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## E UK COMMS INDUSTRY

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Sir Charles stated: "Having worked in UK telecoms for over 25 years, I love the industry and have always found these events a great way to meet people and explore how to do more busi- ness together."

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## THE HEARTBEAT OF THE UK COMMS INDUSTRY

# Sir Charles poised for Comms Vision

**SIR Charles Dunstone, one of the UK's most successful ICT entrepreneurs, will outline his vision for the future of the industry at Gleneagles next month.**

**EXCLUSIVE**

Comms Vision Conference organiser Comms Dealer has confirmed that the industry giant will join a line-up of inspirational speakers at this year's event (November 8th-10th), which will bring together over 200 of the UK's leading resellers and suppliers servicing the private and public sectors.

In a conference session entitled 'From mobile retailer to major network operator – disrupting a market and building a culture to drive growth', TalkTalk Executive Chairman Sir Charles will take part in an exclusive conversation and share his thoughts and experiences on challenging the status quo and stepping outside the norm, while creating a business culture that fuels growth.

Sir Charles founded Carphone Warehouse from his Marylebone flat in 1989 on £6,000 of personal savings. He launched a landline service, TalkTalk, in 2003, and the companies demerged in 2010.

In June 2012 Dunstone received a Knighthood for his services to the telecommunications industry and his charitable work. He is also currently Chairman of Royal Museums Greenwich and BAR Racing.

Sir Charles stated: "Having worked in UK telecoms for over 25 years, I love the industry and have always found these events a great way to meet people and explore how to do more business together."

**See pages 38-45 for more news on Comms Vision 2017.**

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT

**Stuart Gilroy**

GIGABIT cities are 21st century, but too many regions are still stuck in the past. The big question is for how long? The Government has committed to a full-fibre roll out and the infrastructure revolution is well underway. How else can the Government bring to life its vision for Digital Britain? Inspiring figures are at the vanguard of the altnet advance – true leaders and pioneers. While innovations to existing infrastructure also hold promise.

Times of market stimulus like this are most propitious for the aspirational and ambitious among us to rise and make a difference – and be recognised as emerging inspirational business leaders who want to change the status quo.

Digital Britain is no experiment. It is a process with a known outcome, so why not grasp the inevitable now and truly make a difference to your company, your customers, and play a role in delivering the digital future? Such leadership messages will be heard by conferees at this year's Comms Vision Convention (Gleneagles 8th-10th November) where an acclaimed and inspiring line-up of industry speakers will provide insights into key areas across the whole spectrum of workplace digitalisation (see page 38).

As comms technology encompasses new fields such as AI, and with talk of 'mixed reality' in the mix – to name just two hotspots of promise laden innovation – now is indeed a time for the visionaries, the most imaginative and gumptious, to believe in what's possible and act accordingly to accelerate and experience the full whack of opportunities that Digital Britain and 21st Century technology represents.

**Stuart Gilroy, Editor**

• Business Matters: Insight into how Q3 in the comms sector was dominated by a fibre-fest and M&A (p24).

# New vision for UC Ignited by Nadella

MICROSOFT CEO Satya Nadella has revealed a new vision for UC along with plans to develop mixed reality and AI as 'infused' global game changers.

At Microsoft's Ignite conference held in Orlando last month Nadella also revealed a new programming language optimised for exploiting scalable quantum computers, and detailed the expansion of Dynamics 365 with AI solutions, as well as additions to Microsoft 365 and extensions to Azure including a hybrid cloud approach across data, apps and infrastructure.

"I'm inspired by the ingenuity of customers, partners and developers who are pushing the frontiers of what's possible with mixed reality and artificial intelligence infused across Microsoft 365, Dynamics 365 and Azure, to transform and have an impact in the world," stated Nadella.

Plans to bring Skype for Business Online capabilities into Microsoft Teams along with cognitive and data services entrenches Teams as the hub for teamwork in Office 365.

According to Scott Riley, Chief Strategy Officer at GCI, the move is 'bold' and has potentially significant implications for the UC space. "It paints a long-term vision for Microsoft and its customers based around Office 365," he said.

"Teams will bring everything together in one place via a single unified client, making Office 365 more useful."

Microsoft also confirmed its commitment to Skype for Business Server with a new version pipelined for next year designed to provide improved support for on-premise and hybrid environments.

"Microsoft has recognised that the majority of organisations in the UK are in between the old world of on-premise environments and the new world of the cloud," added Riley. "They're transitioning, and most are running hybrid environments.

"So there is no obligation to adopt Teams immediately. Organisations already running Skype for Business online may want to jump straight in, but many will still find that the Skype for Business Server is their best primary PBX replacement, for now at least.

"Also, Microsoft has revealed that Teams will have feature parity across Windows and Mac clients, something which has not previously been the case with Skype for Business."

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

**Satya Nadella**

## COMMENT: MOBILE MELTDOWN?

**Richard Carter**

WHAT more can the phone in your pocket actually do? Manufacturers such as Apple and Samsung continue to unveil new versions of their latest models, but has the technology inside them reached a saturation point? Increasing handset prices and a slowdown in device innovation could mean that consumers are holding on to phones for longer.

In a double whammy, the prices of handsets have been increased due to the weakness of the pound, which is also seeing consumers hanging on to products for longer.

I wouldn't be without my iPhone. However, I really have no desire to splash out £1,000 on the latest model just to be able to unlock the thing just by looking at it! The other new features seem similarly underwhelming.

Higher resolution and wider screens, dual cameras, water resistance and voice assistants are some of the latest innovations to tempt users to upgrade. But there isn't really a massive leap forward as emphasised by the new iPhone X and Galaxy Note 8 which only represent further small steps of progression.

Has the mobile phone market reached stagnation and what does this mean for sales revenue in the channel? I think only 5G connectivity and some more powerful applications can save the day.

**Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans**

• Former England basketball player Richard Thompson jumped at the opportunity to become TalkTalk Business Director of Partners in what he says is a slam dunk of an opportunity  (p30).
• Green Telecom Managing Director Steve Hayden and the ITP have called on the communications industry to prioritise the employment of young apprentices as a matter of organisational policy  (p34).
• Comms Dealer has announced an acclaimed line-up of keynote speakers for this year's Comms Vision Convention at the world famous Gleneagles Hotel, 8th-10th November  (p38).

# Vonage HQ opens in tech hub of Europe

THE opening of Vonage's new European HQ in the heart of East London's Silicon Roundabout underlines the capital city's status as Europe's tech hub, according to Rajesh Agrawal, Deputy Mayor for Business.

"With world class talent, a global financial services hub and a high concentration of global decision makers, it is no surprise to see that overseas businesses like Vonage are continuing to choose London as their place to establish a European headquarters," he stated.

"Vonage's latest expansion is further proof that London is the tech capital of Europe."

The global cloud communications provider has also unwrapped plans to expand its UK team of 200 in a bid to accelerate its international expansion campaign.

Vonage CEO Alan Masarek said: "As an international business technology company experiencing fast growth, we see London as crucial to the continued success of our business.

"We've witnessed accelerated growth in this region and, as we look to build on this momentum in the next few years, we are confident that London, with its rich heritage in technology and community of tech-savvy businesses, is the best place for us to do that.

"By embracing technology and reshaping how companies communicate, we're helping to drive better business outcomes for those who have made the leap to the cloud.

"Our expanding team and presence in London positions Vonage well to support the continued upward trend of this market here."

**Alan Masarek**

# Terra pursues a new course in e-learning

FIDELITY unveiled its new e-learning platform to TERRA Computer partners at Twickenham stadium last month.

Communications and Marketing Manager Katie Sloan told the 100-strong audience that EaaS (Education as a Service) represented an opportunity for resellers to earn extra recurring revenues quickly and enhance their 'trusted adviser' status.

"The opportunity to turn education into recurring revenues with minimal or no investment is simple and the returns are potentially huge," she said.

"Customers will save time, money and resources and you'll be helping them create informed, educated and upskilled employees which in turn will build trust, respect and value."

TERRA Computer is the UK sales arm for Wortmann AG, one of the largest independent computer manufacturers in Europe with 700 reseller partners.

When questioned, the majority of partners who attended the event said they would explore the EaaS opportunity.

"We aim to empower our resellers and partners with quality e-learning which they can supply to their customers across a range of subjects," said TERRA Director, Gavin Rose.

"We believe that e-learning is the most innovative educational development in recent years and will become a significant future stream in all education."

Fidelity Group launched its eLearning service in August via digital and social media platforms, after eight months of development in partnership with EdTech company e-Careers.

The fully white labelled platform was created for channel partners looking to add digital revenues to their portfolio.

**Katie Sloan**

Fidelity has already had enquiries for over 500 courses from customers and channel partners in a variety of subject areas from cyber security, Office 365 and Sage accounting to e-safety and accident prevention courses for school groups.

Alan Shraga, MD, commented: "Our eLearning offering is the easiest way for channel partners to start building digital revenues in under a month from signing. With a fully supported white label platform, marketing support, customer service and technical support teams included as part of the package, there is the potential for high returns on minimal investment.

"Designing, building and supporting a new website can cost businesses thousands, not to mention the development time involved and licencing of courses and content.

"Fidelity has done the heavy lifting in partnership with e-Careers and removed all of this time, cost, risk and hassle for channel partners." **See p48**

## NEWS ROUNDUP

**The** addition of Lifesize to ScanSource's line card significantly expands the distributor's video collaboration portfolio. Lifesize is available through ScanSource Communications in the US and Canada and ScanSource Imago in Europe.

"As the hosted video conferencing market continues to grow our partners are looking for other ways to deliver video solutions," commented Rich Long, President, ScanSource.

"The Lifesize portfolio will be a strong addition to our video solutions offerings within our ProAV practice."

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**A survey** by Node4 of 200 mid-market IT decision makers found that 63% of respondents rate security as a top priority, but 25% don't have basic anti-virus protection and up to 67% don't have intrusion detection in place.

"Inadequate threat management and lack of visibility into the network could have far reaching consequences," stated Steve Nice, Security Technologist, Node4.

"As a crucial sector powering the UK economy, the mid-market should be innovating in security, not failing to implement even the most basic tools."

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KCOM has expanded its enterprise sales team with the addition of 12 new staff focused on delivering IT solutions to large organisations.

The enterprise segment of KCOM's business saw overall revenue growth of 5% and its top five customer contracts growing by 16% over the previous financial year.

Phil Offord, Sales Director, said: "Bolstering our sales team is key to realising the enterprise opportunity. This strengthened team will be working with existing customers and developing new relationships with public and private sector organisations embarking on a digital transformation journey."

## COMMENT: INTERACTION MATTERS

**Phil Reynolds**

AS A conscientious full-time computer scientist and inventor in my spare time, I am perhaps more aware than others about the long-term impact of technology on humanity – and I have concerns.

When I was a young computer scientist I naturally assumed that computers were invented to help people do boring and repetitive tasks, especially the ones we dislike. Automation also removes the dull jobs ascribed to human beings, leaving us free to be creative and do more with the time that we have. In all this, the biggest change has clearly been the impact of technology on how people communicate in business, at home, and wherever else.

We don't use the phone and talk to people so much now. We tend to email, text, message, post a photo with commentary, we blog, chat and share online. We even read in digital. Our vocal chords are barely called on to make an utterance. Our facial expressions have been blanked out by digitalisation, while body language has no part to play in the one dimensional digital dialogues that dominate today.

The writing is on the wall: When I took a flight out of Heathrow recently there was a member of the airline's staff directing us, so I thought. It soon become clear that the figure wasn't a person at all. It was a projection onto a human shaped glass silhouette. Is this the shape of things to come? And with virtual reality, what about people? Where will all this end up?

For my part, I want to expand human-to-human interaction, get people outside enjoying nature, sharing body language, facial expressions and intonations of voice – and sharing the experience of just being with other people. So I've created a new community walking app, WalkzApp, that will encourage users to enjoy live experiences. Hopefully, WalkzApp will see the light of day next year.

**Phil Reynolds, CTO, Oak Innovation**

# Maintel rises in the cloud

MAINTEL is to sharpen its focus on cloud solutions as its Avaya business continues to lacks lustre, noted CEO Eddie Buxton when reflecting on the Group's interim results for the six months to 30th June 2017.

Maintel's revenues rose 68% to £63.8m (up from £38.1m) with recurring revenue at 73%, down 2% on last year's H1.

Group gross profit increased 50% to £19.6m (H1 2016: £13.1m), and the period ended with net debt of £24.2m.

But the company stated that its managed services and technology performance were negatively affected by delays to customer installations for Avaya.

"The performance in the first six months of the year reflects mixed trading across the Group," stated Buxton.

He attributed much of Maintel's growth to an increased investment in its ICON cloud platform, with a 55% increase in the number of seats active on the ICON Communicate.

"We saw strong growth on our ICON platform as well as noticeable progress with our mid-market and larger public sector customers through our new business and public sector teams," added Buxton.

**Eddie Buxton**

"We expect to see continued rapid growth in our ICON cloud platforms and intend to increase investment across the cloud portfolio."

The results include a full six month contribution from Azzurri, which was acquired in May 2016.

Another highlight this year was the acquisition of Cisco Gold Partner Intrinsic Technology in August, post period end, for £5.25m.

"The second half of the year will benefit from five months contribution from Intrinsic and I am optimistic about its contribution over time given its Cisco-led skill set," stated Buxton.

# Virtual1's northern milestone

THE lighting up of Virtual1's north west network is a notable milestone, says Product & Marketing Manager Neil Wilson, coming just five months after announcing plans to roll its network out across the UK.

"Greater Manchester was an obvious early target for the network expansion, with many existing channel partners based there and the business opportunities being created as part of the Northern Powerhouse initiatives," he said.

"These initiatives create a clear need for competitive and high performing Ethernet services to sustain and fuel future business growth."

On net services will be available throughout central Manchester as well as Liverpool, Warrington, Preston, Bolton and Blackburn among others.

These services will also benefit from Virtual1's software defined network feature set.

"It puts partners in direct control of the solutions that they provide, with 35 different features configurable online in real-time," added Wilson.

The network operator also confirmed that the bulk of its expanding network will be live this calendar year.

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## COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK

**Richard Thompson**

A RECENT report from the Cloud Industry Forum found that the overall cloud adoption rate for UK businesses now stands at 84 per cent. An increasing amount of services and data are being stored in the cloud, and most customers will now be asking about how they can best integrate their cloud services into their networks. To better leverage the multitude of cloud services and applications available, businesses need more than a fast and reliable network, they need one that is also dynamic and smart enough to meet their needs. This is especially true if they need to connect multiple premises. With the rise of cloud connected tools the sheer scale of applications that businesses are looking to run over their networks is only increasing.

The question then is how to keep adding more complex services without threatening the core infrastructure that keeps businesses going. We believe that the best solution is to make connectivity smarter. From our side, in September we launched our new Cloud-ready connectivity products which make use of configurable, multi-service technology.

With a smarter pipe, connectivity can be segregated and high priority applications can be given dedicated bandwidth over less critical services. Take for example a retailer. Processing of payments can be kept as a priority through a secure private network, while customer WiFi can be delivered over the Internet. By addressing the increasingly complex needs of businesses channel companies can ensure that they continue to elevate themselves as trusted and valued technology providers.

We'll be sharing more of our plans for Cloud-ready connectivity at Comms Vision this November.

**Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business**

• Adrian Thirkill and the rise of GCI People Cloud (p26).

# Marketing service gains in popularity

**Justin Coombes**

GAMMA'S self-serve marketing portal launched in January this year has notched up almost 500 users. The portal's popularity has in large part been attributed to its ongoing development based on partner feedback.

The portal, called Accelerate, enables partners to more easily rebrand white label marketing material, carry out integrated campaigns to generate new leads, and more effectively engage with prospects and customers to drive sales.

Accelerate offers a range of campaigns for vertical markets and end-to-end purposes such as its latest campaign-in-a-box which includes thought leader style eGuides, infographics, white papers, email templates and social media posts.

"Campaign-in-a-box gives partners all of the tools they need to run lead generation campaigns to help them build their pipeline and boost revenue growth," stated Justin Coombes, Head of Marketing at Gamma.

"After launching Accelerate we sought feedback from our partners on how we could make it work better for them.

"As well as adding new white label material we've enhanced the email templates and content syndication to give partners more flexibility when personalising their campaigns.

"Listening to their feedback has helped to shape Accelerate into a marketing tool that seems to be hitting the mark."

Partners can run campaigns using their own systems or via the campaign feature within Gamma Accelerate which provides email marketing capabilities with landing pages to capture leads, as well as marketing automation to help partners nurture leads until they're ready to engage with sales.

"Accelerate includes a built-in social media tool and content syndication capabilities," added Coombes. "The content syndication feature lets partners subscribe to relevant product content and website banners which can then be automatically published onto their website.

"Partners can also use this feature to automatically feed posts to their social accounts."

Gamma also introduced the option of a managed marketing service where it sets up and runs campaigns through Accelerate on behalf of partners.

Another development enables partners who sell through their own dealer base to co-brand Gamma's white label material, allowing them to support dealers when running their own campaigns.

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# Connectivity fit for cloud deployments

# Solar swoops on Welsh firm

NETWORK reliability and running multiple services over a single pipe with the option to segregate bandwidth and prioritise critical data traffic are key features of TalkTalk Business's new cloud-ready connectivity products launched last month.

"These products offer businesses with single or multiple locations a smarter way to connect their premises to one another, and to the Internet," commented Duncan Gooding, Chief Operating Officer.

"This is crucial as more businesses host their critical services on the public or private cloud."

The service is available via a range of access options from broadband to 1Gb connectivity and will be offered in public, pri-

**Duncan Gooding**

vate and hybrid form. Optional 'boosts' include Business Wi-Fi, Enhanced Monitoring, Mobile Back-up and Private Cloud

Connect. Customers can also add IP Voice, SIP Trunks and hosted voice.

"There are more demands on business networks than ever before, with reliability crucial as more and more services migrate to the cloud," added Gooding.

"TalkTalk Business' network offers 99.995% core reliability and a range of business continuity options through network resiliency, multiple supplier resiliency and mobile back-up."

The company claims 60% more local coverage than BT and boasts multi-terabit direct peering partnerships with over 330 global cloud providers.

**Got a news story? email:
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SOLAR Communications has advanced its buy and build strategy and extended its regional reach with the acquisition of Cardiff-based TWL, adding to its existing offices in Chippenham, Harlow and Manchester.

TWL founder and MD Andrew Nicholson will remain with the business.

Solar CEO John Whitty said: "This latest addition to the Solar Group follows the purchase and integration of our two acquisitions in 2016. The team has shown it can join together new additions to the Group.

"Solar is determined to address the under-served mid-market with value enhancing capabilities, both organically and via strategic acquisition."

Commenting on the acquisition, Nicholson stated: "The TWL team has spent the last 14 years building and developing a strong company and service offering. With Solar's portfolio and service-led culture I am convinced the business will go from strength to strength."

Whitty said the addition of TWL reinforces Solar's position as a Mitel Gold Solutions and Gold Cloud Solutions partner, and is a sign of the company's ambition as a growing provider of cloud, on-site and hybrid UCaaS solutions.

"TWL has already been successful in migrating many of its on-premises customers to the cloud, which is also a key focus area for Solar," said Whitty.

## BT rolls out new digital platform

A PARTNERSHIP between BT and technology consultancy Digital Ecosystem Management has led to the launch of a new Business Platform-as-a-Service proposition known as BT Personalised Compute Management System (PCMS).

Digital Ecosystem Management CEO Angus Ward commented: "PCMS combines our

expertise in digital business transformation with BT's skills in digital platform management to provide an end-to-end digital business service."

Neil Lock, VP Compute, Global Services, BT, commented: "PCMS is a ready-made platform that allows new ways for companies to digitalise, manage and build business models from

their own ecosystem of consumers, producers and innovators.

"By building on a proven platform, businesses can bring their digital services to market within shorter timescales and focus time and resources on innovation and development."

The platform will be available globally during the final quarter of 2017.

**John Whitty**

# Firstnet and Select merge



**Stephen Leahy (left) with Angie & David Cusworth**

LEEDS-based Firstnet and Manchester company Select Data Centres have merged to form a new business under the name of Firstnet Group.

The deal combines Select's focus on data centre design and construction with Firstnet's expertise in connectivity, networks, managed IT, cloud platforms, system co-location and disaster recovery.

The new firm is based at Firstnet's HQ in Leeds which includes a data centre and workplace recovery facility designed and built by Select.

The site is jointly owned by Select's CEO Stephen Leahy and Firstnet Directors David Cusworth and Angie Cusworth.

Leahy is now Firstnet Group's CEO. He brings to the role 30 years experience in the critical power and data centre industry, including development projects on behalf of the NHS, the Civil Aviation Authority, Siemens, Hyundai and BT.

Select's Manchester base will now be deployed as a Firstnet Group satellite office.

Leahy commented: "The deal represents a substantial investment in the city's IT sector and we will continue to invest in our Leeds estate, including our purpose-built data centre."

David Cusworth commented: "This merger represents a positive development for our customers and an opportunity for our employees. It also positions the company for its next phase of growth in the UK data centre and IT sector.

"We plan to double our sales staff by the end of 2017 and create 100 new jobs over the next 18 months."

# NGC's £5.2m performance

NGC Networks is riding a wave of organic growth to the tune of £5.2m turnover in its latest financial year, up 13.5%, while the Wakefield-based company's headcount now numbers 32.

Big customer wins include Moores Furniture, The Funding Corporation and law firm Lupton Fawcett, plus academies, schools and medical centres.

NGC, which is run by Directors Nikki Guest and Dean Harrop, has also benefited from investments in business development, CRM and marketing; and is seeing growth in its hosted telephony proposition.

Guest stated: "We have put time and effort into growing our customer base and that is reflected in our increased turnover figure."

NGC Networks' partnership with CityFibre is also paying dividends via the roll out of full-fibre Internet connectivity to firms in Wakefield, Bradford, Leeds and Huddersfield.

Cloud-based offerings are also proving popular, noted Harrop. "Our cloud-based solution provides customers with a range of communications facilities without the need to purchase an actual on-site telephony server, providing efficiency gains, cost savings and business continuity," he said.

"Flexible finance enables capex and opex models where customers can rent the service from us and still have the option to the title of the software and any associated hardware upon completion of the term."



**Nikki Guest and Dean Harrop**

## NEWS ROUNDUP

**Onecom** has signed a five-year deal with Vodafone to develop, launch and manage IoT services.

Aaron Brown, COO at Onecom, said: "This partnership enables us to make it simple for our customers to deploy IoT technology across their organisations."

**Nuvias** has been appointed as a pan-EMEA distributor for Juniper Networks' full range of networking, security, data centre and cloud solutions.

The distributor will support Juniper's growth plans for EMEA, particularly in the mid-to-high end enterprise market, and focus on partner recruitment, accreditation and sales enablement.

**Huawei's** new partner programme brings together all solution partners previously working in separate programmes run by its Enterprise Business Group, Carrier Business Group, and the Products and Solutions unit.

Huawei said it is investing up to $250m in partner schemes this year, including $70m in co-marketing. The new Huawei Solution Partner Programme goes live this month and incorporates ISVs, independent hardware vendors, systems integrators and consulting partners.

# Giacom pronounces Cloud Market open

GIACOM'S 4,000-plus IT reseller network can more easily sell and license cloud services following the launch last month of the company's Cloud Market, which replaces the MessageStream brand.

In designing the platform Giacom prioritised the key requirements of resellers, such as easing the customer journey, simplicity in its usage and availability on any device.

To bring cloud solutions to its partner network Giacom works with vendors such as Microsoft, Acronis, Bitdefender and TalkTalk Business. Giacom Cloud Market also offers a hosted VoIP product.

"Resellers can provision cloud services such as Office

**Mike Wardell**

365, Signature Hosted Exchange, Acronis Backup Cloud and Bitdefender GravityZone in minutes," commented Giacom MD Mike Wardell.

"The launch of the Cloud Market comes at a pivotal point in Giacom's journey.

"With several exciting product launches planned, our customers needed a modern, easy

to use and flexible way to manage and deploy services."

Giacom's Cloud Market is supported by a new website, a new reseller facing blog, while social media channels are being leveraged to quickly establish the new brand.

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

# Ofcom draws ITSPA dismay

ITSPA has expressed dismay over Ofcom's stance on resolving fixed line switching issues, particularly number portability, which was not adequately addressed in a range of changes to various General Conditions announced last month, claims the industry body.

Chair of ITSPA Eli Katz said: "This is hugely frustrating for industry. Ofcom indicated during its Review of Digital Communications that the General Condition Review provides an opportunity for significant changes to be made.

"We were exasperated when it changed its mind on this decision last year, and we are no clearer as to why Ofcom appears so unwilling to act to

resolve the problems around number porting."

Ofcom wants the industry to reach a consensus on how improvements can be made, but ITSPA says the regulator needs to be more interventionist.

Katz added: "Industry has tried and failed on a number of occasions over the past ten years to resolve this problem.

"Clear timescales around providers establishing porting agreements are needed.

"Guidance on this from Ofcom would help immensely and make certain elements of the industry change behaviour.

"It is a decade since Ofcom launched an initiative to resolve this problem. It is high time that it looked at this issue again."

CONGRATS to 'Team ProVu' for completing the Gauntlet Games staged in Manchester, overcoming obstacles such as monkey bars suspended over ice cold water, space hopper races and foam-filled slides. The team tackled the 10km course dressed in superhero outfits badged with symbols that signify elements of the distributor's reseller portal, called ProSys. ProVu MD Darren Garland commented: "It was great to see everyone come together to help each other complete the various challenges. There were some moments of sheer determination and hysterical laughter. It was certainly one to remember!"

# SD-Wan security is new cash cow for ICT channel

Analyst Gartner predicts that up to 25% of users will manage their WAN through software within two years and a new SD-Wan enterprise has been formed to help resellers cash in on this new revenue stream.

The new company is called OmBex Limited and it's a joint venture between two leading companies in the USA, CybX Security, which specializes in attack and penetration prevention and Omega TeleServe, one of the first independent telco companies to embrace SD-WAN.

CybX Security was founded in January 2016 and has become the world-wide leader in 'Attack and Penetration software'. It has since acquired six immune architecture patents, developed strategic partnerships with several corporations specializing in disruptive security technologies and assembled a mission critical development team. CybX security offerings represent a dramatic shift in the way networks are protected.

Omega TeleServe, which was founded in 2012, became a worldwide reseller for leading SD-WAN manufacturers in 2015. Since then, the company has installed and managed nearly 550 endpoints for clients in the healthcare, insurance, and hospitality industries.

**£1.3 billion market**
Gartner estimates revenue from SD-WAN vendors is growing at 59% annually and it's expected to become a


**Todd WIlliams**

> The alliance between Omega and CybX has allowed us to package the CybX suite of virtually hack-proof Internet security technologies in one rack-mounted appliance


**Anton Oliver**

> What we will be offering is not just revolutionary in the industry, but provides a new revenue opportunity for the channel which has never seen before

$1.3 billion market by 2020!

The OmBex value proposition to address this opportunity in the SME and Enterprise sectors has the success of potential resellers in mind.

- The SME solution is a plug and play 'All in One Box' solution with minimum configuration.

- The Professional Platform is a Multi-Server Solution that is completely scalable to fit customer requirements

"Omega has seen first-hand the limitations of the built-

in security features in most SD-WAN offerings. They are not sufficient to block incidents like the SWIFT heist in February, nor the Equifax debacle in September, nor the ever-evolving ransomware and malware attacks," said Todd Williams CEO at Omega Teleserve.

"The alliance between Omega and CybX has allowed us to package the CybX suite of virtually hack-proof Internet security technologies in one rack-mounted appliance, replacing four to six appliances currently used in most WANs and the

costly private data networks most companies rely on for network management."

**January 2018 launch**
OmBex Ltd is launching its UK operation in January 2018 and is now seeking the help of the UK ICT reseller network as Anton Oliver, Head of Channel Development explained.

"What we will be offering is not just revolutionary in the industry, but provides a new revenue opportunity for the channel which has never seen before.

"For resellers, SD-WAN as a Service is viewed as a new revenue opportunity because they can manage WAN services for enterprise businesses. Likewise, SD-WAN as a Service can be appealing to end-users and enterprises that don't want to manage the WAN network, or applications and would prefer to outsource these services to a service provider."

And there are no issues selling software defined WANs to companies with legacy networks as CybX confirmed.

"Many around the world are still using XP and the like because of programs that have not been ported to the 64bit systems. Many Japanese government systems

are still using XP, and believe it or not, our own Navy still has some NT systems in use.

"With CybX core technologies, we can not only protect these systems with Quantum Shield (IA), and Quantum Enforcer (SPP), but we can support these legacy systems in a cost effective and successful manner. And yes, this can be done today!

"Because Quantum Shield (IA) is an OS layer application, it is 100% effective in rendering instructions (executable etc.) useless. Remember IA brings computer security to a black and white decision. Either it is authorized or it is not. There are no grey areas.

"Then with Quantum Enforcer (SPP), the baselines are configured and the mission critical configurations are monitored 24x7x365 and if there are any changes they are instantly healed back to the baseline."

**This is what we want you to do NOW.**
If you want to be part of this opportunity and increase your revenue substantially, simply click on the link **www.ombex.co.uk** and register now to receive our information and secure your spot on the waiting list. You do not want to miss this train!

# NFON shows new resolve


Myles Leach

GERMAN cloud telephony provider NFON is fast expanding across Europe having established a foothold in Portugal this summer, along with a new office in Berlin and plans for another in Italy later this year.

Undaunted by Brexit, NFON has also ratcheted up its UK growth ambitions with a relocation to larger offices in Uxbridge to accommodate additional staff and provide a springboard to gain greater market share.

NFON opened its UK base in April 2013 and in its third year generated growth of over 300% while channel partners number 100-plus including Chess, Westcoast and ScanSource.

"The relocation signals the company's confidence in the UK and supports our long-term growth plan," said NFON UK MD Myles Leach.

"As part of this expansion we will add five new sales and support staff to our team of 30 employees by the end of 2017."

Hans Szymanski, CEO, NFON AG, stated: "The UK market has gone from strength to strength and our support hasn't wavered in light of Brexit.

"This is a big investment in our UK division and forms part of our plan for the UK to maintain a key role in the overall company growth. It's poignant that as we pass our tenth year milestone we enter a new phase of internationalisation.

"By 2018 we will have increased the number of employees across the NFON group by 34%."

# UC catalysed by Microsoft

NUVIAS UC Business Development Director EMEA, UC Practice, Ciaran Bolger, has spotted significant trends in the distributor's Microsoft business that he believes will further establish the software giant's cloud and UC market presence.

"Microsoft has strengthened its position as one of the global leaders of cloud and UC technology over the past year," he commented. "Its transition from a licensing and desktop company to a true cloud player has been remarkable."

Microsoft's UC presence in the enterprise is trickling down to SME and mid-size organisations making them more receptive to the benefits of UC which is driving the whole market, according to Bolger.

"Teams is an exciting prospect in terms of further enhancing the collaboration stack within the Microsoft portfolio," added Bolger. "It will be interesting to see how the transition from Skype for Business Online to Teams will progress over the next year. There will be a clear distinction between on-premise and cloud."

Microsoft is also driving forward the adoption of cloud services such as Azure and O365,


Ciaran Bolger

observed Bolger. "So much so that historically voice UC vendors are playing catch up in terms of feature and functionality," he added.

"Microsoft is expanding the UC market with scale and dynamism. It has a viable voice platform as well as offering the full UC experience. More is to come with Teams.

"However, the devil is always in the detail so the partner channel must ensure it is clear about end user needs and choose the platform which is right for them."

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

# Ward moves into Firstnet

LEEDS-based Firstnet Group has drafted in Glenn Ward as Sales & Marketing Director. He brings over 30 years of industry experience and has achieved revenue growth for a range of companies in the IT sector including manufacturers, distributors and MSPs.

Ward joins Firstnet from aap3 where he was IT Sales Manager tasked with developing IT distribution and reseller markets, instigating a new strategy for the IT division which increased pipeline by 600% through sales to SMBs, SMEs, channel partners and managed service providers.

In his new role he will help to drive Firstnet's expansion with a target of £34m in sales over the next five years.


**Glenn Ward**

Ward stated: "As well as investing in resources, Firstnet is investing in people and I will be overseeing the expansion of our sales team which we plan to double in size by the end of the year."

MD David Cusworth said: "Glenn's experience will be vital in driving dramatic growth."

VIRTUAL1'S first charity quiz night raised more than £13k in aid of Restless Development. Over 100 people from 12 companies (including Comms Dealer) descended on The Gable in London last month where comedian, actor and presenter Rufus Hound (pictured) hosted the evening. Comms Dealer was crowned quiz champions, walking away with a trophy and £150 bar tab. "I'm proud of the hard work the team put in to making the night a resounding success," said Virtual1 CEO Tom O'Hagan. "It's a fantastic feeling knowing that we are making a real difference to peoples' lives."

# US security specialist set for UK campaign

A NEW company offering ICT resellers revenue streams in cyber security is gearing up for a UK launch in January.

Ombex is poised to unveil its SME and enterprise Software Defined WAN security solutions to help channel businesses address what Gartner says will be a $1.3bn business by 2020.

The company says its SME offering is a plug-and-play 'all in one box' solution requiring minimum configuration, while its multi-server professional platform will scale to meet customer requirements.

Ombex is a joint venture between two consultancies in the USA – CybX Security, a specialist in attack and penetration prevention, and Omega TeleServe, one of the first independent telco consultancies to embrace SD-WAN.

Anton Oliver, Ombex Head of Channel Development, said: "The alliance enables us to package the CybX suite of virtually hack-proof Internet security technologies in one rack-mounted appliance, replacing four to six appliances currently used in most WANs, and the costly private data networks most companies rely on for network management.


**Anton Oliver**

"For resellers, SD-WAN as a Service is viewed as a new revenue opportunity because they can manage WAN services for enterprise businesses. Likewise, SD-WAN as a Service can be appealing to end users and enterprises that don't want to manage the WAN network, nor applications, and would prefer to outsource these services to a service provider."

Ombex confirmed that there are no issues in selling software defined WANs to companies with legacy networks.

# Voiceflex puts calls on click via WebRTC

VOICEFLEX has launched Click-to-Call on its SIP trunks, enabling users to make a call directly from a website, email signature or hyperlink.

"There's no cost to make or receive the call as it's all on net," stated Sales & Marketing Director Paul Taylor.

"What's more, the application is free of charge when using Voiceflex SIP trunks for existing and new users."

Taylor noted that Click-to-Call is the first in a range of pipelined applications based on


**Paul Taylor**

WebRTC technology. "Click-to-Call is a sales person's dream, it sells itself," he commented.

"Seldom in life does such a powerful feature hit the market, and it's free of charge on Voiceflex SIP trunks."

# Growing role of MSPs laid out at summit

MANAGED Services Providers are a growing market force and the primary driver of IT industry growth, according to speakers at this year's Managed Services & Hosting Summit in London (September 20th).

Hosted by Comms Dealer sister firm IT Europa, the conference provided a platform for Gartner Research Director Mark Paine to put a spotlight on the evolving attitudes of IT buyers who now prioritise outcomes versus single point solutions, with IT as a productivity asset also top of the end user agenda.

In facing the challenges of meeting these more demanding requirements MSPs need not struggle as lone rangers, advised Paine, who believes that the opportunity for MSPs to collaborate with suitable counterparts is not one to be missed, providing they choose their partners with great care.

"MSPs must start with a vision," stated Paine. "Look at use cases and consider processes, along with challenges and outcomes for customers."

The rise of MSPs is reflected in the high levels of recurring revenue growth experienced by ICT organisations that are taking a lead with cloud services, such as Cobweb Solutions which sells cloud solutions from Microsoft, Mimecast and Acronis among others.

The firm's MD, Michael Frisby, said: "We started out as a cloud managed service provider by focusing on traditional solutions like Exchange. Now, 95% of our revenues are recurring. But you have to make sure you get the marketing right, along with making investments in training and education."

Another hot topic at this year's conference was compli-ance, most notably around the upcoming GDPR regulations. Legal firm Fieldfisher's partner Renzo Marchini warned that the impact on MSPs would be 'profound'. "Service providers are to be regarded as data controllers under GDPR," he said. "With that comes the potential for huge fines in the event of regulation breaches."

IT Europa's MD Alan Norman commented: "All the latest research points to the continued growth of managed services as a supply mechanism in line with customer demand.

"There is also evidence to show that the provision of managed services is beginning to build more value in the channel, helping MSPs, VARs and SIs to build higher value and longer-term relationships – along with new and emerging revenue opportunities for distribution.

"The growing adoption of cloud-based delivery mechanisms and the increasing convergence of communications and data technologies is likely to further accelerate this trend."

For more news and views on this year's Managed Services & Hosting Summit please visit *www.iteuropa.com*.

**Alan Norman**

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

## NEWS ROUNDUP

**Smartphone** financing company Lease Telecom has joined forces with Vodafone to offer exclusive hardware financing solutions for partners migrating to the network's revenue share commission model.

Through the agreement partners will be armed with multiple finance options including a facility to spread the cost of smartphone purchases by taking on the finance themselves. Thirty Vodafone partners have already joined the programme.

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**Jola's** launch of fixed IP SIMs reflects the rise of IoT connected devices and the channel opportunity in providing remote connectivity.

"The channel can benefit from this rise in demand by providing 4G data to SMEs in areas of poor fixed line connectivity and where there are accessibility issues," said Sales Director Lee Broxson.

"Companies that need remote access to devices require fixed IP SIMs and Jola has launched a range of packages and bolt-ons, on 30-day terms, to meet this need."

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**Internet** of Things (IoT) whizz Graham Doe has joined Onecom to sharpen its focus on smart connected services for businesses.

Doe, who takes the Head of IoT role, brings over 10 years sales and management experience in the IoT space and has previously worked for some of the UK's largest telcos including Telefonica O2 UK and Arqiva.

Aaron Brown, who is the Chief Operating Officer at Onecom, said: "Innovation in IoT services is a major focus for Onecom and its importance is reflected in the quality of this appointment.

"Graham brings a wealth of experience in telecommunications, particularly in IoT, along with an instinctive understanding of how connected hardware will transform businesses."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

**Blue** Chip, part of the GCI Group, has signed up top insurance company SunLife, said to be the UK's largest distributor of life insurance products to the over 50s.

Blue Chip will provide a cloud platform with a blend of solutions based on VMware, EMC, Citrix and Microsoft. Blue Chip will also provide a monitoring and reporting service alongside supporting the infrastructure and users.

**Marston's** Telecoms has expanded its hosted voice (HV1) handset offering following a link-up with Cisco.

To mark the launch Marston's is offering a Silver subscription which includes a premium Cisco handset plus 3,000 minutes. Marston's has included an option to add, at a nominal cost, a Gold bolt-on with call recording, auto attendant and call queuing.

**Pragma** has lifted the lid on UP Campaign, an upgrade to the Ericsson-LG iPECS marketing toolkit.

"The UP Campaign strategy delivers a fresh thinking approach and covers marketing platforms from social media posts and videos to white papers, infographics and web banners," stated Will Morey, who is the Head of Sales and Marketing at Pragma.

# Drinks all round for Datasharp

IT WAS beers all round at Datasharp when it scooped a deal to overhaul St. Austell Brewery's comms systems.

The brewery is one of the largest employers in the south west and its plans for growth, which include a relocation, could only be realised following an upgrade of its comms infrastructure by existing supplier partner Datasharp.

"The brewery is a multi-site operation so needed a range of technologies to be incorporated into its comms and collaboration solution," said Allan Williams, Tech' Director at Datasharp.

St. Austell Brewery opted for Unify's OpenScape Business solution which enables collaboration and seamless engagement across multiple locations.

Williams added: "One of the biggest challenges in a project of this scale is continuity. So we worked closely with the internal stakeholders at St. Austell throughout the project and chose a phased approach.

"The switchover caused minimal disruption and no lost business. Training was carried out before and after the change, ensuring that employees had a solid foundation on the new software and hardware."

# AI development at odds with its users

THE activities and technology investment decisions of AI service providers runs counter to the needs of the market, according to software firm Amdocs.

Research by Forrester Consulting undertaken on behalf of Amdocs concludes that AI developers are not giving enough thought to the basic requirements of customers.

The study found that over a third of consumers interact with virtual agents at least once a week as it's more convenient and quicker, but nearly half of them had no other option.

Given a choice, 83% would prefer to speak to a human agent who can better understand their needs and address multiple questions at once.

Bots, on the other hand, cannot deal with complex requests, deliver personalised offers nor understand human emotions.

Consumers also have preferences on how bots should look and behave, with 46% wanting them to look like a human, while 20% want to see an avatar. The rest don't care either way, but 36% prefer them to be female rather than male (14%).

The best bots will be polite, caring, intelligent and funny, with no airs and graces.

**Gary Miles**

Despite these customer preferences, service providers are not focusing on the right areas in terms of their AI investments, reckons the study.

Their priorities are information security, privacy and speed of response; and 42% of service providers are also creating avatar images for their bots while consumers prefer human-like ones. Other mis-matches include designing bots to be posh or authoritative, and making them sound too young.

More broadly, most service provider AI decision makers say that 85% of customer interactions will be with software robots in five years time.

"Consumers have a good sense of how bots can serve them, and their level of frustration with today's bots is striking," said Gary Miles, GM at Amdocs. "A third will take their business elsewhere if the poor service continues.

"But consumers believe that if anyone can get AI right it's the communications and media industry. AI could be a winning gambit for service providers as long as they sync up their investment priorities with what customers actually want."

Miles believes that Amdocs and Microsoft have taken big steps to give users what they want with their just launched Smartbot solution designed for mobile operators.

"It provides telecom-specific AI capabilities for offering highly personalised and emotionally aware bot interactions, which is something consumers are clearly missing in today's bots," stated Miles.

# Foehn unveils 'visual' system

A CLOUD phone system launched by Foehn has been designed to put power into the hands of those who use it, claims the firm.

Called Voxivo, the system offers intuitive controls with drag-and-drop dial plan functionality and according to its maker gives managers and employees control of phone system management tasks that were previously beyond their reach.

"Voxivo enables companies to take administrative control of phone system performance,

**James Passingham**

workflows and device configuration, and allows phone system managers to make changes or add new extensions," said James Passingham, CTO at Foehn.

"We have seen the industry continue to offer telephony platforms that are unintuitive and convoluted for technical and business teams.

"With Voxivo our customers can reclaim control of their cloud phone system without needing technical help for administrative changes.

"We also believe administrators should empower staff to be able to control their communications. So we used open source and created a visual cloud phone system that removes the headache for IT managers and gives agility to business teams."

A PARTY of 21 top Pragma resellers with stellar Ericsson-LG and So Wifi sales figures under their belts were rewarded with a trip to Ibiza. Pragma MD Tim Brooks said: "These trips provide the opportunity to reward and recognise our customers for their hard work and commitment. As well as a thank you, they also allow us to build close personal relationships with our partners which is the foundation of our success over the last five years." Berry co-owner Paul Hallam enthused: "Great trip, great company and great laughs. A lovely welcome as a new reseller to a great group of partners."

# 4net enters growth phase supported by YFM Equity Partners

A NEW phase of growth beckons Manchester-based 4net Technologies after an investment by YFM Equity Partners which has acquired a minority stake in the business.

As part of the deal Iain McKenzie has been appointed Non-Executive Chairman of the Avaya Diamond partner.

McKenzie has founded and built a number of businesses including Mettoni Group which he sold to Enghouse in 2010. He then ran the Enghouse EMEA/Asia business for five years, growing revenues from circa $30m to over $100m while integrating multiple acquisitions.

4net Technologies was established in 2005 by Richard Pennington, Michael Jervis, Frank Jennings and Steve Tyrrell. They retain a majority shareholding and continue to run the business with the same management team.

Contract wins to supply hosted cloud contact centre services to a number central Government departments have made 4net's recent growth especially notable.

Pennington, MD, said: "Our revenues have broadly doubled in the last two years supported by some significant customer wins. I expect further strong growth in the next few years.

"These wins include a contract for a major utility providing hosted contact centre services to approximately 3,000 seats, and a central Government contract through the RM1045 public sector framework utilising our own 4net Agile Cloud service called Antenna.

"We have around 12,000 users under contract already and expect to win business from several other Government departments off the back of it."

He added that 4net's strategy is unlikely to change significantly following the YFM deal.

"We will remain focused on cloud and managed services, UC and contact centre solutions for enterprises and the public sector," said Pennington.

"Our immediate priority is to manage the ongoing roll out of our major contracts, as well as land several other good sized opportunities in the pipeline.

"The investment from YFM allows us to accelerate the next phase of growth and gives us the opportunity to capitalise on the significant success and progress we have made in serving customers across enterprise, public and Government sectors.

"It will also allow us to accelerate the development of intellectual property that adds value to our customers' digital transformation strategies, and will give us the opportunity to enhance services and possibly pursue relevant acquisitions."

Nigel Owens, Investment Director at YFM, said: "4net has established a reputation in providing innovative solutions to its corporate and Government customer base, which has fuelled impressive growth.

"This is the fourth investment from YFM's 2016 Fund, which closed in April 2017 and represents another good example of investing in well established regional businesses from the YFM network in the £2-7m investment market."

TMT company Knight Corporate Finance advised 4net on its YFM investment.

Paul Billingham, Director at Knight Corporate Finance, said: "Having seen lots of private equity investment in the ICT sector, and with a number of new opportunities being developed by the business, the team at 4net were keen to understand how private equity could help accelerate their growth over the next few years."

**Richard Pennington**
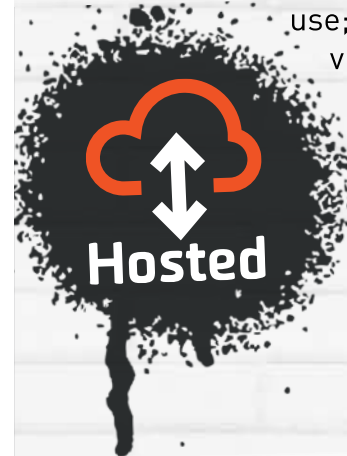
# Firms foiled by bad tech

THE rise of machine learning, Artificial Intelligence and robotics along with more modern employment expectations will cause a seismic shift in the nature and practice of work as we know it, according to the World Economic Forum.

But research commissioned by TalkTalk Business (conducted by YouGov) found that workplace technology can have the opposite effect, with 64% of respondents blaming poor technology for lower productivity.

The biggest bugbear is a slow Internet connection (cited by 40%), followed by a lack of computing power and old versions of software and systems that are liable to crash. Almost 17% said that their time is wasted when attempting to share and download large documents.

Productivity figures released by the ONS for Q1 2017 showed a 0.5 % decline in hourly output, taking the productivity of UK workers back to pre-financial crisis levels.

Graeme Codrington, Futurist to TalkTalk Business, stated: "When it comes to the typical experience of workplace technology in the UK, we are seeing a growing digital divide between the services and tools we all use as consumers and the antiquated technology we're forced to use in the workplace."

According to YouGov research, the top technology priority over the next 10 years is a good Internet connection.

Kristine Olson-Chapman, MD at TalkTalk Business, commented: "Revolutions tend to come with little warning, but businesses have no excuse to be in the dark about the potentially transformative changes to the nature of work on the horizon.

"How to prepare business for the impact of machine learning and automation, and attract and retain a workforce with rapidly shifting expectations of what 'work' means, needs to be a top strategic priority.

"For business leaders, there is a critical need to align with partners who will help them to innovate on their terms."


Kristine Olson-Chapman

# Splicecom gets more analytical


Robin Hayman

SPLICECOM'S new version of Vision (v1.7) comes with enhanced business analytics that enable ongoing reviews and future business planning.

"Vision blends the elements of call management, call recording and real-time dashboards and wallboards into an analytics solution, where the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts," said Robin Hayman, the firm's Director of Marketing & Product Management.

"The analysis is used by companies to increase sales, improve customer service and identify opportunities for new services and products.

"Furthermore, the increased demand we've witnessed during the past 18 months means that we've also focused heavily on expanding our call centre capabilities in Vision v1.7."

# Hirers IT not up to the job

RECRUITERS are falling down on the job when it comes to implementing the technology they need to operate more efficiently, according to a survey of 500 recruitment consultants.

The study was commissioned by 8x8 and its results point to a 10 hour waste of time each week per average consultant.

The main drain on their time is manually updating CRM systems which is also a cause for ongoing concern due to the scope for making errors.

Nor is that all, the timing of sales calls is all too often hit and miss, leading to an average of two hours per week wasted on calling candidates who don't pick up or are unable to speak.

According to the research, consultants believe that analytics could help them maximise their time on the phone. And remote working technology would unshackle consultants from their desks, freeing them from their anxieties about missing important calls.

Respondents also identified the potential productivity benefits of video conferencing when screening candidates.

"With the right communications technology in place that can integrate with existing systems, recruiters can get the full picture of their interactions with clients and candidates, all in one place," stated Kevin Scott-Cowell, UK MD, 8x8.

"This means less time on transferring data between systems and travelling between meetings, while tracking agent productivity with analytics.

"With the advent of cloud-based technology, this doesn't have to be a huge financial commitment, but will undoubtedly help the recruitment sector to work more productively."


Kevin Scott-Cowell



HATS off to Nimans Business Manager Scott Baron (*pictured right*) who completed the National Three Peaks challenge, climbing the highest mountains in England, Scotland and Wales within 24 hours (Scafell Pike, Ben Nevis and Snowdon). The climb is one part of 12 charity challenges Baron has set himself this year. His 'dirty dozen' challenge kicked off in January with a 34 mile walk from Liverpool FC to Manchester United which took 11 hours, and includes cycling around Anglesey and a 10km army obstacle course. "I've always wanted to do something for charity and I'm not one to do things by half," stated Baron. "So this year I decided to push myself and lots of friends to the limit. It's been an amazing experience and we're almost there with just three more to go!"

# Fitbit on track for businesses

ACTIVITY trackers are poised to infiltrate businesses following a bounce back in the worldwide wearables market and a distribution agreement between Tech Data and Fitbit.

The distributor will carry the full range of Fitbit activity trackers and is targeting the corporate and healthcare sectors.

IDC calculated that second quarter wearables shipments grew 10.3% year-over-year, reaching 26.3 million units.

Paul Jacobs, Business Unit Director for CE and Accesso-


Paul Jacobs

ries, commented: "Businesses are now using wearables to support and encourage employees to lead healthy lifestyles. The potential is tremendous.

"We will be working closely with Fitbit in partnership with ISVs and API integration specialists to target reseller partners with ideas or specific opportunities they want to develop."

Olivier Claude, Senior Sales Director EMEA at Fitbit, added: "This agreement enables us to address the potential we see for our products in the corporate wellness, healthcare and wider commercial sector."

According to market watcher IDC the top five global wearables brands in order by shipments are Xiaomi, Apple, Fitbit, Garmin and Fossil.

# Q3 dominated by fibre-f

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

**Philip Carse**

This last quarter has been a vintage one for corporate activity in the Telecoms & Networks peer group, with two strong themes: The first is a fibre-fest, with almost £500m of fund raising for fibre network builds in the last four months for CityFibre (£200m, including for the Entanet acquisition), Hyperoptic (£100m), Truespeed (£75m) and Community Fibre (£11m) among others (all following Gigaclear's May £111m raise). Meanwhile, the Government also announced a £400m fund to kickstart £1bn of private investment; and BT Openreach has announced potential FTTP plans that could cost £400-500m.

The second big theme is significant M&A, including private equity backed (GCI/Blue Chip Data, Sabio/Datapoint Europe, Arrow/Worksmart, Wavenet/Swains and Verastar/Aimera); owner-managed (Elite/Nexus Telecom, Solar/TWL); and public listed businesses (CityFibre/Entanet, £29m, Adept Telecom/Atomwide, £12m, and Maintel/Intrinsic, £5m). M&A reflects a combination of buying customer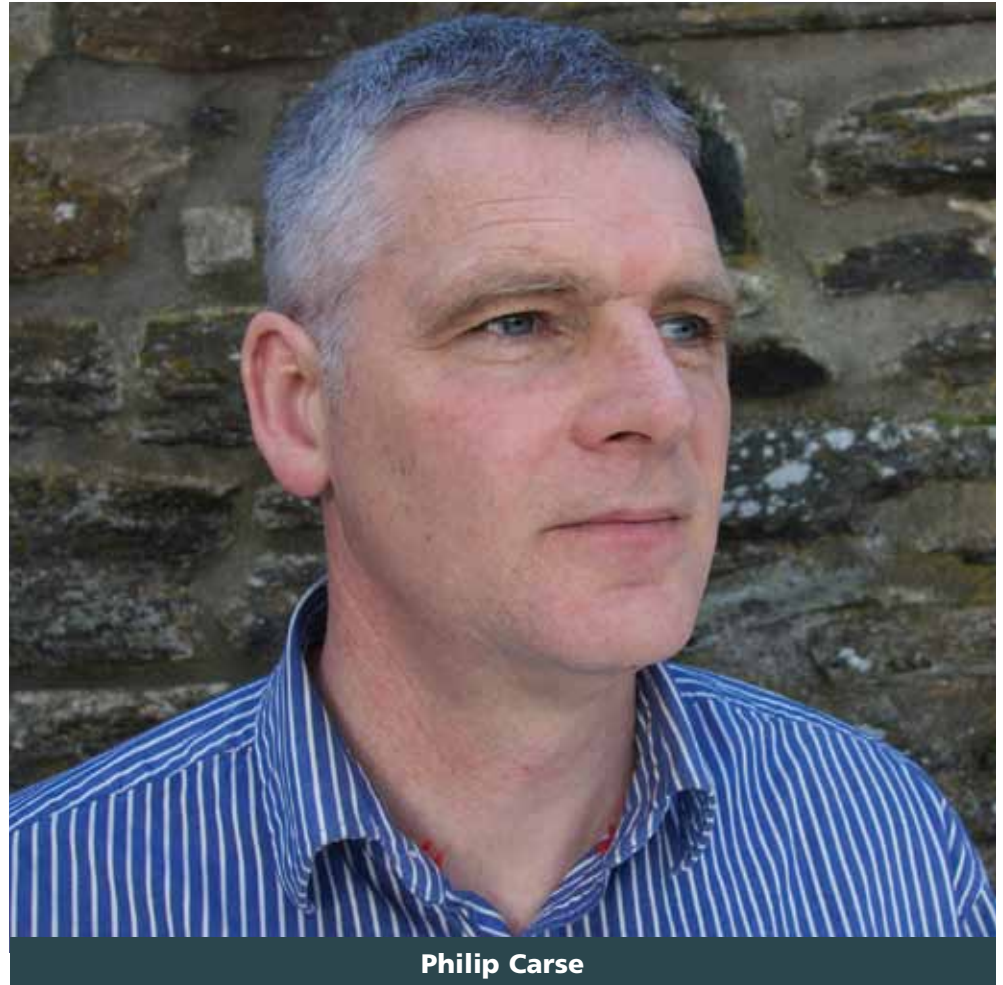s, product capabilities, routes to market, customer bases and geographic expansion. In addition, there has been a mooted IPO (Verastar), a faltering potential IPO (Arqiva), private equity investments (Gradwell, 4net), and a spectrum trade (Arqiva/Luminet).

**Contrasting trading**
As usual, recent Telecoms & Networks results reveal both relative hotspots and notspots in terms of growth, as well as widely differing performances by companies operating in similar markets. In particular, there have been decent results from companies in mass accommodation broadband markets (CableCom and Relish Networks/Keycom), contact centres (IP Integration) and conferencing (Starleaf and LoopUp). Other companies to report decent numbers include Gamma, Focus, Cellhire, Convergence, Charterhouse and Barclay Comms. In contrast, XConnect continues to struggle to find a viable business model, while there were disappointing numbers from Timico and Zen among others, and Maintel's first half 2017 was impacted by Avaya's Chapter 11.

**Valuations in the doldrums**
The Telecoms & Networks peer group has had a muted share price performance in the last one and three months, +1.3% and 2.4% respectively, which is marginally better than the FTSE All-Share but a good 5pp lower than the broader Megabuyte universe. The standout performer has been conferencing company LoopUp which is up 92% over the last three months; whereas CityFibre is down 33%, with investors now apparently losing excitement over the £200m-plus fund raise for an extended fibre build and the acquisition of Entanet.

The peer group has significantly under-performed on a one year view, at -9% versus +7% for FTSE and +13% for the Megabuyte universe, dragged down by Redcentric (-58% on its accounting misstatements), BT (-29% on its various kerfuffles), CityFibre (-31%), Kcom (-17%), and Maintel (-11%). In contrast, LoopUp (+133%), Gamma (+13%) and Adept Telecom (+30%) have out-performed. Notably, this share price underperformance has been reflected in declining current year valuations at a time of rising software valuations, with the difference between the two as large as it has probably ever been (16.1x EBITDA for software versus 10.4x EBITDA for ICT).

**Scorecard update**
Megabuyte has developed the Scorecard which ranks company performance based on a mix of growth, margin, cash generation and FCF metrics. The last quarter has seen some significant Scorecard moves, most notably Cellhire (doubling to 72), CableCom (+13 to 71), Focus Group (+5 to 67), Telecom Plus (-17 to 37), Timico (-10 to 29), Zen (-8 to 38), and Arrow (-6 to 43). Charterhouse became eligible (EBITDA above £1m) with a score of 60, while newly covered companies that entered the Scorecard include Barclay Comms (60), IP Integration (48) and Network Telecom (47). The table continues to be led by multi-utility reseller Verastar and connectivity players M24Seven and Ask4. ∎

# est and M&A

## COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

### 4net Technologies contacts YFM for investment

Enterprise unified comms contact centre specialist 4net has announced an investment by private equity investor YFM Equity Partners for a minority stake, in a deal valued at £9m. The £13m revenue company has entered a rapid growth phase off the back of some major new contracts, including supplying hosted contact centre services for several UK Government departments.

### Arqiva reports further progress, might be forced to reconsider IPO

2017 results from broadcast and comms infrastructure provider Arqiva show a much improved year, with revenues up 6.6% to £944m, EBITDA up 10% to £467m and a 26% jump in operating cash inflows to £438m. Both terrestrial broadcast, telecoms and M2M helped drive top line growth, while profits continued to benefit from tight cost controls, and cash generation was boosted by working capital inflows (specifically, payables).

### Daniell moves to Chairman at FluidOne, replaced by Jagusz

Rigby family/SCC-owned connectivity specialist FluidOne (formerly Fluidata) has announced that founder and CEO Piers Daniel is stepping up to the Chairman role to focus on strategic issues, with current non-exec and well known industry figure (previously CEO of Azzurri and SSE Telecoms) Chris Jagusz assuming the CEO role. Jagusz noted that following the October 2016 merger of the then Fluidata with fellow Rigby company One Point to form FluidOne, the immediate focus will be organic growth at the now £25m-plus annuity revenue business.

### Hyperoptic doubles revenues in 2016 ahead of big debt funding

George Soros-backed superfast broadband provider Hyperoptic has released accounts for calendar year 2016, showing revenues more than doubling to £8.8m, gross margins expanding 7.3pp to 57.9% due to scale economies, and EBITDA losses declining a third to £4.2m, while capex increased 38% to £16.0m. The company has since somewhat increased its firepower, raising £100m in debt to add to its existing £75m of funding as it aims to increase its network sixfold.

### LoopUp growing strong, but at the expense of capex and operating cash conversion

AIM-listed conferencing provider LoopUp has released interim results to June 2017 in line with the end-July update, with EBITDA up 27% to £1.6m on revenues up 36% at £8.7m, while underlying conferencing revenues grew 44% (37% constant currency). The cost of this accelerating growth is a 50% hike in capitalised R&D to £1.85m and, arguably surprisingly for a subscription-based business, a very poor 33% conversion of EBITDA to operating cash flow.

### Timico's year of change

2016 accounts from managed cloud, IT and comms service provider Timico mark a period of considerable change leading up to February 2017's £50m/10x underlying EBITDA, Lyceum-backed, MBO. Revenues rose 5.6% to £55.7m, but fell an estimated 6.6% in organic terms due to changed mobile commercials and expected churn at the ex-Coms business, while EBITDA fell a third to £3.7m and the company also incurred restructuring costs.

### Mixed H1 trading for Maintel following Avaya customer issues

Maintel's half year results to June 2017, which includes six months of trading from Azzurri, show revenues and EBITDA increasing 68% and 62% to £63.8m and £7.1m. With Azzurri only contributing two months in last year's interims, numbers are not particularly representative, although the firm has said the performance was mixed, as Maintel was impacted by delays in investment decisions by some of its large Avaya customers. However, annualised synergies from Azzurri are ahead of those expected at the time of the completion of the deal and there was strong growth in its ICON platform.

### Gamma shows strong first half

Gamma has reported a strong first half 2017, with EBITDA up 21% to £18.5m on revenues up 10% at £115.0m. Leading analysts are to upgrade full year forecasts by 3-4%. While many of the usual trends were in evidence (strong SIP, hosted voice, capex spend etc), revenue growth rates have started to diverge between the indirect and direct businesses, up 6% and 24% respectively. ∎

# Thirkill and the rise of GC

Adrian Thirkill's GCI Vision conference performance last month was indicative of the motivated, energetic culture he has fostered since joining the company in December 2015 as CEO.

**Creating and fostering a GCI People Cloud opened up a whole new talent market for our growth**

**Adrian Thirkill**

**W**ith characteristic frankness and enthusiasm Thirkill demonstrates the limitations he sees at the heart of many business organisations – their adherence to a policy of 'presenteeism'. Down the ages, and unrelated to any strategic need, human potential has been compressed into the confines of an office space, he believes. On coming to office at GCI, one of Thirkill's priorities was to oversee the recasting of internal operations, a task that underlined the ineffectiveness of siloed working as he liberated staff from their desks and reunited them in a People Cloud.

"This means supporting staff to believe and trust in how good they could actually be, enabling them to find their own work/life integration balance with the freedom that other companies don't offer," explained Thirkill. "Part of this is about empowering people to work virtually and not feel paranoid for not being seen in the office. It's about results with a firm steer and a light touch. You can't develop, deploy and use cloud and mobility technology without also applying the same principles to your people. Creating and fostering a GCI People Cloud opened up a whole new talent market for our growth."

Thirkill saw from day one how a GCI People Cloud would work in practice and the improvements in customer relationships it would bring. "I saw the CEO role as a fantastic opportunity to bring good people together and harness their talent to make GCI a company that delivers more for our customers," he added. "My first job was to bring everybody together and break down the walls. To some extent staff were shackled by a siloed approach and by eliminating this it would enable them to see the bigger picture, and empower everyone to make change and deliver what our customers really want from us. Too many companies don't practice what they preach. They're happy to use or sell the technology that makes people mobile and more agile but don't use it themselves. Instead many still foster a culture of presenteeism. This will end."

Having declared himself in stark opposition to business leaders who run their operations under the rubric of 'Presenteeism', averse to the latent potential of their staff, Thirkill spoke volumes about the big

# CI People Cloud

opportunities within GCI's reach having undergone a cultural revolution. "The move towards digital transformation and convergence has accelerated since I joined GCI, and is growing exponentially every single month," he said. "This is what's driving UK PLC and us as a business. Change is the only constant in our industry and technical evolution is quickly rewriting the last 100 years of social evolution. In the immediate business environment the main growth will be UC, cloud security, compliance and IT services. Convergence is driving everything, enabling mobility and digital transformation."

## Outcomes only

Resellers should have nothing to do with single point solutions, noted Thirkill, who went on to explain why they have no conceivable interest for today's businesses. "Customers are no longer coming to us wanting a network or firewall, instead they are asking us for resolutions to particular business problems that need specific outcomes," stated Thirkill. "This maps perfectly to what GCI is seeking to do, which is to empower digital transformation within our customers that allows them to be more agile and innovate faster. All channel partners should be able to plug into the new world of convergence and deliver value. We are working with strategic partners that are able to deliver business outcomes for UK PLC."

Meanwhile, fulfilling another obligation of executive leadership, Thirkill is focused on more potential acquisition targets as well as organic growth. "Our acquisition of Blue Chip in July filled a gap in our convergence capability, giving us a 'fifth service pillar', namely full IT support," he said. "This sits alongside our existing capabilities in UCaaS, cloud, security, compliance, network and infrastructure, and means that we can provide a full range of converged services that underpins our customers as they embark on their digital transformation journeys."

The Blue Chip acquisition is GCI's 18th since it was founded in 2000 by Chairman Wayne Martin. During its 17 years the company has completed over 30,000 technology projects, has a turnover approaching £100 million, 11 offices and employs 500 staff across the UK – 350 of them descended on the East Midlands Conference Centre in Nottingham for last month's GCI Vision event, the firm's largest internal conference to date.

Thirkill joined GCI from Easynet Global Services where he was Managing Director. Previous roles also include Chief Operating Officer & UK Managing Director at Easynet Group and Directorships at COLT Telecom. His greatest career achievement is also his biggest opportunity – keeping an open mind. "It's been quite a journey," added Thirkill. "We are in a state of constant evolution and reinvention. Anything that is disruptive to business allows innovators to grow. This includes Brexit. In times of business uncertainty open minded organisations strive to get ahead and drive change. We want to work with the innovators and help them succeed in their business goals." ∎

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## Just a minute with Adrian Thirkill...

**Role models:** Lakh Jemmett, the MD at Colt, who was a brilliant visionary; as was David Rowe who started and created Easynet

**Your biggest career achievement:** Keeping an open mind

**What do you fear the most?** Boredom

**Name three ideal dinner guests (past or present):** Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking, they would have a great conversation about the world, the universe, time and life; and John F Kennedy who inspired people to even walk on the moon

**How would you like to be remembered?** As someone who got stuff done

**What possession could you not live without?** My glasses

**How do you relax when not working?** Fly fishing. There is no better way to relax in my view

**Top tip for resellers:** Keep an open mind and don't listen to hype. Listen to your people and customers

**What would you change in hindsight?** Everything and nothing. If you had hindsight you'd be tempted to change everything

**One thing you could not do without in your job:** My iPhone

**Give one example of something you have overcome:** Fear of failure

**What do you consider to be your greatest strength?** Keeping an open mind is my biggest strength, but I constantly have to work on the ability to always keep an open mind

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# THE COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS 2017

## 12th October  Hilton Park Lane

## cnawards.com

# FINALISTS ANNOUNCED

**Following another record entry we are delighted to announce the shortlist for the 2017 Comms National Awards.**

"The number of entries our judges have received this year has been astonishing – it's another record entry. The judges have also been particularly impressed with the quality and depth of the submissions, which proves what an amazing industry this is," said Awards Co-ordinator Nigel Sergent, Editorial Director at Comms Dealer.

Finalists can now look forward to the spectacular finals night on October 12th at The Hilton on Park Lane, London.

"We have lined up a brilliant host and with over 160 entries from 100 plus organisations represented, the atmosphere, entertainment and excitement will be second to none. I am sure we'll have a full house to celebrate UK channel success," added Sergent.

**To book your table at finals night contact Simon Turton on 01895 454603  or visit www.cnawards.com**

# CN AWARDS SHORTLIST

## VENDOR AWARDS
### NETWORK CATEGORY
**Best Mobile Provider/MVNO**
Daisy Wholesale
Simetric Telecom
Trellisworks

**Best Fixed Line Network Provider**
CityFibre
Gamma
Vaioni
Virtual1

### SERVICE PROVIDER CATEGORY
**Best Wholesale Service Provider (up to £10m t/o)**
Channel Telecom
Jola
Magrathea Telecommunications
Vaioni
The Voice Factory
Voiceflex
Zest4

**Best Wholesale Service Provider (above £10m t/o)**
Daisy Wholesale
Entanet
Gamma
Interoute
Invosys
Node4
plan.com
Virtual1
Zen Internet

**Best ISP**
Entanet
Gamma
Gradwell
Luminet
Spitfire
Zen Internet

### TELEPHONY CATEGORY
**Best SME Telephony System**
3CX
Blueface
Ericsson-LG
Sangoma
Splicecom

**Best Enterprise Telephony System**
Content Guru
NFON
Ericsson-LG

**Best End-Point or Device**
Jabra
Ericsson-LG
Sangoma
Snom
Yealink

**Best Hosted Platform**
8x8
Blueface
Channel Telecom
Gamma
Gradwell
IP Cortex
NTA
Ericsson-LG
TelcoSwitch

Teleware
Xelion

### SOFTWARE APPLICATION CATEGORY
**Best Call Management Solution**
Cirrus
Content Guru
Invosys
KCOM
TeleWare
Tollring

**Best Billing Platform**
Aurora
Cirrus
Fidelity Group
Inform Billing
Union Street

**Best Partner Portal**
8x8
Fidelity Group
Fidelity Energy
Jola
Invosys
ICUK
plan.com
Splicecom

### DISTRIBUTION CATEGORY
**Best Convergence Distributor**
Nimans
Pragma
ProVu
Scansource
Siphon

**Best Mobile Distributor**
Daisy Distribution
plan.com

### PARTNER SERVICES CATEGORY
**Best Channel Business Service**
Agilitas
Fidelity Group
plan.com
Porrima
Train to Win.tv
Voiceflex

**Best Installer/Maintainer**
Agilitas
IPNetix
Train to Win.tv

## RESELLER AWARDS
### CONTACT CENTRE CATEGORY
**Best SME Contact Centre Solution**
Ethos/Cirrus
ICA
NSN
STL Communications

**Best Enterprise Contact Centre Solution**
Aerial Business Communications
Cirrus
Connect Managed Services with Northumbrian Water

### VERTICAL MARKET CATEGORY
**Best SME Vertical Market Solution**
B4BC
Cirrus
Cisilion
Cloudsource Technologies
GHM Communications
Loop Voice & Data
MPS Networks
netConsult
XMA

**Best Enterprise Vertical Market Solution**
BDR
Cirrus
Cisilion
Ethos
Incom-CNS
KCOM
SAS Global

### IOT/WIRELESS CATEGORY
**Best SME M2M/Wireless Solution**
Pangea
Omnia
Channel Solutions Resource

**Best Enterprise M2M/Wireless Solution**
BDR
Comms365
Mason Infotech
Pangea

### CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS CATEGORY
**Best SME Cloud Solution**
B4BC
Cirrus
Cloudsource Technologies
Dupre
Gradwell
Loop Voice & Data
NSN
Sprint Convergence

**Best Enterprise Cloud Solution**
Connect Managed Services with Northumbrian Water
Datasharp
DF Communications
Ethos
Incom-CNS
TIG

### UNIFIED COMMS CATEGORY
**Best SME UC solution**
Citytalk Communications
Focus Group
Lily Comms
Midland Networks
MPS Networks
Solar
Telephone Systems.cloud

**Best Enterprise UC solution**
Aerial Business Communications
BDR
Cisilion
DF Communications
Ethos
Excell
Incom-CNS
Ocean

**Nine Customer Service Award Under £5m t/o**
B4BC
Cirrus
Citytalk Communications
Cloudsource Technologies
ICA
Lily Comms
Loop Voice & Data
Midland Networks
Rydal Communications
Smart Numbers
Sprint Convergence

**Nine Customer Service Award Over £5m t/o**
2 Circles
Aerial Business Communications
Daisy Group
Focus Group
Infinity Group
MPS Networks
NSN
STL Communications
True Telecom

# CATEGORY SPONSORS HAMMER HOME THE CN AWARDS BENEFITS

## Distribution Category

**Paul Taylor**
Sales Director
Voiceflex

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

## SME Reseller of the Year

**Garry Growns**
Sales Director
Daisy Wholesale

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

## Software Application Category

**Nick Goodenough**
Partner Service Manager
Spitfire

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

## Cloud Communications Solution Category

**Steve Mace**
Senior Director - Channel
Interoute

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

## Vertical Market Solution Category

**Vincent Disneur**
Head of Sales & Marketing
Union Street

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

## Video Suite Hospitality

**Richard Thompson**
Partner Sales Director
TalkTalk Business

"The channel community once again has a lot to celebrate this year; it has also been a time continued change and growth for us at TalkTalk Business and so we're delighted to be helping bring together friends from across this amazing industry to recognise shared success and to celebrate in style. As we continue to innovate and challenge to make business telecoms better for everyone, we hope by helping shine a light on the brilliance of colleagues from across the industry we can inspire everyone to work with us in making sure our industry just keeps getting better and better."

# Thompson nets top job

Former England basketball player Richard Thompson jumped at the opportunity to become TalkTalk Business Director of Partners in August in what he says is a slam dunk of an opportunity to build up the channel operation.

**Richard Thompson**

Thompson has been part of the TalkTalk Business team since joining as a graduate 16 years ago in Partner Sales as an Account Manager. "This was a great learning experience, right at the coal face," he stated. "When the opportunity presented itself to lead our partner business it was one I absolutely jumped at. It is the largest and most important part of our organisation and very much the growth engine of TalkTalk Business, which makes it an exciting place to work."

Prior to heading up the partner arm Thompson held a variety of senior management positions ranging from leading B2B strategy, sales operations, marketing and trading. For the last two years he worked as the Commercial Director for TalkTalk Business across all GTM channels. "My priority now is to connect with all of our partners, so I am spending a lot of time meeting with customers, understanding their challenges and seeing how we can help each other grow and win," he added. "There is a wealth of opportunity and the market is buoyant. I am also reviewing how we set ourselves up for success, where we need to invest and how we strengthen and improve."

The channel is at the forefront of TalkTalk Business's growth strategy. The company has over 800 partners and 180,000 business end users, while four million 'live' customers use its network. "I have an obsession with being easy to do business with and providing our partners with the right engagement model," stated Thompson. "Our partners are at the heart of our strategy, so it's fundamental that we provide them with data and voice services that can be consumed in a simple and reliable manner. It's important to acknowledge that we address the entire spectrum of indirect channel partners, whether a carrier or systems integrator through to a start-up."

TalkTalk Business has over 20 years experience supporting businesses of all sizes, from national retailers to sole traders. And over the last few years it has invested significantly in the core network. "In the first half of 2017 we have seen wholesale growth of 15 per cent year-on-year," noted Thompson. "The investment we have made in the network, training and collaboration with partners has seen the business make significant strides over the last 12 months. Partners can trust us with their customers' mission critical data and voice services and commit to SLAs in the knowledge that these will be met successfully. The reliability we offer is better than the industry average for Ethernet delivery and we have been leading the way with new ways of working with Openreach. This sets us apart and ensures we are constantly ahead of industry standards for Ethernet."

The company has also migrated its wholesale partners to MyNet, an online portal that allows real-time management of circuits from order through to bill. Orders can be quoted and saved for 30 days while integrated mapping functionality enables partners to see the Openreach infrastructure and the complexity of an order to better understand the options available.

### User control

"Visibility of status updates, case management and engineer notes all happens in one place, reducing complexity and enabling partners to manage their customers' expectations," added Thompson. "They can make changes quickly and easily to their account, increase bandwidth and add resilience on their circuit without having to call us. We will be adding advanced features and performance monitoring so that partners can see what we can see. By increasing transparency and enabling greater control our network starts to become their network. We also currently have MyNet APIs in trial that offer wholesale partners all the same functions but integrated within their own portals and systems."

TalkTalk Business's declared intention is to lead the access evolution as new higher bandwidth technologies come to the fore. "It is important that we are at the forefront of this curve, giving our partners and their end customers choice," commented Thompson. "Our Cloud-ready connectivity technology offers configurable multi-service access options, available across public and secure private networks, supported by a range of optional boots. The other side of the equation is voice and the transition to next generation services. Through our SIP and expanding hosted voice capability we are well placed to support our channel partners."

TalkTalk Business is an ambitious company with a DNA grounded in disrupting the market. "This will see us continue to invest in our network design and capability, product innovation and our service experience," confirmed Thompson. "Importantly, we will also look to strengthen our account management and overlay teams to support our growth.

"I am lucky to have been given numerous opportunities to grow and develop while at TalkTalk. When I originally left Partner Sales I took on a strategy project to lead a five year plan for TalkTalk Business. It was a hugely challenging and rewarding experience which taught me a lot, but also gave me the confidence to broaden my channel ambitions." ∎

# Rahimi: A man with grow

To say that BDR Group CEO Bahman Rahimi is a quintessential entrepreneur would be to greatly understate the extent of his opportunism and craft for building profitable businesses.

> I consider myself lucky to be part of this dynamic, revolutionary and life changing industry which has kept up with the pace of change
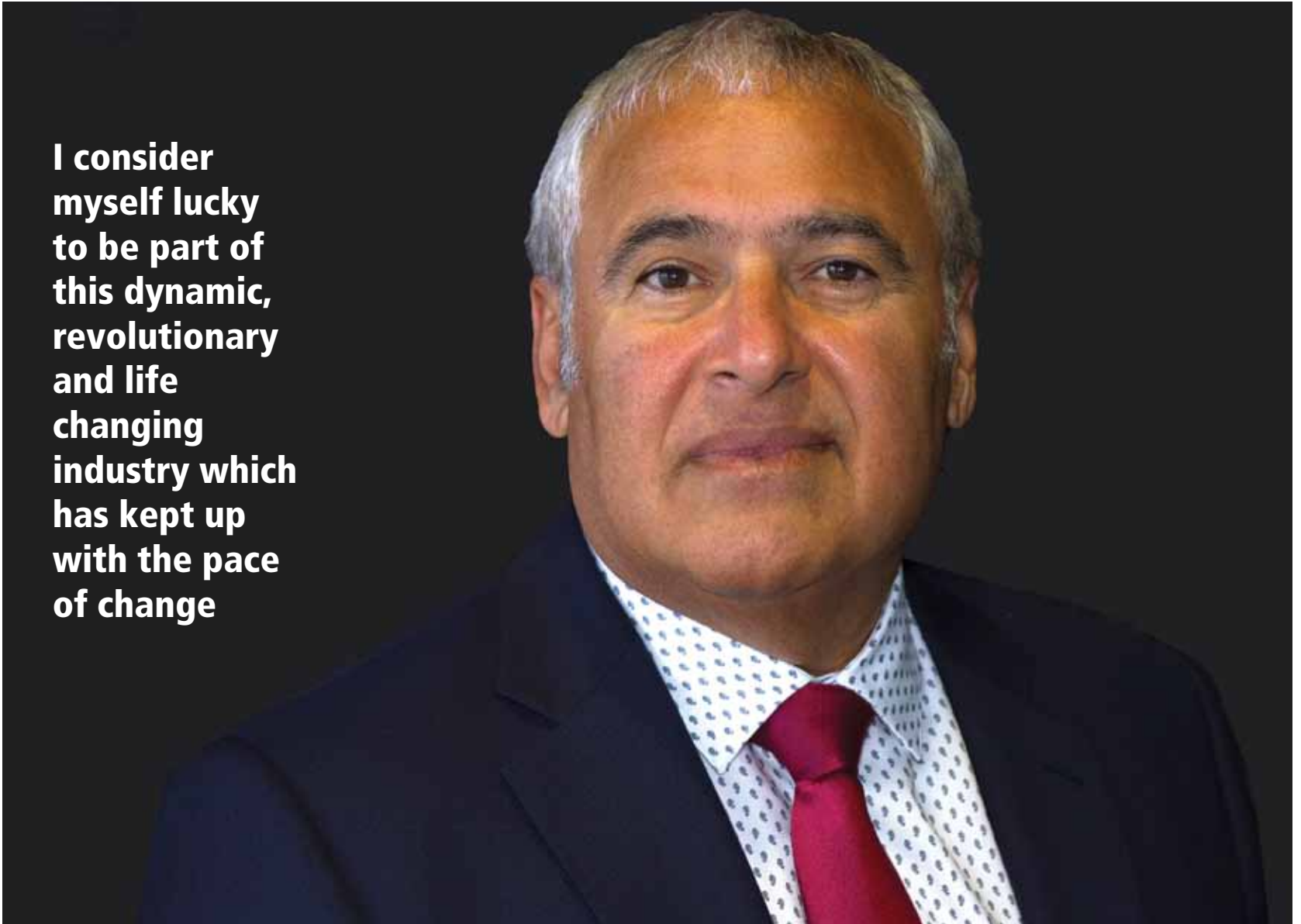
**Bahman Rahimi**

**R**ahimi took control of his destiny almost 30 years ago and his determination to remain independent and self-sustaining has not waned. Nor has his ability to identify a commercial opportunity in the comms sector, and beyond, faded over time. This is plainly evidenced by his unequivocal response to

an agricultural opportunity that arose in his native Iran. The venture speaks volumes and reflects the extent of Rahimi's business acumen. "I acquired some land in Iran and for eight years owned and managed, at arm's length while running BDR, a farm that produced hundreds of tonnes of potatoes annually," he explained.

"During this time the price of land rose significantly and I could not refuse an offer to sell up. The sale was timely because I'd seen enough potatoes to last a lifetime."

**Qualities that count**

Rahimi's agricultural venture displays a rare combination of opportunism, a willingness to diversify and an ability

to take calculated risks. His biggest risk, however, was starting BDR in John Major's recession years with his own limited funds. "No individual or institution would back me," Rahimi stated. "But I did not let my confidence be undermined by the naysayers when setting up BDR in a challenging economic climate."

His original background was in computers and software development, and like many entrepreneurs his entrance into the world of telecoms was more a case of chance than design. "I've been in comms since the eighties, from the early days of privatisation," explained Rahimi. "I jointly owned a telecoms company for six

# vth on his mind

years but felt the time was right to start out on my own. I wanted to test my skills and business abilities without external influences. This led to the creation of BDR in November 1991.

"I have always believed in self-sufficiency when providing products and services to customers. This philosophy over the last three decades led me to develop in house skills for key technological and legislative changes, limiting our reliance on sub-contractors and middle men when dealing with customers. This is a big element of BDR's success, resulting in a stable customer base and loyal staff."

## Partnerships

The main influence on BDR's direction of travel is to follow a policy of not being influenced by brand names or product status and only engaging with suppliers that meet market demands and place a high value on their relationship with BDR. "Our proposition is to design, develop and deliver a complete and fully integrated IT infrastructure and voice platforms to organisations of all sizes," said Rahimi. "We have a specialised approach to some vertical markets, but in my opinion there is a commonality of requirements shared by most industries."

In recent years organic growth has proven more challenging, so sticking to a single growth strategy was not a viable option. "We have blended in growth by acquisition during the last few years to complement our organic expansion, and have enjoyed good success in this field, completing several acquisitions of various sized businesses and assets," noted

Rahimi. "We are hoping to make further announcements before the end of this year.

"Consolidation in our industry tends to be based on private equity models. But I aim to make acquisitions using our own funding, thereby avoiding banks or private equity and their control. This is making an eye-watering change to my financial health and wallet, but I am persevering because I value my independence."

Rahimi's current priority and big challenge is managing the transition from TDM to cloud and the shift from a capex to opex model. "We are making progress, redesigning and planning timely changes to cater for the move away from traditional revenue streams to new models," he commented. "BDR will achieve significant growth and expansion in line with our planned direction.

"On the whole I am an optimist, but I expect the number of resellers to diminish over the coming years due to the ever encroaching digital world and the march of turnkey products, mobility, home workers, multi-nationals etc. There is a shrinking pool of customer requirements and that means less dependence on the specialist expertise offered by resellers. This will have an inevitable impact on them. But our industry is still lucrative and offers many opportunities for those who plan correctly. I consider myself lucky to be part of this dynamic, revolutionary and life changing industry, which has kept up with the pace of change and up-skilled continuously to create a lasting and exciting commercial environment." ∎

# Apprenticeships matter

Green Telecom Managing Director Steve Hayden and the Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) have called on the communications industry to prioritise the employment of young apprentices as a matter of organisational policy. Here's why...



**Steve Hayden and Aneel Ahmed**

**J**ust talking about the skills gap in telecoms doesn't get the job done. What we really need to do is take action and inspire apprentices with the wonders of our vibrant sector, and work hand in hand with the ITP to champion bright young people and help them lay the foundation of a successful career in IT and telecoms, according to Hayden. He has called for the employment of apprentices to become compulsory, with a minimum ratio of one apprentice per ten employees. "Apprenticeships are a great opportunity to take someone into your business and train them in your ways and systems," he commented. "And they help to fill the skills gap. Qualified engineers are hard to come by in telecoms."

Green Telecom was established in 1989 by Hayden as an installer of telephone systems for other telcos. The company became a reseller in 1995 and currently employs 12 staff with a turnover of almost £2 million. Green Telecom is based in Chesham and owns its offices, and has come a long way from the double garage in Ruislip where Hayden started the business. "We believe in honesty, value and a professional but happy work environment which includes apprentices," added Hayden. "We have been involved with the ITP apprenticeship scheme since the outset

and our main engineer, Aneel Ahmed, came through the first cohort."

Hayden himself started out as an apprentice engineer with BT when he left school in 1981. He believes that the number of apprentices employed by a business is a sound indicator of its practical approach to strengthening and growing from within. Moreover, apprentices like Aneel make their career decisions according to what they find relevant to their future lives, which means they have a long-term vested interest in their employer. "My first apprentice role at Green Telecom was as a Junior Telecoms Engineer," said Aneel. "I started off by learning the basics of telecoms such as the use of Cat 5 cable and how to terminate these at a customer site, and then moved on to system installations and programming."

The ITP's role was to help Aneel settle in at Green

Telecom and Coventry City College where he studied. The ITP also provided a mentor for Aneel to contact should he need help with the NVQ and its associated assignments. His role as Apprentice Telecoms Engineer lasted 18 months, the time it took for him to complete a Level 3 Diploma. "Once I had achieved my qualification I had a review meeting with Steve Hayden to discuss my future role and career ambitions," commented Aneel. "Because I was qualified my job role changed to Telecoms Engineer.

**Support network**
"My work colleagues were supportive with my apprenticeship assignments and NVQ, and I was given all the help I needed. I was also assigned a mentor within the workplace so I had someone to discuss, plan and complete my apprenticeship NVQ. Although studying and working together was challenging, it helped to develop my skills as I was able to put the theory I

was studying into practice almost straight away."

Aneel is now a Senior Engineer and has trained as a multi-skilled employee, enabling him to help in the IT and customer service departments when required. "The apprenticeship scheme not only enabled me to develop technical skills in IT and telecoms, it also helped me to develop key employability skills such as communication, presentation and time management," he explained.

Aneel is currently studying through The Open University to achieve a foundation degree in Networking. "Once I have achieved this I aim to sit the Cisco CCNA exam and in the future look at completing other Cisco certifications," he said. "I will keep my options open for future qualifications and certifications as I think it's important to carry on learning and developing skills to keep up with future technologies in this industry."

Apprentices are more likely to be loyal to a company that has given them an opportunity to gain qualifications and practical experience in the workplace. "I would recommend all businesses to consider employing an apprentice" commented Aneel. "It provides a fantastic opportunity to train a young, willing individual and develop them into the type of employee the company requires. The apprentice can be trained in areas of the business where there is a lack of skilled employees, leading to more productivity and the freeing up of staff time to undertake other responsibilities."

Aneel's success during his apprenticeship was rewarded with an Apprentice of The Year award at the Annual ITP awards evening. "Aneel's story is a fantastic example of the power of apprenticeships and highlights the benefits apprentices bring to any business, large or small," commented Crissi Williams, CEO of the ITP. "It's a win-win situation for both the apprentice and employer, and is almost always a great learning experience for both. Green Telecom has paved the way in terms of employing and developing its apprentices, and we hope this will encourage other businesses to get on board. Even if they only employ one apprentice per year, it can have a huge impact on the bottom line." ◼

# Vendors and resellers ne

**T**he delivery of successful customers solutions is the synergy that exists between vendors and resellers. So, what is the magic formula to powerful win-win partnerships? The simple answer is: Communication.

If you look at a vendor/supplier partnership like a marriage, the key is to learn everything about each other including the good and bad traits that every company has.

The best vendor/reseller relationships require a mutual effort to understand as much as possible about each other's businesses including products, services and revenue models. And resellers that take the time to learn as much as possible about the technical side of a vendor's business will build mutual trust and respect - two of the most basic attributes of successful relationships whether professional or personal.

It is also vital for potential partners to understand shared goals and objectives at the beginning of a campaign or installation so that key accomplishments and milestones can be monitored and achieved. Well informed partners are more likely to provide mutual support enthusiastically and not with 'gritted teeth'.

In conjunction with open and frank dialogue among top executives and sales personnel on the front line, the most successful vendor/reseller relationships also engage end user customers. That includes their best, longest standing customers as well as fledglings that need nurturing to grow. Without end users - without growing demand for vendor product and reseller services - neither channel partner can succeed. Just as vendors and resellers shouldn't independently set agendas without considering each other's' business models or concerns. Engaging with end users separately will lead to bad feeling and will accomplish nothing.

Finally, developing and maintaining a healthy relationship requires vendors and resellers to continually ask questions of each other and revisit goals and objectives and policies. Vendors must also ascertain the motivations and conditions behind their existing channel programmes. For example, are they still valid, or have market conditions, reseller or end user requirements changed to the extent that the programme itself must also evolve?

Relationships of all kinds thrive when they are nurtured. The key to ensuring happy and healthy partnerships is the dedication to continuously improve them. We record and track our partner incentives, training schedules, support systems and portfolio offerings, so that we can review and better them, regularly. This is also the same with our suppliers. Ensuring the health of our partnerships lets our partners know that they are valued, and naturally, that encourages good business in return. Our regionally dedicated Account Managers provide constant support with regular meetings to help us understand our partner's needs, whilst updating them on all new products, pricing and exciting incentives. Being committed to continuously improving partner relationships to achieve 'winning' partnerships.

**CLIFFORD NORTON**
**CHANNEL TELECOM**

People buy from people. It's a huge cliche, but treat your supplier as you'd want to be treated. It's fair to say the partners that we enjoy the best relationship with are those who treat us fairly and are straight with us. It's about building trust and confidence with each other. We provide professional account management of the highest level and hopefully this will help us build a rewarding partnership for both parties. The most effective relationships are based entirely on trust. We endeavour to provide the best service we can and in return we'd like our resellers to trust us and work with us to enable us to provide the best solutions for their clients.

**PETER CROOKS**
**INVOSYS**

A strong relationship between vendors and partners is the cornerstone of business success for both parties. It is important to have shared key objectives and communicate them. At 8x8, this means working with partners who are as ambitious as we are and have the focus and momentum that help us both succeed. We aim to be as open as possible and find the more transparent the relationship, the more successful it is. Also, you should always feel able to ask vendors for help and support when needed. A good vendor will have a strong training programme in place, as well as access to relevant marketing and technical resources, to help improve the bottom line for both parties.

**CHARLES AYLWIN**
**8X8**

Jabra like to work in a consultative way with our channel community and provide support whenever needed. Working in partnership with a reseller who includes us in conference calls and meetings as 'the audio device expert' allows us to provide next level support to aid the partner in successfully closing opportunities. We value channel commitment to becoming an authorised Jabra partner and therefore offer a variety of participation levels within our partner programme to suit all partners and their business objectives around audio devices. At Jabra, we truly believe that working in partnership with our channel to provide an end-to-end service yields the best results. Therefore, utilising our readily available personnel, sales and marketing resources whenever required, is essential.

**NIGEL DUNN**
**JABRA**

**commsvision**
THE GLENEAGLES HOTEL
8TH, 9TH & 10TH NOVEMBER 2017

TAKE YOUR BUSINES

THE NETWORK FOR THE U

# ed to talk more honestly

**PAUL BURN**
**NIMANS**

The easiest way we can help resellers grow their business is for them to share their vision of what they are trying to achieve. We are here for the long haul and develop seamless long-term partnerships. Understanding their business is part of a continual process and journey. We've been in the industry for more than three decades and have developed very strong reseller relationships over that time based on shared commitments and mutual respect. Trust is the biggest element. The best relationships are mixed with a social and a friendly element too as well as professional. We all share the same vision and objectives. If a reseller grows then we grow too.

**NEIL WILSON**
**VIRTUAL1**

Running marketing for a wholesale only vendor, a huge priority for me is enabling our partners to drive and build business. Having come from the channel and worked with the world's biggest vendors, I have seen what can really work well. Projects that get my attention have a partner investing into the activity with their own funds, this always sharpens the focus and delivers better results for everyone. Next, I look for a detailed and well thought out plan, with appropriate timescales, demonstrating the approach to build-up, execution and importantly, but often overlooked, follow up. Furthermore, seeing definitive objectives and timescales, such as a number of deals or expected revenue.

**MANDY FAZELYNIA**
**ZEST4**

Zest4 are 100% dedicated to the Channel and 100% dedicated to supporting partners - whether it's over the phone, attending meetings in the office or out onsite with clients. All we ask is that our partners offer the same level of commitment to our partnership and that they invest their time and resource into our training and onboarding initiatives. Our focus has always been and firmly remains on building a mutually beneficial relationship. We don't set targets and we leave business ownership completely in our partners' hands, but by building an open and honest close working relationship, both ourselves and our partners reap the rewards. Our dedication to support and our flexible approach are the key to Zest4's partnership success.

**DARYL PILE**
**GAMMA**

Long-term success in the channel depends on more than product alone. Rarely does the move from one vendor to another generate success primarily based on 'new' features. To produce the big results, partners need a supplier with the right balance of price, solutions and support. Without this the relationship can be unproductive, stifled by a lack of expertise and backing. At Gamma, we make it easy for partners, providing access to the Gamma Academy for all their training needs, 'Accelerate' for white-label marketing material / lead generation and the Gamma Portal to provision and manage services online. With these tools partners can focus on what they do best – providing excellent customer service and offering clients the right solutions for their needs.

**NICK GOODENOUGH**
**SPITFIRE**

We look to partner with resellers that share the same customer-focused ethos as ourselves. That's why we have many IT support companies as partners, because they place a high emphasis on personalised customer service.   Our partners don't need to sell huge volumes of services, but we do want an ongoing dialogue. Partners can get more out of the relationship if they attend the training events, round table lunches and the annual partner conference which we hold. Like any relationship it works best if there is trust on both sides. With trust we can have a relationship with the reseller's customers that allows us to provide a better service to both our partner and their customers

**DEREK WATSON**
**AURORA**

Often business objectives at corporate level can be broad, but a customer who can translate these objectives into clear business plans is always good to work with. Time and resource are the greatest commitment a customer can make to us.  Often billing problems can't be solved instantly and by taking a longer, more strategic view, customers can drive real value from the information gathered over time. This data can then be analysed and turned into useful insights which actually drive better change. 100% communication is also vital. Even when a project has launched there should be a clear handover plan and SLA monitoring to ensure that the customer is still driving the best value possible throughout the products/ service lifetime.

# MIT's Andrew Lippman a

## join inspirational line-up

Comms Dealer has announced an acclaimed line-up of keynote speakers for this year's Comms Vision Convention at the world famous Gleneagles Hotel, 8th-10th November.

### PANEL SESSIONS & DEBATES...

**Capitalising on digital innovation – the new frontier in comms:** What next moves should the channel take to capitalise on new sources of value, and what will the winners in tomorrow's market look like?

**Automation and AI – The new realities of customer engagement and the workplace:** How will automation and AI shape the future workforce? And how can the channel define its destiny in this world?

**Is culture change key to unlocking digital potential?** Business transformation is not just a matter of external technological forces, which raises a key question that must be addressed: How can we build cultural confidence into our digital future?

Conference Chair is confirmed as Andrew Lippman, Associate Director and co-founder of the globally renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab and one of the world's foremost researchers on the evolution of digital technology. He is also a Senior Research Scientist and co-Director for Digital Life. Andrew's highly animated and engaging approach to discussing the latest trends and research will give Comms Vision conferees compelling insights into the future of communications technology.

**ANDREW LIPPMAN**

In a rare conference appearance TalkTalk Executive Chairman Sir Charles Dunstone will take part in an exclusive conversation and share his thoughts and experiences on challenging the status quo and stepping outside the norm, while creating a business culture that fuels growth and puts the customer first. "I'm looking forward to this year's Comms Vision at Gleneagles in November and in particular to having the opportunity to get to know our partner community better," he said.

"Having worked in UK telecoms for over 25 years, I love the industry and have always found these events a great way to meet people and explore how to do more business together."

Also keynoting is Adrian Tucker, Chief Technology Officer, Public Sector/Retail,

**CHARLES DUNSTONE**

who spearheaded an 18 month technology transformation for the Department for Education. He will show how the project changed the culture of mobility and ways of working across the department; and discuss the challenges of realising opportunities through new technologies and how the hurdles were overcome. Adrian will also explain why digital is more about exposing value chains than making business processes faster; and why it's important for technology suppliers to develop a collaborative partnership with customers as a prerequisite to easing the transition to digital.

**ADRIAN TUCKER**

David Dunbar, Director at Workmodes Consulting, is well known for leading the development of BT's flexible working strategy, and as Head of Digital Workplace and Transformation at Nationwide he was responsible for planning and driving the digital transformation for 20,000 people. In his keynote, David will illustrate why a strong digital workplace strategy is crucial to the success of transforming organisations towards more agile, more flexible workplaces through technology, the physical space and culture.

**DAVID DUNBAR**

Optimising the workforce through technology is also a big theme for Euan Davis, who leads the Centre for

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# nd Sir Charles Dunstone

**EUAN DAVIS**

the Future of Work in Europe at Cognizant Technology Solutions. In his Comms Vision keynote session Euan will explore the future direction of workplace digitalisation, how technology providers can help to deliver the future of work, and show why all enterprises must rethink their operations in terms of technology, process and skills to create value and survive.

Survival is ultimately a matter of leadership, therefore 8x8 will introduce Mark Rhodes, author and international leadership speaker, whose keynote will emphasise why the future success of digitalisation in the workplace is as much about effective leadership development as it is technological innovation. He will explain what transformational leadership means in the more complex digital workplace, and why business and cultural change is imperative and can be achievable without having a negative impact on customer service. Mark will also outline new management skills and offer guidance on creating an organisational culture which together will unlock leadership success at a time of unprecedented workplace transformation.

**MARK RHODES**

A key driver of this transformation is the rise of SD-WANs and their impact on the UK ICT market, which will be disruptive and seminal, says Mark Lewis, EVP of Products & Development at Interoute. In his Comms Vision keynote, Mark will highlight the power of SD-WANs to digitally transform businesses, and shine a light on how giving CIO's what they want with a SD-WAN strategy will create new business opportunities for the partner channel. Mark will also outline where SD-WAN fits into the next generation of IT infrastructure – the new Cloud Fabric.

**MARK LEWIS**

Gamma CEO Bob Falconer will elaborate on why digital transformation starts with the channel partner, and discuss how the channel can more effectively expand on its capacity to foster customer ties and derive greater margin, value and differentiation from innovative real-world network-based solutions. Building on this strand, Steve Best, Managing Director for Product Management, Strategy and Regulatory Affairs at BT Wholesale, will explore how resellers can successfully become a competing force in the new digital enterprise. He will discuss how the channel can respond most effectively to the new ICT ecosystem and on-demand world, driven by the rise of M2M, the IoT, growth in bandwidth, and new technologies such as NFV and SDN.

**BOB FALCONER**

**STEVE BEST**

CityFibre, the disruptive infrastructure builder, and Entanet, the channel-centric connectivity wholesaler, are united by their shared vision on the essential role of full-fibre in serving the growing needs of the digital workplace. In their session, CityFibre Director of Strategy Mark Collins and Entanet CEO Elsa Chen will rally the channel to embrace the power they have to deliver full-fibre at scale and ultimately help to make Digital Britain a reality.

**ELSA CHEN**

Comms Vision's enlightening line-up of keynote speakers and panel sessions (see box opposite) embrace all of the key elements that make up the overriding theme at this year's conference – 'Workplace and customer experience – Redefined for the digital age'. "We will explore the trends that are currently shaping and redefining the digital workplace, and examine the role of the partner channel and service provider community in bringing workplace and customer experiences fully into the digital age," commented Stuart Gilroy, Comms Vision Content Lead. ■

**Comms Vision special report continues on page 40**

COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. Places are limited and by invitation: If you would like to join us this year, please register your interest to attend at www.commsvision.com

**We will explore the trends shaping and redefining the digital workplace**

# Altnets set to play pivot

## backs Digital Britain

Government support in favour of Digital Britain has in part been catalysed by consultations with Comms Vision Platinum sponsor CityFibre, creating the foundations for channel partners to step up and leverage their new-found power to help shape the nation's digital future, explains CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch who outlines the significant opportunity at hand.

### FULL-FIBRE FUNDS EXPLAINED...

**Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) Programme:** A £200 million Government subsidy for local authorities to spend on full-fibre between now and 2020/21. The LFFN programme will also incorporate a new Gigabit-ready voucher scheme for business connections targeted at SMEs.

**Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund (DIFF):** A £400 million fund in support of alternative network builders. Government funds will be distributed via private sector fund managers that have to match the funding, representing a total £800 million.

**D**igital Britain without an all pervading pure fibre infrastructure is like a moon mission without a rocket. It won't get off the ground. But since Digital Britain is in CityFibre's sights, and also Government policy, the countdown has begun with manifestoed launchpads already in place. These include the Government's Digital Strategy which supports the roll out of a UK-wide full-fibre infrastructure and is one aspect of the wider Industrial Strategy for the post-Brexit economy. "We've input heavily on both because we believe that the Digital Strategy should not be seen as a pillar in its own right, but as an enabler for the delivery of the entire Industrial Strategy," commented Mesch. "Our lobbying on behalf of the channel and the UK has not gone unheard. Unlike a year ago, there's now no ambiguity in the Government's commitment to widespread full-fibre coverage, and it continues to value our input."

You don't need to be a rocket scientist to see that the Government is in favour of full-fibre to the tune of millions through new programmes that support and applaud the work of alternative fibre infrastructure providers such as CityFibre – its mission being to disrupt the incumbent and bring world class connectivity to those not embraced by the M25 ring. "Sharing a bold vision and strategy is important, but not enough," added Mesch. "Setting clear goals, implementing programmes to deliver those targets and stimulating a competitive national infrastructure market is vital. We are seeing great strides in all of these areas."

But Digital Britain depends on more than Government intervention, so CityFibre and Entanet are calling on the partner channel to play their critical part in shaking up the connectivity status quo underpinned by the incumbent. Such a move has already been taken by CityFibre's Gigabit City launch partners who, hand in hand with CityFibre, have made Digital Britain a reality in their local regions. CityFibre and Entanet now offer, in effect, an opportunity for the wider partner community to clear the national deck of copper and connectivity flat-Earthism.

### Staunch Government support

In breaking new ground, the Government has manifestoed its five year fibre roll out goal to have fibre spines in 100 towns and cities and fibre to the premises in 10 million homes by 2022, with a clear pathway towards national coverage by the end of the decade. "These are not just DCMS targets," explained Mesch. "The commitment to full-fibre is a Government-wide agenda supported right up to Downing Street and the Prime Minister."

The first sign of Government intent on these matters emerged in the Chancellor's 2016 Autumn Statement where £1.14 billion was committed to support new full fibre and 5G network roll outs. "What we've seen since, via the Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund (DIIF) and Local Full Fibre Networks (LFFN) programme (see panel), is a commitment to invest that money in real projects that make full-fibre network build and expansion happen," added Mesch. "These programmes demonstrate that the Government is listening to alternative network

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providers like CityFibre and following through on a publicly voiced commitment to 'actively support the challenger'. The Government's position on creating a competitive UK infrastructure environment is clear. From a competition perspective, a primary reason that the proposed merger of Three UK and O2 was rejected by the European Commission was the viewpoint that four national providers were needed to ensure a healthy, competitive mobile market. In the fixed market we don't have anything close to four national players, emphasising again why the Government has chosen to introduce measures that support the challengers rather than subsidise or incentivise the incumbent alone."

### Fibre campaign advances

For CityFibre, Government backing adds a dollop of grease to wheels that are already spinning fast as the full fibre infrastructure provider advances its campaign convoy across new territory, bringing unprecedented opportunities to local authorities and the channel. "With or without Government support CityFibre would still build of course, and we have already raised significant amounts of money to do so," added Mesch. "Even where a local authority is the initial anchor for a new network build, businesses will always reap the benefits thanks to our shared infrastructure model. What the programmes do add for us though is a huge potential boost, allowing us to build into new towns and cities faster and significantly expand what we already have. In parallel, and to the benefit of the channel, they also put pressure on the incumbent to up its game."

The inevitable move from legacy to full fibre represents a rare opportunity for the partner channel to influence and shape the future infrastructure supply landscape. "Resellers have the decisional power to ensure that, by the time we've completed the full-fibre evolution and transformation as a country, the power to drive improvements does not sit with one major provider," said Mesch. "It's a choice and responsibility that needs to be taken seriously. The CityFibre model only needs the channel to redirect a requirement for legacy solutions towards an alternative network choice. This commitment alone can give us the power to build a superior whole-city network from scratch."

Openreach is consulting on how to deliver full fibre, but its big challenge is how to identify enough incremental benefit to justify a wide scale network upgrade. "The more we build and the more our network is utilised, the greater the competitive pressure on the incumbent to invest," emphasised Mesch. "This will lead to a positive competitive dynamic that will ultimately benefit the channel and UK Plc for many years to come, made possible by the partner channel making a simple, empowered choice.

"By owning the end user conversation the partner channel can identify and generate demand, helping companies like CityFibre to build fibre infrastructure where it's needed. Part of this process will leverage the new Government voucher scheme designed to help realise its infrastructure transformation objective. The scheme is in the latter stages of formation and has been greatly influenced by industry feedback."

According to Mesch, the scheme's success will hinge on how far it drives a full-fibre network build, stimulates long-term competitive infrastructure choice and helps to deliver a superior product and user experience. "Entanet and CityFibre will embrace the scheme's pilot stage in full, and we'll be asking for and consolidating feedback from our partners," added Mesch. "We'll also gladly represent views from any other channel business that would like to share with us what is working and what isn't."

Having a say in the future roll out of full-fibre is the partner channel's chance to influence Digital Britain and draw a line under the limitations of legacy copper. Just as compelling, the Government has put the deployment of pure fibre at the top of its agenda and is constructively engaging with altnets like CityFibre. "The tide of Government support is in our favour, and with it a national full-fibre transformational infrastructure is ours to create together," enthused Mesch. "The channel must leverage the tremendous power within its grasp. At Comms Vision next month, CityFibre and Entanet will rally delegates and the wider partner community to join us on a mission to redefine the digital landscape and finally release businesses from the shackles of copper." ∎

**Entanet rallies the channel to go full-fibre >>>**

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### The channel must now leverage the tremendous power within its grasp

# Why putting fibre at the

## is the channel's call

CityFibre and Entanet hold a single position: That full-fibre is the future, and that the partner channel has a golden opportunity to influence and accelerate the long-quested Holy Grail – Digital Britain.

**CityFibre and Entanet will put out a call to arms to join us on our mission to release as many businesses as possible from the shackles of copper by 2020**

Entanet and CityFibre epitomise the alchemy of complementary partnerships. CityFibre, the disruptive infrastructure builder, and Entanet, the channel-centric connectivity wholesaler, are united by a shared vision about the vital importance of fibre to serve the growing needs of the digital workplace. "We saw an opportunity to join forces with CityFibre and accelerate the mission to make widespread full-fibre happen faster while also representing the all-important voice of the channel and end customer on that journey," said Entanet CEO Elsa Chen. "We can help the channel unleash opportunities for hundreds of legacy-shackled businesses across the UK, while bringing down prices, driving up the quality of service and making Digital Britain a reality."

Entanet's tight alignment with the needs of the channel is made tighter still by its capacity to mobilise resources to solve the UK's connectivity related challenges in a completely new way, leveraging the complementary expertise of CityFibre to empower the channel to shake-up the status quo and deliver full-fibre at scale, ultimately bringing about more fertile conditions for service and product improvements and greater autonomy for the channel. A far cry from how things have stood until now, with the circumstances controlled by all-powerful incumbents and opportunities scarce.

As well as a springboard for full-fibre based products and fresh fibre solutions, Entanet has become an aggregator of demand to fuel network build and expansion across the nation. "Full-fibre is not yet ubiquitous," added Chen. "It will have to be one day, but CityFibre, Entanet and our partners have the power to accelerate this exponentially and drive a whole host of positive outcomes for end customers and the nation at large.

"By partnering with us and choosing modern full-fibre wherever it increasingly exists, and by helping to influence network expansion, the channel has an unmissable opportunity to be right at the heart of the independent, full-fibre revolution. It's the start of a new legacy for Britain that is changing the competitive landscape forever and bringing much needed choice. With choice comes power, giving partners a real voice, enabling greater differentiation and sparking the next wave of innovative business products and services that are already starting to need gigabit speeds."

### The empowered channel's new role
Entanet's proposition and mission to reverse a connectivity status quo that has become ever more entrenched makes every kind of sense, firing up the channel's influence over the development of Digital Britain, so long as partners make business decisions that count towards that end. "A national full-fibre transformational infrastructure is ours to create together," stated Chen. "Where there's proven demand for our connectivity we'll expand our network to meet it. By migrating customers and/or transferring spend to Entanet at no additional cost resellers can also create more business opportunities."

Chen said that the task for the channel now is to fasten minds on what can be changed. Why? Because with every full-fibre decision, Britain's digital infrastructure just gets stronger. "The big change to the channel is about influence," added Chen. "The direct consequence of Entanet and CityFibre joining forces is that the

# heart of Digital Britain

channel can capitalise on their relationship with a new breed of connectivity wholesaler that owns full-fibre infrastructure in the ground and has the power to offer it as a true alternative to the legacy options. Where there's aggregate demand for anchoring network expansion in existing footprints, and even embarking on new city projects, we'll take action. Even where partners have connectivity estates in areas that aren't on-net, we'll build out to reach them if there's a business case."

These are not considerations for tomorrow, the full-fibre solution is embedded in partner choices today, and Entanet's vision is to empower partners to never sell a copper service if a fibre alternative exists. "By diverting spend to a CityFibre-based Entanet service whenever it's available, channel partners not only gain a full-fibre gigabit experience, often at a lower price, they can also directly support the growth of a competitive infrastructure environment that will spread better services across the industry," explained Chen.

The straightforward but highly influential decision to go for full-fibre will catalyse ripples of change. Across the board in multiples, decisions like these will create a wave of digital transformation with the momentum to carry forward the Government's vision that 'the future of high-speed and high quality connectivity lies in deeper, more extensive full-fibre networks'. "This is an approach Entanet and CityFibre echo as we invest heavily across the UK to deliver ever increasing numbers of Gigabit connected cities," said Chen.

"That's why, as a wholesaler, Entanet is making available an alternative full-fibre network from which the channel can build fast, secure and competitive connectivity solutions for customers – with full visibility, control and influence over the underlying network's development in a true partnership model. Our network is growing at pace, and while we can't be everywhere in the immediate term – necessitating us to continue to provide services

that aren't currently on a full-fibre network – our infrastructure build programme is ambitious and we want the channel to play a key role in its acceleration."

Digitalisation is clearly transforming the workplace. It is also showing what copper cannot do, and what full-fibre can achieve. "In the digital workplace there's no place for anything that hinders staff and their ability to focus on their core functionality, their role and objectives," added Chen. "They expect fast and reliable access to data and systems from anywhere and via any device. That expectation is driving demand for faster and more future-proof connectivity infrastructure including full-fibre fixed line connectivity and mobile backhaul."

Entanet knows that bringing about the full promise of Digital Britain comes with challenges for the partner channel. And it knows perfectly well what's required to help partners abandon their acceptance of the status quo and examine the choices now available to them. "Market and technology readiness are key challenges," confirmed Chen. "This means resellers must develop relationships with suppliers that can give them an edge. That's why we have created a full-fibre connectivity-based proposition that meets both technical and commercial needs."

With CityFibre, Entanet brings fast wires-only 500Mbps and 1Gbps Internet access products and Ethernet connections that undermine the pricing available from the 'usual' carriers, claimed Chen. Without full-fibre alternatives to counter the limitations of copper, Digital Britain is impossible. But a small army of 'disruptor' partners will be required to establish new beachheads and make the necessary advances. "At Comms Vision, CityFibre and Entanet will put out a call to arms to join us on our mission to release as many businesses as possible from the shackles of copper by 2020," stated Chen. "And to do this, in part, by embracing the commercial propositions that we'll unveil at the event." ■

**With every full-fibre decision, Britain's digital future just gets stronger**

# Why the workplace will b

## of collaboration tools

Without innovations in collaboration a fully optimised workforce is impossible, according to Andy Brocklehurst, Head of Collaboration for EMEAR at Cisco, who says digitalisation of the workplace is all about the teamwork tools that make transformations happen.

**T**he time and opportunity has never been greater for collaboration in the workplace, and Cisco is setting the teamwork agenda, claims Brocklehurst. "We are witnessing phenomenal growth in the use of team collaboration tools," he said. "Team apps, such as Cisco Spark, are fast becoming the default medium for group projects and team tasks. They transform the way people work and meet, enabling them to participate, create and share across any device, whether in the office, at home or on the road. Good collaboration involves a continuous stream of messaging, meeting, calling, content creation and sharing – before, during and post-meeting or interaction. This is why we believe you need one platform that brings it all together simply, seamlessly and most importantly, securely."

Demand for collaboration tools is beyond doubt, and the days of punching in and zoning out are over. But while more people in more places are doing things together, it is no longer enough to just meet and communicate, says Brocklehurst. "Knowledge workers must be empowered by the tools around them," he added. "You cannot schedule innovation, so you have to enable it as an always-on element of the organisational culture. Companies need to make their workstreams more fluid and allow for cross-functional cooperation anytime. Therefore, it is crucial that collaboration technology is aligned to workflows and business processes."

With open APIs Cisco creates those connection points between technology and workflows at the points where people need it most. "We enable natural and effective workflows rather than force people to adapt to technologies," added Brocklehurst. "Platforms such as Cisco Spark are open to developers and we already have dozens of bots and integrations that can automate tasks or speed up and optimise workflows."

The Cisco Spark all-in-one collaboration platform was introduced in Europe and the UK at the beginning of this year. Cisco is also working with partners to introduce new solutions such as the Business Edition 4000 – a calling platform for companies with up to 200 users, and to expand the adoption of video collaboration. "We have democratised video on the desktop, introduced better and cheaper calling solutions and, finally, with a flexible subscription model any customer can now consume as much collaboration as they need without large upfront capital expenditures," added Brocklehurst.

### Changing the work paradigm

Video still plays an important role. The launch of the Cisco Spark Board 55 inch was the most successful in Cisco's collaboration portfolio's history, bringing together wireless presentation, digital whiteboarding and video conferencing all in one device. Cisco has expanded the offering with Cisco Spark Board 70 inch and Cisco Spark Room Kits for more intelligent video and audio communications in smaller room environments.

"We see a huge opportunity in changing the work paradigm to a world where people come together wherever they are, to do their best work simply and effectively," added Brocklehurst. "Far too many meeting rooms are unconnected or connected with outdated, unfriendly technology. Too many virtual meetings, when

> **Knowledge workers must be empowered by the tools around them to create and share instantly – anywhere, anytime**

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they happen, put people through misery and make teamwork harder. Working parents waste hours on meaningless commutes. Smart brains are not fully involved in innovation and agile working because of time or geographical boundaries. And too many customers are not happy because they can't interact with companies from the place, device or at the time they need to. Our strategy is simple: We want to bring all this to a much better place using the capacity and power of collaboration technology, whether it's meeting solutions, calling platforms or customer experience and contact centre offers."

Cisco works with partners closely to support them with this transition, especially in putting thought leadership and technology innovation into the market. Cisco also provides perspective and educated options to offer simplicity, ease of use and integration of technology tools as must-haves for this digitalisation process to be successful.

"Redefining partner value is important in the context of a changing working landscape," noted Brocklehurst. "As an ecosystem we need to go beyond the sale and deployment, and extend value to the customer in how they use and adopt new collaboration technology. This should include lifecycle and adoption services to ensure the 'dream is delivered' and users reap maximum benefit from the technology. We also need to create and sustain the skills to embed into workflows and processes, either in-house or through partnering."

The collaboration solutions that enable the Cisco connected workplace integrate three key components to deliver a transformative working experience: The workspace design, policy and technology. But the key consideration for a collaboration agenda is people, the beating heart of any organisation that creates, innovates and gets work done. Key questions to be addressed are: How do they need to be supported? How do they need to communicate and collaborate with each other? The answers lie in a paradigm shift where hierarchies fall apart and structures become more flat, believes Brocklehurst. "Against this backdrop leadership is key to driving usage of newly implemented collaboration technology, via the communication of processes, user guidelines and empowering teams," he added. "Partners also need to redefine value here. We can no longer trade on resolving infrastructure or technology complexity. Now it's about solving real customer issues rather than pushing out vendor technologies that are looking for a problem to fix."

According to Brocklehurst, Cisco collaboration continues to focus on reinventing the workplace with tools that fade into the background and let people get work done faster. For example, a Cisco-sponsored report by the Harvard Business Review Analytic Services ('The changing nature of teams') confirmed when it was published in September 2016 that one in three executives already consolidate existing solutions to improve collaboration. Things can only get better, says Brocklehurst. "Virtual Reality (VR), visual collaboration, bots, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are emerging in the market, and Cisco is working on projects in this space," he confirmed.

Analytics will be crucial, noted Brocklehurst. "If companies are to make full use of the power of their data they should watch every line of code and understand how it impacts the user experience, application and infrastructure performance, while providing real-time insight into everything going on inside a digital business," he said. "Business and DevOps leaders rely on real-time insights and code level visibility to make mission critical and strategic improvements to their apps. Teams across the enterprise can collaborate and drive the business from a single source of truth. With our AppDynamics recent acquisition, Cisco enables just that.

"We are also quickly incorporating Mindmeld technology into our product portfolio after our recent acquisition of the company. Additionally, Cisco is in tune with user sentiment on AI and has a different perspective on the technology. Watch this space for interesting developments coming in the near future." ■

## The days of punching in and zoning out are over

# Mid-market player rises

Node4's appointment of Andrew Wilson as Director of Channel Sales early this year was a clear sign of strategic intent. Here, Wilson discusses his channel strategy and underlines Node4's status as a growing force in the mid-market.

## Just a minute with Andrew Wilson...

**Role model?** Alex Ferguson, the ultimate role model for leadership

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be a pro-mountain biker

**What do you fear the most?** Stupid people having too much power

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I have a law degree

**One example of something you have overcome:** I was badly injured in a sporting accident only a few years ago. It was potentially life threatening and resulted in a long period off work and rehabilitation

**How would you like to be remembered?** As someone who made a difference and put a real dent in the channel

**Top tip for resellers:** Take the time to understand your market and focus on key objectives, the audience and the approach you take. Do your due diligence and don't waste time with a scattergun approach

**How do you relax when not working?** Throwing myself down mountains either on a snowboard or a mountain bike

**W**ilson was drafted in by one of the UK's first ISPs straight out of university and he counts himself fortunate to have worked alongside some of the industry's early pioneers, an experience that later helped him to spearhead the launch of Virgin Media Business's ultrafast broadband products to the channel for the first time when many thought it wouldn't work. Other subsequent roles include positions at C&W and more recently Daisy Group where he helped to deliver growth across a variety of channel verticals by introducing data and VoIP solutions to the base.

Wilson moved from Virgin to Node4 in January this year and his immediate task was to educate the channel about the growth of Node4, especially through its new 'hidden in plain sight' campaign that promotes the company as far more than just a data centre provider. "We've transformed to become an IT provider of cloud-based technologies targeted at the mid-market," stated Wilson.

Node4's channel business, called Partner Markets,

**Andrew Wilson**

is responsible for 40 per cent of the organisation's turnover. "It's a significant part for the business," added Wilson. "With a focus on the mid-market community the channel is one of the key areas of our growth strategy. Too many organisations fail to look at their partners' customers and their challenges. But we believe that our heavy investment in mid-market research will be key to our partners' success.

"It's about enabling partners, no matter what size or shape,

to address the needs of mid-market customers. We have a number of proof points in terms of the value we add to these size businesses, so we are taking that into the channel to help our partners understand and address increasingly savvy and demanding customers."

### Three key pillars

Based on its research and experience Node4 has swung its attention onto three primary business challenges – cloud/IT transformation, workplace

optimisation through UC and collaboration, and challenging convention on layered IT security to help businesses focus on their risk profile rather than product and threat.

"Enabling partners is key," commented Wilson. "Our business offers a complete end-to-end solution with a fast-growing services portfolio. We have more than 60 accreditations from Cisco alone, multiple accreditations from Microsoft, Fortinet, Netapp, Zerto and most recently Veeam. So we are keen to ensure that the channel gains access to this portfolio along with the support they need to grow their own businesses."

Alongside its well established products and services portfolio Node4 is keeping abreast of IoT and AI which Wilson says will be 'massive'. "The industry moves quickly so resellers need to be educated on developments such as IoT and AI, and maintain a constant view of the security landscape," he added. "As the landscape evolves and data becomes an even more important commodity, the approach to detection versus protection is sitting high on our agenda."

Also top of Node4's to do list is maintaining the beating drum of its 'hidden in plain sight' message which the company hopes will soon be redundant. "The channel will become well aware of our position as an IT provider of cloud-based technologies to the mid-market," stated Wilson. "We will get to this position through the evolution of our solution set, meeting end user challenges, partner enablement and customer loyalty." ∎

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# E-learning for success

One of American revolutionary Benjamin Franklin's most quoted sayings was 'An investment in knowledge pays the best interest'. Two hundred years on, Fidelity Group's Alan Shraga is issuing the same dictum to UK ICT resellers, urging them to embrace e-learning and ramp up digital revenues.

**Alan Shraga**

**S**hraga has relished being a disruptor during his 25-year career in telecoms. Fidelity, the company he set up with co-founder Simon Payne seven years ago has already demonstrated the ability to pioneer new revenue streams for channel partners through endeavours into M2M and energy. Now, Shraga has turned his sharp eye on the e-learning market, which he believes is an untapped cash resource for resellers keen to develop their trusted advisor status.

Fidelity has built a reputation for forging channel portals to simplify resellers' business processes. Anvil was one of the first telecoms billing platforms and Ambolt enables partners to simplify and manage moves into energy provision. Now, Fidelity's new education portal, developed with e-learning giant e-Careers, is helping comms and IT resellers offer customers valuable online courses across the business spectrum and boost revenues as margins in traditional services decline.

Shraga's lightbulb moment came when he was investigating sending his own managers on PRINCE 2 project management courses plus a Sage introductory course for a new account team member. "The costs were astronomical. For PRINCE 2 it was £2-3,000 for a residential five-day course with a set of exams at the end," recalled Shraga. "We were looking at a £50,000 investment in training to upskill our people and I thought there had to be a better and more cost-effective way to get our people qualified and have less impact on our business and their family life. We found out that e-learning was 10 per cent of the cost and our people could do the courses in their own time at their own pace. It was a no brainer.

"We then came across e-Careers in Slough. PRINCE 2 project management courses were a big seller for them and they had also sold thousands of other courses by partnering with educational providers in the UK namely colleges, universities and adult education groups. Because of the Government cuts and the new fees that students are facing, colleges and universities have started to offer e-learning to reduce costs. It's a combination course where you have tutor time and e-learning modules within the university or college framework."

### Channel's on course

Fidelity's e-Learning platform now gives channel partners access to over 500 business courses to sell to customers including project management, Microsoft 365, cyber security, accounting, human resources and health and safety. "Microsoft themselves have admitted there are not enough training companies to deliver the number of courses they are selling," commented Shraga.

"Selling a 365 licence carries a minimal margin and installing it is all fine, but when you are deploying it across a SME are they likely to invest £4,000 in training? No. But they will invest £150 for access to an online course for one year that educates employees on features such as OneDrive and Sharepoint for maximum benefit from that licence."

When you look at channel partners with enterprise customers wanting to train hundreds of staff, the 20 per cent margins resellers can earn from e-learning gets exciting, especially when corporates can get money back from the Government on the levies now imposed on them to train staff, as Shraga explained.

"The Government has levied a new tax on corporate companies, so if your PAYE bill is over £3 million per annum you now pay an apprenticeship levy. It is taken when corporates pay their National Insurance and you can claim that back if you invest in training. If you don't do it you lose it. Corporate reseller customers are paying that tax now so there is a huge demand for training. We have already had some enquiries for 500 training licences.

"With our data protection and cyber security courses available and providing up to 20 per cent margin for the reseller, there are huge revenue opportunities for the channel to help their customers to prepare for the GDPR and to further protect their businesses."

Fidelity piloted its e-learning initiative via a poll sent out to reseller customers in its monthly bill run and Shraga says he was astonished by the feedback. "It was the biggest response we have ever had," he commented. "Within 90 seconds we had the first enquiry for e-learning course training."

Shraga is convinced the simplicity of the Fidelity portal and the breadth of courses available will help resellers to drive new revenues into their business and improve customer stickiness. "For channel partners, the opportunity to become a customer champion is available through our e-learning portal now," said Shraga. "They can be educated on achieving sales on the phone, closing techniques, data protection and cyber security, on PRINCE 2 or AGILE, or health and safety to comply with Government regulation – the list is endless.

"It's instant access to learning. Small businesses need to invest in training their people to keep abreast of fast paced changes in technology. That's why I am so convinced that online e-learning will be of significant interest to the channel and their customers." ■

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# Day hired in UK push


Steve Day

EXPERIENCED channel builder Steve Day is to lead West Unified Communications Services' new UK partner recruitment campaign. He joined the cloud contact centre specialist from hosted telephony provider Sipsynergy and has also held channel roles at Avaya, BroadSoft and Mitel. His new remit is to recruit channel partners for West's Cloud Contact Pro platform which offers multi-media capabilities to contact centres of all sizes.

Enda Kenneally, VP Sales & Business Development, commented: "We see the channel as a key route to market for West Cloud Contact Pro. Steve's role is newly created, but one that we see as absolutely critical to our future success."

According to research by West, poor customer experiences have resulted in circa £234 billion of lost value to UK companies in a typical year. It's a trend that Day hopes to reverse by introducing Cloud Contact Pro to UK businesses via channel partners. "A user friendly interface creates the kind of customer experiences that today's consumers are demanding," he claimed. "Cloud Contact Pro also allows our channel partners to create deeper relationships with their own customers."

# Proops pops up at distie

MARK Proops has joined Pragma as Head of Technical Operations, moving from Civica Cloud and Managed Services where he worked for nine years. His experience includes heading up a mix of technical support teams including network operations, data centre management and infrastructure support.
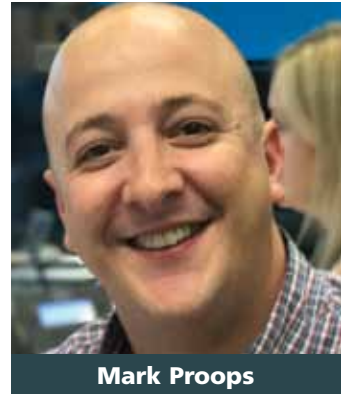

Mark Proops

Proops will build on the reseller support structure for Pragma's Ericsson-LG iPECS cloud and UC proposition. With new Ericsson-LG iPECS on-premise, cloud and UC application products in the pipeline, Proops will also focus on training reseller technical engineers.

Will Morey, Sales and Marketing Director at Pragma, said: "Mark's wealth of experience and capabilities will help us to continue moving our technical support offering in the right direction and strengthen Ericsson-LG's position in the market."

## Also on the move...


Jenny Hicks

**AUDIO visual and document solutions distributor Midwich has promoted Jenny Hicks to the role of Head of Technology. She has been with the firm since 2012, joining the technical division as an IP Video Specialist. Hicks then progressed to the role of Technology Manager, and following the launch of the Technical Division she managed the firm's Technology Specialists and Technical Support teams. Tom Sumner, European Director, stated: "Jenny's strong technical knowledge, coupled with a sound commercial awareness will be of great benefit to the wider international Group, in addition to our UK operations."**

**LEE Henderson is to head up the telesales team at Preston-based Halo Connect, moving from Fibrecloud where in a similar role he saw the**


Lee Henderson

**department grow from three to 38 employees during his tenure. He said: "I'm excited about how hosted products can help small businesses operate more efficiently. I can't wait to pass on my experiences to our staff and ensure they are confident when talking to potential customers about them." Director Jonathan Walker added: "Lee has extensive experience, in particular Virgin Media Business broadband which is a key part of our business."**

# MoD vet set for NG Bailey


Tim Briggs-Mould

MINISTRY of Defence veteran Tim Briggs-Mould has joined NG Bailey's IT Services division as Defence Operations Director.

Briggs-Mould served in the Royal Navy for 37 years and joins NG Bailey from the MoD where he has spent the last five years working as Head of the British Forces Cyprus CIS branch and Head of Information Systems and Services in Cyprus.

"NG Bailey's IT Services division has over a decade's worth of experience delivering structured cabling contracts to the defence industry and continues to play a critical role in the sector's digital transformation," commented Briggs-Mould.

The defence sector is a key growth area for NG Bailey's IT Services division, which specialises in the design, supply, installation, management and maintenance of voice, data and structured cabling solutions to contracting, enterprise and public-sector clients.

Briggs-Mould will report directly to Kelly Tedesco, Business Development Director, IT Services.

Tedesco added: "Digital transformation in the defence sector remains a key growth area for us. Providing effective IT services to this sector requires a depth of knowledge and awareness that only a defence specialist can deliver."

# Hicks and Brunt join Liquid Voice


Matthew Hicks (left) and Andrew Brunt

LIQUID Voice has appointed Matthew Hicks and Andrew Brunt as Channel Development Managers responsible for building the company's EMEA reseller channels. Brunt has over 12 years experience of the contact centre market and previously worked at Adtech Global where he was Regional Sales Director. Hicks brings more than 11 years experience of working with channel partners in the UK and Latin America. He joins from Service Source.

Chris Berry, co-founder of Liquid Voice and Managing Director of the company's UK operation, said: "Andrew and Matthew will play a leading role in building and supporting Liquid Voice's channel network as we continue to develop new contact centre and control room solutions."

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