demonstrated by our peers and colleagues. As a pure Channel business, we encourage all to enter as the benefits are huge! With a wide and diverse range of award categories, you can showcase your business and celebrate success. Excellence in the industry needs to be recognised and rewarded and the CN Awards does just that. So remember to submit your entry now. Good luck to all."

Best Contact Centre Category

Martin Taylor

CMO

Content Guru



"Content Guru is delighted to renew its sponsorship of the Comms National Awards for another year. Contact centres remain at the heart of the Customer Engagement Hub, a key component in any innovative customer service solution. We will be recognising those resellers who excel in this sector, and who are helping to evolve the traditional contact centre to meet the ever-expanding demands of today's consumer. The Comms National Awards continue to play an important role in the channel, and we would like to wish all the nominees the best of luck!"

Unified Comms Solutions Category

Peter Crooks

Chief Operating Officer

Invosys



"Invosys is delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards for the first time this year. Designed by the channel, for the channel, these prestigious awards truly showcase the crème de la crème of the telecoms industry and truly recognise outstanding achievement, innovation and excellence across the board. We would encourage all the channel to embrace the CNAs, which provide opportunities for all companies to enter, regardless of size. Not only is it a great opportunity for your organisation, it's a chance for your whole team to shine as you shape their future – as well as a great night out!"

Event Hospitality

Alp Kostem

Head of Channel Sales

Exponential-e



"Exponential-e is delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards for the first time! We see the value in these events and we're really excited to be attending. Channel is a huge part of Exponential-e and the fastest growing team internally so it only makes sense to sponsor one of the biggest Channel events of the year. This event shows recognition to those hard-working teams, companies and some brilliant individuals which truly deserve to be awarded. It would definitely be worth entering – on behalf of myself and the team at Exponential-e we wish you the best of luck to this year's entrants."

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CityFibre in wholesale m

CityFibre has pulled off a unique triumph in securing high figure financing and the game-changing acquisition of Entanet all within six months.

Fast-expanding CityFibre listed on the AIM market in January 2014 and has grown rapidly ever since with acquisitions a core component of its strategy. The pure fibre infrastructure builder completed its £90 million acquisition of KCOM's national fibre and duct network assets in December 2015 and soon afterwards established a relationship with Entanet as thoughts turned to how the infrastructure would be used most effectively. Now the deal is done the priority is to integrate its products with Entanet and unlock new markets.

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch, who marshals a great sense of strategy and purpose, stated: "We're an infrastructure builder, Entanet sells infrastructure. Its partners buy from BT and we want them to buy from us. Our pure fibre infrastructure is faster, less expensive and now available through the channel. Entanet has thousands of DSL lines and leased lines for potential migration. It's a good fit, and Entanet partners are in a wonderful position now they have greater choice."

The deal was signed at 6:55am on July 5th following

night-long negotiations and is a reflection of CityFibre's intention to become a 'mini BT and Openreach', pointed out Mesch, whose end game is to bring Gigabit Britain to life with partners playing a key role in advancing his digital ambitions as he works with them on a more strategic level. "When partners take our service they help to extend the network," he explained. "It's not just about selling infrastructure, it's about collectively moving our network forwards based on real demand that enhances our case for building out Gigabit Britain, thereby driving money directly into the ground."

Entanet CEO Elsa Chen is under no illusions about the significance of the acquisition, not just for Entanet but the wider channel as a working model. "This deal is transformational," she stated. "The combination of CityFibre and Entanet creates a new type of wholesale provider with more choice. Demand for gigabit speed infrastructure is real and we now have a compelling proposition."

Chen also noted that the appeal of having clear differentiation in a commoditising product-



Greg Mesch

It's not just about selling infrastructure, but collectively moving our network forwards

based market is too strong to ignore. "Customer service is used as a differentiating factor but the messages are often the same," she added. "Entanet is bringing a new network into the channel and a new breed of differentiating service levels."

Business as usual

In reassuring channel partners Chen confirmed that there will be no changes to Entanet's established modus operandi and that staff headcount will remain untouched by the deal. "Our partners will soon be able to take a strong and highly competitive proposition to the market,

reaping the rewards of CityFibre's national full fibre infrastructure footprints and next generation products," she stated.

"They will continue to enjoy the full support of Entanet's long established and mature channel strategy. Together, we are creating a new breed of wholesale service provider that will empower channel partners to change the connectivity market landscape."

CityFibre has also doubled its market value by raising a further £200 million, £185 million of which will be underwritten

by Citigroup, finnCap, Liberum and Macquarie. The company aims to raise further proceeds through an accelerated bookbuilding process and additional funds of up to £15 million through a non-underwritten offer for subscription.

CityFibre plans to expand its fibre metro networks from 42 UK towns and cities today to not less than 50 towns and cities by 2020; and will begin constructing a Fibre to the Home (FTTH) network to address the residential market in five to ten UK towns and cities during 2018. This move also gives partners a much wider base to address

ove on Entanet



and follows CityFibre's successful participation in the FTTH trial in York which demonstrated strong demand from ISPs and consumers for gigabit speed FTTH services. CityFibre is now in advanced negotiations with ISPs that will market full-fibre broadband services to consumers deployed over its networks.

Mesch said: "We are building Gigabit Britain, driven by growing demand from Internet Service Providers and their customers to switch to full-fibre infrastructure. Our announcement to enter the residential market is the first step in our vision to bring gigabit connectivity to millions of UK homes and small businesses.

"This is about more than just better broadband – this is about future-proofing the digital infrastructure we've all come to rely on at work,

at school, at home and in our communities. It's also about stimulating the market, creating jobs and growth. The Government and Ofcom both recognise that investment in alternative fibre networks will catalyse growth in the UK's digital economy as well as reduce the country's reliance on BT Openreach.

Unlocked market

"With Entanet now part of the CityFibre family, our combined offering will accelerate the take-up of services over our growing network footprints by leveraging Entanet's channel partner network and through continuing to transform digital connectivity for thousands of UK businesses.

"Our significant capital raising also better positions CityFibre to undertake larger projects coming forward from the public sector as well as mobile operators in

readiness for their small cell roll-outs and 5G services."

Megabyte analyst and Comms Dealer contributor Philip Carse commented: "The announcement is yet another signpost in what is clearly very strong investor support for fibre network infrastructure, and came barely a day after the launch of the UK Government's own £400 million fund which is aimed at triggering a total of £1 billion investment, and a few weeks after Gigaclear raised another £111 million.

"In particular, this funding is aimed at full-fibre infrastructure, taking it to the premise rather than the fibre to the cabinet variety preferred by BT, which inevitably limits the speeds available. We assume that BT's competitors such as Sky and TalkTalk will be leading the queue to use the new FTTP networks, while a whole host of B2B service providers will increasingly start to use CityFibre metro networks rather than rely wholly on BT Openreach or BT Wholesale.

"Meanwhile, the Entanet acquisition appears expensive at first blush, but comes with a compelling strategic rationale in terms of gaining a large swathe of wholesale partners as well as access to systems, which has been a focus for Entanet investment over the past couple of years.

"It will also boost CityFibre's engineering and software development employee base. Mesch noted that Entanet's existing customer base will provide strong support for expanding to certain new towns and cities. The price looks much more modest if the target £3m per annum synergies can be achieved." ■



Elsa Chen

This deal is transformational. The combination of CityFibre and Entanet creates a new type of wholesale provider.

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Time to secure ground on

Organisations are confronted by a fast expanding attack surface that requires a more diverse set of protection methods and a strategy based on close analysis of internal and external risks, says David Emm, Principal Security Researcher at Kaspersky Lab.

The era of security complacency is over, and the starting point for any lock-down project should be an audit of corporate systems and a risk assessment to reveal where a business is susceptible to attack. Focus areas must include threat intelligence, monitoring of the corporate network, an effective incident response and appropriate technology. "MSPs need to be prepared to provide the protection their customers require," said Emm. "Whether or not offering this type of support will be a burden or opportunity depends on an MSP's IT resources, staff skills and ability to respond quickly to threats. If the MSP is lacking in any of these areas, the time to remedy them is now."

Why? Because the rise of cloud-based digital transformation has opened the door to danger in areas such as API credential exposure, adaptations to cloud infrastructure and most critically the downloading of sensitive customer data. Nor is that all. Even if an organisation considers its critical systems and devices protected and safe, it is difficult to defend against a trusted insider that chooses to undermine security, pointed out Emm. "The motivations of such people are hard to predict, ranging from a desire for financial gain to disaffection, coercion



David Emm

and simple carelessness," he added. "While insider-assisted attacks are uncommon, their impact can be devastating as they provide a direct route to the most valuable information."

Human factor

Human behaviour all too often provides attackers with the means to compromise corporate security, noted Emm. "This can be unwitting or deliberate," he said. "The use of social engineering to trick staff into doing something that jeopardises corporate security typically

forms the starting point for sophisticated targeted attacks and random, speculative infections. As well as people being the unwitting means by which a business is compromised there's also the danger of a deliberate insider threat. One way or another, people are an important element of corporate security. The key is to develop a corporate culture that embeds security, raise awareness of potential threats among staff and make employees guardians of the company's systems rather than potential weak points."

This is an area where resellers can make a significant difference by equipping businesses with the knowledge and tools to make security a priority. "They can do this by offering solutions that address the issues of employee vulnerability to malicious emails by providing automated, Internet-based security awareness to combat social engineering, phishing and ransomware," explained Emm. "Educational initiatives should be cost-effective, continually updated, easy-to-use, and require a relatively short amount of employee

time while being suited to organisations of all sizes."

Emm urges organisations to approach security as a process that encompasses threat prediction, prevention, detection, response and investigation. A multi-layered security solution is a key component of this, but it is not enough on its own. It needs to be complemented by collaboration, education and shared intelligence. "Security breaches can take many forms which is why it is important to have robust procedures and technologies

the cyber attack surface

in place to safeguard a business," said Emm. "While security solutions significantly mitigate the risk of a successful attack there are other measures businesses can take to provide thorough protection. These include running fully updated software, performing regular security audits on their website code and penetration testing their infrastructure.

"It's crucial that businesses ensure that all passwords are protected using secure hashing and salting algorithms. The best way for organisations to combat cyber attacks is to put in place an effective cyber security strategy before the company becomes a target."

Failures in planning, implementation and monitoring are the biggest security threats to companies today, so resellers need to be in a position to offer comprehensive security portfolios that include endpoint protection and a number of specialised security solutions and services. "Advanced scalability, combined with

support for all types of endpoints and platforms, ensures the solutions cope successfully with even the most challenging and dynamic network structures," commented Emm.

However, there are always risks associated with new technology, especially since we live in a connected world. "Today this includes much more than traditional computers," said Emm. "More and more businesses include smart devices. What makes them smart is that they are connected to the Internet and able to send and receive data. A proliferation of devices and objects collect and share huge amounts of data. This has the potential to create greater opportunities for vulnerabilities. Moreover, because these devices are connected to one another, if one device is compromised a hacker has the potential opportunity to connect to multiple other devices on the network."

According to Emm, the basic practice of using strong passwords, regularly checking for and installing software

updates and implementing appropriate security software should be applied to every connected device on the network, including routers.

"Manufacturers of connected products and the security industry need to work together to ensure that strong protection and patch

Manufacturers of connected products and the security industry need to work together

management is designed-in from the very start," commented Emm. "Once a product is on the market it is already too late. There's also a role for Governments in developing security standards for IoT devices. We've all come to expect that everyday objects come with certification marks indicating that they are physically safe. In future,

this will have to extend to digital objects. There's no turning back the tide of IoT applications, but checking the security capabilities before deployment isn't a bad strategy. Especially as it is important to ensure that the advance of IoT isn't providing hackers and criminals with another entry point for attack."

If an organisation's network has been compromised it tends to focus the attention on measures required to prevent similar attacks in the future. Nevertheless, perception and reality don't always match. Data from the Kaspersky Lab 2016 Corporate IT Risks Survey shows a contrast between the top threats faced by businesses (targeted attacks, ransomware and employee carelessness) and what businesses perceive as the most difficult threats to manage (inappropriate sharing of data via mobile devices, data exposed through physical loss of hardware, inappropriate use of IT resources by employees, security of third-party cloud services, IoT

threats and security issues associated with outsourcing of IT infrastructure).

"There's no question that regulatory requirements are also important, particularly where there are financial implications for non-compliance," commented Emm. "The hot topic right now is GDPR. There is a lot of discussion about the impact it will have on businesses. Many organisations are frantically preparing for the arrival of GDPR – not surprising given the maximum fine for a serious breach is four per cent of the previous year's annual global turnover or 20 million euros, whichever is higher.

"In light of this, organisations must put in place safeguarding practices to ensure they are compliant. Although this will have a financial impact on the company in the short-term, budgeting for this will help businesses avoid larger fines in the long run. On the other hand, it's important for businesses to realise that security and compliance aren't the same thing." ■



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Oak Innovation: A truly

Oak's founders James Emm and Phil Reynolds not only gave birth to one of the comms industry's greatest success stories they also fathered two boys who have followed in their footsteps and are themselves blazing the R&D trail and carving out a niche with Canada-based Oak Systems International.

Oak Innovation's (formerly Oak Telecom) founders James Emm and Phil Reynolds have for decades proved themselves to be a formidable partnership in the call management space, and during that time their various qualities have been woven into the fabric of their sons who also display complementary attributes that, says William Emm, are an evolution of their fathers' specific areas of expertise – James being the supreme salesman and Phil the master of all things technical. "We're the upgrades," William stated with a smile. "I am salesy and good at opening doors but also have technical skills, while Dave is technical with a flair for sales. There is more cross-over in the skill sets.

"That said, my dad has more energy than me when it comes to networking

late into the night. He is one of the most honest, ethical people I know, inside and outside of work. I try to emulate that and it pays off. I didn't think I would be working with him when I was younger, but the opportunities at Oak kept coming and they were hard to ignore."

The move to Canada in 2010 was another unmissable opportunity. The decision was a reflection of the rising software market and the march of globalisation and subsequent requirement for a fresh perspective on where the market was heading. "When we moved to Canada we were at the beginning of the R&D process," stated Dave Reynolds. "We needed an international operation to allow us to tackle the unique challenges of worldwide software delivery that are not seen when your focus is

on a single country. Whether it be regulatory, language or market differences, the ability to provide tailored products and the capacity to react quickly to changing market conditions underpins our reasoning for having a team in Toronto."

Oak Systems International is part owned by Oak Innovation therefore does not report back directly to the UK. It works as an independent sales operation in Canada, but on the development side both organisations work in tandem as one entity. The distance between the two operations is bridged by a coherent strategy and blending of resources, and 'space to think' always produces the best development outcome, noted William. "We can have strong debates when it comes to choosing where to put development efforts," he said. "We need to address the newer markets while satisfying the old guard. Being in Canada allows us to articulate new ideas without the immediate influence of our heritage which helps us in our cloud-first approach."

According to David, the move to the cloud is happening quicker in the North American market which plays directly into the hands of Oak's UK strategy, enabling it to take state of the art technology from the Canadian operation and deliver it in a format



William Emm and family

The distance between Oak's two operations is bridged by a coherent strategy and blending of resources, and space to think always produces the best development outcome

that can be consumed by UK customers. "Our team works exclusively on cloud-first products such as our soon to be released real-time reporting product," explained David. "The new product range is capable of ingesting data from a variety of sources such as PBX, CRM systems and IoT devices, which enables us to enrich telephony data and provide meaningful insights. This

leads to actionable metrics which is what everyone needs. Historically, we provided telephony views and reports but ultimately they only tell part of the story. Customers need to better understand the context of the data we provide."

As well as the movement to the cloud, William also sees a migration towards companies such as Twilio that provide



David Reynolds with his wife and children

unique parent company

infrastructure as a service, enabling smaller vendors to offer technology that exceeds the capabilities of SMB PBX vendors at a fraction of the cost. "Moreover, they can move more quickly on the development side and offer customisations in a timely fashion," added William. "However, we are still seeing healthy revenues with on-premise which suggests that we are some years away from the market selling exclusively cloud products."

The strategic strength displayed by Oak Systems International mirrors the parent company's market advance in the 80s and 90s when the chemistry between James and Phil catalysed the organisation's growing sales



James Emm and Phil Reynolds

and technology prowess. "My dad is good at assessing the available technologies and selecting the most productive ones to use," stated David. "I am very much the same in the current age, always

looking at what is ahead so we are well positioned to be on the technology curve as opposed to behind it. My dad also has an exceptional ability to remain calm and plot an effective path through any

challenge. Since coming to Canada I have applied this behaviour to all manner of tasks which has contributed to our growing success."

In comms industry talk, the tag 'next generation' is often over stated, but where it should apply most the term has until now been underplayed as the possibility of three generations of Oak family members appears entirely possible. "With the eldest grandchild reaching 18 in August you never know!" enthused first generation Oaker Phil Reynolds. "Let's not forget the other family siblings contributing massively to the continued success of Oak Innovation here in the UK. We have Laura and Chloe from the Emm lineage

and Michael and Christianne from the Reynolds line, all focused on every aspect of sales and marketing. They are a formidable team."

Family run businesses are mostly traditional brick and mortar type organisations that rely on a long heritage to underpin future sales. But Oak is no ordinary family business. It's a high tech company run as a family business which Phil says is unique in a world driven by profit and a sector that's experiencing dramatic changes. "These are challenging times for all of us," he added. "But having the family alongside for the long haul has reaped rewards and will underpin Oak's continued success." ■

RWG seals S4C platform deal

A deal between Welsh mobile network RWG Mobile and broadcaster S4C will catalyse the development of a digital platform to provide RWG's customers with S4C content including coverage of live sporting events on their mobile phones. The agreement follows investments in RWG Mobile by Finance Wales and S4C's commercial subsidiary SDML.

RWG Mobile launched its mobile network less than a year ago targeting the Welsh market and aims to secure 90,000 new customers within its first three years. Founder and CEO Andrew Davies said: "In bringing together a media company and our mobile network we aim to



Elin Morris and Andrew Davies

share information, develop our capabilities and open the door to creating a cross-platform communications company for the future.

"The bigger mobile networks use their size and buying power to leverage deals and offers from lots of different providers, such as tickets to concerts or sporting events

for example, but these offers are not always relevant to people living and working in Wales. Our model is based on local partnerships and, as our subscriber base grows, we will develop an incentive programme that meets the needs of our users."

Figures suggest that one in ten Welsh consumers access

the Internet exclusively through a mobile phone. To meet this demand RWG Mobile delivers mobile comms via its own SIM card that offers pan-Wales and UK coverage as well as an international roaming capability and 4G connection. To complement the service the company has developed and launched

an app for Apple and Android smartphones and tablets, allowing customers to use multiple numbers to make and receive calls over the Internet using a Wi-Fi connection.

"The business and farming communities in Wales will appreciate the value and advantages of the app as it allows calls to be made using their business number where mobile signals are weak, helping to negate the notorious 'not spots' effect within Wales," added Davies.

Elin Morris, who is Corporate and Commercial Director at S4C, commented: "S4C viewers will be able to watch our content without eating into their mobile phone's data allowance." ■



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With PR strategy, it's all a



ERICA JONES
BAMBOO TECHNOLOGY

“ PR should always be considered as part of your brand, marketing and campaign planning – especially now with the prevalence of Social Media and content. Internally, do you have dedicated resource? If not, consider expertise, commitment and allocation of time; you need to be consistent and develop relationships for best results. Externally, make sure whoever you use is still part of your team. If the relationship is based around a retainer, ensure there are clear deliverables agreed at the start and expect monthly reporting. Build your pipeline, target comms and messaging guidelines together, work closely but retain sign off. Communication is key and a regular weekly call is ideal to keep both parties up to date, monitor, discuss opportunities and results. ”



DEBORAH ROBERTSON
8X8

“ The most effective PR activity doesn't operate in a silo, but is an integral part of a wider marketing strategy. At 8x8, we integrate all our marcomms channels to ensure every message and piece of content is consistent across all media. If cost permits, a specialist agency with PR expertise is invaluable. An external team can bring a different perspective, with the benefit of their experience in different sectors. However, to get the most value out of your PR agency, you need to ensure you have a robust and skilled marketing department to guide and support them. Ultimately, no one knows your business better than you, and if you arm an agency with the right information, it's got the tools to succeed. ”



CLIFFORD NORTON
CHANNEL TELECOM

“ Public relations is your front window, so to speak, and is a key method for attracting potential customers and partners to engage with your company. Outsourcing this function has the benefit of allowing your employees to focus on the job at hand however, the argument could be made that no one knows the business at the ground level quite like the people that work for it. This often means that delegating the task to someone in house will provide a more authentic outcome than offering the work to an external party would. Time management and a team who are all dedicated towards promoting the best company image goes a long way towards making internal PR a success. ”



LAUREN MCMANUS
DAISY WHOLESAL

“ At Daisy Wholesale, we believe PR is a key facet of generating brand awareness. Let's face it, every day we're bombarded with adverts for the latest products, but resellers are much more likely to take notice of articles from third parties highlighting how we can help their customers do their job more productively. We feel that in-house PR resources positioned alongside product managers who live and breathe our products works best. They know how the technologies can help our partners' businesses grow, so work with the PR function to write articles, which proves fruitful alongside the use of social media. Press and social media together are cost-effective methods of creating brand awareness and standing apart from competition in a crowded marketplace. ”



DARREN FARNDEN
ENTANET

“ At Entanet we rely on both our own internal marketing resources and the support of our external consultant to make our PR as successful as we can. Without any doubt, PR is a vital part of our marketing strategy but it's not a standalone element. We always aim to ensure we work it into a wider comms strategy depending on the nature of what we want to say to the market. For us, the benefit of calling on external help is not only about creative writing but especially about having a different perspective on industry matters. Meanwhile, we benefit from using our own resources because we've developed some great relationships with channel media leaders. ”



KATIE SLOAN
FIDELITY GROUP

“ For Fidelity, when managing direct and channel centric customers, as well as communication to existing and prospective channel partners, the most valuable specialist knowledge of these groups is in house. However, when looking to promote new product launches, events and introduce innovation within the channel, there is a great benefit to having the assistance of an external PR agency who are experts in delivering punctual, innovative and on message communications. Whether we're looking to generate effective media coverage, drive website traffic, create social media strategies, or meet other target objectives – the key to a successful relationship with a PR agency is ensuring clear and frequent communication and working together to deliver the most effective messages. ”

Whatever type of channel company you are there will come a time when you will want to portray your message via a broader brush than advertising and promotions. PR can be highly effective in building goodwill and can be more cost effective in terms of creating general awareness about your business aims and philosophies.

Indirect ICT businesses may want to build their reputation in the local press or in trade magazines covering markets they have had success in. Companies addressing the channel may be keen to demonstrate their support for partners via trade press coverage or attendance at trade shows. Both may want to elevate their social media activities.

When it comes to deciding on a PR campaign or a process, the big question will be whether to use in house resources or a specialist agency.

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ELLIE ALLSEYBROOK
INFORM BILLING

“ In my experience, the ideal scenario is where the in-house marketing team is partnered by an external PR specialist, who is experienced and well connected within your industry. A good PR agency is indispensable for building and maintaining profile with a wide range of publications and outlets, particularly the national consumer press and TV, and especially where crisis management support is required. However, day rates are costly and you will still need someone internally who knows the business inside-out to brief, liaise and approve PR. For companies where target audiences are relatively niche, relevant publications are limited and the risk of negative publicity is low, activities can easily be handled in-house— integrating traditional PR with social media and other online marketing activities. ”



PETER CROOKS
INVOSYS

“ In this digital age, PR is more important than ever. It's all about ensuring that your business is being seen, and sharing news, views and insights into hot topics means that a company can go beyond simply showing a shop front through advertising and extend its reach. Many companies don't have a requirement for a full-time PR Manager and so it makes sense to use an expert who has a good understanding of your business. It's often tempting to leave the Marketing Manager to "do the PR", yet this can be time consuming for someone who is not skilled at producing great, relevant content in a short amount of time and in the long run, it just isn't cost effective. ”

An in house-team may be familiar with the target audience and may know the right approach to take and how to pitch a campaign to key influencers in the group who could be enrolled to carry a message through to people.

Conversely, external agencies may be able to bring a depth of knowledge of markets or processes that an in-house team may lack. For example, engaging an external agency that focuses on road shows and little else means you may benefit from the core skills they will have accumulated over a long time. Similarly, if you wish to engage with a specific business sector, perhaps doctors or dentists in a particular area, engaging external agencies which focus in this area may provide the best solutions.

Eventually, the answer will come down to what you want to achieve and who you believe is best positioned to help you achieve your goals.



CHRIS WIDOCKS
NIMANS

“ Public Relations is playing an increasingly prominent role in business communication and the wider media. It's a high profile and cost effective way of communicating across multiple platforms such as traditional print, websites and social media - as part of co-ordinated marketing campaigns or standalone projects. Having worked in journalism, PR agencies and in-house over the last 30 years I would say specialising in-house provides an in-depth understanding of a company and its people from top to bottom, compared to an agency which is much more generic and fee-based. To get the best out of any PR function requires strong news sense, excellent writing ability, good media relations and the cooperation of others to gain content and complete the approval process. ”



MARK ELWOOD
TELEWARE

“ Having worked with in-house and external teams, I am a huge believer in getting the right agency support. Buying the right team means that you can start delivering results straight away as you are buying into existing relationships. You have access to all their media databases, opportunity trackers and more senior and broader talent that you could pay for internally. The trick is making the right selection. When selecting an agency make sure you agree on outputs and outcomes and be prepared to put the time in. Having a curious, ambitious agency means they will need your time to deliver on ideas and campaigns. Also, look for values that match your own - you are buying people...it is a relationship. ”



VINCENT DISNEUR
UNION STREET

“ PR is an essential part of the marketing mix and a well-executed PR campaign is arguably the most effective way to build a brand. It's a great tool for spreading the word about your company, its products and services, promoting key personnel and the expertise your company has to offer to your target market. It's also comparatively cost effective. Most resellers will need an in-house marketing resource but, for specialist advice on media relations or when targeting a new vertical, it's probably best to use an outside agency. You're unlikely to need that level of expertise in-house until you grow beyond SME size. ”



NEIL WILSON
VIRTUAL 1

“ Where external specialist PR agencies can come into their own would be a significant, service effecting outage, through their experience of delivering clear and precise communications under severe pressure. That said I firmly believe that no one knows your business and customers as well as you do. However, many businesses would make mistakes in this scenario, through lack of preparation, experience and processes to fall back upon. After all, the first time that you do something is never the best. So, if you choose to go on your own you need to know who would speak, what language they would use, how often and how would you communicate? Social media and the speed of communication means that you can't afford to not be prepared. ”

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The Experience Defined

Are you prepared?

The clock is ticking on the four month countdown to this year's Comms Vision Convention (Gleneagles Hotel, 8th-10th November). Here's why this world leading industry conference is not to be missed...

Extending the life of industry talking points like 'digital transformation' as primary focus areas from where to strategise may be tantamount to a fixed gaze into the rear view mirror rather than taking a longer view of what's happening further down the road. The immediate job is not to reflect on long pored over topics of conversation but to get down to work on today's industry dynamics and assess their impact on how the future workplace will be shaped and moulded.

To underline the point, at Comms Vision this year we introduce the concept of the Experience Defined Workplace (where technologies, people, operational models, culture and leadership strategies are aligned with the core imperative to deliver a faultless customer and workplace experience). We will discuss the changing patterns in customer environments, why the future workplace will be 'experience defined' and explore the principle technologies and solutions that will be integral to the design of new customer experience and workplace models.

Why? Because technology now makes most sense to businesses when rooted in the workplace and customer experience. The essence of this 'experience' is the point of contact with customers and employees and the real value of interactions lies in the nature of the delivery. The focus here is not on product or service quality, rather the

quality of the experience – in seamless collaboration and participation, automation, culture, and a more personal service. In this world, there is no gradation of experience, according to service levels. The experience alone is king – and corporate cultures not focused on this will fail both staff and customers. Comms Vision 2017 will illustrate 'experience' as the iron law of a modern comms industry.

Business-ready insights

Conference Chair is Andrew Lippman, Associate Director and co-founder of the globally renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab and one of the world's foremost researchers on the evolution and impact of digital technology. He is also a Senior Research Scientist and co-Director for Digital Life. His highly animated and engaging approach to the latest trends in technology and research will give conferees clear business-ready insights into how the 'experience' has become a dimension of our lives.



ANDY LIPPMAN has 35-plus years experience at MIT. His work ranges from wearable computers to global digital television. Currently, he heads the Lab's Viral Communications research group which examines scalable real-time networks whose capacity increases with the number of members. This new approach to telephony transfers mainframe communications technology to distributed, personally defined, cooperative communicators. Lippman also co-directs MIT's interdisciplinary Communications Futures programme.

Technology makes most sense to businesses when rooted in the workplace and customer experience

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Workplace is coming...

The onus is on the channel, and Comms Vision, to shape this new dimension. To show the way forward we have responded effectively with a conference programme that marries an astute assessment of today's market with palpable visionary outcomes. Our keynotes and sessions will highlight the changing patterns in customer behaviours, needs and attitudes, and explore why the relationship between the workplace and customer experience is more important than ever. We will shine a light on the innovations that are redrawing the lines of customer engagement and explore how the channel can take the lead in realising these digital opportunities.

On the agenda

Also under the spotlight will be the key technologies and applications that are driving the workplace and customer experience revolution, with insights into how leading service providers and vendors are already developing and deploying the new technologies and services (such as AI/ML and the IoT) that will enable the channel to redefine the workplace and customer experience.

While the digital revolution gathers pace and the rise of automation continues to accelerate, services are still expected to be 'personal'. Comms Vision will explore how to resolve the customer service dilemma and make digital a personal experience, striking a balance between AI aided customer service and the human touch, while discussing how technology and people can interact most effectively in the Experience Defined Workplace.

For business executives who are leading change, what does the rise of Experience Defined Workplaces mean for their organisation and strategy? What does the CEO's new agenda look like? Comms Vision will address questions such as these and look at how channel business leaders

can expand in 'experience defined' growth markets while ensuring that their leadership team is on the 'experience focused' spectrum. Conferees will also gain insights into how organisational culture can be leveraged to create a greater customer trust experience while encouraging innovation to flourish within their business.

The digital revolution is showing no signs of slowing up, bringing into sharper focus the role of channel partnerships in harnessing technological innovations and turning them into value propositions that have the 'experience' at their core. Comms

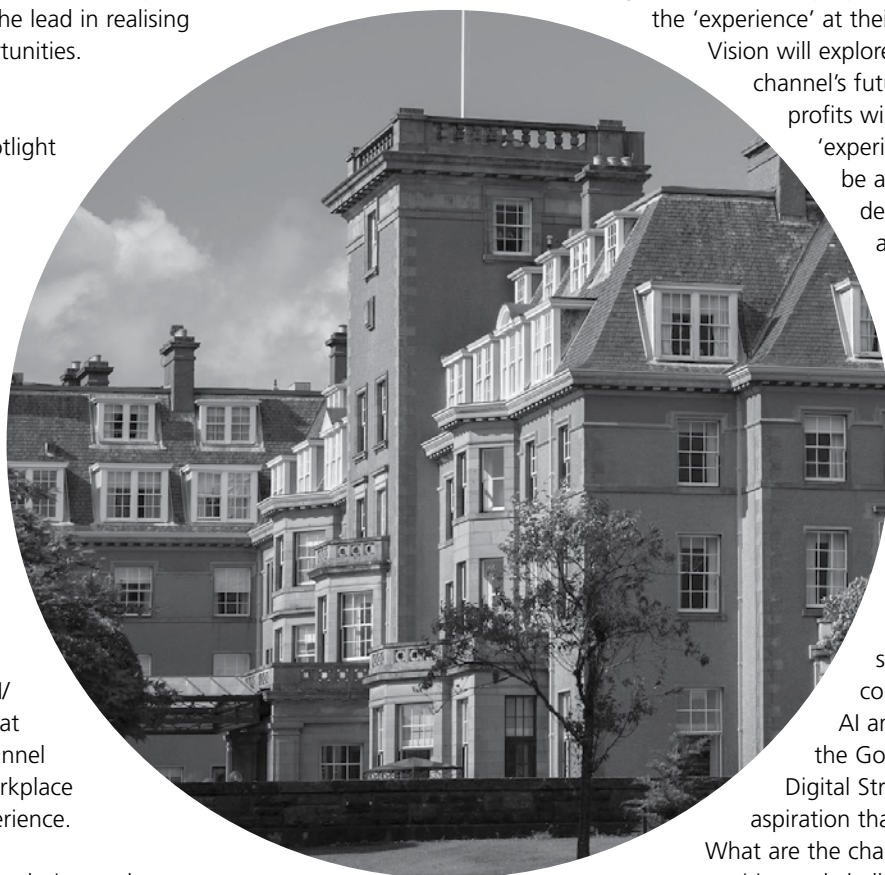
Vision will explore where the channel's future influence and profits will lie and how new 'experience' markets can be addressed through deeper partnerships at both the channel and end user level.

More broadly, the Government has high hopes for the UK to become a leading digital nation and a global driving force based on technologies such as superfast connectivity, AI and the IoT. Is the Government's Digital Strategy more aspiration than reality? What are the channel's

opportunities and challenges in helping the Government to secure the UK's digital

future? Does the Government need to work more closely with the channel and industry bodies? How can this be achieved and what would be the priority recommendations and immediate action points? All of the above are just some of the issues and questions that will be addressed at Comms Vision this year.

In the lead up to the conference Comms Dealer has established an editorial agenda that explores key aspects of the Experience Defined Workplace, beginning with the following six pages of interviews with key figures from Platinum sponsors Interoute, 8x8 and TalkTalk Business. ■



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Comms Vision 2017 will illustrate 'experience' as the iron law of a modern comms industry



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How to be a growing inf

workplace experience

Some idea of how the workplace of the future will look is now emerging, and comms visionaries such as Interoute CTO Matthew Finnie are already talking tactically about the Experience Defined Workplace and the technologies that will underpin it.

All signs are that the rise of the Experience Defined Workplace has already begun, and nothing will signal more clearly the shifting dynamics within the workplace than this year's Comms Vision Convention. In advance of the conference, Matthew Finnie, CTO of Platinum Sponsor Interoute, guides us through the company's responses to this new world where digital is elevating and revolutionising the workplace and customer experience.

"In the future, I envisage dumb computer terminals on desks in offices, input devices and monitors with little processing power perpetually connected to networks," stated Finnie. "All compute and storage will be handled on a shared edge device and central cloud platform; and reliable connectivity and network-anchored-cloud will become more important than ever before.

"For the Experience Defined Workplace of the future, this will mean no more updating of software on client-side systems, disaster recovery being intrinsically pre-built into all systems and services, as well as less of a requirement for costly internal ICT staff. Less time and internal resource will be spent maintaining and administrating systems internally, empowering users to focus on their individual roles and freeing companies to focus on their core operations."

Finnie also expects the Internet of Things to expand from being solely a consumer-led Edge Computing phenomenon to a bona-fide business enablement tool. "Businesses will find practical uses for enterprise grade IoT devices that will revolutionise the workplace," he

commented. "Adoption will be slow at first due to security concerns, but eventually, as private network operators are able to engineer enterprise grade security for these edge devices, uptake will become much more widespread. Network and edge device security concerns are one of the things slowing down the business Edge Computing revolution."

Interoute is addressing the requirement for enhanced security and decentralised compute and storage through its Software Defined Networking (SDN) and Interoute Edge product offering. The edge devices optimise traffic in several ways: Some have the ability to run virtual machines at the customer premises, with local applications (for example, print servers) offering increased functionality and improved local capability. They also optimise and accelerate traffic to the Interoute Enterprise Digital Platform and to SaaS apps, reducing latency and improving the application user experience. "As businesses select services that offer financially and operationally attractive Software as a Service models, network traffic optimisation will become ever more crucial as more traffic from remote systems vies for precious bandwidth and packet priority," said Finnie.

Reliability is key

Elevating the customer experience without increasing the complexity requires a truly converged cloud and network solution so reliable that businesses have the confidence required to entrust more of their services and applications to cloud environments. "If providers can deliver a network anchored cloud solution so reliable, resilient and secure that it removes end user fears of a

Reliable connectivity and network anchored cloud will become more important than ever before

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Fluence on the evolving



add and remove services and applications, and deploy new agile software-based ways of working.”

Despite the advantages of placing an entire solution with one single provider, to enable an optimised workplace experience the provider must have the ability to ensure a no lock-in environment for the customer, believes Finnie. “Offering customers the ability to pick and choose from a suite of products, while allowing integration and free use of their preferred systems is the best way to ensure clients grow with the business and maximise their experience. Once you have a digital platform as your foundation you can then make sensible decisions on what you want to do that are not constrained by a particular form factor of technology.”

One of the key risk factors impacting the adoption of cloud applications is the negative effect increased network latency and lag has on the user experience. Network providers need to take a more joined-up approach and stop seeing themselves as either IT or telecoms companies, says Finnie. “Interoute has always seen itself as delivering Information Communications Technology services,” he commented. “This view led to the development of our Enterprise Digital Platform and converged networked cloud infrastructure. As the world moves to a cloud first strategy this approach is crucial so providers can deliver end-to-end assured services to support the customer experience, all the way from each customer premises (CPE) across the entire network infrastructure and cloud platforms.” ■

severed connection leaving them adrift, businesses will gain the increased confidence required to entrust more of their services and applications to cloud environments,” added Finnie. “To stay competitive, businesses need to be able to flex and pivot to provide the experience that the market demands. So rather than bespoke which often leads to vendor lock-in, businesses need a tried and tested standardised ICT foundation to build their IT on, one that gives them the ability to change direction,

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Businesses will find practical uses for enterprise grade IoT devices that will revolutionise the workplace



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Experience shows that t must be overleaped

To drive widespread optimisation of the workplace and customer experience we must first overcome the intransigence of stick-in-the-mud boardroom executives, according to Comms Vision Platinum sponsor 8x8.

Legacy technologies and the Experience Defined Workplace cannot be squared. But the shape of things to come rests not only on the channel's ability to deliver the required technology, it also hinges on the attitudes of company executives towards adopting the cloud-based communications systems that will underpin the evolving workplace and customer experience. The irony is that too many top execs are wedded to their legacy systems, according to new research undertaken by 8x8 and the Institute of Directors which revealed a rift between the attitudes of company directors and their IT managers towards the value and efficacy of innovations such as cloud communications.

Senior leaders were found to be generally happy with the way their business uses technology, but well over half of IT middle managers identified a lack of investment in new technology resources. It is becoming increasingly clear that the channel will play a key role in preparing workplaces to foster pleasing experiences for both workers and customers, but the issues identified by 8x8's survey indicate that the way forward has to be through closer engagement with the boardroom.

How to achieve this remains a challenging prospect, but 8x8 has devised a strategy to help partners engage more effectively with senior business leaders via a clear set of messages. These are based on less jargon, matching solutions to business goals, talking more frankly about big issues such as security, phased project implementations and building a proposition based on objective data.

According to Charles Aylwin, Director of Channel at 8x8 UK, these strategies will remove the barriers to technology

adoption and give life to a vastly improved customer and workplace experience through cloud communications.

"A cloud-based communications system will be essential for the Experience Defined Workplace of the future," he stated. "At 8x8, being able to pick up calls or messages from any device with an Internet connection changes the way we operate as a business. Staff are no longer forced to work in one place and can easily collaborate remotely. Hot desking is the norm. Rather than having people hidden away in individual offices, those from different departments and levels of seniority sit together and exchange ideas. With this level of transparency teams no longer operate in silos but work together and share common goals. In the future, a collaborative, less hierarchical way of working will become the standard."

Business transformation

For a technology to be disruptive it needs to fundamentally change the way businesses work. Take the cloud, which enables teams to work more closely and effectively. For example, being able to answer calls and securely access systems from anywhere on any device allows staff to work more flexibly, regardless of where they or their business is located. "The cloud is also reducing the need for costly legacy systems that need to be regularly updated or replaced," added Aylwin. "This gives companies of all sizes access to advanced call and communication features at a fraction of the cost."

Technology is getting smarter and this is making it easier for partners to demonstrate which products can solve certain problems. "As an industry, the starting point for conversations with customers should be their business challenges, then we naturally fit our technology to their

The cloud will be essential for the Experience Defined Workplace of the future

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tech adoption hurdles

business,” stated Aylwin. “With 132 patents to our name we’re constantly developing new ways for companies to communicate. For example, we recently acquired Sameroom which enables different teams to send messages and collaborate across an entire enterprise using any app. This means messages from various apps such as Slack and Skype will appear within the same feed, putting a stop to siloed teams and accelerating creativity and collaboration while enhancing the overall experience.”

Against the backdrop of business-changing technologies such as those discussed above, we must revisit our exploration of the rift between the attitudes of company directors and IT managers – a disjunction of viewpoints that could be holding back the market, believes Aylwin. “When speaking to customers we frequently hear anecdotal evidence that mid-level IT managers face significant opposition from senior leaders around new technologies such as cloud communications,” he explained. “IT managers say more could be done to introduce new technology, whereas senior leaders seem happy with the status quo.

“Is this simply a case of ambitious middle managers wanting more budget to play with so they can implement the latest, shiny new technology? Or is there more going on here? One of the most fascinating statistics is that nearly half of IT managers say senior business leaders hold back technology for reasons of ‘self-preservation’. There appears to be a suspicion that senior leaders are reluctant to embrace new tech that will disrupt their own position or the status quo within their organisations.

“Certainly, many businesses have invested in expensive legacy IT systems that senior management are reluctant to replace. That may be simply because they want to see a return on their investment before

moving to something new. But it’s also the case that some senior leaders will hold all the knowledge about these legacy systems. If they are the only ones who understand that complexity, it clearly makes them more valuable. We all need to do more to explain how key metrics like the workplace and customer experience, staff productivity, company profitability and business growth can be positively impacted by the cloud.”



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In the future, a collaborative, less hierarchical way of working will become the standard



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Tempest on why there is of digital experience

Connectivity, flexibility, innovation and configuration – how Comms Vision Platinum sponsor TalkTalk Business is helping to shape the Experience Defined Workplace of the future.

There will soon be no such thing as an experience-lite workplace as the bonds between workers, their organisations and technology continue to strengthen, along with their culture and outlook all defined by the experience of their interactions. But without access to a fast and reliable network the workplace and customer experience revolution will grind to a halt, emphasised Alex Tempest, Director of Partners at TalkTalk Business. She revealed that the company has set out a new direction and new vision for its connectivity portfolio around flexibility, configurability, and above all else, leveraging the cloud through connectivity options to help partners take to market its cloud-ready connectivity product range designed to put the 'experience' front and centre.

"Technology is transforming the way that we work, enabling true collaboration at all times and all locations," stated Tempest. "Employees want to work with any device and from anywhere to get the best experience. As they come to expect more from the companies that they work in, resellers must acknowledge that businesses will need to support a wider variety of working styles. They will also need to support new technologies, some of which we already know about, and some we do not. There are two important ingredients for this digital transformation. The first is to ensure that the organisation has the capacity and the bandwidth to deliver on their ambitions. The second is to make networks smarter and more agile so that they're able to deliver speed when and where it is needed."

In this evolving environment staying competitive demands innovative, next generation voice and connectivity solutions that underpin the workplace and customer experience. Not surprisingly, TalkTalk Business is focused on optimising its network to allow resellers

to offer new technologies in the Artificial Intelligence and automation space that enable employees to spend less time on simple and time consuming tasks, and more time on creative and high value work. "Automation will take on important roles across a range of industries in the very near future," added Tempest. "For example, stock taking in retailers, fleet management for airlines or smart metering for utilities."

Automated services

For the channel, automation will revolutionise what services can be delivered, allowing resellers and their customers to alter the products being offered with very little human interaction. This will free up employees for the more important customer support roles, thereby improving the customer experience. By offering a more reliable and personable service, resellers in the channel should be able to gain a competitive advantage with 'experience' being a key differentiating factor, whether they're selling value packages or top end services. "This is something that we are already putting into action at TalkTalk Business with the automation of some of our services through our partner portal," said Tempest. "We already complete over one million API transactions each month from our partner base, with the ability to check availability and place orders."

There are many challenges associated with elevating the customer experience, and avoiding an increase in business and technical complexity is one of them. "The challenges facing the channel include improving reliability through application performance and improving network security," noted Tempest. "Network structures also need to be simplified across industries. Reliability is important as customers expect to do anything from anywhere, and the channel must cater for this requirement."

A fast, reliable network will be essential to driving the workplace and customer experience revolution

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s no stopping the tide



will always present their own problems, but this has always been the case for the channel. So long as they are equipped with the tools and support that they need from their suppliers, they stand ready to make the most of the new age of employee work experience. So it is important for us to ensure that all of the products we offer can be sufficiently configured, allowing partners to service their customers in the way that they deem best. This is why we have added flexibility, boosts, and different product configuration options to our product portfolios."

Just as each customer may have their own particular requirements, different market segments also need to be treated in unique ways. There's rarely a one-size fits all solution that can satisfy all customers.

"Resellers therefore need to consider how far they provide bespoke solutions for their customers," commented Tempest. "Businesses increasingly expect their IT solutions to address what their employees want which is seamless work experiences, so resellers will need to tailor their products and services to meet the individual needs of different office environments. For example, at TalkTalk Business this is all about the ability to tailor all of our products and make sure that we can configure them. As we react to new trends our products will become increasingly configurable, and we will continue to innovate the way that we deliver our connectivity with the reliability and resilience demanded by the Experience Defined Workplace of the future."

Tempest also believes that the channel must work to better understand the benefits of automation. Those in the channel that are able to turn this technology to their advantage will see that resources can be freed up to deal with the more complicated tasks of integrating new systems into product sets across their portfolios for customers. "Despite the opportunities that come from greater automation it is still true that scaling up the experience factor presents its own problems for larger customers," commented Tempest. "Nonetheless, those in the channel that step up to the challenge, along with the support of ISPs, will find that they are able to capitalise in that area of the industry. Larger customers

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As we react to trends our products will become more configurable and we will continue to innovate how we deliver our connectivity



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AV tech innovator thrives

Sound planning and clear vision are the best guides to strategic action. In the case of US-based audio and visual manufacturer ClearOne, sound and vision also combine to represent an unprecedented advantage for all AV practitioners, according to CEO Zee Hakimoglu.

Visionary technology patents and dynamic leadership have imbued ClearOne with the culture and agility of a cloud-born start-up, making it a rare breed among the stable of businesses with a 30 year heritage. Unsurprisingly, the company has undergone a transformation and augmented its core specialisms in audio with an enviable collection of software-based AV solutions – a process led by Hakimoglu. She joined ClearOne 12 years ago and within six months of being appointed became CEO with a remit to transform what she said was a ‘pony’ into a dead cert thoroughbred runner. She wasted no time in leveraging her experience in communications which includes 20-plus years working in Silicon Valley across technology development, business development and general management.

“Communications has been at the heart of my experience across industries such as satellite and wireless communications, datacoms and fibre optics,” she commented. “I brought the Silicon Valley mentality, drive, work ethic and innovative spirit to ClearOne, which was then a small but struggling audio conferencing company that was undergoing significant legal and financial challenges.”



Zee Hakimoglu

The strategy soon paid off and once outstanding issues were resolved ClearOne was relisted back on the NASDAQ. “I also introduced best practices to the company and recruited and retained strong management,” she added. “We have a number of great technologists gained through acquisitions and others in Salt Lake that have been with the company for many years, some from inception. We all anticipated that audio and video would shift onto the network, so we moved to software-based appliances and cloud services.

These were the drivers behind our acquisitions.”

ClearOne began life as a designer, developer and seller of conferencing, collaboration, network streaming and signage solutions for voice and visual communications. The company has a global network of channel partners with UK distribution via RGB Communications, Nimans and Exertis. “Our products are used by thousands of organisations worldwide, from small enterprises to Fortune 500,

as well as domestic and international governments and educational institutions,” said Hakimoglu. “We’ve aggressively built on our intellectual property portfolio with new patents that span all product categories and technologies including audio, video and network streaming technology.”

Innovations

The latest new patents relate to ClearOne’s beamforming microphone array for the Pro AV market, an adaptive steering technology (think of it as ‘smart beam

selection’). Hakimoglu claims that ClearOne remains the only company with a conferencing grade beamforming microphone array. “We’ve also received a few patents on our video network streaming technology, fundamentally related to streaming audio and video across IP networks, networked speakers and audio sources,” she added. “The company was visionary in terms of using an IP network to stream audio and video and we benefitted from our early patent applications that came to



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on visionary foundations

fruition when the market was ready for the technology.”

Last year proved to be a tipping point and signalled a new drive for growth based on video collaboration and AV streaming solutions. “We are building positive momentum during 2017,” added Hakimoglu. “With the transition to our second generation CONVERGE Pro 2 audio platform gaining traction and our scalable audio, video collaboration and network media streaming products, our addressable market extends to additional workspaces and more businesses worldwide.

“We have finally reached the point where our investments in the new video centric

product line-ups will begin to pay off. These are the right products at the right time, with the right features at the right price. We need to focus harder on the marketing of these solutions and the new direction for ClearOne which is complementary to our audio-centric business, and will initiate new marketing programmes and campaigns for our global channel network of dealers and distributors. We sell generally through a two-tier channel model, so we’re going to work hard to raise awareness.”

These rapid developments and the emergence of early patented technology into market reality have blasted the perception that ClearOne

provides just audio solutions. “We fulfil far more end user needs than just audio,” emphasised Hakimoglu. “ClearOne provides media collaboration products that allow users to seamlessly host meetings face-to-face, incorporating not only our audio conferencing offering but also integrating all of our professional audio solutions.”

Flexibility

One example cited by Hakimoglu is ClearOne’s Network Media Streaming portfolio which transports AV signals from location to location over a single cat 5 cable, using existing networks but retaining the same flexibility and scalability of its other solutions. “We will continue to leverage video

conferencing, collaboration and network streaming technologies to enter new growth markets and focus on the SMB space with scaled, lower cost and less complex products and solutions,” added Hakimoglu. “And we will capitalise on the growing adoption of IT channels and introduce more products to resellers. As we expand and strengthen our sales channels we will also consider acquisitions.”

AV integrators are key to ClearOne’s business model and according to Hakimoglu they have never been in a better position to steal a march on rivals if they share in the company’s strategic advantage, she believes. “There are many start-ups

and wannabes, and some large legacy players trying to figure out how to get into the software-based media conferencing and communications market,” stated Hakimoglu. “They are challenged to re-tool and reinvent themselves, but adopting a new business model can be harder than changing technology.

“This is a classic business dilemma not easily solved and our biggest competitor is under such a threat. Therefore we have everything to gain and nothing to lose in offering software-based appliances and cloud services compared to some large legacy businesses selling high priced equipment and support services.”

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Postcard from Margin sy

Last month's Margin in Voice & Data seminar held at the Forest of Arden hotel on June 22nd signalled clearly the need for a new strategic approach to emerging market opportunities and threats, most preferably along the lines proposed by speakers at the event.

The big industry issues like cloud and digital transformation are now familiar and well understood, but the challenge of moving away from familiar surroundings is ever present in the fast spinning world of technology. The market has also spawned a new competition battleground, the customer experience, but this is a clash that must be won on unfamiliar ground, long before a prospect even engages with a potential supplier for the first time.

It's a fact that a buyer's journey may be 70 per cent complete before speaking to a provider, therefore marketing needs to be focused on self-directed discovery, according to ShoreTel's EMEA Marketing Director Gary Gould. In a keynote presentation to delegates he said: "Content is key. The channel must use material like case studies as



Gary Gould

referenceable proof points in an online environment where peer-to-peer reviews are seen to be most trustworthy."

This shift in buying behaviour is happening at the same time as a jolt in the mid-market where sweated assets are becoming ripe for replacement. In this space, believes Gould, the market for UCaaS is growing and represents the biggest opportunity for resellers with a cloud offering that embraces a 'flight to quality'. "We spend more time on creating a quality user experience," he added. "Mobility is important here, along with video, social collaboration in the workplace, open app integrations and the shift to being interconnected with everything. In this market there are strong margins in consultancy and professional services. Resellers who are able to provide relevant marketing material to buyers at the research phase of their journey are in a far stronger position to win in the mid-market competition battleground."

Paul Taylor, Sales Director at Voiceflex, urged delegates to lift the veil on what lies behind the cloud and offered pointers on what to look for in a cloud partner, price being the least important factor to consider. Top priorities on his scorecard are core values, a channel-only modality, financial



Iain Sinnott

stability, security, connectivity, cloud and network features and apps such as call recording, fraud prevention and analysis including IP profiling – and then price.

New opportunities

A stick in the mud mindset is wholly out of place in such a forum as Margin in Voice & Data from where the rise of new opportunities was to begin, including WebRTC, which is high on Taylor's agenda. He insisted that a future proof strategy must include a WebRTC journey, which Voiceflex has already embarked on and monetised for the channel. He revealed that the company's SIP trunks will be WebRTC enabled later in the year but showed the audience via a live demo the immediate benefits of features such as click-to-call via a website. "We're doing the future now," he told delegates in a keynote presentation.

Voiceflex's WebRTC capabilities are based on a link-up with Genband that enables it to leverage all of Genband's expertise and package the app commercially on a monthly rental basis. "WebRTC will open doors and close deals," added Taylor.

IoT and M2M have also been high on the agenda of industry talking points for some time, but beyond our industry there is little understanding of the technology, according to keynote speaker Anton Le Saux, Head of IoT at Zest4, who cited figures that indicate 87 per cent of people are in the dark about IoT. Before joining Zest4 last summer from O2, Le Saux witnessed the operator's IoT revenues double over three years on what had taken 25 years to build. When you consider the prevailing lack of IoT awareness in

the market, such figures put a magnifying glass on the scale of this unlocked opportunity, spotlighted by today's surge in M2M connections which can be driven by a quite subtle demand from niche markets.

The language of M2M deployed by Le Saux in his keynote address to delegates was one of end-to-end managed connectivity and managed data, and he offered the audience a key to unlock market potential for such services. "Sell managed data and simple end-to-end solutions to get into the customer, and follow up afterwards with more bespoke solutions," he said, citing vehicle telematics as a solid starting point.

Solutions such as in-cab cameras record all of the time but only transmit data when prompted, triggered by incidents that are recognised by the system as worthy of further inspection. Insights



Paul Taylor

mposium

like these are a boon to those, such as fleet managers and insurance companies, who stand to benefit from information about driver behaviour and habits, or require submissible evidence to prove liability or otherwise. "Margin in IoT is a reality," added Le Saux. "Bespoke opportunities are uncovered by asking the right questions. Use simple M2M solutions as the Trojan Horse."

Pivotal role

There is no point having new technology areas like the IoT if they are not widely adopted. The channel's role in this will be pivotal. But unless resellers are blipping bright on the radar screens of ICT buyers they, along with the impressive solutions discussed above, will go unnoticed. What matters in the long-term is how reseller business models are to interact with the industry and end user surroundings. One way is to stand out, says Vanilla IP's Sales Director Iain Sinnott who extolled the benefits of being different, not so much by deeds but through the medium of perception.

According to his equation, being different equals profit. He shot down in flames strategies such as follow the leader, plodding behind the herd and going head to head with rivals. Instead, he advocated an alternative based on owning your own particular difference, invoking stand out figures Eddie Izzard and Lady Gaga as examples of personality projections that make them different. "Create your own unique proposition based on what works for you," urged Sinnott. "Difference can defend margin in negotiations. You'll be thought of first if you are seen as different."



Anton Le Saux

Using 'difference' as a mechanism to shout loudest also applies to those business owners looking to exit, pointed out Knight Corporate Finance Director Adam Zoldan in his keynote address to delegates. He explained to the audience how building up a favourable perception of what a business is worth – based on its people, products, performance and profit – can translate into value. In a discussion on the sale of Modern Communications between Zoldan and its former owner Adrian Barnard on stage, Barnard said: "Your company is what it's worth, but you can create a premium by developing a good perception of your business."



Adam Zoldan

Connect beefed up by PC-1 deal

LDC-backed Connect Managed Services has acquired PC-1 for an undisclosed sum in a move that creates a £26m business supporting over 100 blue chip organisations. The deal expands Connect's global footprint, adds Genesys expertise, augments its Cisco credentials and brings to life a multi-vendor contact centre offering based on technology from Avaya, Cisco and Genesys. PC-1 customers include Vodafone, NSPCC and Northumbrian Water.

Alex Tupman, CEO of London-based Connect Managed Services, commented: "Adding deep Genesys expertise into the mix completes our platform agnostic strategy and extends our existing capabilities beyond Avaya and Cisco technologies. Having collaborated with the PC-1 team on many occasions over the last few years we are confident this



Alex Tupman

will be a great fit for our staff and customers."

Since 2014 Connect has invested in upgrading its technology platforms and building customer-focused procedures. The firm has also expanded its global footprint and now has representation in Europe, North America and Asia. "Businesses are becoming increasingly frustrated by the limitations placed on them by traditional, legacy-laden suppliers," claimed Tupman. "As a result, many are seeking out independent, trusted partners who can provide

unbiased and expert advice, which enables them to confidently select appropriate technology strategies that can also be quickly and efficiently adapted to scale with their changing business requirements.

"The expanded Connect offering has been designed to satisfy this need. With global spending on contact centres alone predicted by Gartner to reach nearly \$10 billion by 2020, we are confident that Connect is well positioned to take full advantage of the many opportunities this projected growth represents for our business." ■

Osborne sits as Chair

Former Daisy Group divisional MD Mike Osborne has been enlisted by Databarracks as Executive Chairman. Daisy's Ex-MD of Business Continuity, Cloud & Hosting will play a key role in expanding the firm's recovery and BC service offerings. Databarracks MD Peter Groucutt said: "In his career Mike has taken a fledgling DR company and grown it into one of the UK's leading providers of IT and

BC planning services with revenues of over £50 million. He has advised more than 2,000 clients and supported many through some of the UK's most significant disaster incidents over that period.

"As an inaugural Chair of the Recovery Site Providers Group and a founding partner of the Business Continuity Institute, Mike has been at the forefront of the UK continuity profession for over three decades and seen it

go from niche to a globally recognised profession."

Osborne commented: "How businesses manage, store, protect and recover data has never been more critical. The recent cyber attacks and corporate IT failures also demonstrate the total dependency that now exists on the IT systems needed to deliver continual customer service, and the importance of having credible and tested continuity plans." ■



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Protection: It's our duty

What's the channel's priority now? Not reacting passively to cyber attacks but doing everything possible to stop them happening, urges Steve Nice, Chief Security Technologist at Node4.

Let's not assume that it's the CEO's sole responsibility to ensure that castle walls are erected to protect against the ever present and growing threat of cyber attacks. We must acknowledge that there are degrees of responsibility – and the channel has a duty to educate end users and help build that wall, says Nice. "The channel needs to educate customers about the realities of this new security landscape," he said. "In a new open digital world data is no longer located purely in the data centre. The edge has been pushed far into operational technology, cloud and mobile. In this environment organisations will need to define their acceptable level of risk and focus security resources where they are needed most."

Gartner predicts that by 2020, 60 per cent of enterprise information security budgets will be allocated for rapid detection and response approaches, up from below 30 per cent. This increase is a reflection of the transition towards cloud-based digital business which is having a significant impact on the security requirements for all organisations. And the opportunity for the channel is clear – to help customers keep pace with a rapidly

evolving and increasingly complex threat landscape. But the way ahead is not so straightforward.

IT departments are under pressure to balance the need to protect their business with the requirement to keep it running. In this scenario, prioritising limited security staff and resources will become more important. Enter security as a service. "Customers are showing a preference for security products in an 'as-a-service' format," said Nice. "Node4's Managed Security Service offers channel partners a market ready security solution designed to help end users identify and prioritise threats so they can isolate risks and take preventative action as well as respond effectively to incidents when they occur."

Node4 has developed a Managed Security Service that addresses the security needs of the SME and mid-market sectors. Its service offers a Defence-in-Depth Security Strategy comprising all the components required to protect local, infrastructure and cloud resources with overlapping security tactics.

Nice also noted that mobile devices are emerging as the biggest threat as they become more powerful and



Steve Nice

ubiquitous. It is forecast that up to 25 per cent of corporate data traffic will flow directly from mobile devices to the cloud, bypassing enterprise security controls. "This means that organisations need to address cyber security risks in technologies and assets they don't necessarily own or control," added Nice. "This calls for a people-centric approach to security which gives each person more autonomy in how they access information and use devices."

Human factor

By far the biggest internal threat is the human element. Not through malicious attacks, but through errors made by employees. "This will come as no surprise to any IT manager that has had to deal with the fallout from a lost laptop or company phone," said Nice. "The more devices

we have, the higher the chance of this happening."

In an increasingly connected world, clicking the wrong website link, for example, or exposing company data on an unsecured area of the cloud is all too easy. Furthermore, there was a time when leaving sensitive printouts on a train or in a taxi was a bad enough risk. Today, all of a company's data might be stored on a single micro SD card and easily misplaced.

"The human error vector carries with it more risk than ever before," added Nice. "There is a huge opportunity for the channel to play a more consultative role with their customers, highlighting the reality of today's security environment and helping them to develop policies that mitigate risk for employees, be that in the workplace, a home office or on a train."

The key to good security is having the right system continuously monitoring the threat environment and managing security risks. Organisations will be looking to outsource a large part of this function to a managed security provider, simply because the cost of keeping abreast of the evolving landscape will be prohibitive to all but the largest organisations. But despite the cold cyber facts, adequate security budget decisions will only be made where there is a full understanding of the threats and risks at board level.

"CEOs will become more aware that a lack of effective cyber security measures will pose a real threat to their organisation," commented Nice. "Gartner has already predicted that by 2020, 60 per cent of digital business will suffer major service failures due to the inability of IT security teams to fully manage digital risks. More business leaders will be asking themselves if they can afford not to have the right levels of protection in place."

One of the channel's most important roles is to educate the end user, emphasised Nice. "We recently carried out research into the IT priorities of the mid-market in which 63 per cent of IT decision makers say that security is a top priority, but most of them have inadequate security in place," he commented. "And while 74 per cent have anti-virus protection, just over half have data encryption and only a third have intrusion detection. It is down to the channel to educate customers about the scale of the security threat in a cloud-based digital world." ■



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Lord takes new title



Georgina Lord

INTERCITY Technology has recruited ex-Virgin Media Business Sales Director Georgina Lord to head up its inside sales and marketing teams. Lord worked with Virgin Media Business for nine years and became the youngest and only female director within the organisation.

Andrew Jackson, CEO at Intercity Technology, commented: "Georgina is a talented and hard working individual. Her drive and industry knowledge will be vital in leading the inside sales and marketing team. This is a pivotal time for the company as we transition from our traditional roots to develop our own technology solutions. Georgina's expertise in sales and her passion for this industry is exactly what we need."

Lord added: "Intercity has made some ambitious, strategic acquisitions over the last few years and I'm relishing the task of bringing together all elements of the business and revamping the sales and marketing strategy. I already feel like part of the family and I'm looking forward to building our client portfolio and cementing the brand as a key player in the market."

Didata CEO steps down

DIMENSION Data CEO Brett Dawson has stepped down after 12 years in the job, making way for COO Jason Goodall who takes over the chief exec role. Goodall is a veteran of



Jason Goodall

Dimension Data having served in a number of roles during his 18 year career with the company.

Jeremy Ord, Executive Chairman, said: "Brett has delivered extraordinary growth for our company over the last 12 years, quadrupling our revenues to \$8 billion. He helped us to globalise and led our transition into being part of the NTT family."

Goodall added: "We see many opportunities for growth across both the Dimension Data Group as well as the wider NTT Group.

"I'm excited about the opportunities in front of us, to continue to build our winning culture, to accelerate the ambitions of our clients, our people and the communities we operate in."

Also on the move...



Andy Devine

PROVU'S new Technical Support Manager Andy Devine brings over 10 years experience across a number of industries including digital print, ePOS, GPS and vehicle telematics. ProVu Managing Director Darren Garland said: "With

over 50 per cent of our staff in technical-based roles we invest heavily in the development of our support team. With Andy's appointment we hope to expand our services and streamline our technical support activities." Devine added: "I look forward to working with the wide variety of products on offer and getting to know our customers."

PROVIDER of hybrid cloud services Pulsant has enlisted Simon Hendy as Channel Manager, who brings almost 20 years experience across the UK, US, Europe and the Middle East. He joins following



Simon Hendy

a five year stint at Microsoft where he was Partner Account Manager responsible for transitioning traditional partners to the cloud. Adam Eaton, Pulsant Sales Director, said: "As Pulsant continues to evolve our

partner programme must change too, keeping in line with industry trends and demands from the channel. Simon's experience will help us to drive further adoption of the programme and deliver strategic advice and solutions to our partners."

Lease whizz heads up UK



Jean-Michel Boyer

BNP Paribas rising star Jean-Michel Boyer has taken over the UK operation as CEO following former chief exec Tristan Watkins' appointment to Programme Manager of the BNP Paribas North America Growth Plan, a joint initiative

with Bank of the West to expand the Group's equipment finance business in the US and Canada over the next three years.

Boyer has worked with the BNP Paribas group for over 30 years, starting in 1986 at UFB Locabail, the equipment leasing arm of Paribas subsidiary Compagnie Bancaire. He joined the French division of BNP Paribas Leasing Solutions in 2009 as Head of Equipment and Leasing Solutions before becoming General Manager of BNP Paribas Rental Solutions Trucks in 2013. In December 2015 he was appointed Business Development Director of the IBL ELS and President of CLAAS Financial Services SAS.

Boyer commented: "Last year, BNP Paribas Leasing Solutions UK advanced in excess of £1.25 billion to over 100,000 British businesses. In my position as CEO, I hope to play a key role in exceeding our ambitious growth targets year-on-year and strengthening our reputation."

Entanet names client care chief

ENTANET has expanded its Service Review Programme and appointed Ryan Berrisford to the newly created role of Customer Relationship Manager. He brings more than ten years



Ryan Berrisford

experience having worked in first line technical support and latterly the company's premier support team as Team Leader and then Team Manager.

Berrisford said: "I've been heavily involved in our Service Review Programme since its inception and I'm keen to see partners benefit from working closer with us in the future."

Entanet's Head of Service Neil Watson commented: "Ryan has developed an enviable knowledge of the industry and the business over the last ten years working in frontline support. When we considered the creation of the new role he was a perfect fit."



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