



Fidelity puts channel on course for revenues in e-learning p10

8x8 CTO Bryan Martin talks tactics for world domination p44



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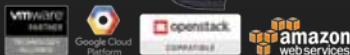


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ShoreTel CEO Don Joos noted: "This concludes our review of strategic alternatives by delivering a significant cash premium for our shareholders."

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Comms People

This month's movers and shakers



ShoreTel acquired by UC giant Mitel

MITEL has swallowed up rival ShoreTel in a \$430m merger deal that positions the enlarged business as a top place contender in the global UCaaS market.

SPECIAL REPORT

The deal brings combined sales of \$1.3bn, increases Mitel's recurring revenue to 39% of total revenues, more than doubles its UCaaS income to \$263m while bolstering the Canadian vendor's capacity to quickly migrate organisations to the cloud.

The enlarged company will have approximately 3,200 channel partners and a global workforce of circa 4,200 employees. It will be based in Ottawa, Canada, and operate as Mitel.



The acquisition is also expected to bring \$60m in cost savings over two years.

Mitel CEO Rich McBee (pictured above), who will lead the combined organisation, stated: "This is a natural combination that enables us to continue to consolidate the industry and take advantage of cost synergy opportunities while adding new technologies and significant cloud growth to our business."

"Together, Mitel and ShoreTel will be able to take customers to the cloud faster."

Solar, a ShoreTel Platinum and Mitel Gold partner, welcomed the deal. CEO John Whitty stated: "Our two main UC technology partners joining forces brings a massive opportunity to take the best of both portfolios and deliver under a single brand. We hope that the same investment and support continues in each product line."

ShoreTel CEO Don Joos noted: "This concludes our review of strategic alternatives by delivering a significant cash premium for our shareholders."

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE headlines always go to those who can turn conventional ways of doing things on their head or shine a light on something new and different. In both cases there is a requirement to keep one eye on the next change-factor or opportunity in order to create the heightened interest.

Therein, also, lies the way to product diversification and finding the next 'pound' for the channel.

Digital engagement is rife and new revenue opportunities are emerging thick and fast, not always from the most predictable sources. Take Fidelity Group which this month launched what its Managing Director Alan Shraga says is the firm's biggest initiative since it entered the energy market three years ago. This time his 'out of the box' thinking has come to fruition with the launch of an e-learning initiative that is complementary to the reseller business model and extends the revenue generating possibilities of channel partners who can provide another service that hits the digital engagement trend (see page 10).

Showing equal vision is Cogent Distribution Managing Director Jim Kernahan who has embarked on a venture to realise the promise of a wireless dominated world where 5G and the IoT combine to turn conventional connectivity methods on their heads, ultimately replacing fibre and copper solutions, he firmly believes (see page 24).

Our industry is adaptable and self-sustaining, has the capacity to absorb and create new areas of business while innovating fresh opportunities from within. But all this depends on the entrepreneurial flair of those people who are able to embrace non-traditional revenue streams as part of an evolving, organic process of product diversification. These people are our readers who every day ensure that the channel is future-proofed from within, through keeping one eye on the 'now' and the other on tomorrow.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

DatapointEurope's acquired by Sabio

LYCEUM Capital backed Sabio has acquired fellow contact centre player DatapointEurope to create a £60m business that supports 250 enterprise customers on three continents.

DatapointEurope has a strong European footprint with headquarters in Madrid, Spain, and offices in Barcelona, Milan, Paris and Utrecht. The company also operates a global alliance programme to support organisations across the Americas.

The move builds on Sabio's acquisition of SaaS solutions provider Rapport.

"Geographical expansion is critical to Sabio's growth plans, so the acquisition of DatapointEurope, with its broad reach across Europe and the Americas, is an important next step for the company," stated Sabio's Chief Executive Officer, Andy Roberts.

"DatapointEurope's international footprint adds to Sabio's existing strong presence in the UK and the Asia-Pacific markets, enabling the combined operation to address the demand for innovative global customer experience solutions."

Sabio has built out its infrastructure to support a larger business operation to drive



Andy Roberts

annuity revenues via hosted and managed service offerings

"We've already demonstrated our ability to leverage value from this model, adding DatapointEurope will allow us to accelerate the process on a much broader geographical basis," stated Roberts.

DatapointEurope CEO Rafael Aranda added: "There's a particularly close fit in terms of our culture and values, along with a shared commitment to making our organisations a great place to work."

"Both organisations hold key strategic technology partnerships and are recognised for their ability to deliver complex customer experience solutions based on core technologies."

Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabyte.com, said: "Subject

of course to the usual caveat over price – which we would assume to be modest given what appears to be low margins for Datapoint – this looks to be a reasonably transformative deal for Sabio.

"It gives the company a substantial pan-European footprint and some clear cross and up-sell opportunities, as well as economies of scale aided by Datapoint's similar 100% contact centre focus."

"It does, however, mark a significant development for a business that has, to-date, developed almost entirely organically – with the exception of the Rapport deal – with management quite sensibly taking the foot off the M&A pedal while it focuses on the task of integrating Datapoint."

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COMMENT: A WINNING RESULT



Richard Carter

THE new football season is about to get underway and for many years Sky has been the king of the Premier League regarding TV coverage. However, in recent seasons BT has emerged as a serious contender, combining Champions League with selected domestic games.

In a move to 'up its game' Sky has announced a major revamp of its sports packages

where Sky Sports 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 have been replaced by 10 channels, including ones dedicated to the Premier League, cricket, golf and F1. So, in a bid to stay one step ahead of its rivals, for the first time Sky's set-up offers the chance to subscribe to individual channel packages.

Of course, businesses have to adapt to changing market trends and it's clear Sky is aware of the impact of sites such as Netflix and Amazon Prime where content can be downloaded for a simple monthly fee on a much more individual basis.

Technology and the Internet remain at the heart of today's entertainment and communications worlds and all of us who operate in these arenas need to continually evolve to meet ever more demanding and intuitive customer expectations.

The Sky versus BT battle – where billions of pounds can be spent to secure exclusive contracts – just goes to prove how football and sport in general is big business on and off the field. As always an interesting new season lies ahead as TV has an ever stronger influence on the beautiful game and clubs spend hundreds of millions of pounds luring some of the game's finest talent to these shores.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

• For years the business connectivity market has been dominated by fixed line solutions, but it's time to move on argues Cogent Distribution Managing Director Jim Kernahan (p24).

Virtual1 speeds up network expansion

VIRTUAL1'S strategy to become a UK-wide channel-only wholesale Digital Service Provider has advanced significantly since the launch of its national network in April.

The company's plan is fast coming to fruition with the network already reaching over 180 UK towns and cities, while 50% of its 212 new exchanges are now available on IPortal for partners to raise quotes against.

Virtual1 has also released real-time bandwidth changes across its Ethernet network.

"Partners can increase and decrease the bandwidth on Ethernet services via IPortal, with changes taking effect in real-time," commented CEO Tom O'Hagan. "This functionality leverages the upgrades made across our core network over the past 18 months."

O'Hagan says Virtual1 is blazing a trail with its fully software defined network which by the end of the year will allow partners to directly control in real-time 35 different features of the solutions they provide.

"Most exciting is how the channel makes use of the new functionality and how being released from the shackles of a legacy carrier's processes and



Tom O'Hagan

and giving this ability directly to the channel our partners can now dictate their own SLAs. "For verticals that experience seasonal periods of demand and predictable peak workloads, this proposition enables them to flex bandwidth and not carry the costs of this ability for the length of a contract. "This functionality is available across all circuits provided on Virtual1's own network, with plans to extend it across all services in the roadmap for 2018."

service levels will drive innovation in propositions," added O'Hagan. "By removing the carrier from the service delivery

and giving this ability directly to the channel our partners can now dictate their own SLAs.

"For verticals that experience seasonal periods of demand and predictable peak workloads, this proposition enables them to flex bandwidth and not carry the costs of this ability for the length of a contract. "This functionality is available across all circuits provided on Virtual1's own network, with plans to extend it across all services in the roadmap for 2018."

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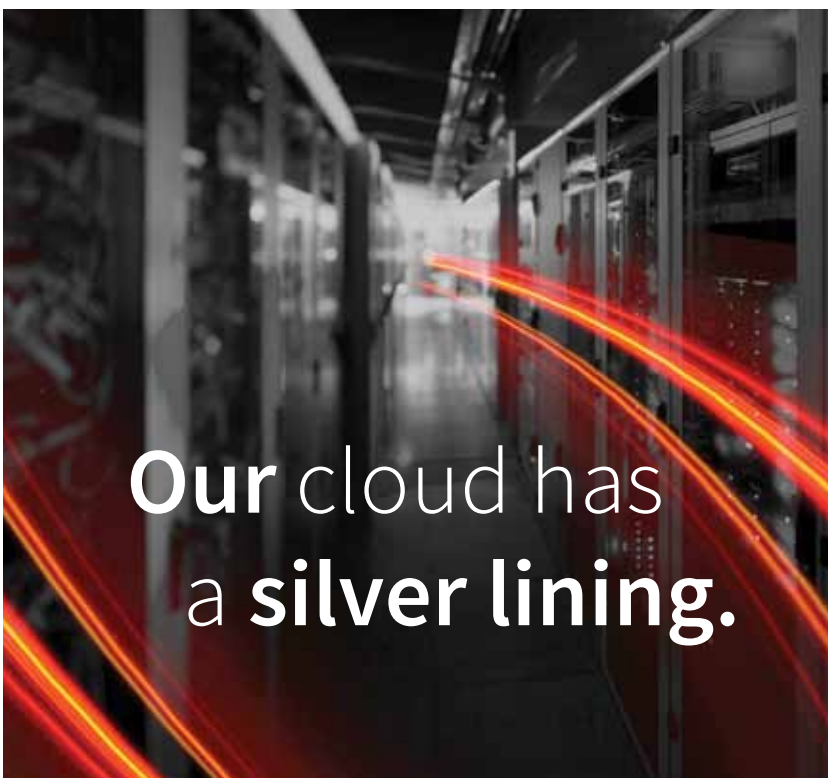
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Expectations for AI almost off the scale

RARELY has a technology caught the imagination as fast as Artificial Intelligence, which according to Gartner will feature in almost all new software products by 2020.

The analyst firm has based its prediction on astonishing website stats and corresponding levels of hype unseen before in the tech sector until now.

According to search analysis of Gartner's website, in 2016 the keywords 'Artificial Intelligence' did not make it into the top 100 search terms. Fast forward to May 2017, and AI ranks seventh.

Gartner now says that AI will be a top five investment priority for more than 30% of CIOs by 2020.

"As AI accelerates up the Hype Cycle, many software providers are looking to stake their claim in the biggest gold rush in recent years," commented Jim Hare, who as Research Vice President at Gartner.

"AI offers exciting possibilities, but unfortunately many vendors are focused on the goal of simply building and marketing an AI-based product rather than first identifying needs, potential uses and the business value to customers."

AI is a term applied to systems that change behaviours (without being explicitly programmed) based on data collected, usage analysis and other observations. But AI vendors need to realign their focus, believes Hare.

"Software vendors need to focus on offering solutions to business problems rather than just being at the cutting edge of technology," added Hare.

AI has unquestionably shot up the corporate agenda, but too many AI software vendors



Jim Hare

are shooting themselves in the foot in their rush to market with undifferentiated products, causing confusion among potential buyers, claims Hare.

"More than 1,000 vendors with applications and platforms describe themselves as AI vendors, or say they employ AI in their products, he said.

"Similar to greenwashing, where companies exaggerate the environmental friendliness of their products or practices, many technology vendors are now 'AI washing' by applying the AI label too indiscriminately – with consequences for investment in the technology."

To build trust with end user organisations vendors should collect case studies that show quantifiable results achieved using AI. "Ensure that you use the term 'AI' wisely in your sales and marketing materials," urged Hare. "Be clear what differentiates your AI offering and what problem it solves."

According to Gartner's 2017 AI development strategies survey, organisations want AI solutions to improve decision making and process automation.

"If they had a choice, most organisations would prefer to buy embedded or packaged AI solutions rather than trying to build a custom solution," concluded Hare.

NEWS ROUNDUP

Ethos is poised to strengthen its presence in the cloud contact centre market following a link-up with Cirrus that adds to its capabilities in delivering operational efficiency and enables it to focus more on business outcomes and improved customer experiences.

Commenting on the partnership Ethos MD Matt Hill said: "Cirrus' CCaaS offering complements our contact centre solution portfolio, and the combined expertise of both companies enables us to further strengthen our proposition, service and support."

Yealink phones are now available to SpliceCom partners following a link-up between the two companies.

SpliceCom's Director of Marketing & Product Management, Robin Hayman, said: "We've built support for Yealink's T4 series handsets into our SelectVoice platform which includes a high level of feature integration."

Andy Roberts, MD for Yealink UK, added: "By treating Yealink phones as system components rather than third party add-ons SpliceCom is delivering a value added proposition that is far greater than the sum of its parts."

Almost a third of organisations questioned in the Veritas 2017 GDPR Report said they were compliant with the upcoming data laws until asked about specific details that brought to light the likelihood of non-compliance.

Jason Tooley, VP Northern Europe, Veritas, commented: "More education is needed on the tools, processes and policies to support the information governance strategies that are required to comply with GDPR requirements."

"Creating an automated, classification-based policy-driven approach to GDPR is key to success and will enable organisations to accelerate their ability to meet the regulatory demands."

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

CLOUD applications are fast replacing essential business apps previously run on dedicated hardware. This means that connectivity is more important than ever to provide an excellent user experience with business critical software applications. As the demands on connectivity and networks increase they need to become smarter with capabilities like Network

Function Virtualisation (NFV) and Software Defined Networking (SDN) in order to keep pace.

NFV is allowing network providers to deploy and manage services that optimise network performance much more flexibly and efficiently than ever before. TalkTalk Business is using the power of NFV and SDN to create a more agile network for our partners and their customers.

An example of the use of this technology is our recently re-architected DNS functionality into a fully virtualised service, achieved by successfully combining virtualised software at the edge of the network, a first with our partner Juniper Technologies. This puts the decision making and customer interaction closer to the end customer, improving responsiveness and the user experience.

Thanks to virtualisation we can continue to scale the operations of our customers easily to keep pace with growing demands and maintain the performance improvements we've seen so far. NFV means we can deliver services quicker than ever before. What does this mean for end customers? Well, TalkTalk Business' partners and customers can now get responses up to twice as fast as before, leading SamKnows to rank us 1st for fibre response times.

We are excited to be at the forefront of innovation in NFV within this space, and excited about the potential for our customers and partners in the future.

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Arrow darts after Worksmart target

THE acquisition of London-based Worksmart Technology by Arrow Business Communications provides an immediate boost to revenues, tech capabilities and strengthens its presence in the hosted space.

Worksmart generates circa £4.7m revenues and has over 350 customers. The deal is Arrow's ninth acquisition in seven years.

Worksmart is strong in the financial services and health sectors and focuses on hosted and on-premise phone systems along with data connectivity.

Arrow CEO Chris Russell stated: "The key reason behind this acquisition is Worksmart's expertise in delivering enhanced hosted voice platforms, which are becoming increasingly popular with customers wanting to migrate away from on-premise based solutions.

"Overnight we have doubled our number of hosted seats and connectivity sales and added depth to our technical and product offering."

Following the deal Arrow appointed two new directors – John Harber and Richard Burke. Harber previously worked at Lenovo, Sony Ericsson and Sony UK and will lead Arrow's



Chris Russell

Pulse Business Energy and Worksmart acquisitions.

Burke joins Arrow from Intercity where he held director level positions since 2009. He is now responsible for Arrow's IT Services, Telesales, Scotland and Strategic Accounts teams.

Russell added: "We started the year with three key objec-

tives – to continue to acquire, to add resource to our senior team and to deliver our numbers.

"We have completed our second acquisition of the year, welcomed John and Richard and won some significant new business. I am confident that we will exceed our profitability targets for 2017."

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COMMENT: PUBLIC SECTOR FOCUS



Charles Aylwin

THE inadequacy of legacy systems and the benefits of cloud technology are encouraging public sector organisations to make significant changes to their communications infrastructure. They're increasingly recognising that having the right technology in place can lead to greater productivity and improved customer service.

Far from budget cuts holding back tech spend, research by the Cloud Industry Forum reveals 40 per cent growth in the use of some form of cloud-based service by public sector organisations since 2010. This is because the cloud allows local government organisations to break down silos by unifying departments and allowing them to collaborate with each other. This also makes their communication with citizens more effective, which is the ultimate goal for any public sector organisation.

According to our own research, 82 per cent of those working in local government say the introduction of new technology has a positive impact on their organisation.

There's an opportunity here for the channel to increase sales. In order for resellers to provide solutions that solve local government's communications challenges it's important to understand what systems these organisations currently have in place as well as how their citizens would like to communicate with them. This allows the channel to demonstrate an understanding of this challenging environment, offer bespoke solutions and be reliable advisors.

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

• As for BI, it's been a while since a technology has so consumed industry discussion. Here, we assess the rise of analytics and its influence on the channel and wider business community (p46).

VanillaIP launches hosted-SIM bundle

VANILLAIP claims to have cracked the challenge of creating a truly unified solution with the introduction of user bundles that combine a BroadSoft hosted PBX seat and a mobile SIM from either Vodafone or O2.

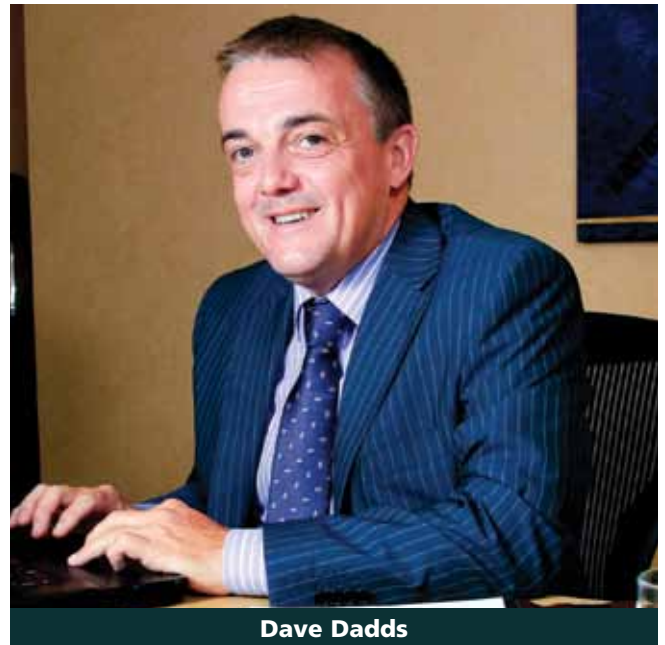
The bundles include hosted IP, mobile minutes and texts and extend the capabilities of the VanillaIP Uboss and BroadSoft platforms to any device including mobile.

Fixed and mobile calls along with mobile data are logged at the user level, and resellers can provide customers with a combined bill for all services.

The Uboss portal also gives users access to unified call logs and recordings.

"The key capability of the solution is that the GSM mobile is used to tether the user to the VanillaIP platform, meaning all calls are made and received through our BroadSoft system off any device," explained CEO Dave Dadds.

"This means a true one number solution for users with a single voicemail and only the office DDI number being presented. All calls, including those from the mobile, are recorded and available almost immediately within the Uboss portal.



Dave Dadds

"With new EU rules on roaming, VanillaIP users can take advantage of a one number feature set without any additional charge when in Europe.

"We are not selling a bunch of different services here but an integrated and fully meshed user experience."

Users have presence and chat with their colleagues, are able to pull live calls between fixed IP devices and mobile, access the corporate directory and pull colleagues into conference calls. They can also configure

advanced call routing while on the go.

"There is no logic to having the hosted PBX service and the mobile as separate silos," added Dadds. "We all understand the importance of mobility in our communications strategy, but until now the challenge for the channel has been bringing in mobile functionality, reporting and billing as a single solution for the customer."

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Fidelity on course for e-learning

HENLEY-based Fidelity Group has launched a white labelled e-learning platform to the channel powered by education technology company e-Careers.

This latest product offering, Fidelity eLearning, will help businesses to benefit from education technology as more resellers look to increase digital engagement and revenues in their portfolio.

The agreement is designed to remove one of the primary barriers to e-learning adoption and unlock the revenue potential of a global market said to be worth \$220bn by 2020, according to Accuray Research.

“One of the problems holding back the digital learning wave is the issue of trust,” said Fidelity Group MD Alan Shraga.

“People balk at the prospect of entering personal details online for services from suppliers they have not encountered before and therefore cannot

fully trust. But resellers hold a trump card. They are already trusted providers in the eyes of their customer bases and in a prime position to unlock demand and drive edtech in the business market with tools that support enterprise e-learning.”

The online courses are numerous, ever expanding and range from office packages, project management qualifications, accounting and IT, GDPR, health and safety, personal interest and hobby courses.

They can be purchased via a white labelled platform linked from the reseller’s website.

“Businesses will find something for everyone to help engage their staff and customers,” commented Shraga.

“Fidelity eLearning (powered by e-Careers) gives the business community, our channel and their own teams instant access to training across multiple devices in their own time.”



Alan Shraga

Channel resellers currently offering software and accounting packages can strengthen relationships with customers by providing the online training to accompany these products, inviting longer-term and beneficial engagement with customers, pointed out Shraga.

The launch follows a seven month development period and represents a new and significant digital revenue opportunity for partners, according to Shraga, who emphasised that the future

impact of edtech and the role of technology providers in delivering it cannot be ignored.

The partnership with e-Careers gives Fidelity access to an e-learning support team of 200, including 76 course developers and 40 accreditation awarding bodies. “One of the most beneficial offerings from Fidelity eLearning is the ability to add new courses that are relevant to channel business and help drive new revenues by meeting customer demand,” said Shraga.

Prominent trends driving e-learning and digital engagement include cloud, anywhere access, increasing budget allocations, the popularity of online content, gamification and rising revenues from digital apps.

“This is the latest product in Fidelity’s offering, providing a new digital revenue stream,” commented Shraga. “The benefits include agile learning, greater employee motivation,

engagement, collaboration and a competitive edge.”

Shraga also noted that it’s ‘critical’ for businesses to find ways to engage, develop and retain talent given the time and expense that goes into attracting, selecting, developing and engaging the best employees.

“With mobile devices staff can learn anywhere, anytime, which helps businesses offering these opportunities to retain skilled staff,” he said.

Fidelity is also offering a course in commerciality on the platform that involves experiential learning via gamification and real world cases designed in association with BBC’s Dragons’ Den.

As part of the white labelled package resellers can benefit from a 24/5 support team that steers customers through the course navigation and enrolment process, together with after-sales support.

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COMMENT: THE NEXT REVOLUTION



Phil Reynolds

I GREW up watching Star Trek with its talking computers, its voice recognition, its robots, androids and light speed travel. Of course it's taken a long time for science fiction to make the jump to science reality, but while we still have a way to go on warp speed travel the rest is pretty much there 50 years on.

Progress can be seen in all corners: I arrived home last month to find a robot in my house. Not the sort that walks about like Data, but a little automated vacuum cleaner that scuttles around the house cleaning and then finds its own way back to its charging station having mapped out the rooms. Clever stuff!

What makes this relevant to me as a software engineer is that I've written software to map out a maze using sensors, I've built self-learning programmes at the beginnings of AI, and I've controlled robotic function within firmware (I guess some inspiration came from science fiction). Fast forward 40 years and we're finally getting enough processing power to deliver on the science fiction promise.

The biggest change today is the communications revolution and how AI is going to take over. We're at the tipping point where you soon won't know you're having a conversation with a robot. Contact centres are about to change forever. When it comes to emails, instant messaging and chat services you have no chance as AI-based solutions will perform far better than humans ever can.

Questions of concern are what to do with all of the human beings that will be displaced by the AI revolution, and what happens when AI supersedes human intelligence? Skynet really is just around the corner.

Phil Reynolds, CTO, Oak Innovation

• How former CIO of Ford Motor Company Kevin Timms got into the driving seat of fast rising Managed Services Provider EACS (p36).

Unify builds the channel

OVER 150 partners descended on Unify's Partner Conference staged in Monte Carlo last month to hear the vendor reaffirm its channel-first business strategy and back up its proclamations with new figures that show 57% of its product revenue is now through the channel.

During the past 12 months Unify (the Atos brand for comms software and services following its acquisition in November 2015) has increased partner numbers by 34%, adding 437 new sign-ups bringing the total count to 2,809 partners in 119 countries.

Unify used the conference as a launchpad for its new OpenScape Cloud offering and also introduced a number of new programmes to strengthen collaboration with partners and between its global partners.

These initiatives include ServiceConnect, which is a service-based community hosted in Unify's Circuit technology.

OpenScape Cloud is a combination of Unify's Circuit collaboration platform and OpenScape Voice and is now available via the cloud.

"The move to cloud is a major trend, and our customers and partners are looking



Luiz Domingos

for more options and stronger offerings," said Luiz Domingos, Head of Product House for Unify. "With OpenScape Cloud our partners can offer customers deployment choices and flexibility to migrate at their pace."

Elka Popova, Vice President for Digital Transformation, Frost & Sullivan, commented: "The market is rapidly moving to the cloud and demanding customisable communication tools that go beyond traditional voice or UC to deliver true collaboration for today's mobile and distributed workforce."

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

Pennine's model for tech sales

PENNINE has set about driving greater tech adoption via the Prosci ADKAR Model, a process that is said to aid change management and create the conditions that promote more uptake of new technologies.

"The ADKAR Model is a research-based individual change model that creates an internal language for change and gives leaders a framework for helping people embrace and adopt changes," stated Steve Watts, Head of Pennine Sales.

ADKAR stands for: Awareness of the need for change; Desire to support the change; Knowledge of how to change; Ability to show new skills and behaviours; and Reinforcement to make the changes stick.

Pennine is a Silver partner of Microsoft and Skype for Business and the company is applying the ADKAR Model as part of its sales strategy around products such as these.

"The key to a successful roll out is communicating the benefits to the whole workforce," commented Watts.

"By embracing the methods of the Prosci ADKAR Model through Pennine's approach, organisations are maximising their chances of success."

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TrueSpeed in funding deal

TRUESPEED Communications has secured £75m funding from Aviva Investors to support the roll out of an ultrafast full fibre broadband network across south west England.

The firm was set up in 2015 to provide residential and commercial customers with multi-gigabit capable symmetrical speeds via a full fibre network.

The partnership with Aviva Investors (the global asset management business of Aviva) allows TrueSpeed to accelerate its expansion strategy to pass up to 75,000 homes and businesses in the region.

Sean McLachlan, Senior Director, Infrastructure Equity, Aviva Investors, stated: "There is a clear and growing demand for this essential infrastructure across the country, in particular rural locations. The funding will allow TrueSpeed and its management team to accelerate its business plan."

TrueSpeed CEO Evan Wienburg stated: "This investment enables us to roll out the full fibre network infrastructure and services the region has needed, providing our customers with high quality broadband and data capabilities for the first time."

Marcus Allchurch, Partner at Acuity, advised TrueSpeed during the fundraising process.



Evan Wienburg

Commenting on the deal he said: "Securing this funding will make TrueSpeed a major UK provider of ultrafast contiguous FTTP network services."

"Aviva's commitment to this investment is admirable and testament to the perfect storm that is being created in the global digital infrastructure market, as the demand for services makes 20th century telecoms infrastructure obsolete."

Wienburg added: "This level of investment for an early stage fibre company such as TrueSpeed has not been done before in the UK and gives us fantastic certainty and a considerable commercial advantage."

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

Sharp rise of attacks on UK biz

THE number of cyber attacks targeting UK-based businesses increased by more than half in the second quarter of 2017, according to a new report from business ISP Beaming.

Firms were, on average, subjected to almost 65,000 Internet-borne cyber attacks each in the three months to June, an increase of 52% on the first quarter of 2017.

While two-thirds (68%) of attacks hitting corporate firewalls targeted connected devices like networked security cameras and building control systems, there was a big increase in attacks on company databases.

On average, each UK business experienced 105 attempts to take control of their database applications per day in the second quarter of 2017, compared to just 14 in the first three months of the year.



Sonia Blizzard

MD Sonia Blizzard said: "Major organisations have been brought to their knees by global cyber attacks and our research shows the likes of Wannacry are just the tip of the iceberg."

"UK businesses were targeted more than 700 times each on a daily basis by hackers over the last three months, who focused on hijacking connected devices and databases."

"The majority of cyber attacks are automated computer scripts that search the web for weaknesses and attack company firewalls constantly looking for vulnerabilities. Businesses need to keep these vital defences up-to-date, prioritise security over convenience and ensure employees understand both the evolving threat and their cyber security responsibilities."



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KNIGHT Corporate Finance has been confirmed as English Half Marathon Corporate Challenge sponsor for the second year. The event will be held in Warrington on Sunday 17th September and offers a full 13.1 mile half marathon and 10k option to suit runners of all abilities. "We

would be delighted if you could enter a team to run alongside other North West businesses and challenge yourselves against Knight's own team of highly trained athletes," stated Knight Director Paul Billingham. Participants gain access to training plans and offers from event partners, as well as receive a host of race day VIP treatments.

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Solar makes Skype shine



John Whitty

SOLAR'S in-house technology team has developed a Skype for Business solution that incorporates the higher call quality and richness of enterprise grade telephony services.

Skype for Business has witnessed a significant uptake from within the business community but it can be limited in its enterprise grade telephony capabilities, according to Solar's CEO John Whitty.

"Skype for Business is a great tool but it comes up short in terms of telephony features," he commented.

"This has become a cause of frustration for many businesses

which is why we developed Solar Skype Connect (SSC).

"SSC addresses a number of customer pain points by creating a scalable next generation answer to the question of how to achieve optimum and feature rich telephony via a flexible model. It's something we're proud of."

Whitty also noted that SSC will be available to resellers of the Microsoft Office365 package. "Delivered as either cloud, hybrid or on-premise, SSC allows businesses to migrate services towards the cloud gradually, in a controlled manner and at low risk," said Whitty.

Openreach to revamp brand

OPENREACH has kicked off a four-year rebranding exercise that, says the firm, illustrates a new era of greater independence from the wider Group.

The development is part of BT's agreement with Ofcom under the Digital Communications Review and signals Openreach's revised governance and independent board with the removal of the 'BT' element from its logo, a move that 'reaffirms Openreach's commitment to treating all communications provider customers equally', stated the company.

The changes began last month across the Openreach

fleet and will be ongoing until approximately April 2021 on all vehicles, customer facing websites and apps, stationery, employee workwear and pass-cards, buildings and signs.

CEO Clive Selley stated: "Removing the 'BT' element from the Openreach logo is a visual reflection of how we deal with everyone on equal terms.

"We want our brand to be consistent and recognisable so we're keeping the distinctive typeface and name, as our research suggests it will mean our engineers continue to be recognised when they knock on customers' doors."

Gradwell sees MBO

GRADWELL CEO Simon Mewett and Chief Product & Marketing Officer Julien St John-Dennis have left the business following an MBO and a change of institutional investor.

The move sees the appointment of Nick Caw as CEO and Andrew Peters who becomes COO, both bringing strong experience in the IT and telecoms market.

The company says the new investment group is supportive of its focus on core strengths in calls, connectivity and cloud.

It was also confirmed that Gradwell will develop its VoIP platform over the coming months and introduce 'positive changes' in customer support, billing and sales processes.

Support desk open

IT SERVICES business Firstnet Solutions has launched a 24/7 help desk support service with over 300 certified network consultants employed at its new facility in Leeds.

Firstnet's team of in-house specialists is based at the company's Tier 3 data centre from where they will provide round-the-clock support with first, second and third line engineers available through the night.

Clients are guaranteed to speak to a live technical consultant within 60 seconds of calling, noted MD David Cusworth.

"With threats from cyber-crime spreading on a global scale it has never been more important for organisations to have immediate access to expert technical support which is capable of providing a helpful response – any time of day and any day of the year," he said.

Key swoop

ADVANCED'S reach into the SME sector has extended with the acquisition of Hudman, the developer of CentralERP, a cloud-based SaaS ERP system.

Gordon Wilson, CEO at Advanced, stated: "Cloud technology is fast becoming the right choice for many organisations to drive efficiencies, manage costs, innovate and grow.

"It's important we help them embrace the cloud to secure this competitive edge."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Strategic Imperatives has signalled big European expansion plans by sponsoring the annual Customer Experience Management in Telecoms B2B/B2C European Summit being staged in Vienna on 26th-28th September. "It is the right time for us to take Elevate to a wider audience," said MD Wail Sabbagh.

Comms Dealer sister firm IT Europa has reported 'huge interest' in this September's Managed Services Summit to be staged in London with record sponsorship support.

The agenda includes keynotes from Gartner on what it takes to sell digital transformation, advice from GDPR legal expert Fieldfisher and presentations on merger and acquisition activity.

Enghouse Interactive's Communications Center 10.0, a new version of its contact centre application, offers intelligent SMS routing and integration, task and activity queuing and support for Office 365 Federated Agents.

"CC 10.0 delivers tight portfolio integration via TouchPoint, enabling seamless switching between interaction handling, quality management and workforce scheduling," commented VP of Product Management John Cray.

Henry set to up his game

ABERDEEN-based SureVoIP has integrated Signalling System No.7 (SS7) telephony following an 18-month preparation period and a six figure investment in the project.

The firm claims that the project is a first in Scotland and puts the business on a level playing field with much larger rivals in the market.

SS7 is a set of Ofcom regulated signalling protocols that physically connects to BT's own network, rather than over the Internet.

MD Gavin Henry commented: "While it's quite common among the industry's big players, our adoption of SS7 technology gives SureVoIP a competitive edge. This develop-



Gavin Henry

ment is the culmination of many months hard work by our team and underlines our credibility as a serious player in Scotland's telecoms market."

SureVoIP currently employs seven staff but plans to add a further three by early 2018.

Last year the company won ITSPA's Best Business ITSP (medium enterprise) gong and has also been awarded ITSPA's Quality Mark.

M24Seven in partner push

AN UPDATE from M24Seven following its acquisition of Venus Business Communications in March this year outlined a stronger channel proposition headed up by newly appointed Channel Director Will Brooks who introduced a partnership programme divided into three categories – reseller, referral and wholesale partners.

"We want to take the best aspects of all the partner programmes across the businesses which have come together to form M24Seven," he explained.

M24Seven MD Neil Rampe commented on the latest developments: "The acquisition of Venus and its integration into M24Seven means better productivity and efficiency through

a greater range of services and capabilities. Our channel partners and customers can now focus on their growth, their business and their objectives while we deliver connectivity without compromise."

Ex-Venus Business Communications Director Brian Iddon commented on the transition: "Our reseller network will transfer seamlessly into the M24Seven partnership programme where they will experience increased levels of support."

M24Seven now employs 230 people across six sites including Manchester, Newcastle, London and Bucharest.

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

ITP urges action on levy

THE Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) is urging all large telecoms employers to access apprenticeship levy funding following a study by the Department for Education which found that circa 11,000 large companies are not using the online service.

From April 2017 all companies with a wage bill of over

£3m need to pay an apprenticeship levy at a rate of 0.5%. The new online service allows them to access the funding available for apprenticeships.

"If you've not yet signed up to an account but are required to pay the levy, then it makes sense to start employing apprentices straight away," stated Crissi Williams, CEO of the ITP.



CITYFIBRE has connected the first businesses (Imperial Automotive and Credit Style) to its full fibre Gigabit City networks in South Yorkshire via launch partner Exa Networks. Jason Petrou-Brown, City Development Manager at

CityFibre, said: "These Gigabit City networks have the potential to catapult the region and the businesses operating there into the global digital arena." Mark Cowgill, co-founder, Exa Networks, added: "Connecting our first businesses to the gigabit network is a milestone in delivering world class connectivity to the Sheffield City Region." Pictured (l-r): Mark Cowgill, Natalie Ward (Superfast South Yorkshire scheme), and Jason Petrou-Brown.

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Cloudsource in transition

A TECH development programme conducted by Cloudsource and underpinned by a £320k R&D investment has come to fruition with the launch of CloudMedia, a music service that enables businesses to stream tailored playlists to customers on site.

Mat Linaker, Head of Software Development, said: "We created CloudMedia in response to a requirement from a group of garden centres. The head office centrally maintains its own playlist and streams it to all other garden centres."

Cloudsource has also set up a new Utilities division that focuses on reducing customers' energy bills.

The forward thrust of Cloudsource's development is reflected in its headcount which has more than doubled so far this year to 25 with additional new starters in the pipeline.

Key hires such as a new Business Development Director, Corporate Development Director and Customer Service Manager signal the company's preparations for a rapid rise in customer numbers.

Cloudsource is also busy building its reseller channel and has recruited five resellers since



Carl Lowe

launching the partner operation in February.

To reflect these cross-company changes Cloudsource is to revamp its online presence with a new website that illustrates its transition from a tech start-up to a fast maturing business displaying far greater depth and an appetite for nationwide and European expansion.

"We want to grow from being a SME-specific technology provider to take on bigger, multi-site customers in the mid-market and corporate space," stated MD Carl Lowe.

Key customer wins include Blue Diamond Group which has offices in the UK, Channel Islands and Europe; and a link-up with Lloyds Banking Group.

Cloudsource's trophy cabinet houses the Ericsson-LG Best Global Partner 2016 award and Pragma's Best Reseller of the Year 2017 gong.

Invosys offers hosted service

THE acquisition of VoIP platform developer Telux HD by call management company Invosys in March 2017 has been followed up with the channel launch last month of Invosys Hosted, a new service that includes Telux's open source cloud communications platform integrated with Invosys's Number Manager portal, which enables customers to configure, manage and monitor their call management solutions.

Invosys Hosted runs on servers across a number of UK data centres and has experienced zero down time in the past 12 months.

Co-founder Peter Crooks said: "Innovation and breaking the mould is what we do best at Invosys. While the majority of VoIP companies are reselling someone else's product, we have decided to throw out the rule book and do it ourselves."

Invosys CEO Rob Booth added: "Invosys is on a mission to create change and offer choice in the channel, providing an alternative and encouraging customers to try something new and exciting. Invosys Hosted is an example of this."

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

Trakm8's drive for partners

DORSET-based telematics company Trakm8 has kicked off a partner recruitment campaign to push its vehicle tracking, dash cam and optimisation solutions deeper into the fleet, insurance and automotive sectors.

The company says resellers can help businesses overcome a number of transport related challenges such as improving fuel economy and road risk, increasing the utilisation of vehicles and reducing downtime.

"These improvements are driven by insights into vehicle whereabouts, utilisation reports, driver behaviour monitoring and vehicle health reports," said Chris Wilton, Channel Sales Director. "Dash cam and multi-cam systems can reduce operational costs via lower insurance premiums and a reduction in accident rates."

Wilton highlighted Euro Car Parts, a customer that has witnessed a 20% reduction in at-fault accident rates following the installation of cameras.

"There has never been a better time for businesses to introduce telematics into their product portfolio, with market trends still pointing to significant industry growth over the next ten years," added Wilton.



THE team at Train to Win.TV fired up Girl Power to complete last month's double Pretty Mudder challenge in aid of Cancer Research. They raised over £1k following weeks of training in hot weather and were accompanied on the big day by Mia the mascot spaniel which also completed the course in a team shirt and tutu. CEO Julie Mills said: "It's not every day you can play around in mud and water with colleagues while raising money that will save lives."

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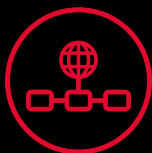
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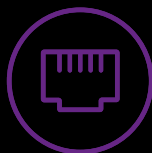
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NEWS ROUNDUP

Nuvias Group has swooped on Benelux distributor DCB which will become its Cyber Security Practice for this region of Europe.

Paul Eccleston, who is the CEO of Nuviac Group, said: "DCB is a value added distributor with a strong reputation and a large partner base. The DCB product range is fully aligned with the Nuviac Cyber Security Practice."

Logicalis has bought a 51% stake in NubeliU, a specialist in cloud computing projects based on OpenStack. The buy is part of Logicalis' strategy to position itself as a cloud integrator, the company said.

NubeliU was set up by the first deployers of production clouds in OpenStack, and specialises in the integration of OpenStack environments with existing platforms.

GCI has been awarded Gold partner status by Enghouse Interactive, a designation that was also notable for the speed in which it was achieved.

Gary Bennett, Channel Sales Director, Enghouse, said: "GCI's rise is the fastest on record. Its momentum in the contact centre space, Skype for Business and plug-in PCI DSS capability for payment card security all complement our software nicely."

Splicecom lifts lid on new offer

SPLICECOM has unveiled its new voice platform to reseller partners during a series of regional roadshows.

SelectVoice is a single platform voice solution developed from the ground up that can be deployed in the cloud, on-premise or a blend of the two, and is available through capital purchase or pay monthly terms – or a mix of these methods.

"Splicecom's heritage is in developing IPPBXs, phones and business management systems," commented Robin Hayman, who is the Director of Marketing & Product Management at the Chorleywood-based company.

"We've been doing this since 2001. Our SelectVoice system is the latest step on this journey, providing a single platform solution for the smallest business to the largest enterprise.

"Even in the cloud each customer enjoys their own system. We don't force them to share it with other businesses."

Stuart Bell, Head of Sales for UK&I at Splicecom, emphasised 'simplicity' as a key selling point: "We have a simple per user licence model that remains the same, totally independent of how SelectVoice is deployed or paid for," he said.

NG Bailey's IT unit brings record sales

NG BAILEY'S IT Services division has racked up record sales for the second year running. It's annual results to 24th February 2017 show a £76m hike in sales, up 27% on last year's £60m.

Group-wide figures rose from £408m to £500m and operating profits grew 100% from £6m to £12m.

The Group's forward order book rose by 10% to £902m.

The group attributes much of this growth to a diversification strategy that has seen NG Bailey move from a reliance on building construction to having a balanced portfolio across services (IT and facilities management), large scale engineering construction projects and traditional building construction.

CEO David Hurcomb said: "Our operating performance over the past year shows the strategy we put in place six years ago – when the construction industry was being heavily impacted by the economic downturn – was the right one.

"However, we cannot afford to be complacent. Each of our key divisions, including IT Services, performed strongly over the past year, but we are operating in what is still a chal-



David Hurcomb

lenging environment for our industry, and with a backdrop of continuing political and economic uncertainty.

"As a family owned organisation, our independence provides us with the freedom to strategically reinvest our profits in areas that support future growth and enable us to be a sustainable business."

NG Bailey has planned to invest £3m a year in staff training and development, and over the past 12 months has more than doubled the range of qualifications available in its apprenticeship programme.

Chairman Kevin Whiteman commented: "Our financial strength, with no third party borrowings and net assets of £124m, allows us to invest for growth and to support the development of our people.

"We also recognise the opportunity to positively impact all of our stakeholders, including almost 3,000 employees.

"That is why we are committed to environmental and social sustainability in order to build a better future for us all."

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

Pedals put new spin on IoT

PANGEA has embarked on an initiative to show how IoT enabled bicycles can keep cyclists safe, help them train harder and transform how councils tackle complex environmental problems.

The company's Business Development Manager Terence le Poer Trench will put the scheme through its paces during this year's RideLondon100, as well as raising money for teenage mental charity stem4.

The Big Data Cycle will be updated weekly and cover topics



Terence le Poer Trench

across cycling, the environment and IoT, and feature analytics gathered from an IoT enabled device on le Poer's bike.

The sensors will capture data on training sessions as well as air quality, giving Pangea

insights into le Poer's progress and his environment.

le Poer said: "Not only can I support an extraordinary charity, it's a great chance to get hands-on with some tech, see how IoT can impact the environment and explore the power of real-time analytics."

MD Dan Cunliffe said: "For Pangea, The Big Data Cycle is about putting a spotlight on the wider impact of IoT, from athletics training and connected cycling, to public health and protecting the environment."



FORMER boxing superstar John Conteh still has the winning formula and helped golfers from TalkTalk Business secure top prize at this year's Comms Dealer/Sir Trevor Brooking Celebrity Classic held at The Oxfordshire, a spectacular new venue for the annual event. But the real winner on the day was children's charity Sparks which netted £20k from the prestige event (sponsored by TalkTalk Business).

"Despite some inclement weather it was a great day and we would like to thank TalkTalk Business, the other industry teams that played, plus of course Sir Trevor and all the Sparks celebrities who turned out to make the day such a success," said Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent. Pictured: The winning TalkTalk Business team – Stuart Blackman, Aaron Tebbutt, Jeremy Woodrow and John Conteh.

Luminet adds more partners



Sasha Williamson

LUMINET is on course to achieve its 2017 target of signing up 400 partners having already on-boarded 140 resellers following the recent launch of its partner programme and automated portal.

Luminet owns its own core and wireless 400 sqkm London network and has invested heavily in infrastructure, transforming from a wireless business broadband ISP to an intelligent managed services provider.

The firm's average revenue growth rate is 24% per annum and EBITDA has grown 16% year-on-year to circa £1.1m.

CEO Sasha Williamson stated: "Having already agreed 140 partnerships, with many more in progress, we are well on the way to hitting our target.

"With our connectivity and compute products and our partners' expertise, we have a sure-fire recipe for success that will enable us to have our best year to date."

Last month Luminet sold its 28GHz spectrum license to Arqiva to sharpen its focus on wholesale, intelligent connectivity and computing services.

Luminet has also become one of the first registered partners of the Connect Westminster Scheme, the new Connected Voucher Scheme that helps cover up to £2,000 towards a SME's one-off connection charge within Westminster and the West End Partnership area.

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

Link-up paying off

STORACALL Voice Systems has joined forces with Enghouse Interactive to develop an integrated call accounting and call recording solution targeted at businesses with large volumes of inbound or outbound calls.

The offering is primarily based around Enghouse Interactive's Proteus call management and call accounting software which has been combined with the Storacall-ST call recording solution.

Joe Jestico, Head of Business Development, Storacall, said:

"There is growing demand from businesses for an integrated solution that enables them to have more control over the calls they are making and receiving.

"Positive customer engagement is a key differentiator, but in delivering it organisations need to manage call quality and agent performance efficiently."

Tony Davies, International Partner Director, Enghouse Interactive, said: "We are pooling our resources to meet the urgent need for call management and call recording."

NEWS ROUNDUP

Microsoft hopes the roll out of its new One Commercial Partner scheme will help partners make more cloud sales.

Ron Huddleston, CVP of One Commercial Partner, commented: "Many partners have told us that they'd like better engagement and support from us in bringing their solutions to market and connecting with customers.

"So we've brought partner-focused teams from across the company into one organisation that benefits all partners, regardless of size, business model or geography."

Record levels of venture capital investment at the start of 2017 has helped London to retain its crown as Europe's number one tech hub for global investors, says Mayor of London promotional agency London & Partners.

VCs are said to have pumped more than £1.1bn into London's tech sector over the last six months, with the total invested across the UK as a whole topping £1.3bn between January and June.

Despite Brexit, the beginning of 2017 saw more investment than any other six month time period during the last decade.

Mitel has acquired the business assets of troubled Toshiba Unified Communications Systems and confirmed that there will be ongoing access to existing Toshiba products and services and that a number of Toshiba sales, support and R&D employees will join the Canadian vendor to maintain support for existing Toshiba customers and partners.

The deal reflects Mitel's strategy to focus on expanding its position in the UCC market, according to CEO Rich McBee. "In a rapidly changing and opportunity rich technology landscape, Mitel is helping customers find a seamless path forward whether in the cloud, on-premise or a hybrid of both," he stated.

Bluetone hits top note with energy

IT can be a major challenge for a dyed in the wool telecoms business to add a completely new customer service to its portfolio, but the move into the supply of energy services has been a breeze for Brighton based Bluetone.

Managing director Andrew Marriott has 20 years' experience in the communications industry and founded the business in 2004 after running mobile phone shops and working in the corporate sector, which gave him an understanding of what's important to business customers.

"At Bluetone we have evolved from a mobile reseller to include a full suite of telecoms products for our customers. Energy was a natural progression as it is a product that all our customers consume every single day.

"Energy wasn't something we were looking to add, but we were interested to see what the team at Fidelity had to offer based on their track record in the telecoms industry.

"We had never sold energy before and Fidelity provided training, pricing, and sales support and we got some quick wins over the line. Half of the deals are as straight forward as simply getting the bills, pricing via Fidelity's portal, signing and then handing over to Fidelity. For others, the nuances of the energy industry come in and Fidelity are on hand with their

experienced energy team.

Rather than setting up separate division or a new brand, the company decided to offer energy services under the Bluetone banner, as Marriott explained.

"We operate under the Bluetone banner as this is what our customers know and trust. We are in the process of adding energy to all literature, as well as our website, as every month some of our customers are signing into energy contracts. Many of them didn't know we had this as an offering!

"Initially, we started with some tame customers and we have now moved onto the rest of our base as well as net-new customers, as they might be tied into a telecoms contract. With these customers, the good thing is that we can sell them energy now and they become a Bluetone customer, then we can look at offering them better value on their telecoms later.

"If I could compare the energy product to anything, it would be akin to the process of selling inbound, without potential pricing issues. And unlike telecoms you are not breaking a strong relationship. Energy companies and brokers do nothing to maintain customers in contract and with Fidelity's proposals and market reviews, customers who may have never moved are comfortable to switch suppliers."



“Energy was a natural progression as it is a product that all our customers consume every single day.”

ANDREW MARRIOTT – MANAGING DIRECTOR, BLUETONE.



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8x8 expands VCC solution



Darren Hakeman

CUSTOMER Experience Analytics, Post Call Survey features and a new version of Quality Management have been added to 8x8's Virtual Contact Centre (VCC) solution.

"One of the promises of the cloud is democratisation, high end features for all, not just for the very large contact centres that can afford expensive customisation," said Sheila McGee-Smith, who is President & Principal Analyst of McGee-Smith Analytics.

"The new capabilities introduced by 8x8 highlight the increasing sophistication in customer experience applications that customers have come to expect from Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS) vendors."

8x8 says these upgrades will enable global mid-market and enterprise companies to better

understand and respond to customer pain points.

Enhanced reporting and collaborative performance management capabilities between agents and supervisors will also improve the overall customer experience, said the company.

"Contact centres that collaborate perform much better than those where agents operate in silos," said Darren Hakeman Senior VP of Product & Strategy at 8x8. "We are responding with an updated collaborative quality management solution."

Customer Experience Analytics and Post Call Survey are available as part of the 8x8 Virtual Contact Centre Standard, Pro and Ultimate service plans.

Quality Management 3.5 is available as a part of the 8x8 Virtual Contact Centre Ultimate service plan.

TTG to break £3.5m barrier

IN A PERFORMANCE update The Technology Group (TTG) has reported £1.8m revenues for financial year 2016, up from £995k the previous year.

The Leeds-based firm, which was established in 2011, aims to double revenues this year and breach the £3.5m barrier.

The firm also doubled its headcount over the past 12 months and relocated to a larger HQ in its home city. Plans are also in place to recruit a number of staff nationwide to bolster its installation, sales and account management divisions.

TTG launched its own private hosted VoIP platform three

years ago, giving it more control over the products and services it provides to businesses in the healthcare, legal services, recruitment, manufacturing and technology sectors.

Sales Director Jonathan Marsden commented: "To come into the telecommunications market as a new company and grow so rapidly is a testament to the team we have built and the service and cost benefits we can provide.

"By continuing to invest in the team they will be able to support our organic expansion plans augmented by a gradual acquisition strategy."



Jonathan Marsden

Top exec recruited by Node4

NODE4'S growth campaign has ratcheted up a notch with the appointment of industry veteran Bill Thomas as Chairman.

CEO Andy Gilbert commented: "We needed a Chairman of the right calibre to help us innovate, widen our market and improve the customer journey and experience.

"Bill's successful career in IT and communications, together with his passion for a customer-focused approach made him the perfect fit."

Thomas has more than 30 years experience in the IT services sector including a 20-plus year stint with EDS and Hewlett Packard running the EMEA services business.

He more recently held a number of non-exec' roles at several firm's including the Co-Op Bank, Balfour Beatty, GFI Software, XChanging, Spirent Communications and VFS.

Thomas said: "Node4 has a particular capability of supporting high growth companies that see IT as a source of competitive advantage. I look forward to playing my part in enabling Node4 to realise its potential."

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The wireless future accor

For years the business connectivity market has been dominated by fixed line solutions, but it's time to move on argues Cogent Distribution Managing Director Jim Kernahan whose business is helping the channel to deftly exploit the wireless revolution that's already in our back yards.

Current technology developments will bring to the industry an opportunity as certain and full in its potential as VoIP, according to Kernahan, who says the Internet of Things (IoT) and advent of 5G will catalyse a period of intense technology-led investment that will play directly into the hands of Cogent and its channel partners. "We're seizing this significant opportunity," he stated. "Mobile data routing (MDR), fast fixed wireless and 5G will create a new platform for network connectivity and we want to be at the forefront as these products emerge and combine."

Analyst forecasts indicate that spending on wireless telecoms worldwide will hit circa \$871 billion by the end of 2017, and Kernahan's 2017 route map shows clearly what is taking place in the market. The Thatcham-based company launched in June this year 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 of mobile and smart devices underscores the importance of delivering reliable, high speed wireless connectivity," said Kernahan.

The Peplink portfolio is supported by radio solutions from Siklu and Mobile Mark's



Jim Kernahan

range of antennas that work with Peplink's mobile data routing products, as well as covering other areas of wireless connectivity. "We expect fast growth in demand for indoor and outdoor wireless solutions and the integration of mobile bandwidth and fixed wireless to gradually replace fibre and copper solutions," added Kernahan. "We will expand our portfolio

accordingly as an ongoing priority and growth will be steep, our success driven by getting the right products and our messages across."

With Kernahan beating the channel drum this opportunity is unlikely to suffer from obscurity, but success will depend not on the technology itself but on the confidence and resolve of resellers to win in the

Integrated mobile bandwidth and fixed wireless will replace fibre and copper solutions

wireless revolution. In most cases this will necessitate a shift in strategy to partner with a distributor that has the expertise they lack in spadefuls. Enter Cogent Distribution. "We see a gap in the market for true value added distributors," said Kernahan. "There are plenty that call themselves VADs despite being box shifters that don't carry enough stock or have the



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technical expertise to truly advise their customers. With Cogent we're going to buck that trend. We do all the groundwork for our partners and there is much more to come – watch this space."

The company is an indirect only operation and its partners are resellers, systems integrators and consultants who lack the expertise required to bring wireless solutions into their portfolios. "Everybody who works for Cogent Distribution is an experienced professional in the wireless market," added Kernahan. "We advise partners and provide the market and product knowledge they need to help ensure that the demand we anticipate is realised."

Industry vision

The integration of cellular access and fixed wireless is crying out for the same industry vision that uplifted the early years of VoIP, and in launching Cogent Distribution Kernahan aims to take this visionary lead in driving the convergence and growth of pervasive high-speed wireless and 5G into a common platform. "5G will bring many opportunities to the wireless market along with a step-change, not just in speed and connectivity but in the way we buy data," he emphasised. "With many more connected devices there will be a huge jump in mainstream user connectivity and this audience will expect and demand fast and reliable connectivity wherever they are."

Readers would do well to learn from Kernahan's market observations, strategic actions and insightful experiences gained from a long career in the ICT industry. "I've been

in the IT business for many years, even before the likes of Microsoft and IBM were regarded as key players," he said. "Experience has taught me to understand the evolution of products and identify the key market trends. I have a strong sense of what will and won't work as well as which products will be the most successful."

When Kernahan left university he was recruited by London Carriers, a wholly owned subsidiary of Philips Lighting, as a graduate trainee. Soon afterwards a friend set up an IT business which he joined in a sales role. "I've been in IT almost from the start and witnessed many changes that stand me in good stead as we strive to become the acknowledged leading provider of 4G/5G and fixed wireless integrated solutions," he stated. "This will involve much hard work, investment and continual monitoring of the tools we use as we prepare for a market that will be a different place to live and work in. Underlying all of this, of course, will be fast connectivity."

Kernahan fully expects demand for wide area leased fibre lines to dwindle as in comparison they become more costly than cellular connectivity over time. "Wireless connectivity will be increasingly important as coverage grows and users adopt cellular services as primary or first choice connectivity solutions, rather than toggle between the two as we do now," he said. "The IoT and 5G will pave the way to a world of opportunity, and those still in the market for fibre might want to rethink their long-term purchasing plans." ■

Just a minute with Jim Kernahan...

Role model? Frank Field, the MP, who has shown honesty, integrity and compassion every step of the way. And Bobby Moore who always showed leadership and strength of purpose with humility

What do you fear the most? Water snakes

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I own a farm in Herefordshire where I strive to build a natural habitat in which fauna and flora can thrive

How would you like to be remembered? As a good manager of people situations

What possession could you not live without? My Aston Martin

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? Working in a habitat and nature conservancy role. I would also like to get involved in a people-based charity

What talent do you wish you had? To time travel

How do you relax when not working? Being busy on my farm

Your strengths and what could you work on? I have patience, understanding and an ability to listen, but I do need to improve on my time management

Give one example of something you have overcome: Public speaking. I was shy and would always wait for others to speak. But over time I beat the fear and now frequently give public presentations

Top tip for resellers: Stick with suppliers that you trust and don't be swayed by low prices or gimmicks



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Gain business acumen

Resellers who set on a path towards the BI landscape will soon have the power to change the course of how businesses will operate in the future, according to Ged Cooney, Director of Legal & Commercial at TeleWare.

All case studies show that BI projects overwhelmingly benefit the end user, which is an undeniably good sign for resellers who observe with interest what is happening in the analytics market, who understand that BI solutions are essential for the future workplace and see how they can be adopted to both their own and their customers' advantage. But this means asking serious questions and facing new challenges, noted Cooney.

"The main challenges faced by businesses wanting to embark on a Business Intelligence journey are in establishing their business intelligence and analytics targets, demonstrating a significant return on investment and overcoming the perception that it is costly and resource intensive to achieve analytics goals," he stated. "Data held on numerous legacy systems makes a single source of truth difficult. A wide range of specialist skills and tools are required, such as data engineering, data science, data visualisation, Machine Learning and Cognitive API platforms. It is unlikely that many businesses will have the required expertise therefore they need partners with these skills to bridge the gap."

Resellers can help customers by partnering with companies that have the range of expertise necessary to achieve their customer's analytics goals, while helping customers understand the competitive advantages that new analytics technologies can bring in terms of increased sales, reduced costs and enhanced customer experiences.

"But first they must gain a deep understanding of the customer's different business intelligence requirements, whether this be high level performance management dashboards or self-serve tools enabling specific business users to gain deep insights from their data," added Cooney. "Then, clear delivery milestones that enable project sponsors to set expectations within the business should be agreed."

It is important for resellers to engage with end user customers at all stages of deployment and adopt an agile approach that also delivers early wins, believes Cooney. Resellers should aim to deploy solutions that maximise self-service analysis tools as they work best when placed into the hands of business users rather than the IT teams. "The users are the ones who will identify the insight



Ged Cooney

but they need to rely on the IT team to produce the analysis," advised Cooney.

The BI market trends of most interest to Cooney include the rise of the cloud which enables the flexible and cost-effective deployment of feature rich services; Machine Learning which promotes advanced analytics including predictive analysis; and automation techniques that allow actions to be taken following analysis with minimal intervention.

Delivering insights

In response to these BI market opportunities TeleWare leverages expertise across a range of disciplines to deliver insights for customers. With over 50 years combined experience of BI and analytics, it has developed a simple and

structured approach (see panel box). TeleWare's main target markets are retail and financial services, and Cooney cited two examples of BI in action within these sectors.

Through Stream Analytics, Azure Machine Learning and Power BI, TeleWare provided predictive analytics for a retail customer's contact centre solution that enabled it to understand the factors affecting their agent answer rates. TeleWare was able to significantly reduce the abandoned call percentage. And with Azure Machine Learning and Power BI, TeleWare developed a sales pipeline predictive analytics solution that enabled customers to target resources at the high probability opportunities. This substantially reduced the customer acquisition costs.

As we have seen, key growth areas for TeleWare include providing advanced analytics services into its financial services customers, enabling them to reduce the cost of compliance, as well as bringing the power of machine learning and predictive analytics to its retail customers enabling them to enhance their customer experience. TeleWare's current priorities also include helping its customers to realise the value from their data through the adoption of the latest Microsoft cloud technologies. "While these technologies offer some outstanding features, in order to realise the full benefit of them still requires a range of skills that are not generally available to customers," said Cooney. "Therefore the channel has a major opportunity to help customers fully realise the benefits of BI."

TeleWare's structured approach to BI...

Data Discovery: Identify the customer's key business goals, analytics priorities, current data sources and potential new data sources

Data Integration: Blend different data sources to provide the fullest picture available

Enhancement: Enrich the dataset by adding additional calculations, metrics and measures

Advanced Analytics: Provide predictive, cognitive (sentiment) analysis

Visualisation: Deliver the power of advanced visualisations to give genuine insight

Deployment: Cloud or on-premise, centralised and/or team-based analysis



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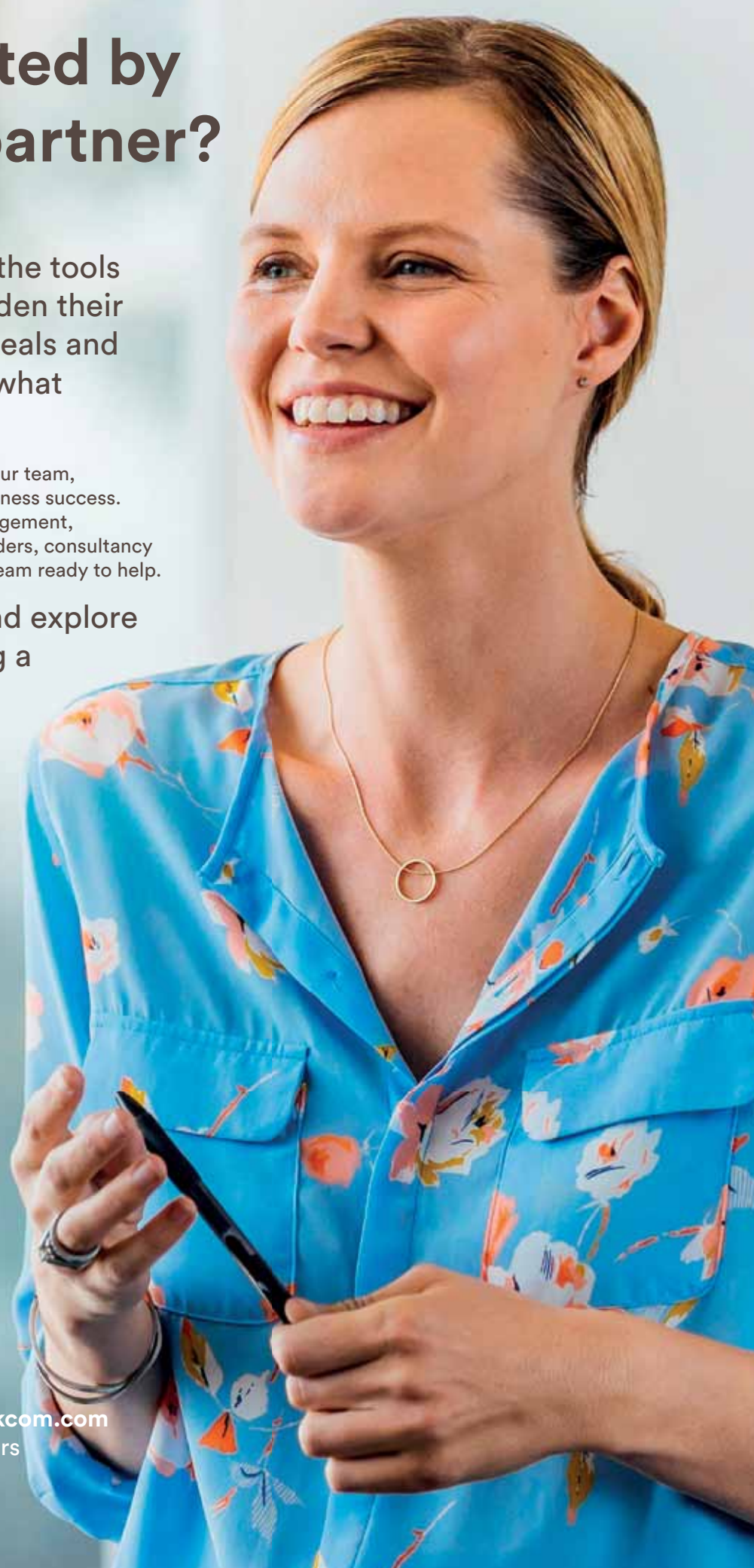
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Cheema's pitch for indus

For PMGC CEO Shez Cheema the coming years have a clear growth trajectory following an acquisition that's created a new force in business communications.

PMGC's acquisition of Northampton-based fellow Vodafone partner Pure Business Services in May created the third largest independent provider of mobile services in the UK with more than 70,000 users and annual revenues of circa £20 million. The deal puts PMGC on the road to becoming a comms industry powerhouse and it's the latest injection of buzz from Cheema in what is a stimulating, versatile and remarkable career. Most notably he was a co-founder of Azzurri Communications and as CFO was involved in 16 acquisitions over six years, a string of deals that took the business to circa £150 million turnover while working with 3i, PPM, Silverfleet and various financial institutions including Barclays and RBS. "Azzurri was a great incubator for

many successful people," commented Cheema. "In building a strong, great and people-centric organisation we were the innovators and leading lights."

The Azzurri megaproject was well conceived and Cheema's strong influence has also been felt in senior finance positions at Safety Kleen Europe (CFO working with Electra Partners VC), Sunderland's Ladbrokes, National Car Parks (NCP) Services, NSL Group, Options, Crossrail London and Speedy Hire International (Middle East). "I've recovered and created significant stakeholder value throughout my career, particularly in buy-and-build scenarios," added Cheema. "I've worked in international, multi-site blue chip organisations including audit and consultancy where I was deployed in several change management situations, company mergers, flotation and turnaround work. But as a qualified engineer, accountant and IT professional I had always wanted to work in the ICT industry and use my broad range of skills and experience. Technology in all its shapes and forms excites me."

Cheema is extending his experience with PMGC which was originally set up by Vodafone Platinum Partner Premier Mobile in 2009 as a specialist vehicle to provide consultancy services for larger private and public sector organisations. PMGC Technology Group



Shez Cheema

was officially established in 2012 by Cheema and senior management following a buyout of both Premier Mobile and Phonebox Communications. The company also acquired Veecom Systems, AMC Communications, Dane Europe and RGT, all between 2013 and 2015, making it one of the largest UK Vodafone Strategic Platinum Converged Partners. Cheema became CFO in

The rise of connected devices will present a huge challenge for businesses to build new models

April 2012 and then CEO in December 2014.

It would be an overstatement to say that Cheema has remodelled himself a number of times throughout his varied and sparking career, but reinvention is a strategic path he follows at PMGC. "We continue to challenge our own approaches and keep reinventing ourselves," he added. "We bring together the best people,

Cheema's top tips...

- Believe in yourself, your team and your people
- Have strong partnerships
- Cut your cloth accordingly – you can't have both short and long-term shareholder and business value
- Read the trends in the market, innovate and be different and unique
- Focus on what you do well
- Ensure the people you recruit are the best and empower them
- Always remember that customers and relationships are critical

Industry leadership

technology and networks. Our success doesn't just come from what we do. It's how we do things and why that really matters. Everyone has a can-do attitude and works hard to create a great experience for our people, suppliers, partners and customers. We are aligned at all levels of the organisation."

PMGC's all-pervading organisational culture helped it to secure Vodafone Total Communication Partner status in December 2016, the highest tier available within Vodafone's new programme. The company is also one of just four Strategic UK partners to achieve this designation. These awards are recognition of how the business has grown from strength to strength in the past three years. PMGC now has a headcount of 150 and hopes to reach £20 million turnover this financial year.

"Our focus is on the mid-SME to large SME market," said Cheema. "Growing the business organically and 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 of Pure provides us with the 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.

"With continued organic growth, investments in our people and through working with our principal partners we will be a truly converged managed service

business providing at least four services on average to each customer. Our five year goal is to become a £30 million turnover company with £3 million EBITDA and 80 per cent cash generation, with three to five years contract agreements."

To help advance its growth ambitions PMGC also set up a data centre infrastructure in 2013 to move into hosted and cloud services, building on its mobility and fixed hosted telephony capability. "We have repositioned PMGC from a pure play fixed and mobile provider to a unified telecoms and IT fully managed service company," added Cheema.

Organic growth has helped the company to expand as a national business with offices in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham, Northampton, London and Bristol. "The challenge in today's business environment is that companies are expected to grow quickly," noted Cheema. "We are looking to develop our IT and cloud services on an infrastructure that can cope with a significant increase in volume and improve scalability."

Looking into his crystal ball Cheema sees the Internet of Things taking hold sooner rather than later. "While the IoT has been consumer led so far, 2018 will be the year that businesses gain traction in adopting it," he said. "The rise of connected devices will present a huge challenge for businesses to build new models across multiple markets and applications, and leverage data to improve performance. I'll be keeping my finger firmly on the pulse to see what develops." ■

Just a minute with Shez Cheema...

Role model? Muhammad Ali: He never gave up

What talent do you wish you had? To take a few deep breaths as I used to do as CFO

What do you fear the most? Failure and disheartened customers

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I love trekking, climbing, underground exploration and running a marathon. Life requires new challenges each day

How would you like to be remembered? To be respected and revered by my staff and customers

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Putting in my own cold hard cash and believing in myself and the first class team, which is an unusual trait for us engineers and accountants

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? Developing my other business venture in legal services and offering one fixed price for all legal work, displacing some of the current well known incumbents and their control of working practices in the industry

One example of something you've overcome: I am now able to win peoples' hearts and minds

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? I'm persistent, resilient and never take 'no' for an answer. But I need to slow down a bit. Things can wait

How do you relax when not working? Running 14 miles on a weekend, cycling, spending time with my wife Saira and two adorable kids Azlan and Umar



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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.
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9 TAKE LEAD AGAIN IN RECOGNISING SUPERSTARS OF UK ICT INDUSTRY

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

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

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

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

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

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Distribution Category

Paul Taylor

Sales Director
Voiceflex



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

SME Reseller of the Year

Garry Grows

Sales Director
Daisy Wholesale



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

Software Application Category

Nick Goodenough

Partner Service Manager
Spitfire



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

Cloud Communications Solution Category

Steve Mace

Senior Director - Channel
Interoute



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

Vertical Market Solution Category

Vincent Disneur

Head of Sales & Marketing
Union Street



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

Event Hospitality

Andy Grant

Managing Director
Bowanarrow



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

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Distributors play key role

The digital era may still be in its infancy but many distributors have already made big strides in strengthening the hand of resellers as they make their strategic plays in the new age of technology driven business transformation.

Digital transformation, cloud and the hybrid enterprise have combined to drive an irreversible shift in the way ICT products and services are consumed and provisioned. It's no longer about physical products, it's about streamlining how business is done and placing the customer experience at the heart of the transaction. "High demand for new technologies and the emergence of disruptive vendors have catalysed an unprecedented rate of transformation within the ICT channel," stated Steve Harris, EVP Unified Communications for Nuvias

Group (formerly Managing Director of Siphon). "It's important to rely on technology partnerships with distributors that are focused on meeting the increasingly complex and diverse needs of their channel partners."

UC distribution in particular is being shaped by players who are new, disruptive and cloud-first, pointed out Harris. "The disruption started the moment tier one software vendors went all in with the cloud," he added. "We're a couple of years down the line from that inflection point. Any distributor that wants to be around in 2020 will already have implemented their digital transformation and transition strategy."

Forward looking strategies take into account cloud-based consumption commercial models that are a departure from the world of CPE. "This encompasses a professional services wrap as part of the overall UC solution which we believe will drive the adoption of technology such as Skype for Business (SfB)," added Harris.

One way Nuvias' UC Practice has harnessed digitalisation is in how it



Steve Harris

High demand for new technologies and the emergence of disruptive vendors have catalysed an unprecedented rate of transformation within the ICT channel.

provisions and configures IP end points, which is done prior to distribution. "The positive impact of this is that the engineering resources previously used for installation, maintenance and support can be redeployed by the reseller, with, for example, end user training tailored to enhance the overall customer experience and drive adoption of the solution," said Harris.

Streamlining

Automation is one of the key areas of development, noted Harris. "We're able to transact in the way that channel players want to do business, which is mainly online and digital," commented Harris. "We have invested heavily in developing software and systems that allow us to deliver our services in a way that is a step change from the classic resourcing method. Distributors must adopt a new business model where

resellers can harness the full value of digitalisation, rather than by making incremental changes to traditional logistics management."

According to David Fearne, Technical Director at Arrow ECS, the two big forces shaping the UK's ICT distribution industry are new demands on the channel for outcome-centric distribution and the cloud. These driving forces raise two key questions, he says: What is distribution's place in the cloud? And how do distributors become both product and solution focused and integrate the two?

"The future of distributors hinges on how quickly they can pivot to becoming outcome-centric," he observed. "Choosing to invest in the right services to deliver the right outcomes, while also supporting customers and making sure they are keeping pace with

the changing demands of the channel is crucial. We invest much more in projects that showcase effective business outcomes."

But digital can create a headache for businesses, including IT distributors, especially those in data management and security, pointed out Fearne. "The more frequently companies engage with their customers through digital devices and technologies, the more data and information they will have about individuals," he explained. "This data helps to ensure that businesses stay relevant and meet the needs of their customers. It also means that they must be compliant with stringent data regulations such as GDPR. As cyber attacks increase this will become more and more important."

As the rise of digitally delivered services continues to turn traditional modes of operation on their heads, distribution leaders need to consider to what extent they can offer the digital capabilities required by their customers, while also ensuring they stay true to their value proposition and service delivery commitments. This is a balancing act that's top of mind for James Vickerage, President of ScanSource Imago.

"What's more, it's important for all members of the channel to focus on discerning how they articulate their value to their partners using digital tools and services," he said. "It's equally important for them to enhance their value and offering to stay ahead of rivals like large suppliers and online retailers that have immense digital capabilities."



David Fearne

The future of distributors hinges on how quickly they can pivot towards becoming outcome-centric.



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Vickerage believes that resellers can find great value in self-service portals that enable them to learn more about vendor partners' hardware and services offerings, enabling them to deliver new applications to their customers while also helping to unify complex technologies. "As the channel continues to transform, so do we, particularly related to delivering services," added Vickerage.

"Although many of our customers are still consuming traditional services we also work with a number of emerging, innovative vendors that look to us to work closely with customers and help them grow the market opportunity. Understanding what is appropriate for our customers and what will genuinely deliver value is where our focus lies, along with the as-a-service model which is critical to all members of the channel."

Online services such as Amazon and ao.com and their speedy response times have whetted the appetite for more of the same



Darren Garland

We were quick to realise the importance of online portals.

among customers who are becoming intolerant of clunky and awkward transactions. "We were quick to realise the importance of online portals," stated ProVu Managing Director Darren Garland. "The key to overcoming these challenges is to be agile when it comes to systems development. As customer requirements evolve, so do our systems."

He cited as an example a recent system development that was undertaken around 3CX which has enabled ProVu to create an automated ordering process.

"This is particularly important when distributing products such as 3CX licences as there is an expectation of receiving them much faster than physical hardware," added Garland. "Thanks to our developments, our customers can now receive 3CX licences within a matter of minutes."

Other ways in which Garland sees distributors helping resellers harness digital for competitive advantage is through supplying cloud services, having a competitive product set, providing cross-selling and up-selling opportunities, and offering value added services. "A clear strategy is also vital for the future success of distributors," he added.

Nimans agrees, and has transformed its business model based on a clear strategic vision to evolve away from hardware-based sales into a world of cloud-based software licences. Tom Maxwell, Head of Dealer Sales at Nimans, commented: "There is still strong demand in the SME sector for standard equipment sales, while hosted has around a 25 per cent market share. The key to success is offering resellers choice and flexibility – on-premise, hybrid or cloud. Years ago many resellers buried their heads in the sand, but that's not the case any more."

However, having raised their heads above the parapet there is still a number of opportunities that aren't fully realised by resellers, such as WLAN, IP infrastructure, CCTV and access control, noted Maxwell. "Many new opportunities exist," he added. "Resellers are in a strong position to control their own destiny."



James Vickerage

As the channel continues to transform, so do we, particularly related to delivering services.

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Making a difference

A lesson from Inclarity Managing Director Enzo Viscito: Don't be wholly enmeshed in your quest for differentiation – be visionary, flexible and pioneering.

The story of Inclarity is characterised by a strategic pursuit of being at the forefront. The strength of Inclarity's outlook is always to play the long game in a fast moving industry where cards are being shuffled by the day, evidenced by its early move into the hosted space. The company claims to be the UK's first IP Centrex provider offering VoIP services in 2003 with a switch running MGCP protocols. This pioneering spirit is clearly reflected in last month's launch of LifeTime licenses which gives partners who purchase them permanent right of use – a potent weapon in a reseller's hosted armoury.

"When purchased these licenses will become the property of the Inclarity channel partner, enabling reuse at the end of each customer term," said Viscito. "Each license gives the user full access to all subscriber features on the Inclarity BroadWorks 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. As LifeTime Licenses are open ended they will allow Inclarity's partners to significantly increase their mid to long-term margins as they will typically sell them as a SaaS-based monthly subscription model."

Inclarity has also added the full range of Polycom VVX handsets to its VoIP telephony bundles. "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," explained Viscito. "To help resellers sell our bundles we include number porting, DDI numbers and a quick migration turnaround."

The introduction of LifeTime licenses and the Polycom bundle launch both illustrate Inclarity's method of working collaboratively with channel partners while prioritising an innate flexibility that was clear to see even when the company was established in 1991 and awarded an independent telco license. At first Inclarity was a player in the prepaid long distance calling card business but in 2001 it evolved into a voice and data services provider offering not only hosted telecoms but also satellite communications.

The business launched a suite of satellite earth stations in 2003 directly connecting Inclarity's London-based technical centre to the Middle East, Europe and North Africa, allowing the firm to offer its voice and data services at substantially reduced costs to customers



Enzo Viscito

Flexibility is at the forefront when it comes to the make-up of services for partners

worldwide. "However, it was the hosted voice side of the business that survived," stated Viscito.

Channel strategy

In 2008 Inclarity set up its channel reseller programme (some early partners are still with the firm). A move to the BroadSoft platform followed in 2010 along with a significant investment in BroadWorks licenses. "We continually invest in the stability of the service, having virtualised the entire network in 2014 and this year virtualising SBCs to provide maximum performance," added Viscito.

He joined Inclarity as Managing Director in 2007 and has been instrumental in moulding the business with

a trademark Mediterranean passion that is well known within the industry. This passion helps him to foster strong partner relationships which are augmented by account management, marketing services and pre-sales support. "Inclarity is not the biggest provider of hosted telephony in the UK but it has a personality not seen in larger new entrants to the market," commented Viscito. "This is partly due to our experience coupled with our sole focus on the provision of hosted voice, UC and connectivity services. We have a loyal partner base, some of whom have been with us for more than a decade."

The investments into Inclarity's network have

paid off with 'non-down time' for many years. Furthermore, Inclarity's partners experience less than a one per cent customer churn rate on average as they also benefit from a UK-based 24x7 customer help-desk that answers support calls within four seconds.

"When it comes to the make-up of services offered to partners flexibility is at the forefront," said Viscito. "We start with standard licenses and 24x7 customer support, softphone bundles, up to a choice of the full range of VVX media phones in a bundle format including the ability to mix VVX models within a customer environment. It is our agile systems that facilitate this level of flexibility."



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EACS CEO thinks big

Former CIO of Ford Motor Company Kevin Timms is now firmly in the driving seat as CEO of MSP EACS, a fast rising £20 million business with corporate sized growth ambitions.

No business leader who has wandered the nether corridors of a large corporation can escape their duty to think big. It's a mindset Timms carried over from the corporate world when he connected with the IT sector and co-founded MSP Streamwire with Anne Stokes. "Leaving Ford after 29 years was like stepping off a cliff," he stated. "I knew exactly what I was doing there but decided to do something completely different. The transition from working in a corporate to being a supplier and business owner in the tech industry was a challenge, but I felt the new generation of engineering was in IT."

Timms joined Ford Motor Company in 1986 and rose to become IT Director. For five of those years he also held the role of IT Director at Jaguar Land Rover. His corporate background gave him an understanding of the systems and processes that need to be in place to motivate a bigger team capable of realising his vision for EACS to become a £50 million business. "I've brought my enterprise understanding and ability to bear in a smaller organisation that has an opportunity to become one of these larger businesses," he added.

Acquisitions are also core to Timms's growth strategy. Streamwire followed up its 2015 acquisition of Event Computer Services with the purchase of EACS in May, boosting revenues to almost £20 million. Timms became CEO of the combined company which now trades as EACS. "This acquisition provides the platform to take our business to the next level, expand into the cloud and cyber security spaces and take on established IT suppliers," he said.

"We have a management team rich with industry knowledge in service providers, corporates and start-ups. With that experience and a focus on the customer we are already seeing growth in the combined business. EACS's reputation for building on-premise solutions is working nicely with Streamwire's cloud offering so we can provide a more integrated approach."

In making some structural changes to deliver rapid growth, rather than slower organic growth, Timms is building the capability to access new clients. "But as with many businesses dealing with technology, a key challenge for us will be getting access to the right skill sets at the right time," added Timms.



Kevin Timms

His engineering background can be traced back to the mid-1980s when computers were being deployed across office desks, rather than a complex box stored in a data centre that was only accessible for accounting. "Overnight these were being used for email, drawing pictures and diagrams and developing business plans," he recalled.

Business transformation

"IT suddenly became interesting as a business tool above its traditional accounting and payroll functions. It's an exciting time to be in the IT space as the industry goes through such a big change. The use of technology is becoming a driving force in nearly every sector. This change provides virtually all companies with

big competitive opportunities, but also as we have seen recently, significant threats. Our acquisition means we have a stronger capability to help our clients and companies achieve their goals and keep their data secure.

"Another part of our role is to isolate customers from the chop and change that characterises the channel. We want to bring a set of capabilities that small and medium sized businesses can use effectively. Larger enterprises tend to do things differently from SMEs and we've got a capability that suits the small and medium sized businesses out there. We stay close to what we are renowned for – implementing and project managing software, hardware and managed services."

The loyal customer bases shared by Streamwire and EACS along with rapid growth in the adoption of cloud technology gives the enlarged company a strong foundation for expansion, supported by accreditations such as Citrix Gold Solution Advisor, Microsoft Gold Partner, NetApp Gold Partner, VMware Enterprise Solutions Provider, HPE Silver Partner and Dell EMC Authorised Partner.

"Our latest acquisition shows the underlying strength of the UK tech scene," stated Timms. "While the political changes happening in the UK have been concerning on some levels, investment in tech continues to increase and we can look forward to a strong future."

Just a minute with Kevin Timms...

Role model? Bob Dover, the former CEO for Jaguar Land Rover, for his humility and inclusivity, the way he led teams and how he made people want to succeed for him

How would you like to be remembered? From an EACS perspective, as someone who improved its sustainability and longevity to provide for my colleagues down the line

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? Owning and running a classic car restoration garage

Your IT bugbear: People who don't have the right moral compass and use it as a weapon rather than for good, whether online bullying or ransomware etc

How do you relax when not working? Classic car restoration



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Working hours flexibility



PAUL CLARKE
3CX

“ A corporate culture should reward and reinforce work from home and remote locations, and workers should not feel that they might be penalised in any way for taking advantage of a flexible work policy. The easier it is for workers to collaborate whatever their location and whatever the time, the more straightforward implementing such a culture will be and the greater the amount of job satisfaction remote workers will experience. With more and more workers operating in the field, getting closer to customers and collaborators, flexible working is becoming a necessity. As this trend increases, a quality Unified Communications systems will become a key factor in enterprise success.



KEVIN SCOTT-COWELL
8X8

“ For us, a good work life balance is about giving people flexibility and choice. That means we offer our staff the option to work in the way that suits them best. For example, our new London office has features like soundproof pods for phone meetings, communal dining and entertainment areas which offer employees a range of environments to work from. The key to effective remote working is good communication. Our cloud-based communication technology means our staff can easily pick up their calls and messages from any internet connected device. This allows every member of the team to be their own mobile office and work remotely or from home if they want to.



LAUREN MCMANUS
DAISY WHOLESale

“ With the modern world and availability of communications, separating work from home life can be a challenge. I check my work phone multiple times every evening, and I bet you do too. To assist in offering a work-life balance, at Daisy Wholesale, we empower staff to work not only from where they like (at home or another office), but when they like. The challenge businesses face is ensuring they have adequate phone cover. Our advice is flexibility: enabling staff to work from home, or to choose their shift pattern, creates a happy, motivated workforce because the time can be used for activities they enjoy. As the adage goes, happy staff leads to happy customers, which in turn, leads back to happy staff.



KATIE SLOAN
FIDELITY GROUP

“ To promote a healthy work life balance, employers and employees need to work together to create the environment and take responsibility for their own wellbeing. Work life priorities for employees change based on age, modern working conditions, personal stress and pressures, new technology and management. Employees at Fidelity are provided with free access to a local gym, and encouraged to use it to create a healthy body and mind. We also encourage and support team development; as learning feeds the mind, leading to more productive and motivated staff. To make life in the office more enjoyable, we also have happy hour, celebrate special occasions and senior management buys the team breakfast on a Friday morning!



With customers increasingly demanding 'joined up' ICT environments, there is continual pressure on people that work in our sector to work long hours to maintain 'always on' services. Companies are however, becoming ever more aware of the business case for a positive work-life balance and many are implementing cultures to reduce the pressure of work on private life. Modern day thinking is that an improved work-life balance can help all parties – the organisation, the individual and the customer.



ELLIE ALLSEYBROOK
INFORM BILLING

“ Achieving the right work-life balance is different for everyone and is best managed by having ongoing conversations to understand what individual colleagues need. You can then judge how these needs can be met alongside those of your customers and your business. Building trust and encouraging flexibility works in everyone's favour - we value productivity and outcomes over number of hours spent in the office. Technology plays a major part in enabling this flexibility; having the right systems in place for remote working and to ensure that knowledge is shared and others can pick up on tasks when someone is out of the business. The fundamentals to a healthy work-life balance are through two-way communication, flexibility and recognition.



DAN FISH
INVOYSYS

“ At InvoSys, our team are the lynchpin of everything we do, so it's important that we strive to ensure they are happy, satisfied and fully engaged, regardless of their role in the company. We work hard - yet we place a huge emphasis on work-life balance. We regularly treat our staff with rewards that are relevant to them. For example, our 'Personal Interest Allowance' gives all staff an annual company funded budget to pursue out-of-work hobbies. My advice is that organisations need to recognise that staff have a life outside of work, so bosses need to get to know what the team really want with trial incentives. This has worked well for InvoSys, reflected in our minimal staff turnover and consistently high engagement scores.



According to the Salford Business School, although the working week is officially limited to 48 hours, the UK has opted out of the European Working Time Directive, which means that some employees may work more hours by written consent. The two most frequent concerns amongst UK employees are long hours and the intensity of work. In fact, many employees say they are working as hard as they can

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PHIL GEE
NIMANS

“ As an ‘Investors in People’ gold company we recognise the value of staff welfare and putting people first. Achieving a work-life balance is part of this process and with an ever-expanding workforce at Nimans it’s becoming more common. Flexibility and understanding people’s needs are inherent in any successful company but any flexible working has to recognise wider business issues too – not undermining customer service for example. People are our biggest asset and in an ever-changing world the work life balance is becoming an increasingly relevant and important factor for companies big and small up and down the country.



ADAM CATHCART
NINE WHOLESALE

“ Work-life balance is the key to job satisfaction and productivity. At Nine Wholesale, we empower our employees with flexibility to improve their work-life balance. By providing the tools that allow for productive mobile working - such as eve - we mutually benefit from having a workforce that is connected and collaborating wherever they may be. Notably, this allows us to respond more efficiently to partner requests, resulting in higher levels of customer satisfaction in the service they receive. By enabling our workforce with the ability to work beyond the constraints of their desk, we have found that they are more inclined to begin work earlier and finish work later in the day, increasing overall levels of productivity across the business.



and could not imagine being able to work any harder. All these factors contribute to awareness of work-life balance as a pressing issue and how work demands often come between family commitments.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) says the UK performs well in most measures of well-being relative to most other countries in its ‘Better Life Index’ but for many professional workers, Internet access and mobile phones represent a complete loss of privacy and downtime, even when at home. Naturally, this has an impact on family life.

Only a small percentage of employers have family-friendly policies or personal support services in place to moderate the situation. However, this is gradually increasing and our industry seems to be practicing what is preached and is not lagging behind in offering employees ‘flexible work-life’ environments, as this month’s Kaleidoscope survey testifies.



MARK SHRAGA
NSN

“ Customers always sense when they are dealing with people with passion in their lives; it really helps them to buy with confidence. I am a firm believer that anything we do for a living should enable what we want out of life. With over 30 staff and in our 7th year of trading, I am always looking for ways our employees can more closely align their personal interests with their developmental plan within NSN. We passionately want people to feel like their life has a purpose and that they have every chance of achieving it. Whether it be spending more time with family, developing a skill or talent, becoming an entrepreneur, or all of the above!



JOSÉ FERNANDEZ
UNION STREET

“ Union Street is in the process of proactively addressing all areas of work-life and, in doing so, we hope to enhance our employees’ work-life balance. We call this our ‘Streets Ahead Initiative’. Most recently, we introduced a flexible start time, catering for early risers and night owls alike. This eases challenges associated with public transport, as you simply work your 7.5 hrs regardless of the time you start. It removes the stress for both employees and management. We also have a high proportion of home workers spread across the UK. We have implemented the very latest collaboration tools to ensure face-to-face communication isn’t lost. We’re also extremely open to homeworking on those ad-hoc occasions when life and circumstances require you to be at home.



KATE BRUNNING
VIRTUAL1

“ Work-life balance is very much linked to how you create the employee experience. At Virtual1, we empower our employees to freely contribute their ideas and voice their opinions. An improved work-life balance is about more than enforcing a 9-5 culture, it’s about having the right physical environment and the tools to enable our people to do their job effectively. It’s about creating an experience that is individual for every employee, there is no one size fits all approach. Trust plays a big part in people’s perception of ‘balance’, we trust our people that they will do what they committed to when they joined up and then we give them the required freedom to own their work-life balance.



MANDY FAZELYNIA
ZEST4

“ We have a diverse team at Zest4 with a mixture of Generation X and Y who all have differing requirements and expectations from their working life. We embrace this and the fact that it creates an environment which offers knowledge, experience and fresh new ways of working. We strongly believe the key to running a successful business is in having motivated, engaged staff who feel that they are being supported both in and out of work. We support flexible working hours and working from home arrangements and provide the tools to ensure this is measurable in terms of output for the business, but also for the individual and benefits are felt both at work and home.



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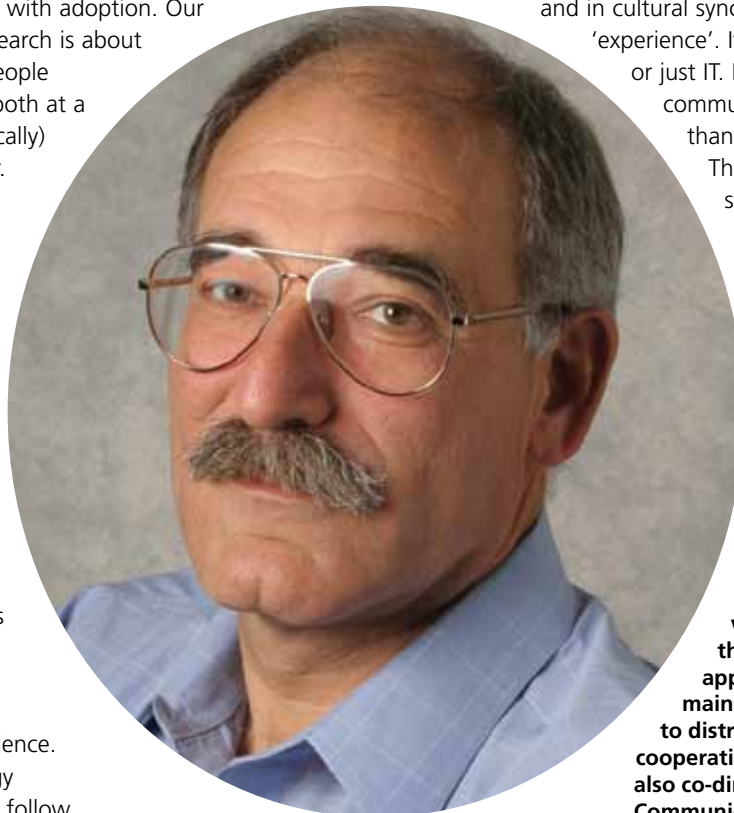
World leading tech innova

and talks experience

Comms Vision Convention (Gleneagles, 8th-10th November)
 Chair Andy Lippman, Associate Director and co-founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab (MIT), delves deep into the underlying trends behind this year's conference theme – the rise of the workplace and customer experience.

COMMS Vision Chair Andrew Lippman is 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 of digital technology. He is also a Senior Research Scientist and co-Director for Digital Life. His highly animated and engaging approach to trends in technology and research will give conferees clear insights into how the 'experience' has become a dimension of technology and our lives.

Communications is going through fundamental changes as the old silos that segregate people continue to dissolve. People today move fluidly between voice, text, audio and video, and between devices and communication situations. At the same time, the cloud has gone viral as new ideas and grassroots innovations emerge. True virality scales without bounds, entails small start-up costs and grows in power with adoption. Our Viral Spaces research is about places where people communicate (both at a distance and locally) with each other. We develop technologies of connection. Our goal is to demonstrate ideas that facilitate discourse and collaboration between real people in real places where networks and computing enhance the workplace and customer experience. Here, technology and workplaces follow



society. We technologists think we create new ideas and possibilities, but in reality we enable them. Shifts in style and activity are led by the populace, predominantly the young. In IT today, anything you can think of we can invent in less than six months.

Businesses that open up their discussions, networks, and involve their people will evolve more flexibly and in cultural sync. That's what we mean by 'experience'. It's not about technology alone, or just IT. It's a method of operating and communicating that opens doors rather than builds intellectual firewalls. This trend reflects the general shift towards a growing faith in distributed networks as opposed to centralised systems. Cloud is part of the picture but the deeper impact is more subtle. We now

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.

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ator Chairs Comms Vision

perceive large institutions as concentrated entities that represent the old 'centralised' way of doing things. The population is leading this charge, reacting against former 'hierarchies' both socially and in the workplace, liberated by technology driven trends that are defining the digital age as a 'distributed' one. In some parts of the world there is no governmental or centralised structure for many businesses. Rather than install a new structure and assume public trust, technology companies are adding the word 'blockchain' to many distributed system designs to legitimise them in the mind of the customer.

Networks between people

Also consider the rise of Uber, AirBnB and the like. While they are not as distributed as bitcoin, which really has no central organising entity at all, they are perceived as networks between people. Somehow it feels different to rent a room from AirBnB than from the Hilton. Uber is more like calling a driver than hailing a company. This is the new experience that is filtering across society and the networks that have come to underpin our lives at work, at home, and in between.

Years ago we used to characterise networks in three ways – broadcast, telephonic and group-forming. A broadcast network grows in value directly with its size – more viewers equates to more value. A telephone network grows as the square of its size, since anyone can connect to anyone else. We have been familiar with this for years. But group-forming networks are a newer concept. Here the network grows in value faster because of groups that are like mailing lists. In these networks, you can connect to other participants as well as each list or group, extending and

enhancing the collaborative experience. We now see this communications trend reaching into media and entertainment. Television programming is moving away from targeting larger audiences and towards giving new experiences to audience members. That makes it a group experience rather than the mere reception of a signal. And there are now radio technologies that are also starting to open new doors. For example, it has been shown that a group of Wi-Fi access points working in coordinated ways can act as a small radar and 'see' people and their movements through walls. In other words, it is a sensor as well as a communicator.

Using better radios, these signals can remotely read your heartbeat and breathing. This is far from a novelty example, it is already making inroads into neonatal clinics to monitor at-risk babies without burdening them with chafing clip-ons. The key point is that comms technology is not just about comms any more, it is sensing, and it is group-forming. That has implications for how we define communications and how we view the Internet of Things (IoT). It's not a separate or new Internet, it is a new dimension to the existing one. It's a new world of experience-based communications that will grow exponentially in power with almost viral adoption across collaborative networks.

At Comms Vision this year we will explore how the communications industry is starting to reflect the underlying trends discussed in this article, and the longer-term implications of these developments on the channel and wider business community.

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True virality scales without bounds, entails small start-up costs and grows in power with adoption





Comms evolves as a platform

in the post-digital age

The workplace and customer experience is inextricably linked, and the forces that drive them are acting in precisely the same direction, towards the intersection that we call the Experience Defined Workplace. Here, Comms Vision sponsors discuss how the quest for impeccable experiences is now an industry mission.

There is no doubting the drive for supreme post-digital 'experiences'. It enthralls organisations to press the green button on internal initiatives and technologies all designed to enhance workplace and customer interactions. According to Henry West, Head Of Channel Sales at KCOM, the workplace experience is about everyone truly understanding each others' needs and creating a work environment that makes us 'smile while still getting the job done'. "Technology and people are now working together to make the workplace easier and more enjoyable than ever before," he said. "Consider BYOD, workplace social media, instant messaging, online meetings – all of which allow us to be flexible throughout our working days."

The consumerisation of IT has led to a blending of different interaction models that have been embraced by users in the post-digital workplace. We say 'post-digital' because our relationship with technology has changed, with a much stronger emphasis on the experiences technology can induce rather than the technology itself. "The days of one system doing everything appear to be over and a lot of the innovation we see is coming from smaller development teams," commented Dave Dadds, CEO, VanillaIP. "But technology is only useful as far as it supports the behaviour of users. Rather than talking about devices and services we provide a fluid and unified user experience

HENRY WEST: Technology and people are now working together to make the workplace easier and more enjoyable than ever before.

which is roles-based and therefore different for various types of users. One trend we are seeing is the wide adoption of team-based and remote working, so we need a layered approach where users can communicate intelligently on different platforms. The ability to enhance user productivity where the technology underpinning that is almost invisible is how we would define the modern workplace experience."

The rise of cloud-based technologies and the revolution in SDN networking coupled with leaps in broadband is now starting to having a profound effect on the workplace and how that trickles down into the customer, observed Justin Fielder, CTO at Zen. "The experience is more profound because cloud-based systems enable greater collaboration, more efficient working and a more engaging experience which directly translates down to the customer experience," he stated. "Happy staff means happy customers. So the ability to create a working environment that supports that is critical. At Zen we are transforming



DAVE DADDS: The ability to enhance user productivity with technology that is almost invisible is how we would define the modern day workplace experience.



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Platform for experiences



JUSTIN FIELDER:
Cloud-based systems enable greater collaboration, more efficient working and an engaging experience.

our workplace to ensure that staff can fit their working lives around their personal lives in a much more aligned way, and we are seeing positive effects feed into our customer experience. It's not just about what people experience, it's also about the emotional attachment and the way the workplace provides the correct sensory experience. The move to video conferencing is just one example of this. Employees enjoy better engagement and retain positive experiences."

Mobility is also having a fundamental effect on workplaces of all sizes. Steve Haworth, CEO at TeleWare, observed: "Being productive anywhere and utilising new technologies is important. From a workplace experience perspective there are many positives, but the additional challenges that mobility brings is to provide a sense of community and belonging through culture even when people are not always within the environment of the office.

"Perception and emotion are important elements of a human experience and learning lessons from companies that have done this well in consumer spaces such as Virgin and Apple can help design great B2B experiences.



STEVE HAWORTH:
The challenge of mobility is to create a sense of community and belonging through company culture.

than cutting costs and corners is key. Using video rather than paperwork can engage people much more, and utilising AI to make recommendations and improve services rather than wait for requests can help delight customers and partners."

A matter of cultivation

The design of an experience enhancing workplace mirrors how the customer experience should be cultivated, noted Neil Wilson, Product & Marketing Manager at Virtual1. "It's about putting the customer experience first and designing a product, service or solution around how a business wants the user to experience it," he explained. "Starting with a desired experience rather than a list of features can deliver a vastly different end product. In a marketplace full of competitors, many of which offer solutions with similar features, user experience is a clear differentiator that drives adoption. You need to look no further than the mobile handset industry to see that in action."



NEIL WILSON:
Starting with a desired experience rather than a list of features can deliver a vastly different end product.

It is universally accepted that happy staff lead to happy customers, therefore employees should always be the starting point, believes Lauren McManus, Head of Marketing and Communications at Daisy Wholesale. "A simple innovation is enabling staff to choose their hours," she commented. "If they prefer to start early and finish early they will be more productive as that's when they know they work best. As the management hierarchy is becoming flatter it is necessary to empower people to make decisions and be accountable for putting the customer first and nurturing a customer-driven company culture.



LAUREN MCMANUS:
Taking an innovative approach to our daily work will ensure that staff, in turn, follow that lead when speaking with customers and resolving their issues.

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8x8 cloud pioneer displa

the innovation trail

Any study of Platinum sponsor 8x8's evolution will reach two key conclusions. One is that its innovations opened the floodgates to patents that galvanise the company's status as a true digital pioneer. The other is that its Chairman and CTO Bryan Martin has a personal quest for world domination that cannot be suppressed.

The capacity of digitalisation to expand the customer experience is clearly immense. So too is 8x8's capacity to deliver the enabling technology. Not so well known however is that the company's high stature today is founded on a grand bounce back of monumental proportions. As with most leading technology companies at the time, a severe toll was inflicted on 8x8 by the dot.com downturn. Yet its latent potential was never lost on Martin whose job it once was to wrap things up. In early 2002 he was appointed CEO with a remit to wind down the troubled business. Instead he decided to unburden the company of its previous experience, pull out of a near terminal tailspin and chart a recovery distinct from its old familiar path.

"The dot.com crash affected all of the telecom companies that were starting to deploy 8x8's technologies," explained Martin. "When Lucent pulled every purchase order in October 2000, and the rest of our customers did the same over the next year, we barely survived. Because of the deteriorating business climate for next generation network technologies we quickly went from \$30-40 million in revenue to basically zero, forcing us to shrink the business from 300 employees worldwide to 35. I had to rally a very small team to pivot and rebuild 8x8. And with one outside investor I personally invested in the company and transformed it from a chip technology business to a VoIP service provider. In 2004 we launched our first business service. Today, we have a well articulated and differentiated value proposition in the global market."

In diverting 8x8's dot.com trajectory Martin set a goal that few would have considered possible to realise. But in setting his course he was revealed as a man of vision and strategy, rather than a hostage to fortune. Today, 8x8 has no debt, an appreciating stock price, a market cap of more than \$1.3 billion and over 1,100 employees worldwide. For five consecutive years the company has featured as a 'Leader' in the Gartner UCaaS Magic Quadrant. Not surprising when you consider that it serves more than one million end users in businesses operating in over 100 countries across six continents.

Success in numbers

8x8's global advance has catalysed a surge of success that is fuelling impressive revenues. For the year ended March 31st 2017 8x8 posted total revenue at the high end of its guidance of \$253 million and non-GAAP net income at nine per cent of revenue, generating \$28 million of free cash flow. Service revenues grew 25 per cent year-over-year and 56 per cent of 8x8's service revenue came from mid-market and enterprise customers. "Fiscal 2017 was a year of great progress for 8x8 as we achieved several key technology and operational milestones," added Martin.

Getting 8x8 into shape after the trials and tribulations of the dot.com era was an awesome task, and Martin showed equal self belief and determination to reassert the company's influence in an emerging cloud market that he has long championed. This year 8x8 launched its Communications Cloud which offers many open

Fiscal 2017 was a year of great progress for 8x8 as we achieved several key technology and operational milestones

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ays pure vision in blazing

APIs that allow customers and partners to expose rich communications data to their existing enterprise applications. "As data has become increasingly valuable to enterprises, employees and customers, we are providing clients with the foundation for a more collaborative and open cloud communications solution," noted Martin.

For example, 8x8's Virtual Office and Virtual Contact Centre solutions provide the mobile tools necessary for employees to get their work done from anywhere at any time. 8x8's recent acquisition of Sameroom also signifies the company's commitment to making full team collaboration accessible to all. "Sameroom is an interoperability technology that enables cross-team messaging and collaboration across an organisation," explained Martin. "Regardless of whether our customers use Slack, HipChat, Spark or one of the many other collaboration applications in use today, we provide the translation layer.

"Our strategic aim is to increase adoption by mid-market and enterprise customers; enrich our product portfolio with new features and services; build an effective worldwide channel organisation; and enhance our global operations to support our multi-national customers and partners. The common theme here and the reason we are winning deals is because CIOs are beginning to understand that all cloud communications services are not alike. These customers take a long hard look and perform deep analysis of our service and technology."

Martin's early background is in engineering. He joined 8x8 in 1990 out of Stanford University in California having been trained as a chip and software designer. His previous work experience included two summers at Chips and Technologies in San Jose while attending Stanford. Martin attributes his technical creativity to these experiences, and his hi-tech knowhow is reflected in the accelerating pace of innovation at 8x8 which continues to collect new patents, with 13 awarded in the last year.

Martin currently holds 55 United States patents in the fields of semiconductors, computer architecture, video

processing algorithms, videophones and communications. "Overall, we now have 137 patents to date and more to come in the next couple of months," he added. "This is a direct result of the expanded resources we've allocated to R&D and the expertise of our full-time engineering teams, including the agile development teams working out of our offices in Cluj-Napoca, Romania."

Business pivots towards channel

As we have seen, Martin has led 8x8 through many evolutions and one of his priorities now is to pivot the business towards the channel model. "In the UK we sell predominantly through channel partners, while in North America approximately 30 per cent of our revenue is sold through the channel," he said. "But we foresee a day when all of our sales will go through the channel. We cannot hire enough people to accomplish the world domination that our business plan calls for. This cannot be achieved without selling and installing through partners."

8x8 has entered a nirvana of cloud landscapes and opportunities that represent the next stage of the comms revolution as workforces become increasingly mobile and organisations call for a more customisable platform for employee and team communication and collaboration. "Companies and employees thrive when they're provided with flexible technologies and tools that suit their individual needs," said Martin. "Our first step towards meeting this requirement was to holistically embrace the cloud which allowed us to open our doors to a more flexible and adaptable suite of products, tools and integrations that simplify the user experience.

"Furthermore, customer requirements have changed. Nowadays they work in distributed organisations, across numerous time zones with virtual teams and intergenerational communications. They have access to information from anywhere at any time, and have the flexibility to work remotely. Team collaboration has taken centre stage along with the demand for integrated mobility and the ability to pick your own tools if you don't like what is mandated by IT. So we're constantly evolving our product portfolio to help customers of all sizes get the most out of their cloud communications."



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Employees thrive when they are provided with flexible technologies and tools that suit their individual needs



Why Business Intelligence

As for Business Intelligence, it's been a while since a technology has so consumed industry discussion. It's of the moment, and all about staying in the moment. Here, we assess the rise of real-time analytics and its growing influence in the channel and wider business community.

Resellers serve their customers best when keeping up with tech trends that greatly benefit end user businesses as well as their own. BI and analytics is arguably the biggest of these technology drivers for some time, and Oak Innovation is just one company aiming to be at the vanguard of this promising market having tweaked its employment policies to plug a skills gap. "We're currently extending BI to report on all forms of communication as well as customer interactions," stated CEO Phil Reynolds. "Our biggest challenge is recruiting the highest calibre development staff both in the UK and Canada. Exceptional staff are hard to find. We've observed the giants in the tech world and replicated aspects of their flexible working practices to entice the elite to Oak with some success."



Dave Dadds

As we move to multi-vendor solutions you need an elastic management interface that unites provisioning, reporting and billing.

BI pervades all areas of business, therefore integration is key. "It's about bringing all aspects of communication and customer interaction together in one place, and about using that information to improve service, reduce costs, maximise efficiency and increase sales," added Reynolds. "The more a business knows about its customers the more it can make intelligent decisions that will drive increased revenues and improved customer service."

Business Intelligence can transform any organisation. It shines a light into some of the darkest and least understood corners of a business and can unearth significant and sustainable improvements. "We know from experience that BI and assisting customers in understanding their data will help to build long-term client relationships," commented Carl Boraman, Commercial Director at Tollring. "The ultimate solution transforms raw data quickly and efficiently and presents the data in easy-to-understand dashboards, displaying observations and insights that drive better business outcomes. There is plenty of raw data. The trick is knowing how to access and understand it."

The challenge is to capture and encapsulate raw data from various sources in a business. Moreover,



Phil Reynolds

We're extending BI to report on all forms of communication as well as customer interactions.

companies need a mechanism to access and interrogate data easily and effectively to deliver answers to their questions. But first, a reseller must ensure BI is at the heart of the customer offering by making it a focal point of the business across all departments up to C-Level.

"Resellers should ensure that their sales and customer facing teams understand the benefits of BI and can show with case studies how BI has helped customers to succeed," added Boraman. "Resellers should undertake training to ensure sales pitches lead with business improvement opportunities and highlight cost efficiencies, improved awareness and better, faster decision making. They should deploy and use BI tools in their own business. This helps to build understanding and credibility."

But you cannot interrogate data if it's sitting in three different silos, noted Dave Dadds, CEO, VanillaIP. "It's also important to have the same business logic underpinning all data sources," he said. "The lowest common denominator is the user. All data for services, GSM minutes and data, IP traffic, device registrations and services comes down to the user level."

Elastic interface

"As we move to multi-vendor solutions you need an elastic management interface that unites provisioning, reporting and billing. Some form of software development resource is vital to develop services that meet market requirements. We took the view seven years ago that this was a key area. Now we are just as much a software development house as we are a service provider."

Having come to an understanding of a client's organisation, its intelligence needs and KPIs etc, how should resellers best develop and deploy an all embracing reporting solution that delivers the insights required by end users? The starting point, says Reynolds, is reseller training. "You can't expect a reseller sales person to be able to sit in front of a customer and understand where they can have the biggest impact on their business without first having a comprehensive training plan," he stated.

"A sales person is really a trusted advisor, and within a business there are a number of stakeholders. It's these people that need to have their questions answered and their needs met. The solution should be developed to meet the needs of every department, whether that be dashboards and wallboards measuring KPIs, or in-depth reporting delivered automatically."

Currently, many reporting systems are siloed which does not help to leverage customer data. But for a quick solution the answer is to look for quick wins, according to Boraman. "Identify BI tools that are product and service specific and available off-the-shelf," he said. "These need minimal effort and expertise to deploy and use. Then leverage the quick wins to help build the business case for further investment in BI



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solutions with more capability that can encapsulate and consolidate different data and drive better insights faster. BI combined with expert knowledge means you are not selling, you are educating."

One of Boraman's priorities is to make Tollring's offering available on more IP PBX platforms and to deliver BI around all forms of customer communications and interactions including social media, IM, online chat, email, forums, WhatsApp (for example), delivering not just high value BI but intelligent control, agent and workforce productivity. "Tollring is also focusing on areas such as video recording, the addition of sentiment analysis and omni-channel contact centre reporting for SMEs," he added. "Furthermore, S4B with its recent enhancements will become a greater force, therefore we will need to add value around the whole Microsoft portfolio leveraging the power of the Azure Cloud."

A modern workplace is swamped by data, and getting it all into one place and in a presentable format is the big challenge. The next difficulty is being able to visualise what's important and pick out the trends. In addressing this challenge VanillaIP has recently added Dashboard Widgets to its reporting portfolio. These services are a natural progression but making them best of breed is a never ending process. The Dashboard, for example, is a configurable view within the firm's Uboss portal that displays different tiles of information for each user based on their role. There are different bar and line charts



Carl Boraman

The ultimate solution transforms raw data quickly then presents it in easily understood dashboards displaying observations and insights that drive better business outcomes.

for number port requests, hardware orders, tickets, month to date revenue, live calls and registrations on the platform. The user can click into any of the Widgets to drill into that reporting area.

Emphasis on insight

"We see BI within our Uboss portal as two areas of insight – reseller and customer," explained Dadds. "Tools that allow end users to analyse which buttons are being pressed on the auto attendant and traffic heat maps are available now, but we have focused equally on developing reseller tools. To be successful and maximise every opportunity resellers need to see P&L, how different services are being adopted and be able to identify up-sell opportunities within their user community. For example, the reseller could look at all customers that are not using a mobility service and upload a campaign pdf that goes out with their next bill."

Edmund Cartwright, Marketing and Business Development Director at Highlight, is focused on SD-WAN, Skype for Business and the overall end to end

application performance monitoring and reporting in relationship to the network infrastructure. "Our partners collaborate with us on the development priorities that will enhance the levels of BI we can offer in applications and network performance reporting," he said. "The challenges we face are in finding code solutions to complex scenarios. So far we're managing to crack the code needed to deliver the capability required by our partners."

"We are ready to do trials with network and managed service providers to prove our capability to accurately report the performance BI of a SD-WAN solution. As for the Unified Communications arena, we have developed our initial Skype for Business BI capability which is designed to offer providers and their customers insights into how the solution is performing."

Tollring offers a fully integrated modular BI solution delivered via the cloud or desktop for resellers to build into their customer UC offering. Its solutions include call analytics,

wallboards, contact centre reporting, call recording and fraud detection. Boraman is seeing strong adoption of BI in markets such as key verticals like multiple-retail, recruitment, hospitality and construction. "We are also seeing traditional voice-centric resellers develop new skills and vendor partners to help sell a broader set of UC and cloud products to their customers," he added. "Some are doing this organically. However, we are seeing a greater number wishing to grow quicker who are actively acquiring complementary businesses to help achieve rapid growth."

Call analytics is probably the most widely deployed and valuable BI tool available to any business or organisation of all sizes, including the reseller, according to Boraman. "Call analytics is often misunderstood and overlooked despite being an inexpensive, easy to deploy and highly effective BI solution that delivers business insights automatically at the touch of a button," he commented. "Even without getting into omni-channel contact centre analytics, the majority of people still

prefer to speak directly to their suppliers and customers over the telephone.

"If customers are calling when you are not there you need to know about it. If they are not able to speak to you when they need to they will eventually take their business elsewhere. By combining call reporting data with call recording the value of the information increases exponentially. Not just who called, when they called, was the call answered, who answered the call – but listening to the actual call to understand and add information such as customer emotion, reason for the call, the promised action and outcome."

Just as relevant is the ongoing consumerisation of IT in terms of BI and the move to the cloud, observed Dadds. "The definition of 'product' has widened considerably with consumerisation," he said. "A few years ago we would have said we were in the phones business, but BI, self-serve and manageability are now crucial to customers and have become differentiators in the market." ■



Edmund Cartwright

We're managing to crack the code needed to deliver the capability required by our partners.

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Ian Kilpatrick

Securing new opportunities

The coming months will be dominated by customers wanting ICT providers to manage more of their security processes. Here, Ian Kilpatrick, EVP Cyber Security at VAD Nuvias, explains why this is an unprecedented opportunity for the channel.

The message from Kilpatrick is clear and simple: Opportunities in security are palpable as more organisations tilt towards security specialists. "The next year will see customers look to their IT providers to manage more of their security processes, and there is a host of opportunities to provide point management around a particular need or activity, as well as provide the full range of managed security services," he said. "Devoting the necessary time and resources is a challenge for many businesses, but adopting security as a managed service not only puts their security requirements in the safe hands of specialists, it also frees them up to focus on core revenue-generating activities."

Security specialists acting as advisors are in pole position to impose controls on the risks faced by organisations, which can be internal as well as external threats. "Many companies have ignored the personal cyber habits of their staff, failing to challenge and improve cyber hygiene in the office," added Kilpatrick. "There is now a significant movement towards cyber

education for personal and business security, coupled with testing, measuring and monitoring of behaviour in the office. This involves training and automated testing and includes exercises such as simulated phishing and social engineering attacks. There should be processes for monitoring, reporting and remediation, as well as disciplinary consequences for failure."

According to Kilpatrick, the next five years will see cyber hygiene become one of the primary growth areas in security. He says resellers are in a strong position to offer suitable products and act as trusted advisors when outlining the issues and providing security training and solutions that give companies the knowledge and awareness they need to avoid becoming victims of common malicious attacks such as email phishing and ransomware.

"More than 60 per cent of all network intrusions stem from compromised user credentials, so education, training and the use of appropriate identity access solutions provide opportunities for resellers," said Kilpatrick. "Furthermore,

board members and finance directors are becoming more aware of the need to manage security risks and are prepared to shift their thinking on the importance of security. They are increasingly demanding a clear picture of the threats to their company and the potential impact on their own roles and responsibilities, as well as looking for advice on what action to take in the event of an attack."

New foothold

Never has the channel been in such a powerful position to gain a stronger foothold in meeting the growing security demands of organisations. Why? Because taking a proactive approach and being extra vigilant is the order of the day for those at risk. But the challenge for resellers is to pick the technologies that are going to grow, rather than the technologies that are well known (where the margins are typically lower), pointed out Kilpatrick.

"The market is overcrowded with an excess of VC-funded vendors," he claimed. "The place to start is with a value added distributor that knows the market and has selected the most likely high growth, winning security vendors."

The security market is a boon to ICT resellers who also have the power to harness the course of technological innovation in areas such as mobility, IoT, wireless and the cloud, observed Kilpatrick. "While there are lots of new risks such as IoT and AI security, the first place for any business to start is to examine the key areas that need to be protected such as critical data, customer lists and financial information," he added. "This should be the starting point for any security strategy. Companies should begin by putting together a plan and implement it by degrees over time to help protect their key assets."

Kilpatrick also noted that organisations should avoid getting side tracked by short impact high profile threats such as wannacry. "While responding in knee-jerk fashion to well publicised threats such as wannacry is not recommended, there will continue to be a regular stream of such high profile breaches in the next 12 months," he said.

"They get managers thinking about whether their own systems could suffer the same fate, prompting them

to re-examine their current security measures and seek to improve them. Senior managers do not want to be publicly scrutinised for security failures, which often come with a call for those responsible to be sacked. And there is more willingness to view security as a business risk which needs to be managed alongside other risks, and to take action on improving security."

A big talking point is the potential impact of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which is due to come into force on 25th May next year but has only just started to blip on the radar screens of business leaders who are now becoming aware of the tough new law and the hefty penalties for non-compliance. "With the real threat of significant fines hanging over their heads and the possibility of being named and shamed, companies are going to be galvanised into action on security," commented Kilpatrick. "There is an opportunity for the channel to help customers get ready for GDPR, notably around solution selection and implementation, code of conduct management and compliance certification." ■



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Johnston joins Node4 CMO promo for Tempest



Paula Johnston

PAULA Johnston is to lead Node4's public sector push as the firm bids to become a 'major contender'. She brings 10 years experience and joins from Virgin Media where she managed the Public Sector Team across the midlands and south regions, and was named top sales performer in 2015. As Node4's Head of Public Sector Sales Johnston will also draw on her previous experience as public sector Account Director at Airwave where she won significant contracts to supply the blue light sector with comms solutions including encrypted connectivity and UC.

Paul Bryce, Business Development Director, Node4, said: "This is an important hire as we work to position Node4 as a true end-to-end IT supplier for mid-tier, charity organisations and the public sector.

"Paula brings valuable experience in the sector and we expect her to play a key strategic role in helping us achieve our growth plans."

Johnston added: "Now that Node4 is fully HSCN compliant and a G-Cloud 9 supplier, my priority is to build on our experience in this sector to ensure that Node4 is established as a major contender."

CMO promo for Tempest

NATILIK'S Rory Tempest has been promoted to the Chief Marketing Officer role following a four year stint running a successful commercial sales function at the firm.

CEO Mike

Danson said: "As our portfolio becomes deeper and broader there has never been a more important time to have someone responsible for linking what our clients really want from their ICT investments to what we can offer. Rory now has the opportunity to help provide clarity on how we bring value to our clients and deliver the outcomes that are most important to them."

Tempest added: "We continue to disrupt the industry and in doing so have achieved some amazing things with our clients which we're keen to share with the global market. We're on course to achieve our five year objectives and storytelling will play a crucial part of that."



Rory Tempest

Also on the move...

Mktg moves at Avaya UK



Darryl Breach

STL Communications' Darryl Breach has been promoted to Account Director in recognition of his high sales achievement and long service with the firm which he joined in 1999 as an Account Manager. Sales Director Philip Donigan said: "Darryl

is a respected sales consultant in the world of business communications and has demonstrated his expertise across all areas of this fast moving industry." Breach commented: "I get a buzz out of sales and managing my accounts. Communications has changed significantly while I have been at STL, so the sales role remains constantly challenging."

PROVU'S founder and Sales Director Ian Godfrey has retired from the company after 18 years service. He established ProVu in 1999 and has played a key role in the development of the company. ProVu's MD Darren Garland



Ian Godfrey

said: "Not only has Ian overseen the company's growth, he has also been instrumental in creating the positive culture that ProVu enjoys with its staff and customers." Godfrey

stated: "I am leaving the company in great hands, with a team that is passionate and dedicated to growing and progressing to the next level. I look forward to seeing them continue to succeed and expand over the coming years."



Ross White

AVAYA'S UK and EMEA marketing team is headed up by two new faces following the appointment of Ross White as Head of UK Marketing, supported by Nick Main who has been promoted to the role of Head of Channel Marketing for EMEA. White

leads all UK marketing activity with oversight of all country and joint partner marketing, channel communications, social media programmes, and SI/SP and distribution relationships.

He has over 15 years of experience in IT and telecommunications marketing. Since joining Avaya in 2004 he has held a number of positions within the company, most recently Head of Channel Marketing EMEA. Main joined the team in 2016 as EU Channel Marketing Manager.

Ioan MacRae, Managing Director for Avaya UK, commented on the appointments: "Nurturing an ecosystem of diverse and rare talents is a huge part of the value our customers and partners expect from us. The decades of experience Nick and Ross share shows just how well suited they are for these expanded roles, and the potential we see in them to deliver even more."

Wagstaff titled Exertis BI boss

EXERTIS has welcomed Jonathan Wagstaff to the newly created position of Business Intelligence Manager. He joins from Context where he managed EMEA wide data collection projects for ICT vendors. He was also instrumental in setting up Context's VR Research Group and PC Gaming category tracking. Wagstaff said: "Having worked at Context I appreciate the importance of interpreting data and identifying trends and the value that business analytics can bring to companies when making critical decisions."

Wagstaff has a European remit and reports to Stephen Casey, Finance & Development Director at DCC Technology. Casey said: "Jonathan's experience is suited to fulfilling the task of providing business intelligence that can enable us to take the right decisions to meet our Group objectives."



Jonathan Wagstaff



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