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## THE HEARTBEAT OF THE UK ICT INDUSTRY



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# No easing up on PSTN switch off

GIACOM'S connectivity chief has urged ICT resellers not to ease up on migrating customers to All-IP following BT's extension of the PSTN switch off deadline due to safety concerns about users with special requirements.

**SPECIAL REPORT**

BT is now aiming to migrate all customers off the PSTN by the end of January 2027, unable to meet the initial 2025 deadline following an industry-wide pause to non-voluntary All-IP migrations mainly due to the risk of personal alarm failures as a result of going digital.

It is estimated that circa 1.8 million people in the UK are reliant on personal alarms and

telecare devices with most using BT's network. The concern is that network outages and power cuts could put this at-risk group in jeopardy.

"This should not be viewed as a green light to stand down, but as an opportunity to take action," stated Dale Parkinson (pictured above), MD - Connectivity, Giacom.

"This extension provides the industry with valuable breathing space to address challenges and enable a

smooth migration onto replacement services for all users and use cases. As an industry we have a responsibility to ensure a safe transition."

Howard Watson, Chief Security and Networks Officer, BT Group, added: "Managing migrations as quickly and smoothly as possible while making the necessary provisions for customers with additional needs, including telecare users, is critically important."

**Continued on page 4**

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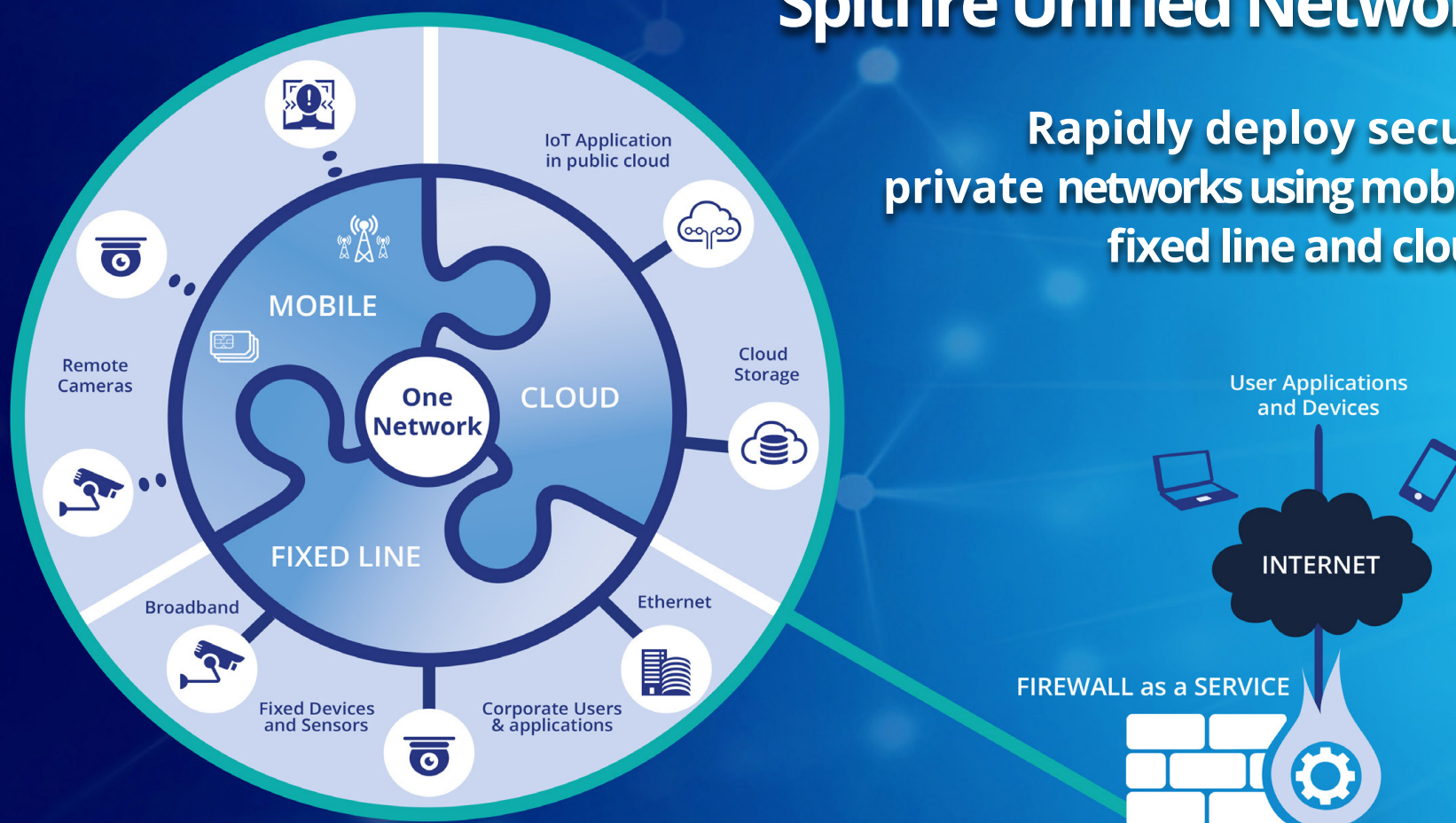
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## Welcome comment



Stuart Gilroy

THIS is a slightly different comment that serves more than a single purpose: I'm hoping that by externalising a bee in my bonnet that won't go away I'll be able to get on with my life, while at the same time making a salient point about marketing and highlighting the

genius of a comedy legend. This is it: Why is comedian Stewart Lee's celebrated brilliance not matched by an equal level of fame? He's regarded by many critics as the best stand up and a comedy genius like no other, yet despite always being a sell out most people would unknowingly pass him in the street except for ardent fans. The area for comments under YouTube videos of Lee doing what he does best is mostly dedicated to the fact that he's brilliant at what he does but beyond the fan base is little known – which is seen to be unjust.

The answer boils down to visibility. Lee's too clever for TV bosses so not mainstream – nor niche. He comes over as a very nice bloke lacking ego but his on stage character is quick to point out that he's the best at what he does. It's an engaging duality played at the same time as being most comfortable among his own audience which he often berates, while encouraging 'followers' not to bring friends along as they won't understand and it would be awkward next time they met.

In having a lower general profile than lesser comedians or comediennees the wider population is missing out on Lee's unique brand of intelligent comedy. And this makes me think about the brilliant reseller businesses in our sector that may also go undetected except by their loyal customers, because they lack broader visibility. So don't limit your profile – elevate your marketing strategy and be known more widely for what you excel in. That includes entering the Comms National Awards which are now open for entries ([www.cnawards.com/enter](http://www.cnawards.com/enter)).

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

To keep up to date with the latest channel news, as it happens, visit [www.comms-dealer.com](http://www.comms-dealer.com) daily

# Celerity inks Chilli IT deal



Craig Aston

BGF-backed Celerity has expanded into new sectors including logistics and retail following its acquisition of Chester-based IBM Gold Partner Chilli IT, which will continue to operate under its own brand.

The deal is Celerity's first acquisition and also adds technical skills, boosts headcount to 95 and takes turnover to more than £40m.

Celerity was founded in 2002 and provides cybersecurity, data protection and data visualisation services. The business received a £15m investment boost from BGF in 2021 and is expected to target more acquisitions.

Celerity COO Craig Aston commented: "We've experi-

enced strong organic growth with our managed services and have been looking for potential acquisitions to support the strategic direction of the business.

"There is synergy between Celerity and Chilli and the deal enhances our service offerings while enabling cross-selling opportunities to drive growth through integration.

"The Chilli team also brings a different but complementary set of technical skills and a good client base."

Chilli founder Richard Warren stated: "This is a statement of intent for the future and provides significant benefits for our team and clients now Chilli is part of a bigger, entrepreneurial organisation."

## Editor's picks

FOCUS Group's acquisition campaign continued last month with the purchases of Brighton & Hove headquartered Cellular Solutions (bringing strong relationships with O2 and Vodafone) and Bucks-based voice and data solutions provider Entropie, bolstering Focus' presence in the central region.

FORMER Nimans Sales Director Richard Carter has joined messaging on hold provider Audio Productions as Non-Executive Brand Ambassador. The move comes almost a year since Carter retired from Nimans where he worked for nearly 40 years.

"The rush to integrate AI and self-service into on-hold solutions has negatively impacted the customer experience," stated Carter. "Redressing the balance of value and low-touch customer experience with a more considered implementation of AI is how AudPro will forge its direction."



Richard Carter



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## Editor's picks

**IN ITS 2024 financial year update Westcon-Comstor reported an 8% hike in revenues to \$3.69bn driven by strong software results. Gross profit was up 23% to \$403m with double-digit growth across all regions. The company also witnessed recurring revenue growth of 24% to \$1.63bn, representing 44% of total revenue. CEO David Grant stated: "As we look to maintain our growth we are focused on identifying opportunities to expand our capabilities through acquisitions and other initiatives such as our Rebura acquisition and AWS Marketplace programme."**

**NETWORK Group (a collective of almost 90 IT support companies) raised over £30k for the Street Soccer Foundation during its annual gala and awards event staged at Wembley Stadium. The funds will enable circa 100 young adults, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, to benefit from the Street Soccer Academy, a personal development programme which uses football as a catalyst to engage participants in positive mindset training, mentoring and employability skills workshops. See page 12 for more Street Soccer Foundation news.**

Continued from page 1

BT Consumer led the formation of the Telecare Action Board in January, bringing together circa 30 organisations from Government, the telecoms and telecare sectors, industry bodies, local authorities and regulatory stakeholders to identify telecare users and those with additional needs before they go digital.

Watson said: "More needs to be done and we need all local authorities and telecare providers to share with us the phone lines where they know there's a telecare user."

BT says that so far only around a quarter of local authorities and telecare providers have disclosed which phone lines have telecare devices on them.

In a statement BT said, 'It's now imperative that every single one of these organisations do the same so that these customers receive the right support at the right time'.

For customers who don't use broadband, including landline-only consumer customers and business users with specialist connectivity requirements (including some alarms, lift and emergency lines, ATMs and payment terminals) BT is working on an interim dedicated landline service that will keep these customers connected while moving them off the analogue PSTN.

Trials have already begun with a nationwide roll out for eligible customers expect-



Howard Watson

**We need all local authorities and telecare providers to share with us the phone lines where they know there's a telecare user.**

ed to kick off this Autumn. BT Business is urging all of its business and public sector customers to register their interest to test this temporary pre-digital phone line product.

BT Group's Consumer division has now restarted switching zero-use landline customers who have a broadband connection to its Digital Voice landline service, and has adopted a gradual approach to switching.

An Openreach spokesperson commented: "Openreach has taken the decision to align the withdrawal of its products that work over the PSTN, which come under the umbrella term of Wholesale Line Rental (WLR), with the new switch off date of 31st January 2027.

"We recognise there's more work to do to reach and mobilise the minority of non-engaged CPs to migrate

their customers off WLR proactively and safely."

Parkinson added: "We will continue preparing partners for this change, leveraging the additional time to enhance education and support, ensuring they are ready well ahead of the new deadline."

## People news

**A LEADERSHIP reshuffle at UCaaS vendor Wildix sees Channel Manager Rob Loakes take the helm as UK&I Country Manager, superseding Ian Rowan who becomes CEO of x-hoppers. Loakes joined Wildix in 2017 when it entered the UK market for the first time. "Rob's appointment marks a significant milestone in our journey," stated Chief Strategy Officer Alberto Carlos Benigno. "His tenure and dedication have been invaluable and I am confident in his ability to lead with vision and strategy." See page 14 for more insights into Wildix's strategy; and page 40 more new appointments.**

**Got a news story? email: [sgilroy@bpl-business.com](mailto:sgilroy@bpl-business.com)**

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# Remodelling for growth

**A major restructure of NG Bailey's IT Services division positions the business for a period of unprecedented growth across various high potential and emerging markets, according to Managing Director Kelly Tedesco.**

**C**onsolidation of the Mobile Services and National Operations divisions within the IT Services business of NG Bailey in April created a new ConnectOp Service unit that will handle all non-defence sector work. It's a necessary move that positions the business for unprecedented growth, says Tedesco. "Another big strategic development is our strong focus on transforming connectivity for businesses and the benefit that brings to people, places and organisations," she commented. "We're more focused than ever on offering the right solutions to the challenges businesses are facing. Our repositioning has also had a transformational effect on how we work with our own operational teams with greater collaboration across the whole NG Bailey Group."

NG Bailey IT Services delivers integrated IT infrastructure and managed services out of offices across the UK including Leeds, London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bristol. The business

operates in many sectors, from healthcare and defence to infrastructure. "In 2022 we launched a three year plan targeting 40 per cent growth in turnover by 2025," added Tedesco. "We're on track to deliver this which is testament to the importance of IT and connectivity infrastructure to the economy."

Against this backdrop Tedesco noted the key industry trends of particular interest to NG Bailey IT Services, including AI and machine learning which present significant opportunities for innovation across various sectors. "By harnessing the power of AI we can streamline processes, enhance productivity and deliver more personalised solutions," she stated. "The increasing adoption of cloud computing also continues to shape the IT industry, offering scalability, flexibility and cost-efficiency."

Tedesco also noted that growing cybersecurity threats underscore the importance of robust security measures and strong cybersecurity



Kelly Tedesco

## In 2022 we launched a three year plan targeting 40 per cent growth in turnover

protocols. And she cited the opportunity offered by private wireless 5G, particularly in driving adoption of the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT). "Last year we formed a partnership with Nokia and Infinigate and have since launched one of the first 5G labs in the UK at our Leeds head office," added Tedesco. "This is enabling our team to continue developing its technical expertise."

### Demand for digital

The biggest opportunity, believes Tedesco, resides with UK businesses yet to fully embrace digitalisation. "Whether you're a

manufacturer in Dewsbury, a logistics business in Milton Keynes or a creative company based in Edinburgh everyone can benefit from unlocking the power of connectivity to improve productivity," she added. "2020 was a transformational year with the pandemic changing how businesses operated overnight, creating demand for increased digitalisation. Since then the digital doorway has fully opened with continued adoption of hybrid working alongside preparations for the PSTN switch off driving demand for integrated solutions including Teams and Google."

While many businesses have faced tough times post-pandemic, Tedesco says that NG Bailey IT Services' consultative approach has enabled it to emerge stronger. "More and more customers are looking for partners who can offer business solutions that enable efficiency and growth," she added. "For example, we encourage clients to look at the PSTN shut down as an opportunity to update, upgrade and future proof solutions. The switch off is a once in a generational change that impacts everyone and is having a huge influence on the market."

NG Bailey's IT Services unit operates in environments ranging from iconic buildings and national landmarks to trailblazing projects such as the aforementioned new use cases for Private Wireless 5G Networks. "Other project-rich areas are the defence and social sectors," added Tedesco. "People working and living in military and social care environments can experience isolation. Our work provides these sectors with Wi-Fi access to keep people connected."

To meet increasing demands for project delivery NG Bailey's IT Services division introduced the Aspirational Growth programme which brings on resources and new hires six months ahead of pipeline conversion. "In 2023 we also relaunched our apprenticeship scheme which saw 150 applications for our Structured Cabling and Digital Technical Solutions schemes," added Tedesco. "We're now planning to recruit five new apprentices every year as we look to develop the next generation of talent." ■



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# Embracing customer- focused conversation and driving simplicity

This past year has been monumental. From the rapid growth of AI, to an increasingly sustainability-focused channel, as well as the continuing momentum of all-IP, the landscape is changing. In turn, partners have numerous new growth opportunities.

Christopher Wellbelove DL,  
Senior Marketing Consultant,  
Partner Plus, BT Wholesale



Every year, BT Wholesale produces a research report essential for helping Partner Plus members seize these opportunities and supercharge growth.

Navigating change is difficult, including driving improvements and efficiencies among employees. That's why this year we surveyed end-users together with IT decision makers and resellers. This will help our partners really get under the skin of what customers are thinking and how the industry is responding. Here, we're giving you a sneak preview into the insights, with Partner Plus members able to receive instant access to the full report.

## Decision makers want to invest in technology this year

**80%** of IT decision makers believe upgrading technology will help employees to do their jobs better. Partners can tap into this and unlock value by understanding their customers' unique business priorities. So, what are they?

The number one priority for UK businesses when investing in technology today is improving customer satisfaction to retain and grow accounts. This was followed by the need to attract new customers and improve employee satisfaction.

With BT alone protecting against more than 500 potential attacks every second, the scale of threats to businesses is huge. However, end-user employees and IT decision makers were significantly less likely than resellers to cite it as a top business priority.

Partners also lead the way when it comes to sustainability – **40%** see it as a business priority, whilst only a third of customer respondents do.

All these business priorities have technological counterparts. Customer satisfaction is closely linked to the quality and reliability of digital connectivity, whilst cyber-security posture can be improved with robust solutions. Newer technologies, such as 5G and all-IP are also more environmentally friendly than their legacy counterparts.

Luckily, **75%** of IT decision makers are keen to invest in technology this year. To capitalise on this, resellers must highlight the link between priorities and tech investment in a way that is customer-focused and, crucially, not jargon-heavy.

## Getting flexible working to work

No surprise; hybrid working and the flexibility that comes with it is still so popular. At least three-quarters (75%) of all groups surveyed believe businesses should allow remote working at least once a week.

**75%** of IT decision makers also agreed that businesses need fewer applications and **72%** agreed that there needs to be simplified ways to collaborate. The simple answer is – invest in UCaaS solutions. This is needed for the hybrid model to be most effective yet less than half of IT decision makers currently have a UCaaS solution.

Partners need to develop use cases that demonstrate the positive impact collaboration tools have on workstreams, wellbeing and productivity. Beyond this, value-add features like call analytics and fraud management can level-up UCaaS solutions and ensure streamlined ways of working.

## The explosion of AI

AI has spread exponentially over the past year. Gartner even suggests that **80%** of enterprise organisations will have adopted Gen AI by 2026. The buzz around AI solutions won't die down anytime soon; **62%** of IT decision makers expect to make investments in AI in the coming year, many due to employee requests.

With **70%** of employees saying that they need more reliable connectivity, this provides resellers with another opportunity to show customers that they must invest in this area to ensure AI solutions can be deployed successfully. That's high-bandwidth, secure, sustainable and scalable – dialling up and down at the touch of a button.

## What's next?

The best, and only, protection for partners long into the future is trusting relationships with customers. When every rational switching cost has been addressed, we will be left with the intangible quality of truly human relationships. This research is designed to help you cultivate exactly that. BT Wholesale's got your back – working with us means you have a partnership for today and tomorrow.

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For more information and facts, like what the optimum number of days remote is according to respondents, and how to convince customers to switch to all-IP, you need to be a Partner Plus member. Our report, **Powering Up People: Navigating the Future of IT Decision Making**, is full of valuable insights to help you seize opportunities, support current customers and attract new ones. If you are already a member of Partner Plus, our team can take you through the data in-depth to help you understand how to boost your sales, marketing and business development. Email [partner.plus@bt.com](mailto:partner.plus@bt.com) to set up a meeting. If you are not a member of Partner Plus, you can apply at [btwholesale.com/join](https://btwholesale.com/join).

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# H1 business update provided

Last month's Channel Forecast insight session brought to the surface how changing partner and customer demands are driving a multi-strategy approach from ICT providers Onecom Partners, Wildix and Xelion. As they prepare for what lies ahead it becomes evermore clear that there are big opportunities for success, but only when the right strategic levers are pulled to enable channel partners.

The observations and experiences of our Channel Forecasters provide a sense of optimism for the second half of the year, largely based on the strategic steps they have taken. Overall, 2024 trading is currently outperforming expectations. "We're seeing strong growth across the whole portfolio, notably from a mobile perspective," stated Roan Pratt, Sales Director, Onecom Partners. "And in preparing for the next stage of growth we are building on our products, adding capabilities, developing more value added services and accelerating these developments into the partner community. But we are aware that they face challenges – whether margin degradation or looking at selling more into their existing base – and we've got to prepare partners to achieve their goals."

In terms of its UK&I performance so far this year, Wildix is ahead of forecast and from a partner perspective is recruiting in high numbers through its roadshows. That said, Country Manager for UK&I Rob Loakes pointed out a growing issue for all vendors. "On the challenges we face, it's the number of acquisitions in the market,"

he commented. "We could on-board a partner tomorrow and three months down the line they may be acquired. There's more M&A this year and our challenge is retaining relationships through the acquisition process."

Xelion is on track for 33 per cent growth in 2024 which is in line with the last three years, and broadly in line with its Dutch and German partner businesses. "We're also seeing resellers challenged by the technology curve and having to get their heads around, for example, social media products and other non-traditional resellers services," explained Dave Reynolds, Managing Director UK, Xelion. "We're seeing demand for WhatsApp and Facebook, which are products resellers have not touched before, so we're working hard on addressing those challenges."

**Strategic proximity**  
One way to remain relevant to channel partners is to invest in their core requirements as they emerge, as well as drive new opportunities, and a key theme that ran through the discussion is the criticality of strategic proximity between upstream suppliers, partners and end users. "We're looking at how we



Roan Pratt

## More telecoms resellers want to become MSPs and are looking at alternative revenue streams

introduce more products into the portfolio and while broadening the product set make it easy for partners to add new lines to their customers," added Pratt. "Human nature dictates that we follow the path of least resistance so being easy to do business with is important. We are also bringing on more tools to enable partners to service their end users."

To strengthen its channel ecosystem Xelion is also

taking a more simplified approach. Whether in product delivery, procurement and general ease of doing business, Reynolds says this is pivotal for long-term growth and resilience. "Xelion is known as a techie business and we needed to improve the engagement experience for partners and end customers, so we focused on making our products and services easier to consume," he added. "We looked at what works and

doesn't work for partners in terms of engagement and built a new AI-driven platform that goes live later this year in our October release. Every partner is different and our goal this year is to create a bespoke partner experience."

Wildix is primarily SMB focused but through working with partners more strategically and responsively the company is gaining unprecedented access to enterprise opportunities. "We also have two new products coming into market – the sales and networking platform called x-bees which is gaining traction with partners, and x-hoppers, our full retail solution which takes communications away from the headset," added Loakes. "These products will help to drive a successful H2."

By aligning their target markets with more inclusive partner strategies vendors are creating a pathway for resellers to achieve long-term growth and accelerate their ambitions. "More telecoms resellers want to become MSPs and are looking at alternative revenue streams like cyber and IT to drive a different customer profile," noted Pratt. "We are having conversations with partners who are ambitious about growth, and once or twice

# vides positive indicators



Rob Loakes

## Through working with partners more strategically we are gaining access to enterprise opportunities

a month, if not more, we are adapting our strategic partner programme to deliver on their requirements. Building in value adds and creating sticky customers also helps MSPs with their churn mitigation."

Measures taken to stimulate new opportunities are paying dividends, but as noted, challenges need to be addressed. "There is a technology challenge across the channel market, whether security, AI, integration, or even Teams," observed Pratt. "Other challenges are more commercial and business-based, such as staff recruitment and margin erosion, so we're helping partners to understand and address these obstacles. For example, we're helping with recruitment through graduate programmes into ours and partner businesses. We're focusing on education, resources and working strategically with partners

to address their priorities."

### Supply chain resilience

Onecom Partners' approach also builds resilience into its supply chain while empowering acquisitive partners to overcome challenges and deliver growth. "We work closely with partners looking to acquire to help offset the impacts of consolidation, keeping relationships under the Onecom roof as much as possible," said Pratt. "It's proving to be a successful strategy while also helping partners to grow."

Onecom Partners has a full suite of products around voice, connectivity, mobile and value add, and Pratt noted that the company is seeing more demand from end users wanting to move into self-service, which has become a key focus area as a result. Meanwhile, Loakes noted that Wildix is hearing more around AI

from its partner network than ever before. "From an analytics perspective we've already embraced AI," he added. "With the x-bees platform we're providing services like accurate in-call transcription and using AI from a sentiment perspective. Services like these are a growing requirement from partners and we will major on them. We also took the decision last year to make our partner portal more user friendly and more information and BI-driven."

Reynolds noted that Xelion also has some AI elements in its platform which partners are using. "We didn't want to rush into AI but gain a good understanding of where we see customer demand with services like transcription and real-time translation," he stated. "These experiences have enabled us to familiarise ourselves with AI elements and inform future releases."

The biggest demand witnessed by Reynolds last year was for contact centre type features, even from the smallest customers, particularly omnichannel and WhatsApp which is proving to be absolutely key. "Two things stand out in tenders for large deals – they want to see something AI and Meta-based," said Reynolds. "So we invested time and effort into developing integration with Meta and social media platforms. We expect more customers to use apps like Instagram Messenger, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp as part of their suite of communication products. This is an emerging market and a completely new product set for resellers. Therefore we're putting a lot into these products

this year and in 2025."

On '2025' and the paused PSTN switch off, Reynolds noted that the delay until January 2027 will have little impact on the channel as in his experience the vast majority of SMEs have already left the PSTN market. "We carried out analysis on new orders and less than 10 per cent were coming off ISDN or PSTN," he said. "The impact of the delay will kick in as a last minute rush in the SoHo space, the one-to-five user market. They won't move until forced to."

The big reseller success stories belong to those who prioritise 'strategic proximity' and keep their customers close, are effective in their product knowledge, wise in their choice of vendor partners and proactively play to their strengths, believes Reynolds. "Our partners win biggest when outing

competitor products that usually do the majority of services the customer wants but the reseller isn't providing them," he stated. "We see this all the time and recently rolled out a 400 seat call centre that displaced a competitor that could have delivered everything the customer wanted if they had better engaged with them and had more knowledge about the product they supplied."

"Customers can be easily lost and the only way resellers can defend against this is to actively engage with suppliers and put time and effort into learning about the services they sell. Resellers need to find partners they can work with and build skill sets to keep their customers. They need to look at their products, engage with customers and try things out as a priority." ■



Dave Reynolds

## We didn't want to rush into AI but gain a good understanding of where we see customer demand to inform future releases

## Serve your large customers with Fidelity Energy

Since its inception in 2014, Fidelity Energy has been a pioneer in helping channel partners succeed in the energy sector. Over the past decade, they have supported more than 746 partners in managing over 15,600 meters across £560 million of customer spend.

This October, Fidelity Energy proudly celebrates 10 years of excellence in assisting channel partners in cross-selling business energy procurement to their existing customer base. In an industry which has historically had low regulation, this has allowed for unscrupulous practises. Fidelity Energy has stood out by maintaining an honest and trustworthy approach, ensuring the highest quality of service for every customer which is reflected in one of the highest renewal rates in the industry.

Fidelity Energy continuously adapts to better serve its partners and their customers. The latest additions to their portfolio include a digital switching platform and flexible procurement products. These innovations are designed to help partners serve their customers more efficiently and effectively.

Managing Director John Haw emphasised, "We are always looking at ways to improve how we can support our partners to successfully sell energy to their base. We are already great at being hands on with customers and managing their energy procurement, but have now added additional ways to support customers at either end.

The digital switching platform is a game-changer for partners and will set you apart from your competitors. It empowers the customer who wishes to independently switch their business energy online, streamlining the process whilst we eliminate any dreaded cold calls. This platform is particularly advantageous for your SME customers, where our partners can acquire these by directing them to the online quoting platform, which leverages the benefits of Fidelity Energy's custom-built energy portal. There are options to fit all our partners which range from sending a trackable link to the online switching site to an energy website.

For energy-intensive industries consuming high levels of gas and



John Haw, Managing Director, Fidelity Energy

power, we now have a flexible procurement option available. Fidelity Energy has introduced a flexible basket framework for customers consuming over 1 GWh combined on their Half-Hourly meters. This allows customers to achieve a hedged strategy and by only purchasing a percentage of the energy on day 1, there is the option to locking in lower rates if the market decreases.

The team at Fidelity Energy will handle all the hard work, allowing partners to benefit from these low-touch products. This enables our partners to generate an additional revenue stream and reach new sections of your customer base with energy, while still providing the same high level of service."

Fidelity Energy is committed to driving the net-zero initiative, offering partners a range of sustainable options to help their customers become more environmentally conscious. These options include installing EV charging points, Solar PV panels, and Voltage Optimisation systems to lower energy consumption. This not only supports the journey to net-zero but also enhances customer satisfaction by providing environmentally friendly solutions.

Channel partners can meet John Haw and Sales Director Sean Dixon at Margin 2024. This event is an excellent opportunity to gain insights into how Fidelity Energy can help you support your existing customer base more effectively and address the energy management challenges faced by small, medium, and large customers. For more information, please email [partners@fidelity-energy.co.uk](mailto:partners@fidelity-energy.co.uk)

# Big Goal now life-changing

With three football tournaments completed and founding member companies now inspiring disadvantaged youngsters at Street Soccer Academies across the UK, The Big Goal is truly changing lives, writes Comms Dealer founder Nigel Sergent.

The Big Goal initiative is riding the crest of an ever-growing wave of support having surged forward in recent months thanks to the passionate backing of organisations in our industry. The project came to life in February 2023 when industry stalwart Andy Mabbutt introduced me to his cousin Keith Mabbutt, a former professional footballer and now CEO of The Street Soccer Foundation. One phone call to Terry O'Brien, CEO of Giacom, secured a headline sponsorship and The Big Goal campaign moved into overdrive.

Giacom's unbridled support has seen The Big Goal develop into an ESG/CSR programme that has united the channel like never before, using football as the catalyst for ICT companies to link up with football club foundations nationwide and help disadvantaged young people find a path out of homelessness and despair. "When Terry got behind the idea and we mapped out the intention for The Big Goal, he was convinced it would galvanise the sector in support of others and put aside competition," recalled Keith Mabbutt.



The Focus Group Academy at Brighton & Hove Albion FC

Forty-four founding member teams have now participated in regional tournaments at Brentford FC, Sunderland AFC and Nottingham Forest FC – and 12 teams will now go through to The Big Goal national finals to be staged at St George's Park, the home of England football, on November 1st.

### Feel-good factor

"All three events had a brilliant feel-good factor and I had a 'pinch myself' moment when I saw hundreds of people playing football and interacting, all because of The Big Goal," said O'Brien. "The tournaments brought to life our endeavour of uniting the ICT industry for the benefit of others, with every team sponsoring an academy of vulnerable and homeless young people."

Channel companies are now visiting the Academies they are sponsoring, helping

youngsters facing massive challenges turn their lives around for the better. These include Gamma (Wycombe Wanderers FC), Elite Group (Everton FC), InTEC Group (Salford FC Foundation 92), Focus Group (Crystal Palace FC and Brighton & Hove Albion FC) and Onecom (Portsmouth FC).

"The founding members have already enabled us to double our service provision compared to 2023," added Mabbutt. I firmly believe The Big Goal can become a true game-changing charitable endeavour akin to Comic Relief or Children in Need, uniting UK businesses through football to help tackle the biggest social issue in the country."

To join The Big Goal email [hello@thebiggoal.co.uk](mailto:hello@thebiggoal.co.uk).

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# Architectural strategies for growth

**Xantaro and Nokia are leveraging their deep industry understanding to help altnets scale-up against fierce competition, whilst maintaining brand identity and customer experience levels. Their recent joint webinar discussed transformations in the burgeoning sector and explored the importance of future-proofing networks.**



Stephen Kingdom & Nigel Abraham

**S**tephen Kingdom, CTO Xantaro and Nigel Abraham, CTO Nokia UK&I discussed how altnets have progressed from proof of concept to full scale rollouts, competing strongly with their peers in on the continent to drive one of Europe's most dynamic fibre markets.

They cited the FTTH Council's latest Market Panorama Report, which revealed that 4.7 million homes were passed by UK altnets between Sept 2022 and Sept 2023, a near 38% growth. This has seen the UK altnet market's collective footprint pass near 12.9 million premises, surpassing that of Openreach.

As these networks hit maturity, Private Equity backers are demanding a return on their investments, pivoting a new focus on homes connected instead of homes passed. This means scaling at pace and onboarding customers, whilst competing with the service levels and innovations of well-funded and well-established tier-one brands.

"The evolving needs of altnet businesses requires an evolution to a more

resilient network model," said Kingdom, "Facilitating this is one of the key ways in which we are helping to drive the industry forward."

He notes that during the 'rise of the altnet', investor packs recommended simple network builds to help lift many of these companies off the ground. However, backhaul requirements are beginning to grow, network functionalities need centralising and technologies like XGS-PON are being more widely adopted.

According to Kingdom, navigating these growing technological complexities remains paramount for altnets to achieve their objectives. He stated: "Many complex technology obstacles must be overcome by altnets to achieve their network & business aspirations. However, many altnets don't know where to turn to overcome these external challenges or how to establish the robust infrastructure required to meet their rollout or connection plans."

The issue is exacerbated by the industry's skills shortage. Abraham points out that the 150 operators are fighting

for the same resources and skillset. He said: "Lots of network architects are coming from the enterprise LAN and WAN space and are now in charge of building resilient carrier-grade networks. This is a big learning curve, so a trusted and experienced advisor is critical."

### Choosing the right partners

To punch above their weight on technical roadmaps, altnet's need to leverage vendors and partners who can provide a long-term roadmap for development.

"As altnets we need a crystal-clear architectural vision that gives you long term capabilities to compete with tier ones and do so in a scalable way to grow bandwidth and resilience as the traffic grows," stated webinar guest speaker Paul Wier, CTIO at G.Network.

Kingdom explains the approach Xantaro takes with customers, prioritising partnership over acting as just a seller. Xantaro works closely with vendors to ensure it acts as a bridge for operators and suppliers, as opposed to limiting access.

"Trust and understanding

are the two most valuable traits of a successful relationship," he said. "The term altnet covers a lot of different business cases, so it is important to understand the customer inside out to sell them the right product. By understanding their foundations and aims we can help them evolve and grow out their architecture."

Abraham highlighted the 7-10 different approaches taken by altnets to build maturity, that either need evolving or converting. "It is about supporting operators through whatever 'what if' situation that might arise," he said.

"For this, interoperability is key, and this is a feature both Nokia and Xantaro have been innovating on and advocating for." For example, Nokia have been working at both card and component level on technology that can facilitate both G-PON and XGS-PON technology.

### XT3 Lab

To supplement the lack of R&D funding available to altnets, Xantaro has built a test lab facility, the XT3 lab, in Frankfurt. Everything sold by the vendor is modelled in this environment and

customer can use it in multiple ways; modelling architecture, modelling faults in their networks and trying new services on an offline network.

"You don't want to do anything to your network that may disrupt service to your customer, especially at a time these companies are creating a name for their brand," said Kingdom. Xantaro has also built some mini labs on flight cases in partnership with Nokia across the UK.

These are proving particularly useful in light of Project Gigabit contract requirements, which require assurance that networks are future-proofed.

Kingdom finished: "Altnets want very good partnerships with a key group of vendors and don't want complexities and interoperability issues. It is better to have a small number of key partnerships so you can be very agile in a very busy marketplace."

Wier corroborated this stating: "A very high levels of trust is what I rely on with Nokia and Xantaro, a deep understanding of altnet perspective is incredibly useful."

For more information go to: [xantaro.net/en-gb/get-in-touch](https://xantaro.net/en-gb/get-in-touch)

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# Wildix builds strategic pa

**Wildix UK Country Manager Rob Loakes draws a clear picture of the vendor's evolving growth model, working more strategically with partners to unlock their potential in the thick of new market opportunities.**

**T**here are many forces at work in the market today, and Wildix's approach to navigating change, leveraging technology and harnessing opportunities continues to pay dividends, with the UK channel at the forefront of gaining market share. Spearheading the next wave of growth is Loakes who took over the UK Country Manager role from Ian Rowan last month. Rowan is now CEO of x-hoppers (the retail sector wireless headset supplier based on Wildix technology). Loakes was previously UK Channel Manager and joined the UCaaS provider in 2017 when it entered the UK and steered an immediate course towards ongoing growth.

Fast forward to 2023, and Wildix realised its goals for the year, achieving over 20 per cent growth. The company experienced strong results across all geographies and brand awareness continues to increase globally, notably entering the APAC and UAE regions. Here in the UK, Wildix has grown year-on-year, so much so that the UK's growth stats are equal to Italy, the vendor's most

mature market, and Loakes is targeting an unprecedented acceleration in UK gains.

He noted that Wildix operates in most UK verticals and highlighted education, healthcare and hospitality as being core (with a fourth vertical shaping up to be especially transformational for Wildix... more on that later in this article). "We have seen our average deployment size in the UK increase from circa 20 users to over 40 in the space of two years," he stated. "We are also being introduced to a growing number of enterprise level opportunities which signifies the strength of our positioning in the UK."

These significant upticks also indicate that the UCaaS market is experiencing strong growth, and Loakes relishes the prospect of addressing this opportunity at 'such a pivotal time'. "The UCaaS market is expanding rapidly, in large part spurred by Covid 19 which shifted end user priorities firmly towards hybrid working," he commented. "The fact that we have been positioned on the Gartner Magic Quadrant for UCaaS,



**Rob Loakes**

**By working strategically with partners many more opportunities in the enterprise space are being brought to the table**

and are the only European UCaaS vendor to feature for the third consecutive year underscores Wildix's strengthening influence."

**Market gains**

As mentioned, Loakes has set his sights on expanding Wildix's presence in the UK this year. "This is our main objective," he confirmed. "We are running roadshow campaigns up and down the country and in Ireland to engage with potential new partners. 2023 got off to a flying start thanks to our

growing partner network and ongoing alignment with each partners' business strategy. Recruitment is also a priority to ensure we maintain maximum interaction with partners."

Developing and accelerating synergies with partners in the context of a fast changing technological landscape is a challenge facing many vendors, but for Wildix this does not involve any kind of reinvention, rather a continuation of existing practices. The company

currently has 130 partners in the UK&I, most of them performing strongly. And Loakes attributed the depth of Wildix's partner network to its long-held go-to-market strategy.

"In 2017 our approach was not to flood the market, rather work closely and develop synergies with those partners who saw the value in our product," he explained. "This collaborative stance enabled us to grow quickly. And by working strategically with partners

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# Partnerships

many more opportunities in the enterprise space are being brought to the table, which is an achievement considering we have only been in the UK for seven years. Partners also appreciate that we are a one-stop-shop end-to-end vendor, from flexible licence types which can be purchased on various terms through to a hardware range with an international SIP bundle offering – all can be provided on an as-a-service model. Our channel-only approach is also appealing.”

Adding rocket fuel to Wildix's growth journey is the release of x-bees, a sales and services focused platform aimed at companies that want to boost their sales, along with x-hoppers, the vendor's retail solution that moves communication beyond the headset through AI assistance. Loakes reports that both propositions are experiencing high adoption rates in the partner channel. Wildix is also investing in applications of AI across the back end of its solutions. To this For example, the x-bees platform has the ability to transcribe live calls accurately, enabling sentiment analysis for calls and video conferencing.

Loakes has an equally clear view of what the future looks like for Wildix and he expects a significant acceleration in UK growth over the coming three years, forecasting a doubling of market share with a particular emphasis on specific sector-based strategies that have introduced a fourth core vertical. “We are going into new territory in retail with x-hoppers,” he added. “That's opening big doors.” ■

## Just a minute with Rob Loakes...

**Role model:** Elon Musk for his resilience, dedication and commitment to what he believes in. The technologies he and his team have developed are truly revolutionary.

### Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I gained an electrician's qualification having completed a three year evening course while working in comms.

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

I'd be an architect.

### Best advice you have been given:

You can start again tomorrow.

### Three ideal dinner guests:

Elon Musk, Paul Gascoigne and Freddie Mercury: They fascinate me in different ways and have extraordinary life experiences. The stories would be riveting.

### Your main strength and what could you work on?

Multi-tasking is a key strength along with building relationships, but I could work on delegating.

### What do you fear most?

Spiders: From an early age they have been a problem. Luckily, my wife deals with them.

### Your biggest career achievement:

Helping Wildix grow to where we are in the UK today. It's been some journey.

### Your favourite comedian or comedienne:

Ricky Gervais.

### What talent do you wish you had?

To sing. There was a moment when I thought I could, but the room quickly emptied.

### Top business tip:

AI will revolutionise our industry – embrace it.

### If you were to write a book, what would it be about?

I'd write Childrens' books that keep my kids entertained as an alternative to gadgets.

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# Thomas grasps MSP oppo

**When incovo CEO Chris Thomas took charge of the company aged just 18 it was the start of a remarkable journey founded on human resilience and enterprise but overshadowed by grief.**

**T**homas inherited the incovo business from his father, Richard Thomas (who was also Chairman of Boxing Scotland), following his tragic death in March 2016. At the time, Thomas junior was working in a shoe shop. "It was a challenge taking over the business with no experience but my father trained me well through life experiences and gave me the tools and confidence to become a strong leader," he stated. "This in turn allowed me to grow incovo over the last eight years, despite not having a traditional education or career path."

Glasgow headquartered incovo was founded in 2002 by Richard Thomas as a provider of print and telecom solutions in central Scotland. "I have evolved and grown the business in response to the ever changing technological landscape," added Thomas. "Demand for IT services in particular has risen dramatically as a result of increasingly sophisticated cybersecurity threats. It was a natural decision to develop incovo into an IT company and move with the times."

The acquisition of Edinburgh-based RGB Solutions in 2022

was a key milestone that cemented incovo's position as one of the primary IT services providers in Scotland. The deal boosted turnover by an additional £700k, added five team members and 97 clients. Incovo currently has 10 staff members and a turnover of £1.5 million and its customer profile ranges from small businesses to large scale enterprises. Thomas is targeting a sales increase of £1.8 million in the next year and is eyeing £4 million within three years. He is also on the lookout to acquire another business.

"Our strategic focus is to continue to evolve into a fully fledged MSP, offering services such as IT Director as a Service to integrate into large businesses and support them with strategy and direction," commented Thomas. "We are also continuing to reinvest our profits into training and improvements, as well as growth activity, with the ultimate aim of not being the biggest, but the best."

"We don't offer break-fix, instead we offer a full MSP model which isn't based around time, but around all the services required under one roof.



Chris Thomas

**It was a challenge taking over the business with no experience but my father trained me well through life experiences and gave me the tools and confidence to become a strong leader**

We charge a monthly rate that encapsulates it all – IT support, software, networking, hardware, cloud, telephony, print, strategy and

SOC. The growth is coming from a mix of these and we're in a strong position to acquire companies offering a similar service."

Thomas is also under no illusions about how quickly he needs to move to an MSP model. "We never stagnate," he commented. "Our driving

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# Opportunities

force is Technical IT Director Iain Bissett who is at the forefront of the IT industry after 35 years working in senior roles for major organisations such as RBS and Tesco Bank modernising their systems. The value he brings is second to none. Our products have moved towards a premium IT offering and the portfolio is stacked well, covering the full range of services any business would need. IT services are crucial to all businesses nowadays and customers have a growing appetite for them. We're also evolving our internal services and automation to better serve clients."

## Key opportunity

Thomas says incovo's biggest opportunity resides in showcasing its MSP approach including a Security Operational Centre (SOC) function with all aspects of the full ICT product suite covered in-house. "Our target market is businesses based in the Scottish central belt that use IT related software, hardware and cloud tools," commented Thomas. "Our key partners are Sophos, Microsoft, Gamma, Konica Minolta and HP."

According to Thomas, many businesses have faced a make or break scenario and he believes that the role of an MSP is to enable organisations to overcome barriers and realise their potential – whatever their size. "With the aftershock of Covid, inflation and the cost of living, businesses have two options – thrive or survive," he stated. "We are able to streamline, simplify, save on costs and implement a high level of service and security to ensure businesses are in the best IT position to thrive." ■

## Just a minute with Chris Thomas...

**Role model:** Former Google X Chief Business Officer Mo Gawdat who shows 'how to get to the fundamental truths of a matter'. I find clarity when needed from this advice.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I enjoy studying music history in my spare time.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Elon Musk, Joe Rogan and Quincy Jones.

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** I'm a great listener, an effective communicator and I care about my team like family. I try to leave my ego at the door when it comes to making decisions for the business. I'm working hard on becoming a better version of myself every day.

**The biggest risk you have taken:** Acquiring RGB Solutions. It was our first acquisition and gave us great learning for our next transaction.

**One example of something you have overcome?** Navigating business and personal life at the same time. We all overcome many obstacles.

**In hindsight:** I would have built my leadership team and advisors quicker. Not doing this slowed down our growth. Building a high quality and ambitious leadership team is the short cut to growth in my opinion.

**How do you relax?** Exercising, whether hitting the gym, football, boxing or hiking. It's important to get the heart rate up and sweat.

**The best piece of advice you have been given?** Empty the cup every time and it comes back twice as full.

**What do you fear most?** Not taking risks.

**Top tip for resellers:** Obsess over your clients.

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# Joyner on Avaya's post-re

**Avaya's Vice President for UK&I Steve Joyner shares insights into the vendor's post-financial restructuring strategy and why its 'innovation without disruption' approach will prove critical.**

**A**gainst the backdrop of major financial restructuring Joyner reports that Avaya UK&I is doing well with a solid 2023 performance under its belt. "We delivered on our revenue plan for the past five quarters and are on track to exceed planned revenue for H1 FY24," he stated. "This strong financial position provides more than enough liquidity for strategy execution, to reinvest in the business and build on what we achieved last season. It's time to use that platform to better serve customers."

Avaya exited the 2023 calendar year with \$650 million cash and access to a further \$128 million in a revolving facility. And Joyner noted that net logo retention among large enterprise customers sits at 97 per cent, with renewal rates on base subscription contracts also ahead of plan. He pointed out that Avaya's strength has always been in serving large, complex enterprises, and that the vendor's big opportunity lies in building on 'what already works', leveraging familiar processes, systems and technologies as a foundation for introducing

new innovations, particularly in the large enterprise and government segments.

"Avaya's innovation without disruption strategy is adding tangible value for enterprises, giving them the ability to bring AI and other innovations on top of existing investments," commented Joyner. "Businesses are investing in innovative technologies but not for their own sake. They are investing in positive outcomes and want to add new capabilities like AI and chatbots, but they don't want to give up existing solutions that work perfectly well in other areas of the business. We're prepared to meet organisations exactly where they are, enhancing existing capabilities while preserving the trusted and reliable experiences they have built over time."

According to Joyner it's a challenge for organisations to innovate quickly enough to meet all of their customer experience (CX) and employee experience (EX) goals, and he observed that business leaders are witnessing a widening gap between their current CX and EX platform capabilities.



Steve Joyner

**Businesses are investing in positive outcomes and want to add new capabilities like AI and chatbots, but without giving up on existing solutions that work well in other areas**

"This state of affairs has led us to a holistic approach that recognises that CX, EX and business growth are not isolated silos but interconnected priorities," he added. "CX and EX are not costs to be minimised. Instead, by adopting an integrated approach businesses can transform customer satisfaction and employee engagement into catalysts for revenue generation,

market differentiation and competitive advantage."

**Customer experience**

End user businesses are more and more aware that the main driver of loyalty and growth in their brand is customer experience. But, as mentioned, concerns about operational disruption or customer service continuity can be a barrier to innovation. "Channel partners have a pivotal role

to play in helping customers understand that there is an alternative to rip-and-replace that enables innovative new solutions to be overlaid on top of what already works in terms of existing processes, systems and technologies," added Joyner.

"This is where partners can add real value. Their knowledge and expertise about available technology combined with strategic



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foresight, consulting and implementation services means they are best positioned to assess how to map digital transformation journeys through a business process perspective.

"It's also important for channel partners to recognise that when they talk to customers it's not just about this or that technology. The addressable market for CX, which includes a multitude of technologies across contact centre and UC, deployed on-prem, in the cloud or hybrid, is huge. Both UC and CC might be needed to help customers meet their CX, EX and growth goals. The customer doesn't care so long as it delivers the desired outcome."

## Leveraging AI

Joyner observed that Generative AI offers many possibilities for the CX space, and late last year Avaya showcased a Generative CX concept that brings AI into the core of the contact centre, creating workflows, reports and helping agents better serve customers. Avaya also forged a partnership with Zoom for AI-powered collaboration and streamlined its solutions portfolio into one product suite for UC&C, creating a single platform offering for CX.

"We've simplified our portfolio and solutions architecture to help customers adopt new capabilities," explained Joyner. "The move enables us to accelerate roadmap delivery and makes it easier for enterprise customers to innovate without disruption, deliver improved experiences to customers and employees while driving measurable business growth."

## Just a minute with Steve Joyner...

**Role models:** My parents who continue to be my ultimate coaches. I trust their input implicitly 100 per cent of the time.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I used to play drums in a band.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** I'd be in the music industry in any capacity.

**Best advice you have been given:** To respect everyone.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Freddie Mercury to hear his stories; Lewis Hamilton to understand what makes him tick; and any illusionist to tell me the odd secret about some of the most famous illusions or magic tricks.

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** I'm a creative thinker, but not always the best executer.

**What are the keys to leadership success?** Trust, decisiveness and empathy.

**What do you fear most?** Needles. As for blood tests, forget it.

**One example of something you have overcome?** I used to have a big fear of presenting on a stage, but I very much enjoy that now.

**Your biggest career achievement:** Keeping up energy and enthusiasm and still enjoying every moment.

**Your favourite comedian or comedienne:** Peter Kay – something for everyone and a naturally funny human.

**What talent do you wish you had?** To play the piano and sing. I would love to be able to walk into a room, sit down and play a tune.

**The biggest risk you have taken:** Moving abroad. There were many unknowns at the time.

**Name one thing you couldn't do without in your job:** Camaraderie.

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# Software pioneer aims to

**NetXL is firing on all cylinders as it powers distribution innovation through a fusion of software centricity and operational excellence, claims founder and CEO Matt Mansell.**

**A** deep dive into Mansell's highly impressive career track record will serve as an informative lens through which to examine his pioneering approach to reimagining hardware distribution for resellers and MSPs while bringing new technology brands to market. And Mansell's many achievements to date go some way in substantiating his bold ambition to set the standard in distribution innovation.

To say that his 25-plus years experience in the software industry has been remarkably influential would be to greatly understate the nature of the impacts he has made along the way, having held executive roles at several multinational businesses and exited many organisations as principal shareholder.

He first entered the software industry with a passion for an early Mac product called QuarkXpress which transformed how publishers created their papers and magazines etc. He went on to drive the launch of the multimedia product QuarkImmedia and worked with Virgin Records using the software on the press launch CD-ROM for

the Spice Girls launch in 1996. Mansell's success in promoting QuarkImmedia led to him being headhunted by Macromedia (Adobe) where he worked across Europe to market Flash, Dreamweaver and many other products, culminating in his role as Product Manager for Dreamweaver.

After Macromedia, Mansell established the Technology Marketing team at \$2 billion advertising and marketing conglomerate Vertis, building an email marketing platform for the Xbox launch across Europe in 2001. Three years later he left Vertis to launch his first idea, MeshCards, a through-the-line marketing product seen by some as an early brand influencer model adopted by Warner Music, Ubiquiti, Atari and a number of other forward thinking brands at the time.

Mansell went on to launch his first domain name registrar at Mesh, quickly becoming the fastest growing in Europe before its acquisition by Host Europe Group (Go-Daddy) where he became an executive board member before its later sale, in a deal valued at \$1.8 billion. Today, as well being NetXL founder and CEO Mansell is also a Non-Exec



Matt Mansell

**The smallest and most efficient part of our operation is the 25,000-plus units we ship a month. We are entirely focused on the software stack that leads to that shipment**

Board Director of PE-backed CPaaS provider TelcoSwitch and Yay.com. He founded Yay.com in 2013 and exited to private equity in 2022.

NetXL primarily caters for resellers, installers, MSPs,

IT support businesses and systems integrators, enabling them to streamline their order processing workflow through what Mansell says is a transformational product procurement process. "NetXL is a software-driven

business with a core focus on efficiently and swiftly delivering tangible products," commented Mansell. "The fusion of technological expertise and operational efficiency is the cornerstone of our approach."



# to redefine distribution

NetXL works with fast-moving innovative network product vendors, utilising a proprietary cross channel retail, distribution and inventory software platform to serve its customers. The company is an evolution of the Yay.com service, responding to growing customer demand for seamless integration with VoIP platforms. Initially, Yay.com supplied essential

## The fusion of technological expertise and operational efficiency is the cornerstone of our approach

hardware components like Grandstream phones and DrayTek, later broadening its vendor portfolio to include Ubiquiti, Yealink and TP-Link.

### Distinct entity

"The logical step was taken to establish NetXL as a distinct entity," commented Mansell, who (naturally) leveraged his software expertise to develop NetXL's proprietary platform, which anticipates demand and dynamically assesses distribution channels. "NetXL's technology is its secret sauce," he added. "Developed internally from the ground up we have the ability to be agile with constant efficiency and flex in all we do."

Mansell also noted that API integrations have become instrumental in streamlining processes and maximising efficiency. "Our JSON API enables integration for real-

time stock information, order processing and tracking details," he explained. "They can even place orders and receive a detailed product feed including descriptions, images and attributes."

Investing in the development of NetXL's technological infrastructure has also enabled it to automate and optimise its own internal operations, resulting in

significant resource savings. "This enables us to redirect our focus towards delivering additional value to customers, including strategic planning, customer relationship management and innovation," added Mansell. "By customising our fulfilment platform

and building key functions such as stock take and finance reconciliation in-house we deliver a tailored experience."

According to Mansell, many service providers face significant operational hurdles in managing hardware orders, spending unnecessary time and resources on dealing with multiple manual distribution partners for their customers. "From manually handling order processing and provisioning to having limited visibility into shipment progress, they often struggle to maintain the same standard of hardware fulfilment services as they do with their software offerings," he added.

Mansell cited TelcoSwitch as an example of a business restricted by its hardware fulfilment process, until it moved its purchasing over to NetXL and made full

use of the API, automating and streamlining what were laborious ordering processes from device shipment, configuration and provisioning, up to automation of the purchasing and finance process. "As MSPs continue to embrace digital transformation forward-thinking distributors with reliable APIs will play a vital role in driving innovation and success," added Mansell.

### Internet revolution

He believes the channel is fundamentally different to 25 years ago and that traditional channel firms would be wise to remodel their business strategies accordingly. "If a brand isn't strategic with its Amazon presence then it might as well not list in Google's rankings," he stated. "If it believes a reseller or distributor entirely serves distinct sectors, it's mistaken. The Internet was only just getting going 25 years ago, but it's here now and here to stay.

"That fundamentally changes buyers' access to information and their purchasing demeanors. We have positioned ourselves to take advantage of that change by creating a software business that ships. The smallest and most efficient part of our operation is the 25,000-plus units we ship a month. We are entirely focused on the software stack that leads to that shipment in building a brand's presence, stature and value across all channels."

According to Mansell, NetXL's pioneering approach to shipping is a magnet for partners. "Prompt delivery is not just a convenience, it's a necessity today," he said. "By achieving a 7pm cut off for next day service

## Just a minute with Matt Mansell...

**Role models:** A good friend (Shaun) and an old boss (Adriaan). Shaun taught me to hustle, Adriaan taught me to charm – without either you're going nowhere fast.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I can tell you the make, model, tonnage or horsepower of just about any excavator or tractor from 100 metres away.

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** My greatest strength is being decisive. You can talk and plan all day long, but you'll never know until you just get on and do it. My biggest weakness is assuming others are willing to run that risk with me.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Subpostmaster Alan Bates; farmer Kaleb Cooper; and Ecosign founder Jason Lemkin.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** Farming. I love nothing more than being outside, dealing with pressure and challenges yet getting a sense of accomplishment.

**Best advice you have been given:** The first person to think of an idea has the advantage. The first person to implement it wins.

**What do you fear most?** Time being my own. I fiercely protect my diary. I want to spin on a dime – you can't do that going from meeting to meeting.

**The biggest risk you have taken:** Putting my life's savings into my first company, spending the lot, then doubling down at the last minute to come out the other side.

**Your favourite comedian/comedienne?** Michael McIntyre.

**How do you relax?** Tractors and sailing. There is enough stimulation in both that you can't get it wrong, but enough serenity that you can simply enjoy the fruits of your labour.

**If you were to write a book, what would it be about?** Divorce and its positive impact. Much is written about the emotional trauma of divorce for both adults and children. My parents divorced when I was young and I all but fended for myself from aged 11. Working from a young age and owning that independence and responsibility so early in life had a positive impact for me as an adult. I'd like to tell that story.

**What are you most looking forward to?** Tomorrow. I genuinely love waking up each day. Plan for tomorrow but live for today – life is entirely and only what you make of it.

**If you were to be reincarnated, what in living nature would you like to come back as?** A Bumblebee. Without them we would lack the pollination needed in many of the crops we eat. We all need to do so much more for our planet and its people.

**Top business tip:** Always answer the phone within one ring. The world waits for no one now.

weekdays and 3pm Sunday shipping for Monday delivery, we're meeting the immediacy that partners demand."

NetXL has also added white labelled customised solutions into its fulfilment and shipping cost, including custom branded delivery notes and white labelled,

untraceable courier accounts. And with the entire team being technical NetXL provides value add services such as router pre-configuration and API integrations. "This combination of fulfilment solutions and technical expertise drives our growth prospects," added Mansell. ■

# CyberLab ramps up as key

The merger of Chess Cyber Security (which is independent from Chess ICT) with acquired businesses Armadillo Sec and Cyberlab Consulting in November last year created a 'one-stop-shop security powerhouse', according to CEO Gavin Wood who says the combined and rebranded CyberLab business is shaping up to become a leading cybersecurity linchpin for channel partners.

CyberLab represents the culmination of a journey that began in 2017 when Chess acquired Foursys, followed by the addition of penetration testing expertise in 2021 through the purchase of Armadillo Sec, and in April last year Cyberlab Consulting was acquired to bring in more compliance and managed security services, including a cybersecurity as-a-service (CSaaS) platform. CyberLab and Chess have the same shareholders but it can independently pursue its own finance growth partners, and alongside Wood the leadership team includes CFO Tom Davies (Group Finance Director of Chess) while Cyberlab founder Ryan Bradbury is CTO.

Wood joined Chess as part of the acquisition of Foursys and became the group's

CTO. He was appointed CyberLab CEO in 2023 and is leveraging his 25-plus years experience in driving business transformation, including critical national infrastructure projects and solutions for major UK telcos. For the last ten years Wood has focused on security and he says the Foursys deal catalysed the formation of a major force in cybersecurity equipped with the right technology, knowledge and expertise to help businesses of all sizes, including large public sector organisations.

#### Strategic goals

Wood's primary goals for 2024 are to continue year-on-year organic growth and expand CyberLab's partner ecosystem while completing integration priorities. "We combined three cybersecurity companies with rich histories, technical expertise and



Gavin Wood

**Our long-term plan is for rapid organic growth supplemented by strategic acquisitions and to establish CyberLab as a leading UK cybersecurity business**

excellent reputations into one organisation," he stated. "Our short-term goals are to continue integrating these businesses, people and systems into one cybersecurity powerhouse while maintaining our security guidance, services and support for customers. We have become a one-

stop cybersecurity advisor providing a full suite of services that range from testing, assessment and discovery to consultancy, delivery and hardening. We anticipate continued organic growth because our products and services complement each other, enabling us to guide customers through

a complete cybersecurity journey. Our long-term plan is for rapid organic growth supplemented by strategic acquisitions and to establish CyberLab as a leading UK cybersecurity business."

CyberLab's core partner proposition is underpinned by its CyberLab Control

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# 7 security player

cybersecurity-as-a-service platform which provides tools such as Dark Web Monitor, phishing simulation and user education training. "The platform is designed to work seamlessly with our partner channel and the programme is working well," stated Wood.

He also pointed out that CyberLab's portfolio and development priorities are shaped by customer feedback alongside ongoing alignment with the ever evolving cybersecurity industry and

## We see a huge opportunity in the partner channel

changing threat landscape. "Advanced threat detection and response are becoming increasingly important due to the prevalence of targeted ransomware and data exfiltration attacks," he explained. "Having tools that monitor systems 24/7 is now the minimum standard for protection. Furthermore, securing the human element of businesses through user education and awareness is crucial as even the best security tools can fail without knowledgeable users."

### Channel focus

Wood noted that CyberLab performed 'exceptionally well' over the past 12 months and that he is currently focused on new revenue streams and growth opportunities generated through channel partnerships. "We see a gap in the market for MSPs and MSSPs, especially in the channel," he commented. "CyberLab onboarded Chess ICT as a strategic partner and other large telco and wholesale

partners are currently in the onboarding process. Through our partnership with Chess ICT and our existing customer base we have over 6,000 businesses already using our services through the channel. Ongoing investment in CyberLab Control's capabilities will bring more opportunities for partners."

### Expanding base

From a broader perspective, noted Wood, CyberLab is expanding into new markets with a strong focus on supporting mid-market corporates while also continuing to enhance its NHS propositions where it already has a large base with over 50

NHS trusts as customers. "Our public sector base also includes government, local government and the MOD, along with a diverse range of commercial customers from SMEs to large global enterprises," he added.

But the channel will play a 'crucial role' in driving growth and influence across the market, emphasised Wood, particularly through the CyberLab Control portal which offers partners a way to introduce cybersecurity to their portfolios. "We are investing in scaling up the partner channel with additional dedicated partner channel managers," he said.

"Partnering with a cybersecurity specialist enables resellers and MSPs to identify security requirements and maximise those commercial opportunities. We see a huge opportunity in the partner channel and I aim to establish CyberLab as one of the UK's biggest cybersecurity providers for partners." ■

### Just a minute with Gavin Wood...

**Role model:** My mum. As a single parent she worked multiple jobs to support my sister and I when we were young. Her strong work ethic and determination have inspired me to have the drive to succeed.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** I'd be in the Royal Navy.

**Best advice you have been given:** Don't be afraid to hire people better than you.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Winston Churchill, Julius Caesar and Pope John Paul II.

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** I have an ability to work with people from all areas of a business and bring them together to achieve a common goal. But I am prone to overthinking 'what if' scenarios.

**What do you fear most?** Snakes.

**One example of something you have overcome?** In my early career my lack of formal ICT education was perceived as an obstacle. However, I found that my practical hands-on learning style and engineering mindset enabled me to excel in the ICT world.

**What talent do you wish you had?** To play any musical instrument.

**Your biggest career achievement:** Establishing CyberLab.

**Your favourite comedian or comedienne:** Ricky Gervais and Steve Coogan.

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Starting CyberLab.

**How do you relax?** Spending time with my family on the water, sailing, canoeing or using our paddleboard. I also take part in competitive sailing. And I'm currently rebuilding a very old and rusty Land Rover Defender.

**Top tip:** Partner with a security specialist.

## Don't Get Stuck On The Starting Grid

In the fast-paced world of cloud-based collaboration it's not always easy to stay one step ahead of the competition. Technology never stands still and continues to evolve.

Evolve IP's recent Partner Day at the Williams Formula 1 Exhibition Centre near Oxford provided an ideal opportunity to assess the current state-of-play and pinpoint the road ahead, with five million more users expected to join the cloud collaboration bandwagon over the coming years, as the race to win new customers intensifies.

We were able to bring many industry experts and analysts together from inside and outside the business to provide valuable insights and share their vision of what the future holds.

Now that the dust has settled on a thoroughly memorable day, it's clear cloud service providers will need to continually raise their game as they battle directly against each other. In a world of super-charged UCaaS solutions, driven by AI, traditional on-premise alternatives are being overtaken at an even greater pace.

By 2028 cloud communication adoption is estimated to rise to 15.9m from 10.9m users this year, reaching 88.3% penetration in a market worth £1.86bn. In many ways we are only at the start of the journey!

### A Winning Team

Evolve IP is not afraid to push the boundaries, drive forward and adapt just like F1, based on a best-of-breed eco system of partners that keep innovating too. The investment, the drive and the passion to be the best, beat the best and strive to go even further and faster is inherent across our business. We want to win. We want to be the best. Just like a race team we're evolving all the time and never stop, nor does the competition.

Which specialist has the best UCaaS solutions will prove crucial in the future, in a 'cloud v cloud provider' market competition. According to analysts, Cavell Group, millions

more users are on the way – which is why developing market maturity means differentiating from other cloud solutions is becoming more important.

It's clear collaborative partnerships are becoming ever more crucial, based on being agile and addressing different needs. We're listening, improving and investing in our team all the time.

Collaboration platform Webex is growing 10 times faster than Microsoft Teams across our partner base – fuelled by powerful new features, designed to enhance the customer experience and boost reseller revenue.

### AI Innovations

A new 'Vidcast' video presentation tool as well as enhanced AI meeting functionality including a 'Be-right-back' innovation, are accelerating adoption.

Successful collaboration is based on three key pillars - efficiency, analytics and security. Customer experience and revenue growth are intrinsically linked and Webex shines in all main areas and offers security by design. It is very cost-effective, delivers high-value functionality, low cost of ownership, lots of integration such as with Office 365 and offers great margin potential.

It's very exciting that more organisations are starting to get aboard the Webex train in much greater numbers. So far we've attracted hundreds of new customers this year as month-on-month demand intensifies.

According to the latest industry research, around 85% of companies that work to improve their customer experience report an increase in revenue. Organisations with outstanding service generate around six times more revenue than competitors who fall behind, he said.

Just like Formula 1, Evolve IP is striving to lead from the front. We want to be in a position to drive our partner's businesses further forward. Find out more here: [www.evolveip.net/en-gb/](http://www.evolveip.net/en-gb/)

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# Leading societal change

**It is too easy for business leaders to pay lip service to societal change rather than deliver it. Instead, they must demonstrate bold and positive actions, urges Claudia Osei-Nsafoah, Chief People Officer UK&I, Group Talent and D&I, Sky.**

**M**eaningful societal change requires bold actions, real investment and total transparency, according to Osei-Nsafoah. At an industry level, she says, enhancing collaboration between companies, sharing best practices and increasing transparency in reporting D&I metrics are crucial steps to driving impactful progress. For its part, Sky has partnered with a variety of organisations committed to societal change including the Black Equity Organisation to provide connectivity, along with mentorship to address systemic inequalities in the business landscape for black entrepreneurs.

By putting words into action Sky has accelerated its measures against racial injustice with a £30 million commitment, and increased its ethnic diversity within the workforce from 15.4 per cent in January 2021 to 21.2 per cent by February 2024. This reflects a 5.8 per cent increase in representation across the business. "We've made a commitment for 20 per cent of employees across

Sky in the UK and Ireland to be from an ethnic minority background by 2025, with at least a quarter of these to be black," stated Osei-Nsafoah.

She also stressed that organisations need to build diverse and inclusive cultures. Not only internally, but also consider the responsibility and role they play in influencing society. "Creating a more inclusive society is at the heart of our business," added Osei-Nsafoah. "Having the right culture enables different perspectives and we have a responsibility to create a culture that everyone feels part of. We're building an organisation where inclusion is actively managed and invites natural curiosity while enabling people to be themselves, express themselves and thrive, no matter who they are or what background they're from."

In June 2023 Sky signed up to a pledge alongside Ofcom and a number of industry peers to help more women build a tech career in telecommunications. But having a diverse workforce alone doesn't necessarily



Claudia Osei-Nsafoah

**We can't solve systemic issues of injustice and inequality in a day, and we can't solve them alone. But we're committed to doing our part over the long-term**

provide the full benefits of diversity, noted Osei-Nsafoah, who also pointed out the critical role of leadership in driving the full potential of inclusion.

**Leadership training**

"Sky has established a programme of Inclusive Leadership training for its circa 400 leaders," added Osei-Nsafoah. "They have a pivotal role to play so it was important that we invested in providing practical guidance on how to model inclusive leadership in their teams and business units. We have bespoke inclusive

leadership materials that provide managers at all levels with the practical skills that empower them to play an active role in creating a culture of inclusion and innovation across Sky. "Our Employee Networks are also supported at a leadership level, all being sponsored by a member of Sky's executive team. This helps our networks raise awareness at the top levels of our organisation of the issues underrepresented communities face."

Establishing industry benchmarks and holding

companies accountable will further push the D&I agenda forward, believes Osei-Nsafoah. To help ensure its own accountability and progress Sky works in partnership with the Diversity Advisory Council, an external body composed of nationally recognised diversity and inclusion leaders. "These leaders advise on the development and implementation of our D&I initiatives and their impact on corporate governance, workforce and supplier diversity," noted Osei-Nsafoah.

**Continued on page 29**



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# ITPS strikes the right solution

Tech business ITPS has put economic transparency at the forefront of IT decision making, while enabling businesses to innovate, generate growth and establish competitive strength through smart technology partnerships, according to CCO Andy Harris.

Having fine-tuned a line of action that strikes the right balance between economic realities and customer demand for value-based technology outcomes and innovation, it is no surprise that ITPS' agility is driving greater confidence in its strategy which is becoming evermore data driven. "We see expansion in our ability to communicate the productivity gains with newer areas like AI, cloud and automation," stated Harris. "We spend a lot of time providing detailed economic analysis for IT decisions as boards demand more transparent spend-returns and also turn to technology for the transformative impact they are seeing in their respective markets.

"Perhaps the most exciting elements hidden in the rise of AI and automation is the need to communicate value way beyond the IT team. Every day I see our conversations turning to

business stakeholders who, increasingly, understand and influence the technology decisions that will have the greatest benefit. We're building out our partners around big data and moving customers from dashboards to data-driven organisations."

Security is also topping the ITPS agenda with the launch of a 24x7 SOC which has 'taken off', according to Harris. He also noted that adding more SOC features is another strategic priority along with creating a fully fledged business unit that takes advantage of the firm's SOC and 24x7 NOC. "Channel partners are already gravitating towards us as a one-stop-shop, so it also made sense to invest in holistic solution delivery as an area of innovation," added Harris. "Our medium-term goals will see us grow our data science capabilities and extend our strong university relationships to ensure we have the best minds making use of the best technologies available. We already have a



Andy Harris

## We're building out our partners around big data and moving customers from dashboards to data-driven organisations

team looking at data-driven use cases because I want to go to market talking about business outcomes rather than a set of AI features and functions."

### Market reach

Most of ITPS' partners already buy and manage circuits through its portal, with cloud and security currently the main focus areas for the channel alongside recurring revenues, noted Harris. He said the company has a good balance of business across the public sector and not-for-profit

verticals including housing associations, schools and emergency services, with its influence also being strongly felt in legal, manufacturing, energy and sustainability. Insurance and life sciences are also emerging as strong growth markets. "We have a good understanding of the challenges facing each of those sectors which informs our approach to tailored solutions," stated Harris.

ITPS currently generates circa £20 million turnover, growing at 15-20 per cent per year, and has a 109

headcount. The company began its commercial life in 2000 when founder and former Managing Director Garry Sheriff spotted a gap in the market for what he saw as 'straightforward IT support'. The business' year-on-year growth was primarily catalysed by local customer recommendations but the addition of its own data centre in 2003 was a turning point that attracted major ISPs and MNOs to PoP its location. "From there we started reselling circuits to the channel and managed networks to our existing

# ion balance

customers," explained Harris. "Once we had an established customer base we built out our products, introducing a private VCloud offering in 2019 and creating a self-serve portal in 2022."

Even though ITPS is an established business Harris characterises it as having the energy, flexibility and innovation of a start-up. And following an investment boost in March 2021 ITPS bolstered its exec team and prepared for greater scale and growth. Subsequent developments also included a simplified structure and more engineering depth to the product portfolio ahead of a brand revamp in 2023 which Harris says is reflective of how the company is seen by its customers – Intelligent Technology, Practical Solutions (ITPS). "It's all about the customer journey and we aim to differentiate from the outset through our teams and approach to current and future market requirements," added Harris. "Being an MSP for over 20 years also brings an authentic edge to our offerings and go-to-market support."

"Customers inform our strategy. They want a knowledgeable and trustworthy partner so we take a consultative approach, listen and talk about challenges and recommend a technology stack for the next chapter in their own story. Technology is intertwined so we look at the 'whole' when building solutions. But budgets are squeezed and we have to be mindful of economics of outcomes – especially when we talk about innovation. Whether it's AI, cloud or managing cyber risk, you need to think through their impacts." ■

## Just a minute with Andy Harris...

**Role models:** My three children. Each of them has learning difficulties but they embrace their situation and pursue their goals to be the best they can.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I fell in love with cricket during lockdown but I'm still not sure if it's the sport or the commenting that brings the joy.

**What talent do you wish you had?** Federer's forehand, Nadal's backhand and Murray's grit.

**Best advice you have been given:** Help when you can because everyone's trying to succeed.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Dinner is for laughing, so the Fast Show cast – Paul Whitehouse, Arabella Weir and Charlie Higson.

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** My greatest strength is knowing I can't do much alone. I've always gravitated to, or worked with people quite different from me. On the flipside, my attention to detail is a lifetime's work.

**Industry bugbear:** The IT industry needs to listen more. Customers and partners know their businesses best so IT needs to be more of a conversation than a rush to a solution.

**In hindsight:** I'd have been bolder and run faster.

**Biggest career achievement:** The people I met and the relationships I forged along the way.

**What do you fear most?** Not being good enough to make the team.

**The biggest risk you have taken:** Not taking the first job offered to me after college. I needed a moment before I got stuck into work and don't regret the adventure.

**Top tip:** Be demanding! ■

Continued from page 26

She concedes that while significant strides have been made in driving the D&I agenda there is always more to be done. "One of the initiatives we introduced to catalyse more progress is an Inclusive Hiring Tool to ensure all recruitment managers hire through a diverse lens," explained Osei-Nsafoah. "Bespoke training is created by Rare Recruitment and centred around inclusive hiring. We're working closely with talent acquisition to build this into the hiring process."

"We're also continuing to drive systematic change under our £30 million commitment, focusing on wider intersections of diversity and inclusion including disability, LGBTQ+ and social mobility. Disability is another focus area as we work to improve our accessibility measures."

It is clear to see that Sky's aspirations to progress its D&I agenda are treated with the same rigour as any other part of the business, with a demonstrable and robust leadership commitment, clear and measurable targets, an inclusive culture that encourages open dialogue and continuous learning, along with a commitment to addressing key issues and inequalities for under-represented groups in society.

"We can't solve systemic issues of injustice and inequality in a day, and we can't solve them alone," stated Osei-Nsafoah. "But we're committed to doing our part over the long-term. Sharing success stories such as our investment in new storytelling through the New Focus Fund, supporting black businesses through the Black Equity Organisation, combating racism in football with Kick It Out, and addressing school exclusions with Mission 44, we can help inspire further progress across the industry." ■

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Intel, "Success breeds complacency. Complacency breeds failure. Only the paranoid survive."

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**James Arnold Roberts – CEO, Voiceflex**

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Voiceflex has been a sponsor at Margin for several years, allowing us

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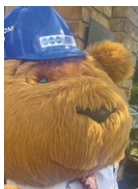




**Ian McNamara – Transformation Director, Anvil**

Anvil is a game-changer in the telecom industry, offering a unified solution to

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**Don Moore – Group CEO, Channel Solution Resource**

Channel Solutions Resource (CSR) is the UK's most proficient legacy-to-UC/Cloud

migration specialist. CSR enables partners to take on support for PBX's and then migrate to new platforms thus ensuring partners are in the prime position to help drive their customer's move to IP, be it SIP or Cloud. Come and talk to us at Margin. We are easy to find – we are the ones with the bear!



**James Boyle – Channel Account Manager, Cloudcell**

"A leader in the UK fibre-alternative connectivity market and a Peplink Gold Partner, Cloudcell

Technologies are thrilled to be attending this year's Margin event. Peplink's approved technology partner status with Elon Musk's Starlink has resulted in utilising the unbreakable combination of hybrid cellular and starlink, we are committed to offering customers unrivalled connectivity solutions, so if you are looking for a connectivity partner to help unlock additional revenue streams, look no further than Cloudcell Technologies."



**David Alldritt – Chairman, Federation of Communications Services**

Benefits of membership of FCS, the association for companies

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**Sean Dixon – Sales Director, Fidelity Energy**

Join over 700 telecoms partners who have achieved success selling energy through Fidelity

Energy for the last 10 years. Unlock a recurring revenue stream with our comprehensive suite of solutions tailored for your entire customer base, from an online switching platform for SME's to bespoke procurement options for energy-intensive industries. Drive the journey to net-zero with sustainable products, including EV chargers and Solar Panels. Elevate your business with the perfect cross-sell opportunity and discover the multitude of benefits of a Fidelity Energy partnership further on page 12.



**Donnavan Labuschagne – Fidelity Head of Operations, Fidelity Group IoT**

Fidelity Group's IoT offering is now powered by our latest software

platform. Named vM2M, this platform enables channel partners and their customers to quote, order and manage their IoT SIM estates entirely online, 24/7. Our platform provides the most straightforward IoT management portal on the global market. Talk to one of our team at Margin 2024 about how our solutions can help you and your business.



**Peter Gradwell – Chief Commercial Officer, IQMobile**

IQ, as a channel focused MVNO on the UK's best network is excited to show partners how easy

it is to support customers away from the world of red & blue bills. We offer a fully-fledged real time portal, API and roaming controls. Physical & eSIM. Wifi Calling, Uncapped EU Roaming, you name it. We will also be introducing our market leading Cloud PBX integration – enabling you to tightly integrate a SIM as an extension on any & every PBX.



**Anna Maria Marzec-Thomas – Sales Director, ProVu**

ProVu is thrilled to be sponsoring Margin 2024. As the Channel's leading Comms, Security,

and Data distributor, we boast over two decades of experience in tailoring services to meet our partners' unique needs. With an array of services meticulously crafted to streamline your operations, we redefine distribution by offering automated solutions for hardware fulfilment, provisioning, and ongoing management of IP technology. Whatever your requirements, we've got your back. Join us at Margin and to explore how we can support you and your business."



**Lauren Croxson – Sales Director, Sangoma**

Since 1984, Sangoma has been at the forefront of providing UC solutions, helping businesses streamline

their communication and collaboration processes. We've been recognised for 9 consecutive years, as an industry leader, in Gartner's UCaaS magic quadrant. Our wide portfolio, all owned and manufactured by Sangoma includes multiple UC systems, phones, gateways, SBC and SIP trunks. Our partners gain a competitive advantage by offering unparalleled flexibility— choice from a huge portfolio and options on how to deploy UC - cloud, on-premise or hybrid.



**Tamsin Deutron-Yue – Managing Director, Support to Win**

Removing obstacles to revenue and profitability with technical and operational excellence on demand

Support to Win's Tamsin Deutron-Yue leads a vital session showing how partners can liberate their service delivery to deploy customer projects faster and achieve complex technical migrations with ease. Drawing on the latest best-practice for contact centre and UC, Deutron-Yue explains how outsourcing and smartsourcing specialist skills empowers partners to realise their revenue goals and build sustainable operational models that respond to rapid market change.



**Justin Blaine – Channel Sales Manager, TelcoSwitch Group**

CallSwitch One is a channel-focused software platform that enables MSPs to deliver UCaaS

solutions to their customers using our resilient and purpose-built infrastructure, all while leveraging their own brand. We'll be on hand to discuss how our partners are deploying CallSwitch One to their customers, from SME to large scale enterprise deployments with bespoke 'one click' integrations, and uncover how we can support you in delivering unique solutions tailored to your specific customer markets.



**Andy Jones – Chief Revenue Officer, Telxl**

"TelXL are thrilled to be sponsoring Margin again this year. 2024 will see the channel realise opportunities

in Contact management and CX. Our agile cloud-based contact management platform offers affordable voice, digital and omnichannel elements that scale as needed. Having the support to deliver the exceptional experience that customers expect is now imperative. We will help demystify contact

management for the tens of thousands of businesses not equipped or aware of what's available to them."



**Michelle Livingstone – CEO, Layer Systems**

The Layer is a community-led, end-to-end CRM solution crafted to meet the ICT sector's unique and ever-evolving

needs. "We've recently added exciting integrations for billing, finance, and phone systems to enhance visibility across the customer journey within a single pane of glass, boosting efficiency and productivity. For the last 14 years, our mission has been to solve the channel's biggest challenges with technology - let's discuss how we can help you."



**Rob Loakes – Country Manager UK & Ireland, Wildix**

At Wildix, the partner relationship is everything. Our channel-focused strategy truly resonates

with our partners. As a true end-to-end vendor, we offer a comprehensive licence suite, an extensive hardware range, and international SIP services, providing a one-stop shop for our partner network. Delivering through direct vendor relationships, we ensure exceptional support and success for our partners. This comprehensive approach is why you win with Wildix.



**Craig Howell – Sales Director, Xelion**

Xelion is the most partner-friendly communications vendor in the channel. We sell through the channel only. We

develop the platform in-house, giving partners direct input into new features. Technical support and training are free. All features are under one licence, giving partners a great selling point and simplifying the quoting and billing processes. Everything about Xelion is built to maximise partner gains. We can't wait to meet delegates and show what Xelion can do.



**Nikki Freeman – Business Development Director, Knight Corporate Finance**

With deal activity continuing, Nikki of Knight Corporate

Finance, the channel's leading transaction specialist, will kick off the event by providing an overview of the M&A landscape, the facts and figures that make deals work along with insights into what is driving the unquenchable thirst for reseller acquisitions.

# Fibre sector faces business

**Business model reinvention is a hot topic in the UK's fibre provider space, and balancing the key components driving change is an immediate priority for all players in the sector, according to industry leaders at last month's state of the full fibre market insight session hosted by Comms Dealer in association with Xantaro and Nokia.**

**M**any altnets are facing an inflection point in their business models as the need to connect customers and increase APRU overtakes their previous focus on build. This shift provides an opportunity for altnets to 'sit down and have a realistic conversation about priorities', according to MS3 CEO Guy Miller. "Thinking about what customers will want in five years time and how to monetise add-ons is crucial, but we also need to think about our immediate needs – to keep funding coming in, keep the build rate up and increase customer connections," he stated.

The early years of altnet expansion were driven by a flood of investment and characterised by a rush to get fibre in the ground. This quick start compelled business leaders to make important and

impactful decisions early on, sometimes without a fully fledged team of architects around them. Ogi CEO Ben Allwright said: "Many altnets made business-critical decisions with a crystal ball view of the world. These decisions have wed them to a particular design or tied their technology to a specific vendor."

The panellists noted that investors expected homes to go live on their networks just six-to-nine-months after money arrived. This was compounded by supply chain issues and lead times.

Nokia Customer CTO Nigel Abraham shined a light on important insights gained from his early days at the company when he looked at many of the altnet investor packs and worked to re-write some of the design rules for emerging challengers. He commented: "I see a stark difference between operators



Full fibre industry leaders unravel the sector's business model

## Altnet leaders are being forced to make decisions that weigh up the costs and benefits of changing their business model

who started three or four years ago versus those who entered the market seven years ago as the architectures are very different."

### Altnet evolution

As well as early design decisions, the profile of investors will also decide how altnets evolve going into the next phase. "Investor expectation will drive decision making within the business," highlighted FullFibre CEO James Warner. "Different investors will have different investment timeline goals. We all have funds behind us who have a horizon

and they want to hit a milestone, therefore we make decisions in the business that achieve this to the best of its value creation."

Therefore, the sector is full of operators doing the same thing but are approaching it with different operational and technical methods. Now, as the sector shifts with potential wide-scale consolidation and customer additions prioritised, altnet leaders are being forced to make decisions weighing up the costs and benefits of changing their business model.

The starting gun for consolidation has been fired with deals for CityFibre, nexfibre and Freedom Fibre well publicised earlier this year. During the discussion, contributors highlighted how the acquisition landscape has affected decision making throughout their company's growth. Allwright believes the companies that are currently in the best stead are those who've not focused on acquisition.

He said: "An altnet's priority should be to build the most successful business you can and if consolidation

For more information go to: [xantaro.net/en-gb/get-in-touch](https://xantaro.net/en-gb/get-in-touch)

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# Business model change



Business model evolution

happens you will hopefully realise the value from having done that. My focus is on being profitable as quickly as possible.”

Steve Glendenning, CTO at Brsk, agreed, noting that the M&A landscape hasn't shaped up quite as industry pundits had predicted three or four years ago, making the business plans of those who factored M&A into their roadmaps obsolete. He said: “Planning with an exit in mind can doom you to failure. Being acquired should not be a rigid part of your roadmap, it is a factor that is out of your control. You can't control if or when it is going to happen.” He noted that the value of the business comes from the fibre in the ground and the ability to add customers to it.

However, with M&A inevitable to many, it would make sense to look at decisions and pivot points around the technology stack through this lens as a precautionary measure. Warner noted that during FullFibre's merger with Digital Infrastructure, decisions had to be made regarding which network design to move forward with, exploring the option of maintaining both to get the benefits of exploring how both evolve. He said: “In the coming years many will have to look at changing network infrastructure to create a more efficient operating model moving forward.”

### Balanced decisions

One panellist suggested a proactive system that includes running your own race but making technology and operational decisions that won't harm the business when consolidation happens. They said: “We have a 'no red flag rule' that dictates that every major decision we make can't create a red flag in due diligence. It may be that businesses that are considered as the easiest to integrate are those with the highest perceived value in the future.”

As in all industries, AI remains a poster child for both emerging technologies and potential revenue saving. At the round table, guests discussed potential use cases for AI across customer addition and balanced this with delivering immediate value.

According to Ruth Pickering, MD at UncoverAI, the UK can learn from California where network builders are exploring the uses of AI without fear. She noted: “AI

and analytics can provide incredibly rich customer data that can be useful when digging down a street to harvest the socio-economic data of households and better understand your users. This can inform what areas will be most likely to take-up services but also help you be more reactive to demographics with growing internet needs, such as the effect of the pandemic on older users looking for online healthcare options.”

Miller took an alternative view on the readiness of UK altnets to explore AI. He said: “The value of business in America is far more speculative, but here we are more reliant on proof points and provable returns. Many operators simply won't be around by the time AI begins to pay dividends.”

According to John Irvine, AI also poses a risk to altnets as it will encroach on their USP as champions of customer service. He noted that after a hyperlocal approach, exceptional customer service is his next biggest differentiator. He said: “AI may let the big brands emulate the service that we give our customers. If the technology can replicate the benefits of human interaction, then altnets will need to find new ways to take on the organisations with more resource.”

Spring Fibre Sales and Marketing Director Andrew Skipsey provided an alternative view. He stated: “The way in which an altnet deploys AI in five to ten years can be their differentiator. The possibilities it opens for personalisation and customisation will enhance your USP as an altnet.” ■

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# Driving the DE&I agenda

**Colt Technology Services CPO Catherine Leaver shares insights into how the company is fostering an inclusive culture that enables people to bring their authentic selves to work, fully bolstered by supportive policies and a raft of well targeted DE&I initiatives.**



Catherine Leaver

**H**ow can the channel more effectively advance the DE&I agenda?

For the channel to be truly inclusive, DE&I must be a core part of the culture and drive strategic priorities. It is the responsibility of the entire business, not just the HR team, and active commitment to driving change must begin at the top. Colt's CEO Keri Gilder has created an executive leadership team diverse in backgrounds and with a 50/50 gender parity. Across the wider business we refreshed our gender action plan, looking at how we can attract and retain women in technical roles to increase our focus on creating a more gender balanced organisation. A key part of this plan is our Inclusive

Recruitment programme aimed at mitigating bias and upskilling managers, finding ways to move women from non-technical roles into technical ones.

**What areas of DE&I do we need to look at more closely?**

Addressing DE&I is rising up the boardroom agenda, but businesses tend to focus on addressing certain demographics more than others. The demographics they spotlight are those where data can be more easily gathered – ethnicity and a focus on women, for example – at the cost of other marginalised groups where data may be harder to gather. We must consider that employees may be less likely to want to share

their sexual orientation, accessibility challenges or neurodiverse traits. While companies are becoming more accountable for building gender inclusivity, such requirements do not exist for LGBTQ+ inclusion even though the LGBTQ+ pay gap is almost double the gender pay gap at 16 per cent. In a survey by Indeed, only 30.7 per cent of LGBTQ+ employees are 'out' to everyone at work, and according to Stonewall one in five feel that being LGBTQ+ limits their job opportunities. Workers from minority ethnic backgrounds also come up against barriers in the workplace. One study found more than 120,000 ethnic minority workers have left their jobs in the past five years due to racist comments at work.

**How can these challenges be properly addressed?**

There needs to be more focus on the 'I'... inclusion. We have to create the right inclusive culture that fosters psychological safety so employees feel included, comfortable and inspired to share information about themselves without fear of consequence. We need to set goals and hold ourselves accountable, and industry collaboration is critical for the channel to achieve its DE&I goals. For our part, Colt is a member of Change the Face Alliance, an industry-wide initiative which calls on businesses to take action to increase DE&I in telecoms.

– 500 people have joined this community. We're intentional about engaging men as we can't drive change without male colleagues. DE&I programmes haven't traditionally focused on this, but taking time to explain why it matters to men is important. We're creating opportunities for men to share concerns and vulnerabilities and lean into DE&I. We're also doubling down on our focus on women in tech, building out a clearer proposition as to why women should join Colt particularly in technical roles and building on our Employer Value Proposition. We're equally focused on neurodiversity having realised there's more we can do as an industry, and at Colt, to support colleagues who are neurodivergent.

**What areas of DE&I are you currently focusing on?**

We have a strong focus on our Allyship programme

**About Catherine Leaver...**

LEAVER joined Colt as Chief People Officer in 2022 and is a seasoned telecoms industry HR professional, highly experienced in working across international workforces and building strong teams, delivering change and driving results, while ensuring the wellbeing of people within the organisation remains a top priority. She joined Colt from Telefónica Group where she was HR Director and a member of the executive team at Telefónica UK.


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# forward

We have a neuro-inclusion programme under way, beginning with defining and providing support for neurodivergent employees, and delivering training for our recruitment team while leading or sponsoring many industry events.

## What are your longer term inclusion goals?

Over the next two years we'll expand our targets and strengthen our industry collaboration. We'll also develop a more comprehensive approach to using employee feedback from different demographic groups to improve the experience of all employees. Over the next two years and beyond we'll also be focusing on AI tools to embed workforce equity at different parts of the employee lifecycle to support neurodivergent employees.

## Where are you seeing the most inclusion success?

A year ago we kick-started our journey to get 'Colties' talking, thinking and learning about accessibility with the launch of our five year Accessibility Roadmap in May 2023. Our journey began with the inception of Colt's Disability Accessibility employee Network (DAN). This was followed by an internal consultation with our workforce on accessibility, an external expert review of our processes and further stakeholder engagement culminating in the construction and launch of the roadmap. Initially, people were thinking this is going to be about making spaces physically accessible, but now they understand that although that's a critical part of our roadmap, our pathway to accessibility includes removing barriers to digital

and visual accessibility as well as physical accessibility. If barriers to accessibility remain, your business is not truly inclusive.

## What key elements must be in place to drive a successful DE&I strategy?

Building strong foundations required action across five key areas: Strategy and governance, employee experience, awareness and skills, brand and reputation, and customer experience. Inclusion must be intentional, consistent and strategic. It helps to build a framework or foundation to structure change. We run an extensive and active DE&I programme with activities across four pillars – governance and impact, leadership and culture, diverse representation and equitable business practices.

## What have been the biggest success factors in your DE&I efforts?

Involving our employee base has been our biggest change driver, within key areas including our employee networks, allyship programme, accessibility roadmap and neuro-inclusion mission. We still have a way to go, but we are improving with initiatives such as community and employee support networks; mentoring circles and our development series called Embrace your Best; our Rise Programme for underrepresented emerging talent; mandatory conscious inclusion training; a focus on wellbeing including mental health first aiders, menopause champions and a domestic abuse support policy; inclusive policies such as parental leave along with education and training – with our CEO leading from the top as a champion of change. ■

# Why ND is not a health matter

## It's high time we clarified the absolute difference between neurodiversity (ND) and mental health issues, writes ND champion and Train to Win CEO Julie Mills.

Last month marked Mental Health Awareness Week and social media was full of IT channel companies participating in this important initiative. It's great to see businesses so enthusiastic about promoting the mental health agenda, but I do get irritated when neurodiversity unthinkingly gets pulled into the mental difficulty debate.

Neurodivergent conditions like ADHD, autism and dyslexia are not mental health disorders. Saying they are incorrectly labels neurodivergent people as having poor mental health which is misleading and wrong. Mental health and wellbeing is of course rightly seen as being fundamental to a productive and happy workforce – but it can be a complex area, and neurodiversity is not a sign of bad health.

So it's time to clear up the 'confusion' between mental health issues and positive differences in neurological function. This confusion, I think, is reinforced by undetected neurodiversity and the general lack of neuro-inclusion in workplaces.

Undiagnosed or undisclosed neurodiversity can be a barrier to acceptance, communication and



Julie Mills

be empowered to do what is necessary to make the most of those extra skills."

As well as missing out on these vital skills, business leaders who are not inclusive across neurotypical (NT) and neuro divergent groups will likely be presiding over disharmonious workplaces where NT people feel confused and resentful over the perceived 'special treatment' of others, and ND people feel disempowered and exposed to deeply uncomfortable working practices – all potentially leading to conflict, absenteeism and drops in productivity.

Therein lies the only connection between neurodiversity and mental health deterioration, caused by work environments that fail to address every employee's individual needs, whether NT or ND. In a neuro-inclusive workplace both sides understand each other and the ultimate goal is harmony.

Businesses with great cultures breed harmonious working environments. This doesn't mean everyone is the same. Quite the opposite in fact. The harmony comes from individuals respecting one another while working towards common goals and achieving success. ■

mutual understanding in the workplace. There are many people who either don't know they are neurodivergent (they typically suspect they are different and are self-conscious about it) or who know they are but are fearful of 'coming out' to colleagues despite being gifted with an ability to think outside the box (they typically mask their ND traits because of the associated stigma).

## Jobs need ND skills

This issue was debated in the House of Commons in April with Matt Hancock MP (who is dyslexic) saying: "Straight line thinking can be done by computers, but future jobs will need skills such as creativity, lateral thinking and enhanced communication that are often more prevalent among those who are neurodiverse. It is great to see some employers proactively hiring neurodivergent people, but if people do not know they have a condition they will not

# 3CX ecosystem thrives

**A partner ecosystem-led approach powered by knowledge is central to 3CX's ambition to become the top UC vendor within three to five years, according to Global Sales Director Natassia Allery.**

**B**uilding and scaling an information-led partner ecosystem strategy will enable 3CX to realise the full potential of channel partners, accelerate growth and disrupt the global UC vendor league table in 3CX's favour, believes Allery. The company continues to facilitate partner events, forums and online communities that strengthen its channel ecosystem, with greater knowledge sharing creating stand out levels of expertise that set its resellers and MSPs apart, she claims.

"Knowledge gaps between suppliers and resellers are not uncommon in the technology industry, especially in fast evolving markets like UCaaS and contact centre," stated Allery. "Various factors create these gaps, such as partners being bombarded with information that's hard to filter, the complexity of the technology, inadequate training, poor resources, changes in customer demands and evolving market dynamics. Building a vibrant community where partners can network, share best practices, collaborate on projects and provide feedback creates a sense of belonging and encourages mutual growth."

Allery also noted that 3CX's pursuit of a unified partner ecosystem is advanced by formal training and certification programmes on features, capabilities and best practices, along with resources such as documentation, guides and webinars. Partners' understanding of the technology and market trends is also supported through dedicated channels including partner portals, account managers, pre-sale and technical support teams, lead generation, marketing and sales enablement.

The requirement for partner enablement is strong across the channel and vendors driven by this imperative stand to gain most, as do their partners. "By implementing these strategies and fostering a collaborative ecosystem 3CX can empower partners to better serve customers and capitalise on opportunities in the UCaaS and contact centre space," reaffirmed Allery.

To emphasise the point she says 3CX's most valuable assets are its forums, which also provide food for thought when looking at ways to improve or introduce new features and functions.



Natassia Allery

**Building a vibrant community where partners can network, share best practices, collaborate on projects and provide feedback creates a sense of belonging and encourages mutual growth**

The vendor's emphasis on feedback is reflected in the release of its V20 platform and portfolio mix of hardened security, easier configuration, along with future integrations with Grafana for advanced reporting options and AI.

**Positive feedback**

Two years in the making 3CX V20 was released in February and has since registered high adoption rates and positive feedback. A welcome aspect of the solution is that resellers can sell a pick-and-mix end-to-end solution

(with recurring revenues) they are familiar with and can readily support, because 3CX does not tie them into selling specific hardware, software or SIP trunks.

Looking ahead, Allery says AI has the potential to transform working models and 3CX is ready to capture those upcoming opportunities. "AI will help steer the market into the future and the early adopters will experience huge benefits," she added. "We plan to build on 3CX V20, especially AI integration that will make using and

managing the system easier. In terms of market approach, we like to keep things simple and easy."

3CX is also expanding its partner and alliance recruitment activities with a view to extending its influence across all markets. "Building and maintaining a strong network of channel partners, including resellers and distributors, is crucial for reaching all industry verticals and horizontals in the UK," added Allery.

3CX currently has over 1,000 active partners in the UK, with a 35 per cent rise in new active partners registered last year. "Our existing partner base is also steadily growing, hence the increase of our partner targets in 2024 which are aligned with their growing achievements," noted Allery. "In the coming two years we also expect the number of larger partners to grow significantly."

Understanding industry and customer challenges and addressing them through simplified technology (supported by inter-partner collaboration) will remain an integral part of 3CX's go-to-market strategy. And the company's knowledgeable and ecosystem-powered approach will be a core lever for success in what Allery says is the channel's biggest opportunity – the PSTN switch off. "This is a huge opportunity for 3CX and our resellers because companies unprepared for the switch off need to get ready quickly," she stated. "It's also an opportunity for businesses that have already made the switch to digital to re-evaluate their choices and ensure they made the right technology decision." ■



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# Key points to consider when going vertical

Channel business leaders share insights into the risks and rewards of operating in specific verticals, the criteria they consider when selecting their targets, avoiding pitfalls and capitalising on niche opportunities.



**JALPA SHARMA**  
MD  
DBSL

In the crowded marketplace, differentiation is key to sustainable growth. Rather than casting a wide net, consider niching down and becoming the unparalleled expert in a specific customer segment or industry. This allows you to intimately understand your target audience's unique challenges and tailor your solutions to their needs. The rewards include loyal clients, premium pricing and stronger reputation. Navigating a niche market requires more than simply narrowing your focus. It needs thorough market research, a deep understanding of your target audience and a willingness to adapt and stay ahead of the curve.



**PETE JURY**  
INTERIM MD  
ELITE GROUP

Niche markets are smaller, potentially limiting growth and making your business reliant on market trends or regulatory changes. Therefore, ensure you deeply understand the market. When selecting a market, collaboration is key. Do your research and have experts to advise and guide you. Ensure your vendors have the skills and expertise to help you. By understanding the market, you can find areas of high demand and low competition. Over the past decade we have provided unique solutions in many verticals, including travel, retail, automotive and contact centres. We listen to their needs and deeply understand the problems they aim to solve and the benefits they seek.



**MARK BODEN**  
SALES &  
COMMERCIAL  
DIRECTOR  
FIRSTCOM EUROPE

Key to gaining a competitive advantage in a particular marketplace is aligning customer need with service and product. It's no good bending your business to fit something you aren't suited for. So, our prime driver is finding a niche we can really deliver a difference to. You also need your vendors to buy into that integrated service and product offering. A recent example for us has been the drive to be part of the NHS' Better Purchasing Framework providing cloud-based telephony services to GP surgeries. It suited our customer profile, skill set and product suite so we can help the vertical to be more efficient.



**MARK WILKINSON**  
GROUP COMMERCIAL  
DIRECTOR  
RAZORBLUE

Navigating niche markets presents both challenges and opportunities due to the diverse landscapes of various industries. In the manufacturing sector our team ensures compliance with stringent health and safety regulations. We also understand the intricate legal frameworks governing financially regulated industries such as pensions and accountancy firms, and the critical importance of cybersecurity in healthcare. Cultivating strong vendor relationships remains pivotal for our benefit and for enhancing the support we offer our clients. Utilising your wider support pool is something I would push all businesses to do. Continuous learning is also paramount. Ensuring teams remain abreast of industry developments is how we can continue to support niche requirements.



**PAM BLANCHARD**  
DIRECTOR  
ICA

Specialisation in niche markets allows companies to develop deep expertise and a nuanced understanding of specific customer needs. For UCaaS and CCaaS providers, this means understanding the intricacies of integrating communication platforms and contact center functionalities to deliver seamless and efficient customer experiences. Customers are more likely to remain loyal to a provider that consistently delivers tailored solutions that precisely meet their requirements. This loyalty can result in long-term contracts, repeat business, and a strong reputation within the industry. Train staff to understand the specific needs of niche customers and establish robust support channels to address their concerns promptly and effectively.

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**JAMES GARGARO**  
**HEAD OF SALES**  
**FOR HEALTH, DAISY**  
**COMMUNICATIONS**

Specialisation in niche markets can provide a competitive advantage but can also pose a number of challenges. Daisy Patient Line being specialists in the NHS/Primary Care sector means that we have to provide 365 support for GP practices who require a lot more care than the average business. Focusing on support is so important in this vertical which is why supplier relationships and product development have been key to Daisy's popularity in the health sector. Resellers need to ensure that they have the support levels required for this market and not just the usual 9-5 levels.



**JAY BALL**  
**CEO**  
**FLOTEK**

Niche specialisation enhances competitive advantage by fostering expertise, client trust and tailored solutions beyond just pricing. Finding unique selling points is difficult until you spend time within the sector and see firsthand their challenges. However, once understood the benefits are unlimited. We usually discover a niche via acquisition, meaning the understanding of the market and how to fully penetrate the sales process is already there. Be conscious that a market sector downturn can have a large impact across your overall business if you allow the sector to take too much share. Our focus is to add sector niches to our overall market stance so we're never reliant on certain sectors.



**RICHARD SCOTT**  
**SALES DIRECTOR**  
**START**  
**COMMUNICATIONS**

Whether it be bespoke integration into a CRM, pulling omnichannel data together into an interactive data visualisation software, or simply having experience and a track-record within a market, all these things are an advantage to a reseller and can lead to more business. Relationships with vendors are critical to winning in niche verticals, specifically with ones that have experience and pedigree within the sector. When something is non-standard, that is when you need extra support from your vendors and that comes from having a strong working relationship. Resellers should consider the market size and their dependency on a single niche or vertical as specialising too narrowly in one vertical can leave you vulnerable to economic or industry changes.



**FRASER FERGUSON**  
**FOUNDER AND**  
**DIRECTOR**  
**KUBENET**

Breaking the cycle of prospects buying from established vendors can and will be rewarding. Ensuring that you understand the sector is important and having a strong USP that will interest them is key. If you've built a solution from the bottom up, then you'll already have identified a niche market for your offering. Being able to demonstrate the benefits, allied with a service wrap that differentiates you could give you a competitive advantage that established competitors may not have. The big guns will come out fighting so be prepared for that. Start with clients where you can deliver and spend time tweaking for potentially low or no margin, build from there and hopefully the reputation will follow.



**PAUL HOOPER**  
**MD**  
**UPLANDS ONETELCO**

Tailoring products or services to meet the needs of a niche differentiates you from broader competitors and less focused campaigns, but these markets often have limited size or may require specialised knowledge. Success factors include a deep understanding of the vertical, agility to adapt to changing demands and effective marketing to reach your target audience. Identifying lucrative niche verticals involves market research, analysing trends and considering factors like growth potential and competition. Partner and supplier relationships also play a crucial role in going niche as strong partnerships can provide access to specialised products, support and resources. You should watch out for pitfalls such as overestimating demand, neglecting broader market opportunities or becoming too reliant on a single opportunity, partner or supplier.



**JAMES ROUTLEDGE**  
**SALES DIRECTOR**  
**GLOBAL 4**

Knowing a sector inside out offers an advantage over competitors as you can provide a solution that often increases revenue while mitigating potential typical challenges that others wouldn't know about. You face entering a market where everyone talks, so you must make sure you not only do a good job but also provide fair and reasonable pricing. This allows for recommendations and a greater footprint with a lower cost of sale. Enter for the long-term and provide case studies or references as the circle is often smaller than you think.




**IAN DUNSTAN**  
**MD**  
**COBALT**

Vertical markets are constantly appearing for us. Innovative and agile businesses will be able to evolve quickly as they are spotted and targeted. A niche we operate in is primary and secondary schools in rural areas where we deliver a solution based on pain points. Our relationships with our vendors are crucial to the success of how we can tailor our solution to niches. The key to working with the niche markets is that your product and customer service must be exceptional. The margin is often higher, but many of the customers know each other so for us this is an opportunity as they all talk.



**DAVID WARDELL**  
**DIRECTOR**  
**EVOKE TELECOM**

These days, the comms sector is like Race Across the World, with teams ending up on the same bus, and ultimately arriving at the same metaphorical checkpoint. To differentiate is to steal a lead, but to specialise brings about a risk versus reward conundrum. Competitive edge, higher margins and brand identity, versus, in-house skill sets, market fluctuations and dependency risk, all must be evaluated. The answer lies with innovation, differentiated alternatives, advantage and tangible benefits across the value chain. With innovation one can be fleet of foot as opposed to being tied to 'the wheel of niche'. The secret is less vertical and more difference.

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**UK FIBRE AWARDS**  
6th June 2024  
London Marriott  
Grosvenor Square



**Margin**  
20th June 2024  
Forest of Arden  
Midlands



**CHANNEL CHAMPIONS**  
4th July 2024  
Regents Park  
London



**comms national awards**  
26th September 2024  
Park Plaza  
Westminster



**commsvision**  
THE GLENEAGLES HOTEL  
6th - 8th November 2024  
The Gleneagles Hotel  
Scotland

For full details of our awards and industry networking events visit.



# Birch takes MD role



Hannah Birch

HANNAH Birch is to lead Node4 as Group Managing Director following a period of organisational integration involving recent acquisitions risual, ThreeTwoFour, TNP and Tisski. Node4 founder Andrew Gilbert continues as CEO and former Managing Director Paul Bryce becomes Chief Experience Officer. Birch joined Node4 in January 2023 to lead the company's Digital Business along with integration efforts. She has 20-plus years technology leadership experience including over 10 years as a Managing Director with Accenture. "By integrating the capabilities from our recent acquisitions we've assembled a portfolio that enables us to support our customers across the full technology stack – from cloud infrastructure to modern digital transformation initiatives leveraging Microsoft's latest solutions," she stated.

## Also on the move...

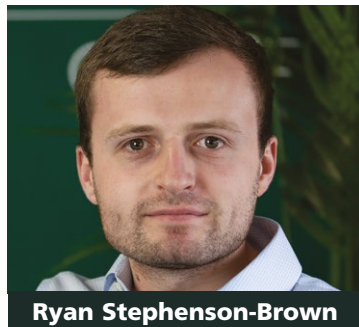
TXO's bid to become an OEM alternative in the telecom sector received a boost with the appointment of Simon Wort as CCO. He moved from wholesale full fibre provider ITS Technology where he was Chief Revenue Officer, and before then was Arrow Business Communications' Chief Commercial Officer. Wort stated: "TXO has an opportunity to serve a global customer base and lead the charge for an ESG conscious and circular economy-driven telecoms industry. Operators around the world are at different stages of this evolution and TXO will help them unlock financial and environmental benefits."



Simon Wort

IT SOLUTION provider Jigsaw24 has appointed David Dudman as Managing Director in a move that strengthens the firm's focus on Apple-based solutions. He was previously Chief Operating Officer and joined the company in 2019. "Businesses are embracing Mac, iPad and iPhone like never before thanks in part to their security, user experience and productivity benefits," he stated. In tandem with Dudman's appointment, founders Roger Whittle and John Hughes transition to Non-Executive Director roles. Jigsaw24 is on track to deliver £200 million turnover this year.

EVOLVE'S Ryan Stephenson-Brown has been appointed as the firm's first Chief Operating Officer. He founded a managed network services business in 2014 at just 15 years of age



Ryan Stephenson-Brown

which was incorporated into Evolve. "I joined the company during its formative years and took on a range of roles which enabled me to help shape the culture and direction of our organisation," he stated. "As COO I am committed to driving operational excellence, fostering a culture of innovation and steering our company towards sustained growth." CEO Alan Stephenson-Brown added: "Ryan has played a crucial role in driving efficiency, implementing best practices and fostering a culture of pace within our organisation."

CYBERSECURITY provider Sapphire has pulled in Nadine Errington as CFO. The move builds on recent additions to the exec team including Ian Thomas as CEO, Charly Davis as CCO, Gareth Pritchard as CTO and CPO Claudia Quinton. Thomas commented: "Nadine's track record in diverse sectors will be instrumental as we continue to drive growth in the cybersecurity landscape."

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4<sup>th</sup> July 2024, Regents Park



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