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to channel as NGA  
Non-Exec p21

Olson-Chapman:  
Prepare to fibre up, but  
hurdles remain p30



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THE UK's fibre-fest has spawned yet another major investment deal with Infracapital snaring a 50% stake in SSE Enterprise Telecoms late last month.

**SPECIAL REPORT**

The pre-Christmas £380m deal values SSE Enterprise Telecoms at over £700m and creates a shared ownership structure designed to accelerate the comms provider's plans for growth in the fibre sector.

The transaction also underscores the comms sector's vibrant and ongoing M&A and investment activity as the nation gears up for Digital Britain.

SSE Enterprise Telecoms MD Colin Sempill (pictured

above) said: "Both parties see this investment as an opportunity to help develop the network infrastructure this country needs to turn the UK's vision of a digital economy into reality."

Infracapital is a high profile and active investor in the telecoms infrastructure sector and manages businesses across the UK and continental Europe with a focus on the delivery of fibre networks.

SSE Enterprise Telecoms, which has a 12,000km UK-wide fibre network, will retain the

SSE Group as a key funder and anchor customer.

According to Sempill the investment also provides an opportunity to enhance and develop the company's approach to customer service and delivery.

James Harraway, Infracapital Director, noted: "High speed connectivity is vital to economic growth and prosperity.

"SSE Enterprise Telecoms is an established telecoms infrastructure provider and is well positioned to support growth in this critical sector."

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## Simwood targets comms arm

Simwood has announced another major investment deal with SSE Enterprise Telecoms late last month.

Both parties see the deal as an opportunity to develop the network in the country needs and vision of a digital reality. Simwood is a high profile investor in the infrastructure sector across businesses across continental Europe and the delivery of fibre to the edge. SSE Enterprise Telecoms, a 100km UK-wide fibre network, will retain the

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THIS month's issue of Comms Dealer reveals the depth of the channel's opportunity in key areas of the market under rapid development – full fibre and contact centres. New contact centre technology is evolving fast and emerging into market reality quicker than

concurrent comms industry innovations. You don't need to be Einstein to work out the Artificial Intelligence equation, because this technology makes clear sense and already sums up the future look of customer engagement for many organisations.

History may compare the rise of full fibre and AI this year to that of electrical telegraphy in their capacity to transform communications; and with the advent of 5G upon us technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality along with far greater scope for automation will also catalyse widespread business transformation.

It is said that such developments will create the conditions for providing new products and services that are yet to be conceived, such is the high level of expectation and potential that surrounds our industry at this time.

Just as certain is the critical role of the channel and the unique position occupied by resellers in their ability to deliver business transformation like never before to a market they understand so well. But only if they execute the opportunity before them and develop their own markets in promising areas such as full fibre, 5G, Artificial Intelligence, the IoT, virtual and augmented reality.

It's all happening under our noses right now, and many observers featured within this month's magazine believe that 2019 will be pivotal in all of this, a watershed year for everyone who moves with the times. Against this backdrop, Comms Dealer wishes all of our readers a happy and prosperous year.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• Reasons not to lurch towards the copper cliff edge (p30).

# Nimans' networks arm builds muscle

AN IMPRESSIVE award scoop that capped a five month run of record business reveals the strength of Nimans' expanding Network Services division according to its chief Mark Curtis-Wood.

One year after launching an EE reseller channel Nimans was last month crowned Newcomer of the Year by the mobile operator. Curtis-Wood attributed the win to an 'especially straight-forward' mobile proposition which helped the distributor to become EE's fastest growing partner for 4G voice and data services including M2M and managed mobile data.

"We ended 2018 with a bang, generating the division's best ever levels of new business," stated Curtis-Wood.

Particularly strong performances were recorded in connectivity, hosted PBX, broadband, services and billing as well as mobile.

"In many ways the division has reinvented itself during one of our most challenging years as we implemented new software, portals and billing systems to future proof processes for the long-term," said Curtis-Wood.

"The launch of our EE reseller proposition was also



Mark Curtis-Wood

well received. When I attended the EE Partner Conference for the first time I was the new boy in the room.

"Last year I was invited to speak at the conference to share insights into how we collaborate with EE."

In what was a busy year of development for Nimans' Network Services division the business also improved and simplified its hosted proposition, boosted headcount across all areas of the operation and is seeking to ramp up further in 2019 bolstered by a new technical sales support arm.

Plans for this year include the addition of more automated and streamlined services which will

be available through Nimans' reseller portal, along with initiatives to get more hands-on with channel partners and turn up the volume on key messages to the market, building on similar efforts in 2018.

"We staged and took part in a series of events to engage directly with more customers and drive awareness of our services," added Curtis-Wood.

The growth of Nimans' Network Services division is reflective of broader cross-company business expansion with overall record revenues achieved in 2018, staff numbers approaching 400 and 'realistic plans' to break the £200m revenue barrier.



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COMMENT: NEW HORIZONS



Richard Carter

THIS year offers a golden opportunity for resellers to take, for sure, their biggest strides forward by embracing the latest technology trends. Despite the continued Brexit uncertainties, this year represents some of the most compelling reasons to develop, diversify and expand – with CCTV, AV and UC end points among the most popular sectors many of our resellers are targeting.

There's a great opportunity to get into these areas along with AV and wireless infrastructure. These are all growth markets that are relatively easy to embrace and sell into, and are a natural extension of existing portfolios. There's big revenue potential too. For example, both the AV and CCTV markets are bigger than the PBX arena and continue to develop.

In many ways Nimans is a bastion of the channel, based on a near 40-year trading pedigree. For us, 2018 was a year to remember with record levels of revenue generated. Let's hope 2019 is also memorable for business achievements and for bringing much needed clarity and stability on Brexit.

We have fingers crossed in the hope that Brexit won't damage our economic prosperity too much. But at the time of writing it seems one big mess with little sign of a clear pathway forward. Hopefully, by this time next year the 'B' word won't be dominating the political agenda. I'm sure we can all drink to that!

Richard Carter, Channel Sales Director, Nimans

• The story of male domination over the course of the comms channel's history is all too familiar, but there are clear signs that the gender imbalance is starting to equalise as positive perceptions of the sector's move towards diversity begin to proliferate, says Sky Business Head of Operations and Pre-Sales Harmeet Kapoor (p28).

# Fiscal performance hailed by Excalibur

EXCALIBUR Communications has capped a busy financial year – in which it completed an MBO and acquired two businesses – with an impressive set of results showing turnover up by 11% to £8.1m for the year ending June 2018, with underlying profitability increasing by 15%, up from £1.3m to £1.5m.

According to Excalibur CEO Peter Boucher the results indicate that the company is delivering on its plan to scale up via organic growth supported by the acquisitions of Techs4Education and Sensata.

Excalibur has also invested in sales and customer service and witnessed non-mobile revenues increase by 28% compared to last year, while mobile customer acquisition has spurred a 54% increase in mobile connections in the second half of the financial year.

“These results show our investment in the business is already paying off,” stated Boucher. “We are well placed for continued growth this year and are at the forefront of bringing ultra fast fibre network services to businesses in our home town of Swindon.”

Other achievements notched up in 2018 include Investors in



Peter Boucher

People Gold accreditation, recognition as a Sunday Times Top 100 Company to Work For and raising over £30k for charity. Employees also received their

first pay out from the company's £1m bonus scheme.

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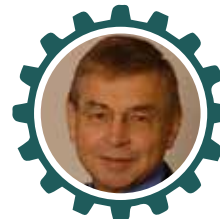
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# Connectwise snares security doyen Sienna

CONNECTWISE'S plan to become a cybersecurity knowledge hub for MSPs took a giant leap forward with the acquisition of managed security services provider Sienna Group.

"Our mission is to leverage Sienna Group's expertise to educate, support and consult MSPs in the delivery of cybersecurity services," stated ConnectWise CEO Arnie Bellini.

Cybercrime has risen to \$6tr annually, or 7% of the world's economy, according to research firm Cybersecurity Ventures, with the frequency and intensity of cyber attacks continuing an upward trajectory.

Mindful that MSPs are often held liable for client breaches even when they are not responsible, Bellini expects that Sienna's knowhow will enable ConnectWise partners to properly assess their cyber vulnerabilities and learn how to better



Arnie Bellini

protect themselves from misplaced reproachment.

"The acquisition also supports ConnectWise's strategy to provide an ecosystem of security solutions, especially for SMB partners looking for new ways to expand their offerings," noted Bellini.

"MSPs already have a trusted relationship with their customers, so they are well positioned

to provide them with managed security services."

John Ford, CEO and founder of Sienna Group, added: "We've been working with ConnectWise for years, and we share a vision and a commitment to ensure that MSPs have the tools to protect themselves and their clients in a time when a disastrous cyber breach is often just a single click away."



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DIVA Telecom has taken a lead this year in drumming up support and cash for local charity Dogs Trust Leeds, raising £512, while urging people not to get a dog for Christmas but consider adopting one instead. In the five weeks after Christmas in 2017 the charity took over 5,000 calls from UK dog owners wanting to hand over their unwanted canines. In 2018 Dogs Trust Leeds cared for hundreds of dogs and rehomed over 760. Diva Telecom MD Erica Lewis said: "The high numbers of abandoned dogs at Christmas is heart breaking and serves as a reminder to take the purchase of dogs as pets seriously. They can't ask for help, but we can on their behalf. Every penny the centre receives goes right back into giving each dog a happy life."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

**CITYFIBRE** has put in place an infrastructure debt package of £1.12bn from seven financial institutions including ABN AMRO, Deutsche Bank, Lloyds Bank, Natixis, NatWest, Santander and Société Générale. Proceeds will be used to fund the first part of CityFibre's £2.5bn investment plan which will see it roll out full fibre to five million premises by 2025.

**IN A MOVE** that reflects its ambitious growth plans wholesale connectivity provider Entanet has relocated to new offices in Telford, a three-storey building that houses up to 320 people. The CityFibre owned business currently employs 140-plus staff and is set to act on the parent firm's full fibre infrastructure investment plan.

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COMMENT: CHANNEL MATTERS



Nick Powell

JANUARY usually heralds a wave of activity as resellers push ahead with their 2019 plans. Although strategies may differ from business to business they are broadly based on the same dynamics – market trends, customer centricity, revenue protection and growth, margin versus revenue balance, possibly a merger and acquisition or a planned

exit. If the strategy is right, then the challenge is speed and accuracy of execution.

Execution is one of the two key areas where the (calendar) year is won or lost. In the first two months, while others meander back into their offices, the 2019 winners are 100 per cent focused on execution. January and February will not deliver breakthrough results but will lay the foundations for the business to do so.

It is, however, the second vital element, agility, that makes or breaks a strategy. Unless an organisation has a proverbial crystal ball, then the strategy/plan/goals are based on a degree of best intelligence. There is little absolute certainty and only so much time to cover the detail in the planning stages. While the execution must be at pace and immediate, the business leaders must have the ability to adapt and reshape as required.

Keeping the end goal in mind, the winners in this market are able to make change instinctively and steer through the problems that others either stop at, deciding it cannot be done or ignore and carry on regardless. Suppliers should be a key part of these plans and resellers should ask themselves before they implement – are my suppliers either able or willing to support me in delivering my strategy?

So, if your business is looking forward to the year ahead, my message is simply to execute fast, be agile and look for a partner who can and wants to genuinely be a part of your journey.

**Nick Powell, Sales Director, Sky Business Communications**

# Boston swoops on security firm 2020

FAST growing Boston Networks has swooped on its second acquisition target since Aliter Capital took a stake in the business a year ago.

The Glasgow-based integrator snapped up 2020 Vision Systems, the North Shields located security business, as it seeks to establish a stronger foothold in the mid-market and extend its geographic reach.

The financials of the deal were not disclosed and the acquisition builds on Boston's purchase of London-based PEL Services in April 2018.

2020 Vision Systems brings expertise in IP security technology, video surveillance, access control and converged security solutions and has a particularly strong presence in north east England and the midlands, with an office in Birmingham.

The deal boosts Boston Group's headcount to 170 and it is understood that the 2020 management team will continue while MD Peter Houlis exits the business but remains on hand as an advisor.

"We will leverage 2020's experience of working in key areas of critical physical security, which will help us to drive towards the next phase of our



Scott McEwan

growth as we focus on applying technology to improve the performance, safety and security of people, buildings and assets," commented Boston Networks CEO Scott McEwan.

"In particular, this acquisition deepens our services in the further education sector, enhances our existing security offering through the cloud platform and spreads our geographic coverage."

Boston began its commercial life in 2000 and now operates as an integrated technologies business working across IT network infrastructure, with a focus on IoT, life safety, security and smart building solutions.

Greig Brown, Partner at Aliter Capital and Chairman of Boston Networks, added: "2020

Vision Systems is a great addition for the Boston Group. It is a significant step forward in our plan to create a national provider of integrated life safety, security and networking services in key sectors, specifically targeting mid-market UK-based blue chip companies."

Notable deals won by Boston include the Queen Elizabeth University & Children's Hospitals, the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Open Golf Championships and the 2018 Ryder Cup.

The firm recently secured a contract with AGS Airports to upgrade the Wi-Fi infrastructure at Aberdeen, Glasgow and Southampton Airports. Boston is also leading the £6m project to build and operate Scotland's national IoT network.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THIS year will be decisive for channel partners transitioning away from hardware sales to the SaaS model, according to Mitel's VP of Channels Mike Conlon. "The cloud gives partners an opportunity to deliver their products using an open consumption model, providing more long-term value for customers from a cost and enterprise operations management perspective," he stated.

UNION Street has got more hands-on with the management of its Technical Support, Customer Service and Bureau departments following the promotion of James Wilson to the newly created role of Operations Manager, reporting to Ops Director Robert Bristow. Thirty of Union Street's 100 staff fall under Wilson's wing just six years after he joined the company's apprenticeship programme.

VAPOUR Cloud has appointed Andrew Nash as COO as the company seeks to build on this year's 51% growth, targeting a further 50% revenue uplift in 2019. Nash brings more than 20 years experience in the tech space and his previous roles include a stint at Avaya as Global Services & Support Director and MD of SBL Group.

# Winfield: Industry excited by AI tech

CREATING the conditions for seamless human and non-human interactions that improve the customer experience is a top priority this year, and 'AI is the technology that everybody is excited about', according to Content Guru's UK Sales Director Edward Winfield.



Edward Winfield

"The Artificial Intelligence landscape is constantly shifting and progressing with chatbots and machine learning playing an increasingly important role," commented Winfield.

Other game changers shaking up the contact centre market are Natural Language Processing (NLP) and unstructured voice IVR, observed Winfield.

"These disruptive technologies are helping to provide fluid customer experiences, especially in web chat, by creating a seamless handover between automated chatbot interactions and human contact," he added.

"The key trend will be for organisations to identify appropriate uses of AI and incorporate these intelligent and continually advancing solutions into their communications estate."

In a recent project Content Guru leveraged AI and chatbot technology for a 47,000 web chat agent deployment in

Japanese e-commerce. "This shows just how quickly the market is moving towards AI technology at such a large scale," added Winfield. "Everyone is developing different ways to incorporate AI into business processes and it is an area which is constantly evolving."

Content Guru's AI project, a toolset called Brain, is always under review as the company seeks new ways to utilise intelligent automation.

"Another key area that requires attention is how organisations can extract value from core systems by integrating them into their communications estate," added Winfield.

"Legacy systems can still be used but in a smarter and more efficient way when integrated with new technologies."

Developments in speech analytics and sentiment analysis will also be crucial to Quality Assurance in the customer experience, believes Winfield.

"The sector is developing at a rapid rate and there are some key areas for improvement that are being highlighted time and again," he commented.

"The addition of omnichannel capabilities to an organisation's communications strategy has become vital in reflecting the preferences of new and emerging customer demographics, with an emphasis on automated and self-service options for the millennial market."

Winfield also pointed out that every one of Contact Guru's CCaaS customers is seeking a cloud solution.

"The ability to scale on demand to cope with fluctuations in contact is also prevalent, with intelligent automation being harnessed to increase efficiency across the contact centre and unburden agents of repetitive tasks," he stated. "There is also much higher demand for WebRTC functionalities and NLP solutions." See page 32

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## Tech hub relocation for Vaioni

MANCHESTER-based Vaioni Wholesale's move into new offices at MediaCityUK follows a four year period of sustained 100% growth, with 2018 standing out as a bumper year in which the company boosted revenues by 27% and set out plans to hit £20m turnover during the next three to five years.

Also rising is Vaioni's headcount, up 30% to 33 staff with a proposed recruitment spree expected to boost numbers to over 70.

Vaioni MD Sachin Vaish commented: "Our new home allows us to collaborate and innovate better between ourselves and with our customers. The office has been designed for our employees and shaped by their feedback following one-to-one and group sessions."

The man responsible for the overall look and feel of Vaioni's new office space is designer Atul Bansal who is known for creating some of the region's most iconic tech environments.



Sachin Vaish

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE new partnership between Databarracks and Rubrik is reflective of a market that has 'suddenly become interesting again', according to Databarracks MD Peter Groucutt. "The combination of backup, disaster recovery and archive in a single scalable product addresses a need we see from mid-market and enterprise organisations," he said. "Rubrik's compatibility with all major public clouds – AWS, Azure and Google Cloud Platform – enables us to design backup, archive and disaster recovery services to meet all customer needs and vendor preferences."

GREATER Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham outlined his vision for the city as a UK digital leader during a customer and partner event staged by InTec Business Solutions based in Altrincham. Burnham cited the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund as a key driver for the digital revolution within Greater Manchester and he emphasised the important role of companies such as InTec – which secured a £500k investment from the fund this year – in digitalising the region.

SOFTCAT'S strategy to optimise cloud platforms has advanced following a link up with CloudHealth which provides deeper insights into public cloud spend, usage and efficiency. "Many organisations are adopting public cloud to be more agile and to drive down costs," said Softcat MD Colin Brown. "However, some are finding that their lack of experience operating in a public cloud environment leads to a lack of control over the services consumed resulting in costs that are far higher than predicted. Softcat's Cloud Intelligence Service addresses this challenge by generating automated reports on all of an organisation's public cloud usage."

# Incom Wales open for biz



THE extent of Manchester-based Incom-CNS's ambitions in Wales are clear following the establishment of a south Wales office led by newly appointed joint MDs Dean James and Ian England who share 50 years industry experience.

The launch of Incom Wales – which is located near the M4 corridor between Cardiff and Swansea – caps a big year for the group in which it bagged a record £2.5m contract.

The formation of Incom Wales is also reflective of local council efforts to regenerate the south Wales region. Group CEO David Hughes comment-

ed: "South Wales is seen as a significant growth area for the group and partnering with the right people to head up this venture was paramount.

"Dean and Ian are respected businessmen and we share a common focus. Their local presence alongside the backing of the nationwide group will enable us to build on our Welsh customer base."

Incom-CNS was established 30 years ago and is a Mitel Gold and Gamma Platinum partner.

*Pictured above (l-r): Dean James, Ian England, David Hughes and Incom-CNS CTO Jason Kilvert.*

# ITS set to hunt local channels

FULL fibre network provider ITS Technology Group (ITS) is seeking to recruit local partners across its 22 networks spanning key locations in the east midlands, Greater Manchester, London, mid and north Wales, the south west and Yorkshire.

The company has updated its partner programme as it targets comms, IT services companies and ISPs to sell full fibre and wireless network services.

Dave Hudson, Business Development Director, stated: "We have reinvigorated our established partner programme.

"Our partners demand urgency, agility and flexibility to succeed in their markets."

Following a funding boost from Maven Capital Partners ITS has invested in network upgrades and, according to Hudson, the firm is now 'ready to scale at pace'. "All full fibre and hybrid fixed wireless access networks connect to ITS's national network," he added.

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# FCS hails reducing CLI costs

INDUSTRY body the Federation of Communication Services (FCS) is claiming a win for its members in helping to reduce the caller display price increase imposed by Openreach.

The charge for caller display was increased from £0.45/year to £1.44/year as of 1st September, coinciding with a regulatory change from Ofcom that introduced a requirement for CLI to be provided free of charge to subscribers commencing 1st October.

"We raised the effect of the price change with Openreach, pointing out the difficulties that many of our members faced when coupling this with having to provide the service to 100% of the customer base rather than the average of around 20%," commented FCS interim CEO Itret Latif.

"Openreach has reduced the price increase to £0.84/year. There are no increases planned, and Openreach will assess yearly as with all prices."

Latif also noted that Openreach will manually adjust bills to back-date this new price to 1st September and that FCS members have no need to take any action.

# Ofcom to decide fibre related regulation according to region

INDUSTRY regulator Ofcom has issued a consultation document that sets out its initial views on how to define geographic markets from 2021 when it carries out its next review of wholesale telecoms networks.

The watchdog has recognised that investment and competition in fibre networks will vary by geography and therefore it proposes that regulation should also vary by region.

In a statement Ofcom said, 'We plan to consult on a full set of market proposals, including market definition, market power assessment and remedies



Adrian Baschnonga

for fixed network services, by autumn 2019'.

Commenting on the development, Adrian Baschnonga, EY's Telecoms Lead Analyst, stated: "Ofcom's latest consultation underlines the importance of flexible rules when it comes to

fibre infrastructure. Levels of competition and willingness to invest vary by geography, and a more nuanced appraisal of the UK's infrastructure landscape will play a key role in the regulation of fibre in years to come."

NEWS ROUNDUP

BECKENHAM firm Avita Tech and Westerham-based Systemax have pooled resources and expertise and are now operating under the moniker Avita Group led by new MD Gary Duckman. Avita has knowhow in IT, AV, telecoms, electrical and digital imaging products and services, while Systemax's strengths lie in network infrastructure installation, telecoms, CCTV, access control and AV. "Both companies are complementary and support Avita Group's growth ambitions," said Duckman.



# FASTEST 4 2019 IS BACK

## ARE YOU READY?

KCOM's annual incentive, Fastest 4, returns to the track, but not the one you're used to... This time, get ready for the adrenaline rush of a lifetime on the rally stage.

Fastest 4 invites Partners to resell our fastest connectivity products to win this unforgettable, adrenaline-pumping off-road and rally driving experience.

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It's simple: resell KCOM's fastest connectivity products across a three-month period to accumulate points. Reach 40 points and you'll be joining us on the track for an exhilarating off-road and rally driving experience that you won't want to miss, with evening entertainment and an overnight stay included.

For each product sold you'll be awarded points (don't worry, we'll keep track for you):

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|----------------|-----------|
| FTTC and FTTP  | 1 point   |
| EoFTTC and EFM | 5 points  |
| Fibre Ethernet | 10 points |

Reaching the target is as simple as reselling just 10 FTTCs each month and a couple of leased lines. Achieve that and you'll be joining us on the track. Or, to guarantee your place even quicker, spot a small WAN opportunity and close the deal in one fell swoop with just four Fibre Ethernets.

### How do I get involved?

Secure your driving seat.

Fastest 4 runs from 14 January 2019 – 12 April 2019 and is open to every channel reseller. If you're not already a KCOM Partner, don't worry; we can quickly sign you up to our Partner Programme, just call us on 0345 122 4777 or visit [www.fastest4.co.uk](http://www.fastest4.co.uk)

It's really quick and easy to get involved.

Once you're on-board, all you need to do is resell our products to reach 40 points over the three-month period. We'll let you know when you get close. Then you'll be in the driver's seat to join KCOM for the most adrenaline-pumping driving experience you'll ever have.

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All qualifiers will get to experience the thrill of oversteer, handbrake turns and powerslides on the rally stage, plus the challenge of vertical ascents and descents and axle twister on the 4x4 off road course. First, you'll head for the scenic off-road course where you'll face some nerve-racking obstacles, but the adrenaline really starts pumping as you get into the driving seat of the rally car for your turn on the slippery gravel track. Things turn competitive when the stop-watches come out. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 GO for your timed run to see if you can become driver of the day. So, if you're keen on mud and going sideways, then sign up fast.

### So, are you ready for the ultimate adrenaline rush?

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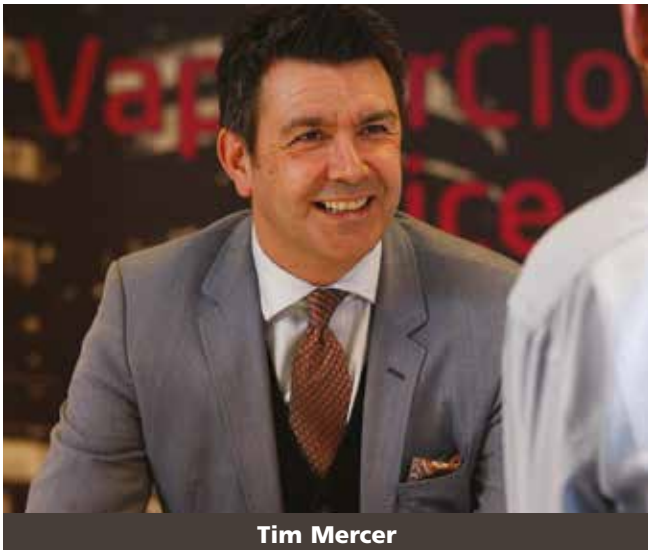
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Iain Shearman, National Network Services Managing Director says 'This year's incentive offers our Partners a truly exhilarating experience that's going to test their nerves and bring out their ultimate competitive streak. We decided to keep the incentive simple, with a clear route to success, so that Partners can get their sales teams fighting for a place on the dirt track by increasing revenue on products that are quick and easy to sell. We're looking forward to seeing who's brave enough to conquer the vertical descent on the day.'

# FASTEST 4



# Telesis seals Vapour deal



Tim Mercer

CUSTOMER demand for full scale digitalisation services prompted Bolton-based Telesis to plug a portfolio and skills gap by partnering with Yorkshire HQ'd Vapour to supply its Sanctm product suite.

Telesis hopes the partnership will provide up to a 20% boost in turnover over the coming three years.

Telesis MD Christian Bleakley commented: "The technology sector is becoming increasingly crowded with suppliers vying for customers' attention, which can make it difficult for organisations to know which way to turn. We've built a solid

reputation in the telecoms market but when it came to requests for wider digital transformation support this was a gap we couldn't previously plug.

"The relationship with Vapour will allow us to expand our service offering to existing customers while enhancing our proposition for new prospects."

Vapour CEO Tim Mercer added: "We're big believers in concentrating on our own niche and fostering partnerships with other organisations to leverage expertise in their key areas."

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# Sabio scoops key tech firm

SABIO'S acquisition of Singapore-based FlexAnswer Solutions expands its reach in the APAC region and brings on board additional virtual assistant technology.

FlexAnswer's Virtual Assistant platform covers web, voice and messaging channels and uses a Natural Language Processing platform to understand requests and generate appropriate channel responses from its Knowledge Management system.

The acquisition follows Horizon Capital's original 2016 strategic investment in Sabio.

Acquisitions already completed include SaaS solutions provider Rapport and DatapointEurope in 2017, and customer insight and contact

centre benchmarking company Bright UK in March last year.

"We're focused on empowering organisations with the insight and solutions they need to ensure better visibility, increased responsiveness and greater control across every customer interaction," said Andy Roberts, CEO, Sabio Group.

"Adding FlexAnswer into our digital proposition will help more of our clients to take advantage of the latest conversational AI-enabled virtual assistant technology."

Lin Milne, FlexAnswer Solutions' CEO, commented: "Becoming part of the Sabio Group gives us a platform to accelerate the global deployment of our solutions."



Andy Roberts

# Avaya to rescheme program



Fadi Moubarak

CHANGES to Avaya's Edge partner programme include a newly structured step by step journey from basic value propositions advancing through to solution selling, innovation and digital transformation, all presented as an equal opportunity open to every partner no matter their size or business model.

"Our own growth is linked to the growth of our partners, regardless of where they sit today on the Avaya Edge programme," said Fadi Moubarak, Vice President Channels, Avaya International. "Our growth strategies need to align with those of our partners if we're to succeed in our goals."

Moubarak said Avaya will focus efforts on three main areas in 2019 – a bigger emphasis on cloud, complete solutions based on the vendor's API driven ecosystem and new technologies.

Avaya says partner numbers in the Edge programme are up 159% over the past year.

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# Business Mobility: What's next?

According to technology analysts, around 3.5 billion people are now connected to the mobile internet and there are no signs of this figure decreasing. Mobile data consumption continues to rise as more and more businesses deploy mobile based solutions.

The advent of 5G super-fast connectivity will fuel more exponential growth and create huge opportunities for resellers to provide an increased range of mobile, IoT and UC solutions to their customers.

Now is the time to ensure your mobile communications and IoT offerings are fit for purpose and your business is poised for growth.

Margin in Mobile is the new channel event that will provide resellers with the knowledge and understanding of the new margin opportunities that now exists in the mobile solutions landscape.

Part of the hugely successful 'Margin in' series of events organized since 1999 by Comms Dealer, Margin in Mobile will provide the most effective platform for vendors and resellers to meet and explore these new opportunities.

During one day of education and networking, you will meet a range of mobile and IoT operators, service providers, vendors and distributors all expert at helping you launch into or grow existing mobile revenues.

Margin in Mobile will help you understand:

- **What's new in technology?**
- **What solutions are customers looking for?**
- **How your team can sell mobile and IoT more effectively?**

Subjects to be debated and discussed at Margin Mobile will include:

- Where are we now? A state of the mobile market review (analysis, trends etc - scene setter and provide context for what follows)
- 5G and mobile network innovation: What next for business mobility?
- Managing mobile: Harnessing the power of portals
- Mobile UC/Mobile Office/Mobile Conferencing: Staying connected anywhere, anytime.
- Realising the potential of mobile Apps and APIs
- Intelligent mobile: The rise of wireless and Wi-Fi analytics
- Mobile Security: The cyber threats and how to protect against them
- Mobile planning: How to develop an end-to-end employee mobility strategy for customers
- Working with suppliers to identify the most profitable mobile solution opportunities.
- How will the supply of M2M/IoT solutions fit into new 'as a service' business models?
- How will resellers get sales teams up to pace with Digital Britain and the new mobile solution opportunities.
- SIM device management. Never has a channel portal been more powerful!

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## MiM sponsors line up to meet new partners



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"We want to understand the challenges facing the reseller community. By supporting Margin in Mobile, we aim to inform the channel about the opportunity to drive incremental annuity revenue afforded by Cloudcell Connect."

KEVIN BOYLE – CLOUDCELL



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"Now is a great time for the channel to adopt some of the latest mobile data technology and incorporate it into their value propositions. M2M and IoT are still specialist subjects that need to be fully understood to appreciate the revenue opportunities."

MIKE VAN BUNNENS – COMMS 365

"We want to encourage resellers to embrace the huge opportunity presented by mobile and converged solutions. The future of mobile is strong so we're looking forward to helping partners take advantage of the fastest growing solution in the Channel."

LAUREN MCMANUS – DAISY WHOLESALE



Gold sponsor

"This event is a great opportunity to enable the channel to understand how to profit from new technologies in the mobile market, key to this will be 5G. Nimans will be showing resellers how to unlock this with EE Wholesale."

MARK CURTIS-WOOD – NIMANS NETWORK SERVICES

"More businesses than ever are deploying mobile solutions. Very soon, we'll be living in a world without wires and with 5G just around the corner, ultra-reliable low latency communications will open up a plethora of opportunities for resellers and their customers."

BERNIE MCPHILLIPS – PANGEA



Gold sponsor

"We'll be taking the opportunity to highlight the tremendous potential of our 'Tech-as-a-Service' proposition, which gives resellers a great way to drive not only higher margins, but also improved customer retention and opportunities to grow their business."

DAVID NELSON – TECHDATA

"This new event will be an excellent platform for us to provide the channel with information and innovative ideas surrounding mobile and IoT. We look forward to meeting partners keen to progress their digital journey and discover new opportunities."

ANTON LE SAUX – ZEST4



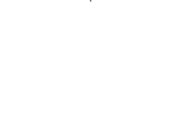
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"Margin in Mobile will provide positive insights and connections, stimulating ideas that will help channel partners to add even more value to their clients at a time of accelerating change."

STEVEN LOWE – GAMMA

"At Margin in Mobile we will explain how Abzorb has understood and taken steps to remove all of the obstacles preventing channel partners from adding mobile solutions to their portfolios. These include our resellers having more autonomy and control of their customer relationships and at the same time having flexibility and support to doing business more easily. Removing bill shock and strong commercials are also key factors."

MARK RIDDELL – ABZORB



Silver sponsor

"Margin in Mobile is an important event tailored to the growth and proliferation of 5G, IoT and cloud connectivity. This is where the future lies and it important to start now."

WAIL SABBAGH – STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE integration of Mitel's MiVoice solution into Telent's portfolio alongside the vendor's existing MX-One offering has been recognised with Gold Partner status. Nick Riggott, Head of Sales UK&I at Mitel, said: "Telent has demonstrated its commitment to our portfolio of services and we have built up a great relationship during this process."

INDIGO Telecom is to ramp up its M&A activity on the back of an investment by Growth Capital Partners (GCP). Following a management buyout led by CEO Stephen Thompson in 2016 the business kicked off its M&A campaign with the acquisition of Belcom247, a provider of data centre connectivity solutions. Thompson said: "The GCP team fully understood and supported our plans for growth including a number of future acquisitions."

MAINTEL has added SD-WAN to its managed network service based on Cisco technology. "The drive towards cloud services, the constant need for businesses to be agile and cybersecurity threats put increasing demands on an organisation's network," said CTO Rufus Grig. "SD-WAN technology brings extra agility to the way the network is used, drives more effective and efficient use of bandwidth, and provides visibility of the performance of the network."

NUVIAS'S cyber security practice has strengthened its identity access management (IAM) range following an agreement with One Identity to distribute its solutions in the UK. Ian Kilpatrick, EVP Cybersecurity for Nuvias, said: "Organisations are challenged by the complexity of access management and the increasing regulatory demands being made upon them."

# High rate of leaking voice



Richard Stevenson

FAILURE to plug the voice data black hole and join up leaky data with analytics engines is tantamount to ignoring the greatest possible value add opportunity, according to Red Box.

A survey by the company found that most businesses are capturing only partial voice data sets, while over 50% of the data that is captured is locked away and out of reach of AI and analytics processes.

"Fewer than half of organisation-wide conversations are being captured," stated Richard Stevenson, Red Box CEO.

"Today, voice is a critical data set. It holds much more value than any other means of communication because it conveys context, sentiment, intent, emotion and actions, providing real intelligence and driving valuable business outcomes.

"The research shows how few organisation-wide voice conversations are being captured and how much of that data is inaccessible. This is a significant risk in terms of data silos and a missed opportunity."

Stevenson noted that recent advances in transcription, AI and ML make the value of voice data sets realisable, but just 8% of those surveyed say their voice data is easily accessible for processing by AI engines and analytics.

Jon Arnold, Principal of analyst firm J Arnold & Associates,

commented: "Voice data is currently locked in a complex mix of cloud and on-premise telecom systems and disconnected from the services that can maximise its value.

"Insight lives across an organisation, and high quality and complete structured and unstructured voice data sets are crucial to enabling businesses to benefit from technological advances like Artificial Intelligence and sentiment analysis. These are the true value add for today's enterprise."

# Simwood offers SLA covenant

BRISTOL-based Simwood is backing up its new 100% SLA on wholesale voice services with a pledge to compensate for any outages should they occur with 25x the channel rental paid during the period affected.

But MD Simon Woodhead explained that Simwood's network is architected so that a failure will not lead to an outage, and to prove the point he noted that the company has not experienced a failure of service, such as no incoming or outgoing calls, since 2010.

"I do not like outages and we work extremely hard to avoid them," commented Woodhead.

"Our whole network effectively functions as one big SBC, with customers able to send calls anywhere and get a predictable response from a system we mostly built and entirely operate. Anyone that says they're immune from failure is lying or simply naive. If stuff breaks it is our fault and we will pay you."

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RECORD annual sales of Jabra products secured Nimans the headset maker's Distributor of the Year gong at the vendor's One Partner Conference held at The Wood Norton Hotel in Worcestershire. Nigel Dunn, Jabra MD for EMEA North, said: "In our industry we talk about solutions rather than products, but our success depends on our partners being committed to solving real-life business pain points. These awards were our opportunity to thank our resellers and distributors for their hard work and performance in supporting our brand." Pictured with the award are Nimans' UC Devices Business Manager Jason Welsh and Paul Peters, UC Devices Internal Sales Specialist.

NEWS ROUNDUP

CONTENT Guru is preparing to stage the 'brain Artificial Intelligence Symposium' at the Natural History Museum in London on January 24th. The event will explore the future of AI and technologies like chatbots and Natural Language Processing and their impact on customer engagement. Sean Taylor, co-founder and Global CEO of Redwood Technologies Group, said: "By 2020 there will be seven billion consumer devices with AI-powered digital assistants and 85% of customer interactions will be automated, so it is more important than ever to keep up to date with the latest AI developments and trends."

VIRTUAL1 has achieved three star accreditation from Best Companies, the organisation behind The Sunday Times – Best Companies to Work For. The designation represents the highest standard of workplace engagement and this year just 120 UK companies across all verticals and sectors achieved the grade. For CEO Tom O'Hagan the award caps a five year people-first journey. "I believe in investing in people," he commented. "Happy people deliver a fantastic service, and that is what drives sustainable top and bottom line growth. The benefits of this people-first strategy are also shining through in our NPS initiative."

PRIVATE equity house Dunedin has taken a stake in digital technology services business Incremental, which was formed following the acquisitions of First eBusiness Solutions in November 2016 and GAP Consulting in June 2018. Incremental CEO Neil Logan said: "Dunedin brings an additional funding capability which will enable us to execute a number of acquisitions, enabling us to expand and deepen the range of services that we offer our clients across the UK."



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# TMT firms in north region growth spurt



Oliver du Sautoy

THE rise of the technology sector in northern regions of England is starkly reflected by new figures that show TMT firms are responsible for hiking office occupier activity in the north to record levels.

According to a Northern Powerhouse Office Market Report from Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH) the TMT sector accounted for the largest share of take-up across the eight Northern Powerhouse office markets of Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester city centre, Newcastle, Salford Quays, Sheffield, South Manchester and Warrington, reaching 21% of total activity.

Employment in TMT related jobs across the Northern Powerhouse has also increased, up 23% since 2013. Job numbers are forecast to rise by a further 4,200 from 2018 to 2023. The growth of TMT occupiers has been driven by expansion with key deals including Gamma's 27,939 sq ft letting at The Malt House in Salford Quays.

Salford is now home to the region's strongest concentration of TMT sector jobs, standing 59% above the national average. Meanwhile, Newcastle has seen the fastest job growth within the sector, increasing 59% over the last five years. Leeds boasts the highest number of TMT sector

jobs outside London and is forecast to increase by 7.2% over the next five years, the strongest increase of the markets.

Oliver du Sautoy, Head of Research at LSH, said: "Despite Brexit uncertainty there is a sense that the major cities of the Northern Powerhouse are firing on all cylinders. The region's stalwarts of professional services and public sector occupiers have been joined by a new breed, namely in technology, media and telecommunications, which now account for the largest share of take-up."

Adam Varley, Director of Office Advisory at LSH Leeds, added: "Occupiers in the TMT sector are increasingly looking for more flexible office accommodation which is capable of supporting rapid changes in their business structures.

"We've also seen many of the businesses in the sector clustered around other like-minded organisations which is reflected in the location, size and type of space leased.

"Landlords that accommodate this growing sector have seen the best results but region-wide examples are limited. We need to ensure that landlords and developers maintain this focus to support the continued growth of the TMT sector as we head into 2019 and beyond."

# Heed new risks on tele-card payments

BUSINESSES must review their transaction processes following new guidelines issued by the telephone payment security watchdog, warned Ultracomms.

The provider of PCI DSS compliant telephone payment solutions has called on organisations to review the way they take card payments over the phone following the latest guideline update by the Payment Card Industry Security Standards Council (PCI SSC), which put a bright spotlight on the risks businesses take if they continue to use Pause and Resume methods for processing telephone card payments.

Updated for the first time in seven years the guidelines state that removing payment card data from the contact centre environment is the only secure solution to prevent fraud attacks and ensure compliance.

Derwyn Jones, CEO of Ultracomms, said: "Businesses that use Pause and Resume as part of their payment processing strategy are not out of scope for PCI DSS.



Derwyn Jones

"Pause and Resume only removes the call recording and storage systems from scope, but not the agent, their desktop environment or internal telephone systems. This leaves businesses and their customers open to the risks of card data fraud, investigations by a PCI forensic investigator, substantial fines and the reputational

and brand damage that would result. Completely removing the contact centre environment from PCI DSS scope using technology such as Dual tone Multi Frequency (DTMF) masking is the only surefire way to guarantee compliance."

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# CEO switch to sharpen ONI's focus on customer operations

ONI co-founder Mark Collins has stepped out of the CEO role to become CTO. Sales and Marketing chief Kevin Kivlochan, who also co-founded the business, takes over as chief executive.

The move is designed to bring a sharper customer focus to operations as Collins assumes responsibility for customer engagement and service, project management and professional services while seeking to identify future customer solutions and strategies.

Trevor Mockett has been appointed as Customer Exper-



Kevin Kivlochan

ience Director. Kivlochan commented: "Since the introduction of our Business Assured customer strategy two years ago

we have seen a significant shift in the types of customer that see value in us.

"Our move to focus more on service quality has seen year-on-year sales grow 25% in FY18 with recurring revenues up 55%.

"Strategic partnerships are also critical to our success. We reported a 74% year-on-year increase in Cisco sales and with new joint initiatives such as our Assure Insight Double Red, Security and SD-WAN programmes we are well placed to expand our customer experience proposition." **See page 26**

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# Concern over fibre race and overbuild

OFCOM'S stance on the roll out of full fibre could jeopardise the viability of existing infrastructure investments and kibosh the potential for future investment in certain areas, warned James Warner, Sales, Marketing and Product Director at Glide Business.

"Ofcom wants to pursue a strategy of multiple physical fibres deployed as competing networks, predominantly funded through commercial enterprise," stated Warner. "I ask a simple question on this approach: Should every business and home have multiple physical gas, electric or water supplied into it?"

"The likely outcome of Ofcom's strategy is a race and overbuild scenario for densely populated urban areas, resulting in a consolidation of competing infrastructure networks.

"With added competition comes a threat to original investment, which could damage future infrastructure investment in an area."

Warner also believes that Ofcom's commitment to consumers in hard to reach areas, known as the watchdog's 'outside-in' strategy, is more 'upside down' in its logic.

"Ofcom has thought about the most rural consumers, providing funding for the hardest to reach three to four million users," added Warner.

"Yet this approach, coupled with the competing overbuild scenario, will lead to mid-size towns and semi-rural locations being unattractive for commercial investment. Ofcom needs to rethink its role in managing the roll out of full fibre."

As full fibre prime movers turn up the volume on their 'act now' message to resellers, Warner fully expects channel partners to find it increasingly problematic to consume multiple standards of networks and services in disparate geogra-



James Warner

phies across the UK as Digital Britain continues to grow.

"The channel should work together to try and help Ofcom devise a set of standards that all alternative network suppliers can adhere to, making the consumption and management of those services easier for them and end customers," he stated.

"The opportunity for the channel to provide more products and services than ever before shouldn't be underestimated. In our specific scenario, we deploy to locations predominantly with average speeds of 7-10 mbit/s, enabling gigabit capable business FTTP. This opens up a whole new set of capabilities and conversations previously not achievable for these businesses."

A growing number of consumers and organisations across the UK have already displayed an appetite for these services, signalled by over 5,000 vouchers claimed by UK companies through the Government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme since March 2018.

"If you don't start offering customers these services someone else will," said Warner.

"The Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review published in July last year was a great first

step in the Government taking the issue seriously.

"The Government understands that we need to build the railways and motorways of the future and enable the British economy to function in the 21st century. There are, however, two key challenges we still face – logistics and adoption."

Warner believes that important logistical changes, such as Duct and Pole Access (DPA), will widen the scope of full fibre. "DPA is an agenda Glide has pushed for many years and we are currently the single largest consumer of DPA in the industry," he claimed.

"It stops the expensive and long delivery approach of traditional full fibre deployment, meaning you don't have to dig up half the country with trenches and heavy machinery. We simply lay sub-ducts within the existing ducting infrastructure to deliver full fibre right to our customers' devices, removing those logistical headaches."

Practical obstacles, including wayleaves, are a challenge but progress is nevertheless being made, pointed out Warner.

**Fibre updates: Pages 24 & 30**

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# Megaproject under way

No one can doubt that Britain has been starved of a focused and determined full fibre strategy supported by substantial investment, until now, and Entanet's Head of Sales Paul North says resellers must truly believe that the UK's full fibre campaign is the comms industry's priority of the age – and Digital Britain one of the greatest infrastructure megaprojects in the land.



Paul North

realise the benefits of a future-proofed full fibre infrastructure. In doing so, they will open up the doors to innovative and cost-effective full fibre products which allow businesses to balance cost against gigabit speed requirements and a need for service guarantees – opening up generous margin opportunities. We're already seeing solid evidence of Entanet partners grasping the differentiator that CityFibre infrastructure allows them to market to business customers in cities across the UK, and winning strong full fibre business. The high profile Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme also means there has never been a better time for businesses to invest in full fibre services."

CityFibre's £2.5 billion full fibre investment plan, announced in October last year, reveals the depth of Britain's ever growing copper-fibre divide, and underscores why resellers would be doing themselves a big favour in planning to bridge the chasm sooner rather than later. "The race to fibre-up the UK is now gathering pace and preparing for a full fibre future is a golden opportunity for channel partners to do what they do best – forge a competitive advantage through innovation," stated North. "Resellers that take the lead and embrace a new business model that no longer waits for full fibre to come to where they sell, and instead looks to target their sales where fibre already exists, allows them to seize first mover advantage and claim the lion's share of new opportunities in a ready market."

Entanet, a CityFibre company, aims to help channel partners

unlock such opportunities in all of its Gigabit cities across the UK as it seeks to play a lead role in realising the goals of the Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review, published in July last year, which set out a national long-term digital strategy for the UK by targeting full fibre and 5G services as the de facto UK infrastructure, mainly completed by 2030.

#### Level playing field

"The long-term targets of the FTIR are achievable, but only with a level playing field that creates the right regulatory climate for investment and allows customers to switch easily between infrastructure providers," added North. "We need a new model that discourages predatory overbuild and instead promotes the development of a single underlying full fibre network for every city, town and region. This will then act as a neutral platform upon which multiple ISPs can deliver genuine choice to customers. There also

needs to be an end to fake fibre advertising, because for too long the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has allowed copper-based broadband to be marketed as 'fibre', which misleads customers and holds back the investment and rollout of ultrafast full fibre connectivity."

North is just as clear in his answer to the question of whether Ofcom is sending the right signals and displaying true well-informed intent in terms of ensuring a level competitive playing field. "It's great to see that there is now universal acknowledgement from Ofcom and the Government that the UK must urgently move away from copper and revolutionise its digital infrastructure," he commented. "We are working closely with both to ensure the right regulatory framework is put in place to create fair competition. Ofcom must continue to engage and support all of

the infrastructure providers in the UK. Entanet's role is to be a voice of the channel and ensure that its critical role in delivering a truly Digital Britain is at the forefront of shaping the country's future digital landscape."

#### Opportunity

The scale of the opportunity for resellers to provide more products and services than ever before will vary only according to their will and capacity to make hay while the sun shines. "The channel's opportunity is huge, especially for channel partners that look at the market differently," said North. "The decisions channel businesses make with respect to who they partner with and which full fibre solutions they champion and take to market will be crucial.

"They will have a direct impact on transforming the landscape of the connectivity market and helping customers to

According to North a watershed in the transition to all-digital has already been reached as CityFibre has been on the march as an 'industry disrupter' for some time now, turning the connectivity status quo on its head and 'igniting the full fibre revolution that the country so desperately needs'.

"We continue to execute an ambitious investment programme to deliver an advanced and intelligent full fibre network," he said.

"As part of the £2.5 billion investment we have identified 37 towns and cities where CityFibre already has critical fibre spine assets as primed for expansion for fibre-to-the-home. CityFibre's rollout will reach five million premises and corresponds to one third of the Government's 2025 target of 15 million. Full fibre rollout at scale and the size of the emerging new market represents the most significant opportunity for the channel in a generation." ■



# Ex-Gamma big gun returns to channel as NGA Non-Exec

**B**ob Falconer is back – and helping Amber Infrastructure-backed

Nextgenaccess (NGA) map a path towards rapid growth. The former CEO of Gamma who retired in May last year has joined NGA as a Non-Exec Director following the firm's £22 million investment from the National Digital Infrastructure Fund (NDIF) to back its UK 10Gb fibre network. NDIF is a commercial fund established in 2017 by Amber Infrastructure Group which has over £8 billion under management with interests in energy, property and transport. "It clearly feels the environment in the UK is right to invest in fibre assets, and they are not alone in their conclusion," stated Falconer. "FTTP, alongside 5G, is going to be the biggest transformation in the sector for a generation. It will enable services that haven't even been thought of yet – but soon will be."

Falconer is well known in the industry as a long-term supporter of creating a viable regulatory market for competitors to Openreach to take fibre to the premises. "That market is now in full swing," he said. "It's an exciting opportunity, I like the management team, and we all feel that my background could help focus the company on growth. In particular, NGA understands that it needs to work through partners, and I'm well aware from my 15 years at Gamma of the channel's strength."



**Bob Falconer**

The reality of the UK market, pointed out Falconer, is that Openreach has fibre to most cabinets as part of its FTTC roll out, but fibre to the end customer sits at a woefully low single figure penetration. "Now, others have built competitive fibre infrastructure to the major BT exchanges serving large customer concentrations and larger data centres, and investment in residential penetration is ramping up," he said. "But the vast majority of the country still only has one current provider of fibre to cabinet level. The market is there for a faster, quicker, cheaper competitor to Openreach."

#### Prime time for altnets

According to Falconer the new PIA regulations (Physical Infrastructure Access) transforms the business case and minimises disruption and lead times in providing alternative services. "NGA's plan is not to build an alternative national network, service the residential market nor to overbuild in areas where others already have, but to selectively identify major routes where there is

a paucity of alternatives," explained Falconer. "In these environments NGA's expertise in providing fibre services on existing infrastructure of ducts and poles can be put to work."

Generally, a build will have at least one anchor tenant. NGA then plans to open the route up for businesses through its channel partners in the vicinity using PIA to provide access. "NGA can then provide layer 2 access services to the Internet or appropriate meet-me point," said Falconer. "It's anticipated that the offering will appeal to infrastructure based carriers looking for help in expanding their reach, asset-light operators seeking alternative access routes and to channel partners supplying the business market in the locality. The offering is not a complex one and processes are in place to support the channel."

Falconer, who is also a Non-Exec Director at global carrier Epsilon Communications, described NGA's ideal channel partner as being able to sell to medium to large businesses and public sector organisations, and with a reasonable degree of technical and engineering capability to provide the CPE and hook up the services on the back of a layer 2 data facility. "Many partners providing voice and data services have those skills," he added. "The channel is key to deploying next generation connectivity and building the nation's full fibre future." ■

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# Rise of fibre continues in

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

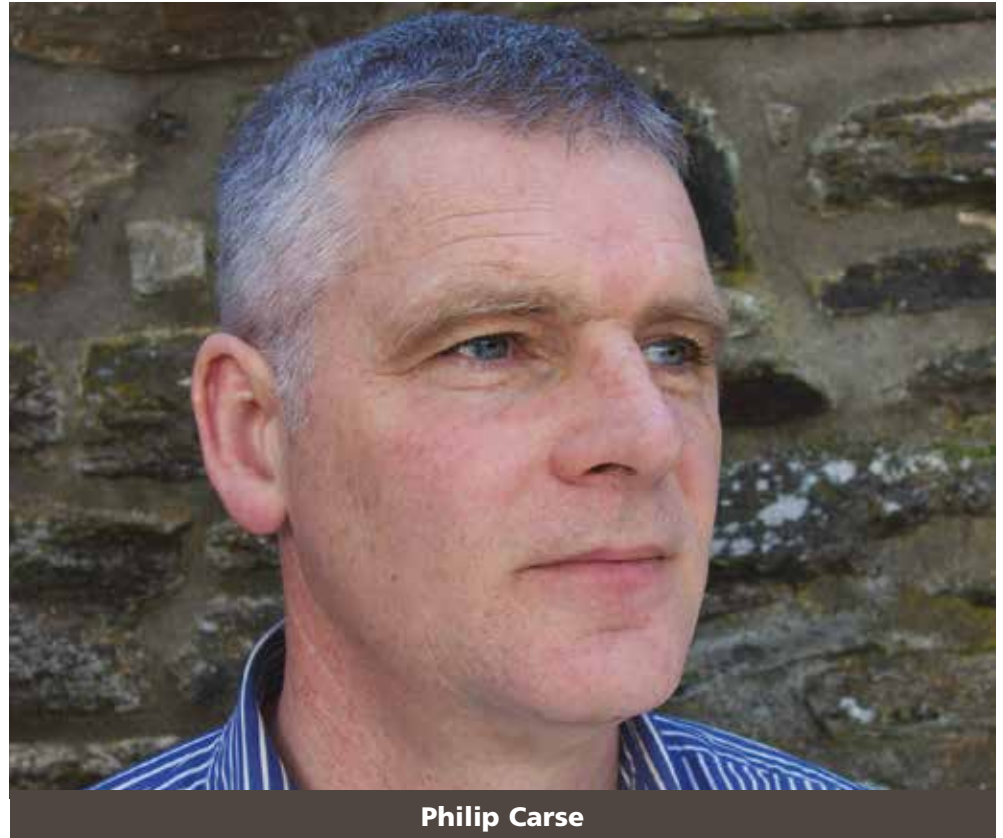
**F**or a second quarter running, fibre (or more accurately next generation networks) features strongly in corporate activity, involving a mix of fundraising, acquisitions and business plan announcements (CityFibre, Hyperoptic, WIG, G.Network, Nextgenaccess and Opencell). There was also an abundance of corporate activity by resellers – transformative ones for Wavenet, Southern, Babble Cloud and Peach; interesting owner-managed decisions by Adam Phones, Charterhouse and Bistech; bolt-ons for Adept (two), Timico, IP Integration and Chess; and overseas deals for Gamma and BT – and some interesting deals for the UCaaS and CPaaS players, especially Vonage and Twilio.

Of particular note, Beech Tree-backed business comms provider Wavenet announced the transformational acquisition of owner-managed Solar Communications, adding at least £2.5m EBITDA pre synergy on £22-23m revenues to Wavenet's £5m EBITDA on £26-27m revenues. In an equally transformative deal, Babble Cloud, the LDC-owned hosted voice specialist previously known as IP Solutions, announced the acquisition of Arden Group, doubling its revenues to

about the £20m mark. Charterhouse Voice and Data announced the sale of a majority stake to August Private Equity to help fund an M&A strategy aimed at building a broad based unified comms, cyber and IT managed services business. In a deal at the more interesting/unexpected end of the spectrum, London-based unified comms reseller Adam Phones was acquired by Crewe-based Radius Payment Solutions, an Inflexion-backed service provider to the fleet and logistics market, with Adam's circa £15m revenues/£3.3m EBITDA/59 staff (year to August 2017) adding to Radius's 1,200 staff and fiscal 2017 EBITDA of £55m.

In another surprising move, Gamma announced the 13.2m euros initial, 27.2m euros maximum/7.5x EBITDA acquisition of Netherlands-based mini-me DX Groep BV (Dean One), boosting revenues by about 6% and marking its first ever step outside the UK. Gamma is buying a business in a less penetrated market than the UK in newer products such as cloud PBX and SIP.

A particular theme of recent results has been business comms providers prospering from a mix of M&A, investments in organic growth, and good customer wins, including



Philip Carse

## A key theme is business comms providers prospering from a mix of M&A, investments in organic growth and good customer wins

Focus, Southern, Excell, Charterhouse, Indigo Belcom, Commsworld, Gamma, Intercity Technology, GCI, Vodafon and Network Telecom, while Olive Comms looks to be on the road to recovery. In contrast, we noted mixed trading from Onecom, Timico, Cellhire, SAS Group and Indigo's ex-parent, TTG. Meanwhile, alongside significant corporate activity, most of the US-listed UCaaS and CPaaS players (8x8, RingCentral, Vonage and Twilio) again beat expectations in the most recent quarter.

### Peer group performances

The Telecoms & Networks peer group has performed reasonably in line with the Megabuyte universe and FTSE

All-Share in share price terms, with three and 12 month declines of 7.5% and 11% respectively. Recent declines were driven by 20-30% falls for Cloudcall, LoopUp, Maintel and Vodafone. In contrast, there were rises for Telecom Plus (16%), Sky (14% on the bid from Comcast) and BT (5%). It is also worth highlighting an 8% decline for Gamma since its interims in early September, which is broadly the magnitude of declines in EBITDA forecasts under new accounting standards.

On a one year view, the outperformers have been Sky (+82%), Gamma (+34%) and LoopUp (+18%), while the underperformers include TalkTalk and Cloudcall (both

-44%), Vodafone (-32%) and Maintel (-19%). This soggy share price performance is reflected in declining current year valuations at a time of high (but also subsiding) software valuations, with software (17.4x) remaining at a significant premium to ICT (10.0x) and with Telecoms & Networks on a lowly 6.4x. Most of the quoted telco players are in the 6-10x current year EBITDA range, with the outliers being BT (4.7x), Gamma and Telecom Plus (15-16x), and LoopUp (19x). ■

**IS Research publishes [www.megabuyte.com](http://www.megabuyte.com), a company analysis and intelligence service covering over 600 public and private UK technology companies. [philip.carse@megabuyte.com](mailto:philip.carse@megabuyte.com)**



# busy Q4 period

## COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

### Bistech CFO elaborates on secret sauce

Accounts to July 2018 from business comms and IT provider Bistech show EBITDA up 1.1% to £5.8m on revenues up 7.1% to £16.5m, combined with the usual solid cash conversion; while a sale of investments resulted in year-end net cash of £30.4m versus £16.4m in 2017, ahead of a £22m share buyback in August 2018. In first time contact, CFO Jonathan Kirkham elaborated on the secrets behind the company's cash generative success over the years, which was rewarded with Bistech being the top placed Telecoms & Networks company at the recent Megabuyte50 awards recognising the top UK private companies.

### CityFibre raises £1.12bn debt for FTTP

Following the news in late October that it intends to spend £2.5bn to deliver full fibre to 5m premises by 2025, Antin and West Street-backed CityFibre last month announced a bumper £1.12bn debt facility from seven banks that will fund the first 2m premises. As such, it caps a bumper year for UK fibre fundings with the exception of TalkTalk which has yet to get its plans off the ground.

### Ofcom announces latest spectrum auction details

Ofcom cleared the desk before the Christmas break with last month's announcement of spectrum licence fees followed by news of another spectrum auction (planned for spring 2020) at the 700MHz and 3.6-3.8GHz level,

representing a 22% increase in available mobile spectrum. As with the 2.3GHz (4G) and 3.4GHz auction earlier last year, Ofcom proposes limiting any one operator to 37% spectrum ownership, primarily impacting BT/EE. Ofcom has set a £1-2bn reserve price range but will offer discounts of £300-400m for operators that opt for enhanced outdoor, indoor and/or rural coverage obligations.

### Fishwick moves up to Chairman role at Adept Technology

AIM-listed £53m revenue business Adept Technology has announced a management change with founder and CEO Ian Fishwick moving up to Chairman from the 1st January 2019 to focus on M&A, being replaced as CEO by Phil Race who brings IT and software experience from his roles at Advanced, Xchanging/Agencyport and SSP. Long-time Chairman Roger Wilson becomes Deputy Chairman.

### Quick and profitable Indigo Belcom exit for Maven and YFM to GCP

Telecoms network support service provider Indigo Belcom has swapped private equity owners barely 2.5 years since its spin out from beleaguered Gresham-backed TTG, with Growth Capital Partners (GCP) buying out Maven and YFM. Indigo CFO Peter Welch confirmed guidance from September of a £4m EBITDA run rate on £31m revenues for the year to April 2019 as the company leverages strong demand for network services and the September 2017

transformational acquisition of Belcom, as well as flagging more M&A backed by GCP's larger cheque book.

### Avaya pleases investors with positive outlook

Avaya has reported slightly better than expected fourth quarter to September 2018 results, with EBITDA of \$178m on adjusted revenues of \$770m down 21% and 3% on the same quarter in 2017, when the company was in Chapter 11 protection, but perhaps more importantly up marginally on the prior quarter. The results, positive commentary and guidance of slight growth in fiscal 2019 went down well with investors, with the shares up 6.5% to \$16.77 versus the \$17.55 when it emerged from Chapter 11 in December 2017, valuing the company at a very modest 5.7x 2019 EBITDA.

### KCOM's new CEO gives view of challenge ahead

KCOM announced revenue and EBITDA for the six months to September 2018 of £142.0m and £29.0m under new IFRS9 and 15, down 5% and up 2% in pro forma terms based on previous accounting standards, but with the new accounting standards impacting headline revenues and EBITDA by 1% and 5% respectively. New CEO Graham Sutherland highlighted a potentially exciting future for the Hull network as well as flagging the UK-wide network, but admitted that much needs to be done around complexity, currently unscalable IT skills and a poorly performing legacy National Network Services. ■

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# Openreach advances mo

There are clear signs that prime movers in the full fibre space are starting to shift the nation towards Digital Britain, and according to Katie Milligan, Managing Director for Customer, Commercial & Propositions at Openreach, the infrastructure provider is doing everything in its power to overcome the practical and regulatory challenges fibre builders will encounter.

**T**he grand project to overhaul the UK's comms infrastructure was always going to be tough. The Government has set a target of 15 million premises connected to full fibre by 2025, with nationwide coverage by 2033. "It is a huge task and, as a business and industry, there's a lot do to achieve that vision," stated Milligan. "The regulator is doing a good job of what is a difficult balancing act. But the Government's 2033 target is a hugely challenging ambition and we need to pull together as an industry to deliver it."

Widespread deployment and take-up of full fibre will be key to the UK remaining globally competitive, and it will support the regional rebalancing of the economy by creating new opportunities in areas like health, education and social care. "I can't think of any CP that doesn't want to be a part of that bright future, but the critical thing is that to get there the planning has to start now," added Milligan. "We're not far away from publishing our consultation on the national upgrade from copper to fibre, and I'd urge any reseller to come and speak to my team about their future planning and how we can help them manage and benefit from the transition."

According to Milligan, Openreach is 'seriously



Katie Milligan

## The way the VOA calculates the rateable value of networks is a handbrake on long-term investment which we need to lift

picking up the pace' of its own rollout by building the infrastructure to serve an additional 13,000 premises every week. "Our current pace gives us confidence that we could reach 10 million premises and beyond, with the right conditions in place for our investment," she explained. "We know we're building ahead of demand but we're building in the midst of a digital revolution. As a country, we're consuming double the amount of data that we did three years ago and there

is no sign of a slow down, so planning for a full fibre future now not only makes sense, it's critical. Building a full fibre network for the UK is all about future proofing our digital infrastructure for decades to come."

### Future services

FTTP technology will enable resellers to offer customers ultrafast, ultra-reliable services that help businesses to compete and grow, and consumers to do everything they want to do in their digital

lives, simultaneously and without interruption. "It will enable new, transformative applications that haven't even been considered yet, and it will be a platform for 5G, the first generation of mobile technology that's designed to support the full spectrum of applications, from mobile broadband and entertainment services, to industrial applications such as robotics and logistics," commented Milligan.

"But a major challenge for us and the industry is business rates. We all hoped the

Chancellor would announce a review of the 'fibre tax' Cumulo rate in the Budget, so it's disappointing that didn't happen. The way the VOA calculates the rateable value of networks is a handbrake on long-term investment which we need to lift. More helpful were the consultations on new builds and wayleaves which will help us all reduce costs. In fact, we're encouraged by the cost points we're achieving on our own build now thanks to innovation and learning at scale."

But cost is only one side of the equation. The big challenge is take-up, pointed out Milligan. "As we're building ahead of demand we need to see consumers and businesses adopt FTTP services quickly in future to make our investments pay," she said. "We have already incentivised the adoption of FTTP for new sites and BDUK areas via wholesale pricing deals, and will continue to encourage wider adoption in the cities with attractive propositions for CPs and customers. We've also consulted channel partners on the potential plan for upgrading their customers to the new network as it's built. Our aim is to move everyone onto the new full fibre platform. It's pointless running two networks."

Another key factor is open competition, and Milligan reaffirmed that Openreach

# ove to full fibre

will encourage others to build by taking advantage of its ducts and poles. "This is important to us as we're only going to meet the Government's ambition by working together, so we're working hard to make our infrastructure easier to access and use," she explained. "We need to continue improving our duct and pole access product, which will be unrestricted, and we're launching further enhancements next year. We've seen the number of CPs using PIA nearly triple and in August we published our Draft Reference Offer, an important step on the road to launching an enhanced product in April 2019."

To push things along Openreach is working closely with CPs, Ofcom and the Office of the Telecommunications Adjudicator (OTA) to develop the PIA specification through the Passive Industry Working Group. "DPA hasn't had the interest or focus to make it a large scale product, but we've done a huge amount of work to develop it and we're still making improvements having consulted with the whole industry," added Milligan. "We're determined to be a dependable partner when it comes to sharing our infrastructure."

"And in terms of creating the practical conditions that will ensure the industry meets the Government's targets, we're working closely with Ofcom and others on the enablers for full fibre – for example the conditions around the upgrade from copper to fibre, and principles around getting a fair bet on any investment. We'll also be responding to Ofcom's

BCMR consultation and we believe full fibre is a key enabler of 5G. With an ever expanding range of leased line products at continuously improved pricing, we believe we're creating the conditions to support the early 5G roll out."

The opportunity for the channel to provide more products and services than ever before is enormous, according to Milligan. "Full fibre networks will be needed to provide the back-

**Our aim is to ultimately move everyone onto the new full fibre platform. It's pointless running two networks**

end data shifting muscle for the next generation for 5G mobile networks," she commented. "5G is set to completely transform the way we do business and promises to boost efficiency and unleash the potential for automation. 5G will also enable a greater exploration of the development of technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality."

"Full fibre is also the driver for a multitude of new emerging services that can be built off that infrastructure, such as the Internet of Things, including fully automated homes, driverless cars, e-health applications and social services at home. All this relies on the greater

capacity, reliability and consistency of service that you get with FTTP. But the tipping point will only come when there is sufficient scale and a sufficient number of people using and consuming products and services on full fibre. That's why we're building a business case that enables us to invest at scale and build at pace."

Digital Britain is one of Ofcom's biggest priorities, noted Milligan, and the watchdog is keen to understand how to help the industry meet the challenges including the creation of a level competitive playing field. "By ensuring we are opening up our ducts and poles, and also by enabling competition at the network level as well as the retail level, Ofcom is indeed creating the conditions for a competitive playing field," stated Milligan. "Ofcom will have a role to play in continuing to guide the industry's thinking going forward."

Openreach is advancing a number of products and programmes designed to help CPs make the transition towards an all-IP world, such as the planned pilot and launch of its Single Order GEA (SOGEA) product suite in 2019. Openreach also announced that the WLR platform will close in 2025, and its FTTP ambitions are crystal clear. "When we see the majority of large and small CPs actively consuming FTTP – and all CPs who signed our recent NGA offer have an objective to consume FTTP by the next financial year – I think we will have crossed the chasm," stated Milligan. "CPs will be able to think of the services they offer exclusively on IP terms where it's available." ■

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# Kivlochan gets more stra

Any attempts to keep ONI CEO Kevin Kivlochan from achieving his business goals are going to flounder on the strength of his strategic independence and ambition – as his early career experiences have already proved along with ONI’s unswerving growth trajectory.

**F**rom the moment Kivlochan sniffed the IT sector’s air there was only one way to go, as far away from his previous work environment as possible. Despite early career highs as a sales person shifting office equipment Kivlochan’s stellar performance did not pay off as you might expect having single handedly doubled company revenue within two years. For his assiduous efforts he received a £25 cash bonus at Christmas as an official thank you present. Feeling understandably miffed Kivlochan realised that his future lay elsewhere and with the help of his uncle, who worked in IT, he secured a sales role in the IT industry. “My basic salary was more than my total remuneration package selling office equipment,” he commented. “My first boss in IT taught me that nothing can conquer like perseverance. The thought of never giving up has guided me ever since. I haven’t look back.”

A sense of bald injustice, followed by a reality check, would again prompt a change in Kivlochan’s career direction when he was Sales Manager at Jaguar Communications prior to the company being acquired by Cable&Wireless. He sought a position on the executive board but, after lengthy delays and stalling tactics, Kivlochan was told, ‘if you wanted to be a boss you would have started your own business by now’.



Kevin Kivlochan

## When I left the company my boss bounced my final pay cheque – so the gloves were off

Not one to duck a piece of solid negativity flung in his direction, and also spurred by anger, Kivlochan teamed up with a member of the sales team who was of the same mind, Mark Collins, and the pair decided to start up a company they called ONI. “We worked out of hours for six months before the time was right to leave Jaguar and devote ourselves full-time to our new venture,” explained Kivlochan. “We soon won our first order, an MoD contract worth

£12,000 which I still have framed on my office wall.”

### Fighting talk

Kivlochan may also consider himself well framed by what he saw as another incident of undeserved and spiteful injustice. “I had to work my notice as a sales person while privately cold calling non-Jaguar opportunities,” he explained. “But when I left the company my boss bounced my final pay cheque – so the gloves were off. I approached Jaguar clients

and within six weeks we won a BT order for £160,000.”

The payback was almost as sweet as ONI’s decision to build and operate its own data centre. “This is something that really differentiates us from nearly all of our competitors out there,” claimed Kivlochan. “And a change in company structure has allowed me to step back, look at the strategy and rebuild the ONI identity based on our core strengths – not just those

that vendors want us to have. This led us to develop our Business Assured branding that now defines us. Our commitment to 100 per cent uptime underpins our data centre and managed service portfolio, and assures customers that they will always have access to their business critical data and applications. The ONI data centre has never had a service outage since it opened in 2011. We are confident it never will.”

ONI currently has a 74 staff headcount and generates circa £20 million turnover with £1.2 million profit. Its target markets are organisations of between 200-2,500 staff across a number of sectors including local government, housing associations, stock brokers, London clearing houses and MoD contractors. “By combining legacy on-premises solutions with our data centre services our customers benefit from transformative digital solutions, deployed where they add most value,” noted Kivlochan. “Our agnostic approach to deployment helps organisations to gain a competitive advantage by reducing costs and delivering leaner, less complex IT solutions.”

For many organisations, believes Kivlochan, the future of IT lies in a hybrid converged infrastructure that features elements of on-premises, colocation and cloud-based products and



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# Strategic with ONI

services. But finding agnostic advice on the best place to deploy each application can be difficult, so ONI straddles both solution areas with a strong legacy Cisco business supported by its status as a data centre owner and operator.

## Value add

According to Kivlochan the actual technology is becoming less important – it is the service wrap and customer experience that now carries the greatest import. “The days of selling kit are long gone because customers want far more value than just technology,” he stated. “Customers don’t care who makes the product now. They prefer the assurance of knowing that the people they partner with will deliver on the service and solution promises they make, all of the time.”

ONI Assure Managed Services provides details about the status of IT infrastructure devices, enabling IT professionals to make better informed investment decisions about life cycle management and avoid unnecessary costs. Improved visibility of contract renewals, or when devices reach end-of-life and end-of-support, makes budgeting more accurate and more predictable.

“The pressure of finite budgets will never go away, but ONI helps by making costs more visible so that customers have greater control,” explained Kivlochan. “Cloud services are provided from a single orchestration platform, one that offers a simplified product range and an all-inclusive price based on customer usage. There is no need

for specialist procurement knowledge to understand a complex product offering or EA pricing structure, let alone fluctuating exchange rates, making it easy to stay in control and avoid unexpected spiralling costs.”

The main three big market trends of most note to Kivlochan are SD-WAN as a driver of customer ROI, the move to hybrid cloud solutions and the rise of customers outsourcing ‘everything IT’ except their core in-house expertise. These developments, he believes, should be a catalyst for resellers to focus on value add services, especially as more companies take services and products from giants like Amazon AWS, Google and Microsoft. “These commoditised services are eating into traditional SI/ VAR markets,” he warned. “Speed of change is our biggest opportunity. We have the capability to adapt in this fast changing market and continue our move towards a recurring revenue model while seeking to acquire and develop stronger data centre offerings.

“As we move further towards becoming a more customer focused business it is important that the whole company changes tact in one go, and doesn’t follow the typical staggered shifts that many businesses suffer from when transformation occurs. Traditional thinking on five year plans are also outdated because of the speed of change in terms of technology and client needs. We plan no more than two years ahead and analyse our strategy and progress. This way we remain confident that our 25 per cent year-on-year growth will continue.” ■

## Just a minute with Kevin Kivlochan...

**Role models:** Paul McCartney and Richard Branson

**Big career achievement:** Starting ONI the same year my daughter was born

**If you weren’t in comms what would you be doing?** Professional racing driving

**Best piece of advice you have been given?** Breathe

**How do you relax?** Go to the gym

**What’s the biggest risk you have taken?** Starting ONI, and moving to a dilapidated Victorian farmhouse as a five year renovation project

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Jesus Christ, I’d ask him why there’s so much sorrow in the world; Winston Churchill to understand some of the unknown truths of World War 2; and John Lennon to talk about the days at the Cavern

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** My greatest strength is perseverance, but I need to work on my ability to hold concentration in long meeting

**Top tip:** Keep looking forward, don’t get bogged down by details and stay positive

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

**How would you like to be remembered?** As a great father

**Industry bugbear:** Manufacturers that use the word ‘tin’ for their products. They devalue the reseller market

**Something about yourself we don’t know:** I’ve been married three times to the same woman but never been divorced

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# Prime time for women

The story of male domination over the course of the comms channel's history is all too familiar, but there are clear signs that the gender imbalance is starting to equalise as positive perceptions of the sector's move towards diversity begin to proliferate, according to Sky Business Head of Operations and Pre-Sales Harmeet Kapoor.

**T**he UK comms and IT industry has always been bad at representing and supporting the ambitions of career women, but it is no longer fantasy to think the IT channel is anything other than a land of opportunity for aspiring females, believes Kapoor. "Perceptions of the tech world are changing from a male dominated environment to an open and supportive landscape for all who wish to succeed," she stated. "Technology and telecommunications do not discriminate between male or female. Anyone with an interest in technology and innovation is welcome to thrive and develop in this industry."

Kapoor has over 15 years experience in setting and achieving strategic objectives across Sky's EMEA region, and during this time she has witnessed a shift in the IT industry towards embracing both male and female talent. So much so that she firmly believes that now is the best time for women to seek a career path in technology.

Restricting the career prospects of females has never been a comms industry blood sport, that would be nothing short of a howling outrage. Women have always had an opportunity to make their own mark, but the general problems, believes Kapoor, have been their negative perceptions of the IT industry, self-imposed capability limitations, and no schemes designed to attract women into the sector and support them through to leadership roles – which all tolled creates the perception of an endemic lack of opportunity for women in the exciting IT environment.

#### Removing obstacles

"Women must dismantle the barrier in their minds and believe that anything is possible," said Kapoor. "There is nothing a woman can't do. More organisations are recognising women and pushing initiatives to support females in technology. Many of the FTSE 100 and 500 companies now have gender balance as yearly targets, as does Sky. People are purposefully recognising



Harmeet Kapoor

## Women must break the barrier in their minds and believe that anything is possible. There is nothing a woman can't do

women as leaders and the stereotypes are changing."

The broad challenge is clearly to find a conduit through which women can conduct their careers and break free from the historic perception of their aspirations being strangled by a male dominated sector. "There are initiatives at Sky, Get into Tech for example, that specifically encourage women with little or no previous technical experience to learn some of the skills necessary to begin a career in technology," explained Kapoor.

"Sky recognises the lack of gender diversity in the

technology sector and believes that encouraging capable and talented women into technical roles will bring enormous benefits, both to women themselves and also the teams and companies they work with. By introducing women into this talent pool Sky hopes to increase diversity in its technology teams and urges the wider industry to follow suit."

Kapoor, who is part of Sky's Women in Leadership programme, is tasked with supporting Sky Business revenue growth through partnerships in the Wi-Fi and wholesale connectivity sectors. She is responsible

for wholesale operations, new partner on-boarding, bid management and provisioning. The leadership programme has helped to advance Kapoor's career progression while instilling the value of mentoring others.

"Sky champions the case for building authentic leaders and giving everyone an opportunity to benefit from mentoring programmes," she explained. "I have personally developed my career and become a much improved leader and fully encourage the use of mentoring programmes. I like to be compassionate in my leadership role so provide flexibility to my team in order to balance their work and home life. I trust them to deliver great results and I'm always there to guide and support my team in their personal development and help them to build a strong career for themselves."

Too many females working in the comms sector have spent the past quarter century foregoing career independence and opportunity, but they should no longer misjudge their opportunities nor see their career prospects suppressed by the fact of a male dominated sector. "There hasn't been a better time for women in technology," Kapoor enthused. "This is the right time for those who want to excel. But we must start from the ground up with schools and parents to encourage girls to explore all aspects of IT, open their minds to careers in technology and operations, and urge them to pursue this life course, just like they would advise on being a doctor or a teacher." ■



# Accelerate Your Communications with a V16 Engine

3CX is starting the year with a bang, introducing the Alpha of its latest version in December, the much anticipated final release of V16 is almost upon us. What's new in 3CX's sweet sixteen and what more can we expect in 2019?



Over the past decade we've experienced incredible shifts in technology and communication which has seen the way we communicate on a personal level change dramatically. Finally, this level of innovation is now having an impact on the way we communicate in the workplace, and an increasing number of businesses are making efforts to ensure that they are not lagging behind.

One of the biggest shake-ups in the industry, which is finally giving businesses the nudge they need to modernise, is the progressive

IP-based communications systems and all that they entail. 3CX has already taken innovative strides towards developing a product that your customers' end-users, administrators, and accountants can all get behind, and with the impending release of the latest version, 3CX is set to stir things up in the UC market like never before. With the V16 Alpha releases in December 2018, 3CX unveiled some exciting new features that completely revamped the PBX from the standpoint of an end-user and an administrator.

security-fix release, .NET Core framework update, and 3CX Debian 9 "Stretch" ISO.

## Beefed-up Security

The emphasis on digital security is sure to grow in 2019 and, in keeping with the promise of a bulletproof PBX solution, 3CX has introduced a number of security updates to address the latest concerns as well as to make management easier and your customers' communications less vulnerable. V16 introduces a new option, which can be enabled through the management console, allowing for the auto-updating of IP blacklist entries daily from an online list managed by 3CX. Additionally, there are new options to restrict access to the management console based on IP, as well as changes so that the PBX does not send the user agent by default, and updated checks and warning notifications for weak extension security levels.

## The Ideal PBX Feature Set for Call Centers

3CX's Alpha release also included an expanded PBX feature set for administrators to explore, including the very well received improvements to the Office 365 integration module, which now enables one-way syncing of Office 365 users to 3CX extensions and more. Some more exciting features, especially for call center managers, include enhanced queue options for skills-based routing, a restructured queue engine for improved scalability of larger installs, better reporting and

an extended IVR module. And, in developing the call center module of the PBX for a more comprehensive contact center solution, the final release of V16 promises even more features and improvements to come.

## More Enjoyable User Experience with Advanced Apps and Web Client

V16 gives us the 3CX Web Client 2.0, with enhanced usability, WebRTC calls straight from the browser as well as inbuilt video - no need to download any clients, apps or plugins. Combined with the revamped Android and iOS clients that include improved instant messaging and a more intuitive user interface, 3CX V16 takes the mobile working experience to a whole new level.

## Easily Manage Multiple PBXs

Perhaps the most exciting V16 introduction for the reseller is the 3CX Instance Management Portal released with V16 Alpha 2. The portal allows you to easily monitor and manage multiple instances - no stress, no hassle. The modern and user-friendly interface enables users to clearly view installations, errors, performance and more as well as perform updates and start and stop services. What's more, the Instance Management Portal

brings all of your customers' PBXs together in one place while keeping them as separate, individual installations.

## Coming Back to the Customer Experience

Aside from continuing on with the mission of providing the most powerful yet manageable PBX solution on the market, 3CX is also turning the focus of its product to the customer experience. With the ability to simplify processes, cut costs for businesses as well as their customers, and to consolidate multiple communication methods onto one platform, 3CX offers an all-encompassing solution that will work for businesses of all kinds. With artificial intelligence and real-time communication appearing to be the next big focus in providing the ultimate customer experience, the exciting new features that we've seen from V16 so far are only the beginning.



phasing out of ISDN. Many of the major telco providers have announced the switch, forcing businesses to think about what their next move is. With the likes of BT Wholesale confirming that ISDN and PSTN will be phased out completely within the next 5 years, the move to SIP for all businesses is looking to be inevitable. Thousands of businesses are now more open to the capabilities of

## A Glance at the Foundations

3CX V16 is built upon a more modern architecture, integrating the latest technologies and standards for a more powerful and secure system. Among the many updates to the "under the hood" components of the PBX is the addition of the latest Postgres DB version for more robust performance on a solid database engine, the latest OpenSSL



# Prepare to fibre up, but

The art of winning in Digital Britain is that of speed and agility in grasping new innovations that surround the roll out of full fibre and 5G. On that there is no fall-back other than to lurch towards the copper cliff edge, according to TalkTalk Business Managing Director Kristine Olson-Chapman who urges resellers to act now despite the wider industry challenges.

**T**he UK's full fibre vision is emerging into market reality, laying the foundations for a new era of innovation in Digital Britain. "The capacity, speed and reliability that full fibre brings enables the channel to provide cloud-based services and applications, many of which haven't been invented or developed yet," stated Olson-Chapman. "Key innovations all have one thing in common – they rely on secure connectivity to access compute power and big data in the cloud.

"Whether it's mixed and augmented reality transforming the retail sector while enhancing communication and collaboration; robotics automating the more repetitive office tasks and customer interactions; or how the IoT and Artificial Intelligence will transform the connected home or office – having the right connectivity is key. Furthermore, the channel understands customers, their business and their future needs. The most successful will be those that deliver real value by putting new technologies and great connectivity together."

This is the vision contained within the Government's much welcomed Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review which was published in July last year. It set out a national long-term digital



Kristine Olson-Chapman

## The Digital Communications Review (DCR) represented a real pivot in strategy. Previously, Ofcom largely accepted Openreach's infrastructure monopoly

strategy with full fibre and 5G services confirmed as the de facto infrastructure of the future. Key themes in the report, pointed out Olson-Chapman, include

the wholehearted backing of competition as the best way to deliver widespread FTTP; a practical focus on addressing the barriers that add unnecessary costs or

delays to fibre roll outs; and an acknowledgement that rural areas must not be overlooked. "The commitment of £3-5 billion for FTTP in the final 10

per cent of the country is an important step, but at a time of competing pressures on Government resources we don't yet know when that funding

# hurdles remain

will be released and when rural areas will benefit," commented Olson-Chapman.

"FTTP coverage will take a while to reach the majority of homes and businesses, so resellers will need a partner that can support their customers on the journey from existing services through SOGEA (the data-only fibre to the cabinet access option) before getting to FTTP. By 2025 we expect approximately half of the UK's premises to lack FTTP access. Therefore, a provider that can offer resellers options to transition to dedicated Ethernet access as well as smooth migration to SOGEA will be crucial."

Olson-Chapman highlighted a number of challenges that lie ahead, such as timelines, citing wayleaves which may require primary legislation to resolve. "That isn't going to happen quickly, particularly if Parliamentary time is dominated by Brexit-related legislation," she added. "The risk is that we don't see a meaningful benefit for several years. Some issues can't be resolved by central Government alone. Reforming street works, for example, requires cooperation with local authorities which have their own competing priorities."

Is Ofcom sending the right signals and displaying well informed intent in terms of creating a level competitive playing field, and encouraging the conditions to ensure the industry meets the Government's target for UK wide full fibre and 5G roll out? There are two aspects to this question, believes Olson-Chapman – the strategic direction of travel and the tactical implementation.

"Strategically, Ofcom is heading in the right direction," she stated. "The Digital Communications Review (DCR) represented a real pivot in strategy. Previously, Ofcom largely accepted Openreach's infrastructure monopoly and focused on creating competition at the retail level. The DCR changed that and Ofcom is now explicitly supporting competition at the infrastructure level as the best way to achieve quick, widespread

## We need Ofcom to define what the Openreach transparency obligation looks like in practice so everyone is clear

FTTP coverage. That mirrors the Government's approach and is a welcome change in strategy."

### Pace of change

The next question, however, is whether the practical steps required to support alternative network investment are moving quickly enough. Ofcom and the Government are focusing on many of the right issues – a workable, affordable system for altnet providers to access Openreach duct and poles; reforming wayleaves to make it easier to roll out FTTP on private land; standardising streetworks; and new rules to speed up the deployment

of FTTP to new build estates. "Some of this will require legislation, meaning it will be several years before we see the practical benefit," noted Olson-Chapman. "It's crucial we maintain the momentum and move as quickly as possible."

She highlighted other areas where Government and Ofcom need to go further, such as Openreach transparency. "The Government's FTIR rightly sets out an expectation that Openreach has a unique obligation to be transparent with the market about where it plans to build and enable altnets to avoid accidental overbuild," she said. "That principle is important, but we need Ofcom to define what the Openreach transparency obligation looks like in practice so everyone is clear. That's crucial to ensuring the maximum number of homes and businesses benefit from FTTP."

Ofcom understands the dynamics of the B2B market, including the importance of the channel, believes Olson-Chapman. But on big decisions it's likely that established players with large regulatory and legal teams will shout loudest. "That potentially squeezes out the channel voice," she commented. "The only way to stop that happening is for the channel to engage with Ofcom, which can be difficult without dedicated regulatory teams. One option is to work with larger partners. We are keen to talk to partners and share our understanding of what's happening, what it means for the channel and how the channel can best use limited resources to have its voice heard on the issues that really matter." ■

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# Centres of innovation

Given the nature of today's communications environment, the only plausible option for contact centres is to strike the right balance of new technologies such as cross-company omnichannel analytics and reporting.

It is increasingly clear in the contact centre space that all roads lead to innovations in new technologies, the challenge is to strike a workable balance, noted Sabio Chief Innovation Officer Stuart Dorman. Sabio has long supported CX and contact centre teams, helping organisations to deliver an optimum balance of self-service and assisted service based on technology such as conversational AI. "We're seeing an emphasis on digital transformation, and from a contact centre perspective that means steering more and more people towards digital and self-service channels," he stated. "However, while this is proving increasingly successful at deflecting lower value interactions away from the contact centre, there's a danger that CX teams might unwittingly lose a potential sales conversion or pass off more complex interactions. Hence the need to strike the right balance between automated self-service and the contact centre."

The key challenge facing today's Customer Experience teams is how to engage successfully in a world where customers are communicating more than ever across

multiple websites, social and messaging networks. As a result, more than 50 per cent of organisations are now forecasting a reduction in their overall contact centre voice traffic. "We've passed 'peak voice' and how brands respond to this shift in customer engagement is critical," added Dorman. "It's important they get their timing right and avoid jeopardising their CX performance by debuting next generation technologies before they're ready to support customer interactions."

As organisations seek to maximise customer interactions across all web, voice and messaging channels, conversational AI-enabled virtual assistant technology and Natural Language Processing platforms, supported by Knowledge Management systems, will come to dominate how customer requests are understood and channel-appropriate responses are generated. Against this backdrop, and since Horizon Capital's investment in Sabio in 2016, the contact centre specialist has focused on broadening its solutions portfolio and geographic coverage.



Stuart Dorman

## We've passed 'peak voice', and how brands respond to this shift in customer engagement is now critical

Its strategy included the acquisitions of SaaS solutions provider Rapport in March 2017, DatapointEurope in July 2017 and customer insight and contact centre benchmarking firm Bright UK in March last year, as well as the addition of FlexAnswer Solutions, a Singapore-based provider of Virtual Assistant solutions in December 2018.

### Virtual assistants

"We're convinced that within the next few years almost every customer interaction will be fronted by conversational AI-enabled virtual assistant technology, and that these solutions will quickly evolve to handle interactions better and deliver improved CX outcomes for customers," commented Dorman. "This technology will be instrumental in

transforming the contact centre landscape, but its success will pivot around how interactions are seamlessly blended with more complex human-assisted service capabilities. This next generation of integrated digital and human-assisted CX offering presents a fantastic opportunity for resellers. That's why Sabio invested in FlexAnswer's virtual assistant, NLP and machine learning technologies."

While 2019 will see an increased focus on technologies such as AI and augmented interactions, it's equally important that organisations should focus on smarter analytics and insight in order to track and inform the user experience across end-to-end customer

journeys. "We'll continue to build out our digital and insight capabilities, particularly around intelligent voice of the customer initiatives that we can apply to inform CX re-engineering and digital transformation projects," explained Dorman.

"We're also seeing interest around the conversational user interface, not just for the voice channel but also across web channels and messaging. It's essential that organisations adopt a single conversational AI platform to support all engagement channels. By adding the full stack FlexAnswer cloud-based virtual assistant solution to our portfolio we're able to provide our customers with a conversational AI platform that can understand customer requests and generate channel-appropriate responses."

Such capabilities are essential as customer-engaging employees now face a number of disjointed inbound information (via voice, video, chat or email) in addition to their own internal channels such as Slack or Skype, meaning that one system of engagement is important to capture all interactions across any site or channel, believes Lisa Clark, VP of Contact Centre Product Management at 8x8. She said that 8x8's acquisitions in the UC space validate the business value of tightly integrated UC and CC solutions, which is reflected in its X Series product suite.

"They belong together on one platform, not only so that every interaction and conversation anywhere in the enterprise is captured globally for analytics and business improvement, **Continued on page 34**

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Continued from page 32

but also because a single platform drives simplicity and ease-of-use for both the business administrator and the end user," stated Clark. "We are seeing ease of use resonate equally with having actionable insights and analytics, especially with mid-market customers."

Clark noted that machine learning and AI are having a big impact on the UC and contact centre industry, and that 8x8 is using this technology to derive context from the data that flows through its global cloud services. "By providing insight on possible anticipated needs and recommending intelligent actions and next steps in the customer journey we are enhancing the end-to-end customer experience," she added.

"We're witnessing a whole class of data analytics technologies coming to fruition. These will provide a contact centre manager or agent with greater insight into who is on the other end of the interaction, their relative value, why they might be interacting with the contact centre, and then optimally route or escalate the interaction accordingly. These capabilities will move from the lab to the real world and create a solid business case for a contact centre to move to cloud-based platforms. It will be contact centre malpractice to stay with legacy systems."

Clark also observed that open source technology will play a big role in developing contact



Lisa Clark

centre applications. It's an area of particular interest for 8x8 given its acquisition of video conferencing provider Jitsi which has an open source community. "By incorporating Jitsi's open source technology into our video communications platform, contact centre agents will have another channel to engage with customers and subject matter experts, driving improved first call resolution," said Clark.

Akixi Managing Director Bart Delgado has also witnessed companies of all sizes display an appetite for adopting new and popular communication channels. Until now contact centre or omnichannel solutions have mainly been adopted by larger organisations with deep pockets, but Akixi has taken into account the requirements of all companies no matter their size with a strategy to deliver enterprise

## We are seeing ease of use resonate equally with having actionable insights and analytics, especially with mid-market customers

reporting and analytics into the omnichannel environment. "Omnichannel solutions have provided many large enterprises with a differentiator," stated Delgado. "However, as these solutions become more widespread and mainstream the focus will once again come around to who can differentiate their service and gain that competitive advantage."

### Rise of omnichannel

Also trumpeting the rise of omnichannel is Simon Whatley, Director of Sales Operations at Tollring. He agrees that the need to manage and analyse customer interactions across the whole business is critical to delivering high level customer experiences. "While a contact centre may be the best way to handle and process high volumes of customer interactions, this often means that data and insight relating to traffic and performance is limited to one small area of the business," he stated.

"A significant amount of customer interaction happens outside of the contact centre, in stores and accounts departments for example. Achieving targeted service levels and SLAs in the contact centre is

important but focusing on this area alone carries the risk of missing hundreds of valuable yet unmonitored customer interactions elsewhere in the company."

In the SME and mid-market space it is particularly important to take into consideration customer interactions within every customer-facing team, according to Whatley. "Since over 60 per cent of the workforce in the UK works within SMEs, funnelling every customer interaction via a formal call or contact centre may not be an option," he stated. "If you can't measure it, you can't manage unanswered calls, unreturned emails, unmonitored web chat and unread social media, which could paint a very different picture of the overall customer experience. Where such communications tools are used they need to be monitored as part of the overall customer engagement strategy to fully understand the customer experience."

Customer expectations must therefore be understood and serve as the foundations for KPIs, SLAs and other metrics, and this year will see the rise of omnichannel analytics where all relevant customer interaction data is evaluated, predicts Whatley. He also expects demand for cloud-based solutions to continue rising. "The cloud provides an opportunity for a contact

centre to de-risk the process of adopting new solutions by paying only for services they use, with the ability to scale up and down," he added. "Cloud contact centres work well in business sectors where communications traffic peaks and troughs throughout the year, such as universities, travel agents and retailers, since capacity can be increased much more easily than with on-premise.

"Cloud technology is the facilitator, opening up a significant opportunity for the channel in terms of accessibility to new markets and ease of deployment and management. The cloud is enabling contact centre solutions to become accessible to the mid-market – the more 'informal' contact centre space - that has until now had little access to powerful analytics tools. This is an area of growth for Tollring's channel partners.

"Analytics that unlock hidden data that exists within all channels, both verbal and written, and across the whole of the business will provide a holistic insight, enabled by speech intelligence and omnichannel integration, and will change the rules for customer experience. Businesses will ultimately be much better equipped to manage their customer facing teams and use intelligent analytics leading to more informed decision making." ■



Simon Whatley

## If you can't measure it, you can't manage unanswered calls, unreturned emails, unmonitored web chat and unread social media



Bart Delgado

## The focus will come around to who can differentiate and gain that competitive advantage



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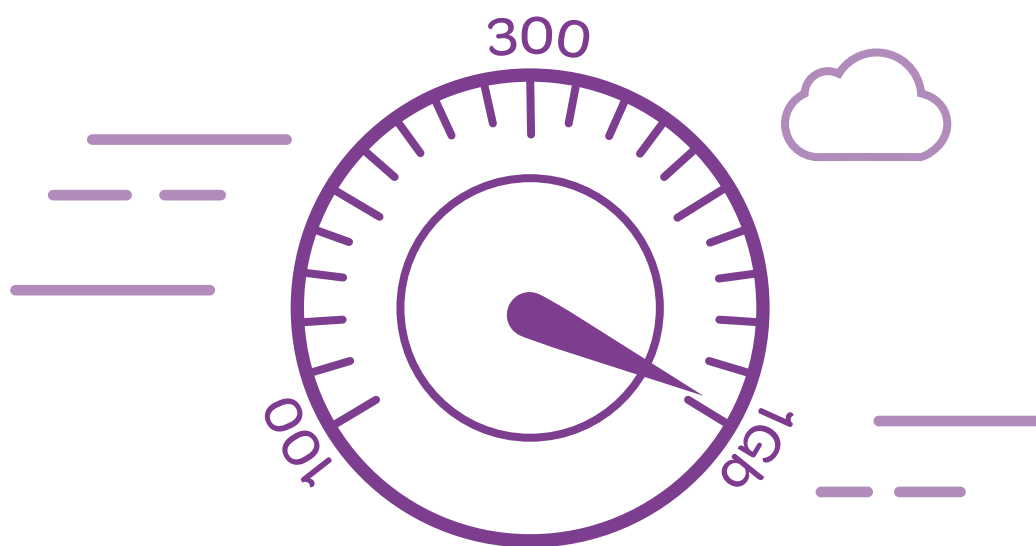
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Iain Shearman, Managing Director of National Network Services, Kcom

the fourth year running.

Iain Shearman, Managing Director of National Network Services commented: "The value sales and marketing brings to businesses is incredible, not only are they the voices and faces of our organisations, they're the ones who help drive success. "The Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing awards provides the perfect setting to celebrate our colleagues' success and reward them for the hard work and commitment they bring to

their roles every day. It's important we recognise the great work that they do, and the passion they bring to the partner channel, making it a real joy to be part of. "We're so proud to be part of this event, and for me, these awards are truly invaluable and a unique opportunity to show our gratitude to the teams that translate our vision into tangible results that make the channel such an important part of the communication services market in the UK."



## Reseller Awards

Sales Team of the Year – businesses up to £2.5m turnover  
 Marketing Team of the Year – businesses up to £2.5m turnover  
 Marketing Campaign of the Year – businesses up to £2.5m turnover  
 Sales Team of the Year – businesses £2.5m to £7.5m turnover  
 Marketing Team of the Year – businesses £2.5m to £7.5m turnover  
 Marketing Campaign of the Year – businesses £2.5m to £7.5m t/o  
 Sales Team of the Year – businesses over £7.5m turnover  
 Marketing Team of the Year – businesses over £7.5m turnover  
 Marketing Campaign of the Year – businesses over £7.5m turnover

## Service Provider Awards

Channel Sales Team of the Year  
 Channel Marketing Team of the Year  
 Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

## Distributor Awards

Channel Sales Team of the Year  
 Channel Marketing Team of the Year  
 Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

## Vendor Awards

Channel Sales Team of the Year  
 Channel Marketing Team of the Year  
 Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

## Special Awards

Best Partner/Customer Event  
 Best Sales Support Team NEW  
 Charity & Fundraising award NEW  
 Best Social Media campaign  
 Best PR campaign  
 Best Company to Work For  
 Best Apprenticeship Scheme  
 Overall Channel Team of the year

## Event Details

Thursday May 2nd 2019: 12:30pm - 6:00pm

## Table Booking

The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards provides a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the success of your 'superheroes' in style at the glamorous Grosvenor Square Marriott Hotel in London's Mayfair. For table booking details please contact Simon Turton on **01895 454603**; email [sturton@bpl-business.com](mailto:sturton@bpl-business.com)

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# It's all systems grow in th

**D**espite economic and political uncertainty across the globe, analyst Gartner is predicting that ITC spending is projected to total \$3.8 trillion in 2019 and spending on communications services will increase by 1.2%. Indeed, at Comms Vision in November, channel leaders outlined how the roll-out of fixed line fibre and 5G mobile services here in the UK will accelerate digital transformation across the country, creating new and exciting opportunities for the channel.

Whatever Brexit (if it ever happens!), may bring to the economic fortunes of the UK, the ICT channel is poised for continual growth in the year ahead and even if there is a downturn – and many predict a global stock market correction is inevitable - our industry is better positioned than many to ride out stormy conditions.

The Government is fixed on its digital connectivity path and FTTP and 5G promise exciting opportunities for fleet-footed resellers prepared to be disruptive and take customers on new technology journeys.

More than ever during 2019, as the No 1 magazine and events business serving the channel, Comms Dealer aims to help you understand the new margin opportunities emerging and grow your business on the back of the Digital Revolution.

Our education programme kicks off in February with our new ICT Investment Forum event at London's BAFTA on February 21st. This is a 'must attend' event for reseller owners and directors seeking to grow their business in the year ahead. See: [www.ictinvestmentforum.com](http://www.ictinvestmentforum.com)

This will be closely followed by Margin in Mobile at the Northampton Marriott Hotel on March 21st, another new event designed to help resellers introduce or upgrade mobile and IOT offerings. See: [www.margin-in-mobile.com](http://www.margin-in-mobile.com)

With the Comms Dealer Sales Awards, Margin in Voice & Data, The Comms National Awards and Comms Vision to follow, you can be assured channel education, networking and business development remains at the core of our strategy in 2019. We look forward to sharing success with you in the year ahead.



JAMES WARNER  
GLIDE

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

Extremely confident – demand is stronger than ever for advice, support and capability when it comes to IT and Comms services we as a business and as a community offer.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

The ever-increasing march towards Digital Britain means business and consumers continue to need higher bandwidth, better quality data services in order to run their daily lives and business.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

A genuinely different offering previously unavailable to our target audience. We ask the question, "how did you survive before we got here? Now let's give you the capability to really transform the way you do business".

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

Work much closer with the channel to ensure maximum benefit and possibilities are open to our target end user customer. As well as using this medium to spread the word that full fibre and faster speeds will transform the way you can do business.



TOM MAXWELL  
NIMANS

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

Nimans has experienced record levels of growth and we're very confident the momentum will continue throughout 2019.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

On-premise system sales remain strong however we recognise this will not be sustained longer term. But this is off-set by the continued growth of cloud-based technologies where end points play a critical role. They are becoming ever more feature-rich which aids adoption.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

Compendium, our IP end point provisioning and management service helps set us apart from our rivals alongside continued investment in our staff to ensure they always deliver the highest levels of service – combined with an ever-evolving product portfolio.

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

For the last 40 years Nimans has been at the forefront of the distribution industry in 2019 our people will build on our trusted reputation and deliver strong and sustainable growth.



JUSTIN BLAINE  
NTA

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

NTA are very confident going into 2019. With the ISDN turn off becoming a reality, resellers will continue to educate end users that they need to migrate to either SIP or Hosted Telephony, therefore we see no slowdown in the market.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

NTA has a whole raft of new products and features planned in 2019 which we truly believe will even further differentiate NTA from our competition and in turn give our partners some unique USP's.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

Our models always set us above our competition. We will continue to be disruptive and you will see some real advantageous initiatives coming from the NTA team very quickly in the new year.

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

NTA will continue to offer a more comprehensive marketing support programme for our partners and a series of conferences to reiterate why NTA offers the best margin opportunity for all reseller partners.



ADAM CATHCART  
9 GROUP

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

We're excited about the future of eve, our hosted telephony solution. We have achieved quarter on quarter growth for ten consecutive quarters. We're looking forward to more of the same in 2019.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

The integration of voice and IT services will continue to evolve, and this link will become more apparent in the buying process for the customer. Partners will have to continue to react to a more educated buyer, to maintain a consultative relationship.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

Our agility. Throughout 2018 we have bolstered our IT knowledge and expertise. With over 220 people in our business we have the experience and flexibility to be agile with partners while they transition with the changes in the market.

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

Maintaining our partner focus led approach. We aim to help our partners be Free to Perform by giving them the confidence to be truly consultative.



## The power to differentiate

Wavenet Wholesale have unified the leading providers under one roof so our Partners don't have to. We are continually strengthening our relationships to offer the latest portfolio of products and services.

# The new digitised landscape



COLIN HEPHER  
SOS

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

SOS Communications will be celebrating its 25th anniversary. This has helped us to re-focus, despite what is happening on the political scene, and we envisage significant growth both in revenue and staffing levels.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

SOS has introduced a new on premise VOIP PBX from FONtevo which offers proprietary SIP phones. The systems also work with Polycom, Snom, Yealink and other major SIP phone providers.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

SOS Communications is renowned for supplying upcycled equipment, repairs and for its training academy. We are not so well known for the new equipment we distribute. We are already ahead of competitors ...we just need to tell more VAR's where we are!

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

Re-branding to clarify that resellers are aware of our experience and flexibility. Above all, we will offer free technical training and also generate end user leads for our partners.



LAUREN MCMANUS  
DAISY WHOLESale

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

We're confident that 2019 will be a success for Daisy Wholesale. With our One and Only Convergence Solution, we have a unique offering that has been specifically designed to maximise the convergence opportunity.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

The rise of the mobile workforce will encourage our sales teams to optimise the hosted voice and mobile potential. Unified communications is becoming increasingly important so we will be pushing our flexible solutions to capitalise on this.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

In addition to the high levels of support that we offer our Partners, we expect the launch of our Partner Sales Academy to propel us ahead of competitors.

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

We plan to take advantage of the opportunities presented by unified communications to encourage our resellers to cross-sell with the One and Only Convergence Solution. Each product complements the others, working together to create a market-leading integrated solution for business.



VINCENT DISNEUR  
UNION STREET

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

Having invested £1,750,000 into research and development over the past year, we're very confident going into 2019. We have a lot planned, including the launch of a new product and some exciting new developments to our aBILLity billing platform.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

Integration continues to provide many exciting opportunities for the development of our solutions. Our recently released Quote2Cash solution, which allows CPs to compare prices for connectivity services by integrating with suppliers' ordering systems, continues to be a strong seller.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

Combining feature-rich billing and provisioning software with unbeatable technical support, consultancy services and training, continues to differentiate us in the market.

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

Look after your customers and they'll look after you. Continuing to provide a first-class service for our 600 customers is, as ever, our top priority. We also have a disruptive new product coming that CPs are going to love.



PAUL NORTH  
ENTANET

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

Absolutely! As part of CityFibre we're at the forefront of the UK's exciting full fibre revolution, rolling out an ambitious £2.5bn infrastructure investment plan to provide full fibre services to five million premises, a third of the Government's target, by 2025.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

Our Gigabit Passive Optical Network (GPON) technology and Ethernet products offer blisteringly fast high capacity access at a price that gives resellers the best margin opportunity in the market.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

CityFibre's full fibre network is designed and built for our digital future, providing the channel with innovative and highly differentiated connectivity products at the most competitive prices in the market.

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

We're encouraging forward thinking partners to adopt a new business model and target their sales where fibre already exists in our Gigabit Cities across the UK.



ED WINFIELD  
CONTENT GURU

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

2019 is set to be an exciting year for Content Guru. New developments will transform the way that organisations connect and build lasting relationships with their customers, using intelligent automation and self-service options to keep up with rising millennial demands.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

AI and NLP solutions are set to shake up the market, with our AI toolset 'brain' becoming a key focus for the team in 2019.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

We are ahead of the pack in contact centre AI, developing and implementing solutions at scale to enhance customer contact. For instance, our recent 47,000 web chat agent deployment in Japanese e-commerce shows a big leap in our chatbot capabilities.

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

Engaging with more resellers is a key part of our strategy, and Content Guru will continue to make rapid developments in contact centre AI and Intelligent automation.



PAUL HARRISON  
THE VOICE FACTORY

**ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?**

We are confident about the year ahead despite challenges such as Brexit, primarily based on our international focus. We are already sell into in 37 countries and expect to continue to grow in 2019 both domestically and internationally.

**WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES EXCITE YOU?**

New technologies around collaboration with our 'UC-One Complete' solution, contact centre solutions and our Intelligent IVR will enable TVF's partners to win more new opportunities and increase ARPU from their existing customers.

**WHAT WILL GIVE YOU AN EDGE IN 2019?**

Our carrier grade 5x9s platform, 100% indirect sales strategy, international capabilities, open APIs, vertical focus and market leading state-of-the-art solution capabilities set us apart from the competition.

**WHAT'S YOUR BIG IDEA FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?**

To ensure continued success with our 100% indirect model, a focus on new verticals, integration of some key EvolveIP owned solutions and to carry on doing what we do well.



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# What's your number?

A business plan without a personal strategy is as pointless as not knowing your numbers, according to Xentum Managing Director Adam Carolan, a next generation financial planning expert whose Grab Life ethos brings a fresh perspective to a staid sector.

If you're in business, your day will undoubtedly be full of numbers. Numbers relating to your profit and loss, your sales figures, your headcount, your cash flow, your net income, your price point, your gross margin, your total inventory. They're what you focus on day in, day out. After all, they'll be what will determine the health of your business. The problem is that you can be so focused on all the numbers there's sometimes little time to step back and think about your own personal future. But when it comes to your own financial planning there's one number that's more important than

any of the others – your number – the number that will allow you to plan your exit from your business and get on with enjoying your financial freedom. The irony is that very few people think about taking the time to work it out.

What does knowing your number mean? Being clear about your number means working out the figure that will allow you to do everything that would make up your ideal lifestyle. That figure will give you the assurance you won't run out of money, whatever happens. It will also enable you to set a clear date for



Adam Carolan

when you can exit your business. Now, selling your business may seem a long way off but it's never too early to start planning; and as with anything in life, if you know what you're aiming for you've got a much better chance of getting there.

#### Time to focus

So how do you work out what your all-important number is? Think about when you would like to step away. It's a tough one. This is the business you'll have put your heart and soul into building up but there'll come a time when you'll want to move on and do something else. After all, the reason you decided to start your own business in the first place was no doubt to give you and your family financial freedom and live your ideal lifestyle.

If you want to stop work at 60, and assuming you have paid off your mortgage, now think about all the money you will still need to spend on outgoings each year: Basic bills (food, utilities,

council tax, broadband, phone etc); holidays (skiing and summer – maybe including some lifelong travel ambition); leisure expenses (clothes shopping, eating out, entertainment, gym membership etc); and helping other family members.

There'll be many more things to consider but in this simple example let's take a figure of £40,000 per year. Assuming you live until 90 that's 30 years of life after running your own business – 30 x £40,000 makes £1.2 million. Without over complicating things in this short article, we can take off what you'll receive in state pensions,

other income and bingo – we have your number! When you know this number you'll have a goal that leads you to achieving financial freedom. That's the only figure you really need to worry about – the one that will enable you to live your desired lifestyle for your life going forward.

Obviously, the calculation is a lot more complex in reality. As well as state pensions it will also need to take into account any other income, inflation, investment returns, future capital expenditure and changes in lifestyle – but you get the idea. Knowing what you're working towards means that if you're getting tired of the daily grind and there are other, more exciting things you want to do, you no longer have to feel tied. All sorts of opportunities could open up.

It also makes sure that you don't have to carry on working crazy hours, completely wedded to your business for longer than you need to be, without realising you could have exited years earlier. Once you've reached your magic number you can stop! So maybe it's worth taking a step back and asking the question, 'If you could sell your business today and know that the proceeds would allow you to live your desired lifestyle for the rest of your life – would you?' ■

## Fresh perspectives on life matters

ADAM Carolan will share more insights on financial planning and wealth management based on his *Life. Grab it. Live it. Love it.* approach at next month's ICT Investment Forum (see opposite box). He is championing a new approach within the financial advisory space and has worked with many organisations and business owners in the creative media and tech sectors to help them achieve personal financial success. He has supplanted the traditional standardised, rudimentary service with a focus on innovation and inspiration as the cornerstones of financial advice and wealth management. Carolan also founded NextGen Planners, a primarily digital training and community platform that trains the next generation of financial planners with over 300 members. And he hosts the NextGen Planners podcast which has over 60 episodes.

## Maximise the value of your business

ICT Investment Forum, February 28th 2019, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

#### Insight sessions include:

- Navigating the comms sector growth landscape
- How to identify the optimal financing solution
- Investing in the future: You have the funds, what next?
- M&A strategies: First steps and how to get it right
- High calibre interviews with business growth experts

This event is free to attend based on approval. To register your interest please go to: [ICTInvestmentForum.com](http://ICTInvestmentForum.com)

## Partner Service

*The Clark's nutcracker disperses the seeds of the whitebark pine, helping it to grow, while the pine provides a vital source of food for the bird – together, the two form the perfect partnership.*



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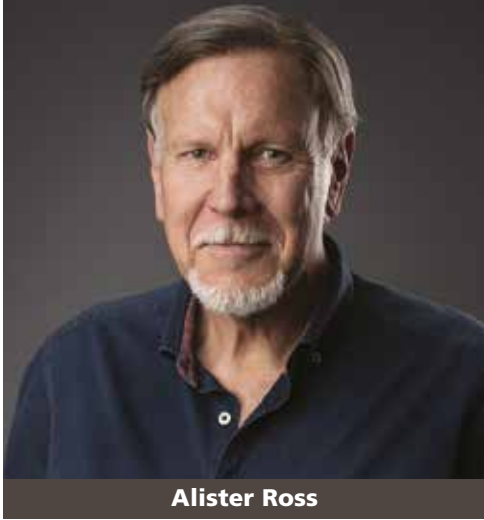
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# Simwood gears up



Alister Ross

A TOP level executive reshuffle at Simwood sees Group Chairman Grahame Davies become COO of the UK operation. The move follows the appointment of Thomas Hadden to the same role at the US business. Davies' immediate remit is to build operational scale as Simwood seeks to advance work towards ISO9001 and ISO27001. Over the longer term and in line with business growth Davies will redefine and delineate the future MD role according to the company's developing strategic objectives. "Grahame brings a lifetime of relevant experience having been co-founder of Demon Internet and Group CEO of Easynet, along with being the Chairman of LINX," stated MD Simon Woodhead.

With an eye on amplifying Simwood's key messages to the market the company has also pulled in Alister Ross as part-time CMO. "Alister brings a wealth of experience across many sectors

including telecoms," added Woodhead. "He'll turn up the volume on our current work to ensure that customers fully understand our approach, our objectives and our evolving proposition."

Simwood's current recruitment activity includes the appointment of former FreeSWITCH-er Kathleen King who joins Simwood's Bristol office this month as a Level 2 SIP Engineer.

## Also on the move...



Ruth Hickman

DMSL has pulled in former BT-er Ruth Hickman as Channel Account Manager for the northern region with a remit to get hands on with existing local partners and recruit additional MSPs.

Hickman joins the distributor following

a 20 year stint at BT where for the last eight years she operated as Channel Manager for BT Business. Hickman said: "The demand for data on fixed line and mobile services is growing at a phenomenal pace and that potential is not confined to the south of Britain. The north is a vibrant and dynamic region and the potential in cities like Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Newcastle is enormous."

THE appointment of Phil Donigan as a Director of White Horse Telecom is reflective of a new phase of growth planned by the Hungerford-based comms and data provider.

Donigan moved from Witney-based STL where he became Sales Director during a near 20 year stint at the firm. White Horse Telecom began its commercial life in January 2006 and according to MD



Phil Donigan

Paddy Coppinger the hire of Donigan will enable the business to shift up a gear. "Phil brings many years of experience, a successful track record and together we'll shape the next chapter for White Horse Telecom and push the business forward."

# Exertis hires transformer



Howard Ingleby

RESPONSIBILITY for the business transformation under way at Exertis has been grasped by incoming Howard Ingleby who steps into the newly created role of Programme Director for UK&I

reporting to COO Richard Hinds. "Managing change is a key process for all organisations and requires detailed planning, a methodical approach and engagement with different functions," said Hinds. "Howard has Programme Director and Programme Management Office experience gained in a variety of industry sectors."

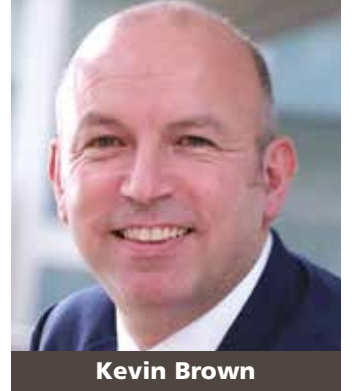
Ingleby's previous business transformation experience includes periods in insurance, engineering, plant hire, construction and management. He also spent six years as a Programme Director at Speedy Hire and seven years with Deloitte and Price Waterhouse Coopers.

"Given the high volume of projects on the go it can be a challenge to manage, control, deliver change and realise the benefits without a co-ordinated and structured change management process and governance regime," said Ingleby.

"With the existing Exertis teams working on delivering change we can collectively build an approach that will be rapid, flexible and capable of delivering sustainable change to the business."

# BT Security boss named

BT SECURITY chief Mark Hughes has stepped down and departed the business making way for incoming Managing Director Kevin Brown who joined BT in 2012 following a 20-year



Kevin Brown

career in law enforcement. Brown has specialised in security throughout his time at BT and in previous roles has led its global investigation and intelligence teams and driven the modernisation of BT's protection systems.

In his previous position Brown led BT Security's engagement with international governments and managed its relationships with international law enforcement agencies such as Interpol and Europol.

Brown said: "Our global network gives us a ringside view of the latest threats so we can anticipate and mitigate emerging attacks before they impact our business or our customers."

# Directors step in as Baker retires



Lee Harris, Lee Baker and Ross Floyd

THE retirement of long serving Midwich Commercial Director Lee Baker has prompted a management restructure and the appointment of Lee Harris and Ross Floyd to Divisional Director roles. Mark Lowe, MD, said: "Lee will leave a lasting impression but at the same time we are excited about the succession plan and these well deserved promotions." The AV and document solutions distributor provides technology from over 300 vendors including Samsung, LG, Epson and NEC. Harris will focus on AV while Floyd's remit encompasses AV, document solutions and associated technologies. Baker, who joined Midwich in 2002, added: "I'm proud of how Midwich has grown from a small Diss-based business to a global player. It's been an amazing journey."

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

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Digital transformation is impacting all areas of the comms market, disrupting traditional business models and prompting a wave of M&A deals and investments in high growth channel businesses. Against this backdrop, it is essential that potential buyers, sellers and investment-seekers understand their options and how to advance through the process.

## Insight sessions include:

- How to navigate the comms sector growth landscape
- Financing your growth plan: How to identify the optimal financing solution
- Investing in the future: You have the funds, what next?
- M&A strategies: How to get it right



*Hosted by Simon Jack,  
Broadcast Business Editor*

## LIMITED PLACES AVAILABLE

Passes to attend this event are free of charge, based on an approval process. To apply for a pass for a leading representative from your business to attend go to:

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