



Intercity chief kicks off campaign to hit £100m turnover p8

Goodman on today's critical leadership priorities p10



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# SCG swoops on Pile as new CEO

**HAMPSHIRE-based MSP Southern Communications Group (SCG) has accelerated its next expansion phase with the major appointment of former Gamma Business MD Daryl Pile as CEO.**

**SPECIAL REPORT**

Pile (pictured) is expected to take post later this summer in a move that sees long-term SCG CEO Paul Bradford become Executive Chairman. Non Exec Chair David Goldie, who's been with the business since 2016, becomes Non-Executive Vice Chairman. "Daryl is joining the team at a time of aggressive fast growth, both acquisitively and organically," stated Bradford.

"SCG needs someone of his calibre and experience. He's been instrumental in rapidly building and scaling Gamma with drive and enthusiasm and his track record and leadership qualities align perfectly with our trajectory." SCG is the only independently owned MSP of scale and generates £40m-plus EBITDA on circa £150m revenue. The company operates out of 12 offices, has a 750-plus headcount and over 30,000 customers supported by its own SIP platform, Tier 2 ISP network and two hosted telephony platforms.

SCG services the SME, public, third sector and enterprise markets via a channel of over 450 partners and its own sales and service support centres. Pile added: "SCG is one of the most respected businesses in our industry with an accelerating growth trajectory. This is an exciting opportunity."

**Paul Bradford interview – p6**

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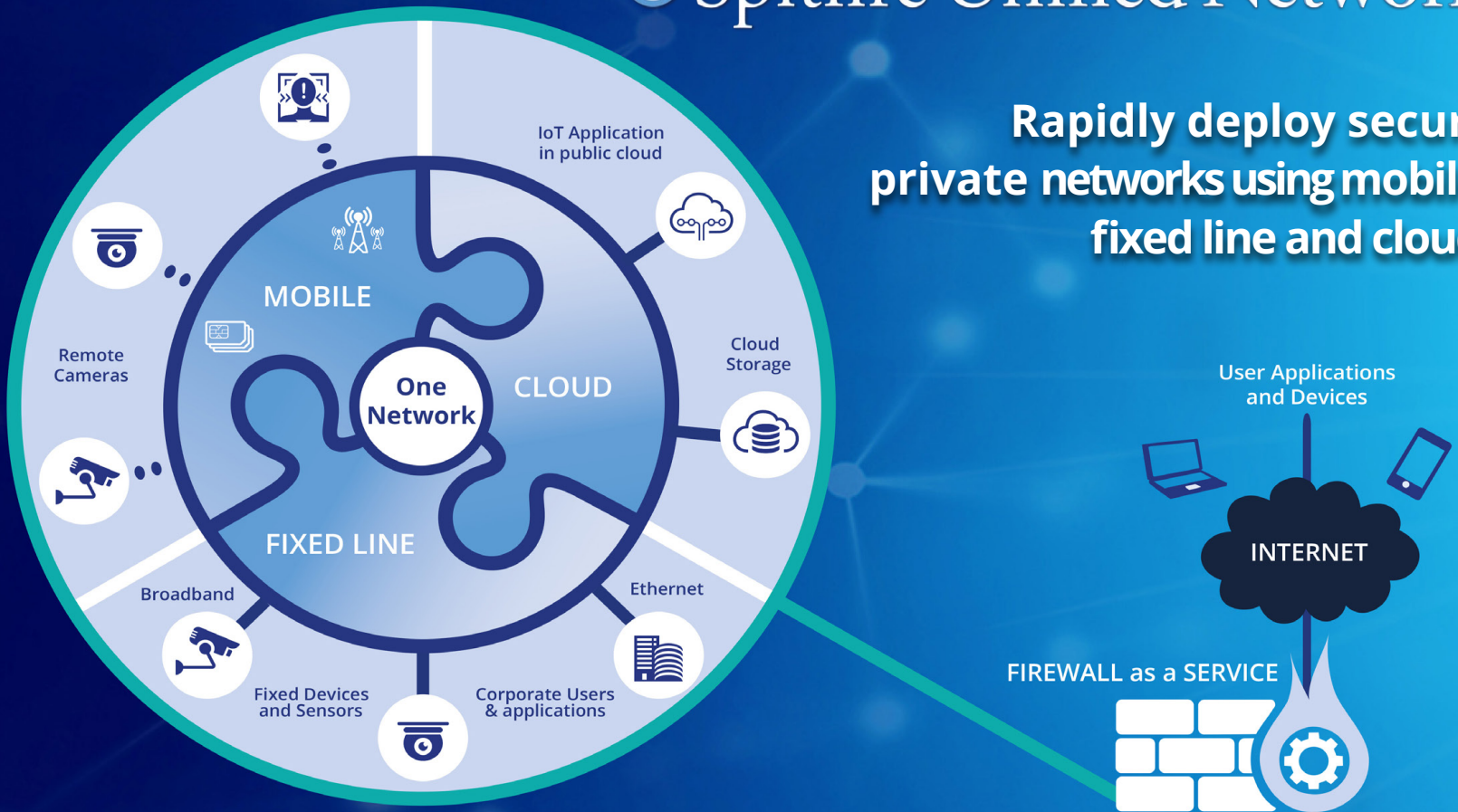
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## Welcome comment



Stuart Gilroy

FOR a while last month I couldn't work out why my blood pressure seemed to shoot up every time I thought about the election. Then I twigged: For the comms sector, the stakes were sky high last time the country went to the polls on December 12th

2019. Labour's proposed policy on free fibre broadband ranked the most senseless in political history.

The plan included a pledge to nationalise Openreach and amounted to stupid populism that threatened to pull the rug from under our industry, along with the probable annihilation of what was, and still is, one of the UK's most invested in and thriving entrepreneurial sectors. It's hard to believe, but Labour back then blamed the private sector for Britain's lack of full fibre roll out – when the opposite is true.

By the time this month's magazine is published the election will be over, and with a Labour win on the cards we shall explore in the August issue of Comms Dealer how the next Government's digital strategy will likely shape up. Fingers crossed, nonsensical political thinking without an ounce of strategic thought on UK comms infrastructure won't be allowed to bulldoze a thriving sector.

Just as big an issue is how such topsy-turvy thinking on the UK's broadband infrastructure sector even made it past the first mention let alone set in stone as potential policy. Probably a case of follow-the-leader. But for leaders of all kinds in all environments having that level of sway is no game. It's a smack in the face for diversity of thought – and if the free broadband debacle taught us anything positive it is that lending an ear to well grounded advice and embracing all perspectives could stop you from making the biggest mistake of your life.

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

# MSP sweeps up Daly deal



Martin Flick

LDC-backed Onecom Group's acquisition of Leicester-based Daly Systems is its 12th deal since 2020 and significantly extends its geographic reach.

Daly Systems is primarily a unified comms and IT managed services provider and has tech partnerships with Gamma, Microsoft, Openreach and Jola.

Onecom CEO Martin Flick stated: "The acquisition fits perfectly into our expansion and diversification strategy. In addition to broadening our geographic reach across the UK, we see cross-sell opportunities with our combined customer groups."

Daly Systems founder Peter Daly added: "Both businesses share a similar culture and that helped me with the final choice. After the handover period I will retire from the business to follow my motor-sport opportunities."

Whiteley located Onecom Group was established in 2002 and has a 700-plus headcount and circa 100,000 business customers.

Its strategic partners include Vodafone, Microsoft, Google, Mitel, Samsung, Apple, Gamma and Five9.

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

## Editor's pick

GAMMA COO John Murphy's remit has expanded to include the Gamma Business MD role following the departure of Daryl Pile who moves to SCG as CEO. Murphy joined Gamma in 2011 and has held several leadership roles, implementing process improvements, strategic initiatives and creating the customer services department. "I aim to build on the strong relationships we have with channel partners," stated Murphy, who takes additional responsibility for the channel, service provider and SME routes to market. Exiting Gamma Business MD Daryl Pile added: "For the immediate future I am focused on ensuring a smooth transition to John who I have worked with, side by side, for many years."

• See the next issue for a full interview with John Murphy.



John Murphy

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## Editor's picks

THE merger of fast expanding altnets Netomnia and Brsk creates a new wholesale company with a combined network footprint of 1.5 million ready for service (RFS) premises and plans to reach three million by the end of next year leveraging up to £900m of debt. The two businesses have so far connected 140,000 customers using £300m of debt. Since 2020 Netomnia and Brsk have raised over £1.3bn of capital. The new entity will be led by CEO Jeremy Chelot and CFO Wil Wadsworth. Giorgio Iovino and Ian Kock remain as Brsk's CEO and COO respectively. Chelot commented: "We are creating a powerhouse to drive innovation and further consolidation among altnets. The additional capital from our investors and support from lenders is an endorsement of our vision and ability to execute."

WAVENET'S acquisition of Symbiant Technologies adds CRM, billing, mediation, provisioning and ASP services to its portfolio kit bag. Symbiant supplies some of Europe's primary service providers. "Billing is vital for us and our customers," commented Wavenet CFO Venetia Cooper. "It's a complex area and this acquisition enables us to provide a flexible and scalable billing process that is more easily modified to accommodate the particular needs of customers. With more staff, resource and expertise we can also embark on a development roadmap including new features such as additional self-service capabilities and an improved customer portal."

FLUIDONE'S growth trajectory received a boost following a long-term refinancing agreement with Pemberton Asset Management. FluidOne aims to treble in size within five years fuelled in large part by acquisitions. Since an investment from Livingbridge in 2019, which supported an MBO led by CEO Russell Horton, the business has quadrupled in size with revenue growing to £109m on the back of eight acquisitions. "We have our next acquisition in process and a pipeline of follow-on targets that fit our strategy," stated Horton. Simon Hollingsworth, Partner at Livingbridge, added: "The new debt facility provides the scale and flexibility to support the next phase of growth. The strategy since investment has been to build critical capability in the highest value, next generation product sets. We now believe we have the right value-add capabilities to deliver this across customer segments and market verticals."

# Energy firm gets a boost



John Haw

AN INVESTMENT boost from PE firm Blixt Group has accelerated Fidelity Energy's expansion ambitions as it seeks to drive organic growth supported by acquisitions across the UK and Europe.

The funding will also enable Fidelity Energy to augment its service offering to a wider range of energy, Net Zero and sustainability advisory services.

The company will continue to be led by CEO John Haw and Sales Director Sean Dixon, supported by Chairperson Guil Hastings and Non-Executive Director Kevan Walsh.

Haw stated: "Since being founded nearly 10 years ago Fidelity Energy has grown rapidly and with this investment we are further developing our service offering to partners and customers.

"Blixt brings strategic expertise and the addition of Guil and Kevan to the team will strengthen our leadership given their experience in business scale-up and energy brokerage." See page 12

## Skills news

ANS partners now have access to its apprenticeship programme following the launch of Academy as a Service. The scheme has been rated as Outstanding by Ofsted. Ryan Martin, Head of Indirect, said: "ANS is taking its training to the channel, enabling partners to build early career pipelines for their business and a diverse and skilled workforce." Thomas Robinson, Head of Apprenticeships, added: "We design and build programmes alongside partners with the right support for apprentices and employers, including the newest technologies in cyber and infrastructure."

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# MSP big gun SCG boosted

**Former Gamma Business MD Daryl Pile is poised to take the Southern Communications Group (SCG) helm as CEO in a move that sees long-term Chief Exec Paul Bradford assume the Executive Chairman role. Here, Bradford shares insights into SCG's strengthening fire power, growing scale and expanding capabilities as an independent fast growing MSP, and why Pile is the right leader to catalyse the business to the next level.**



Paul Bradford

**T**he appointment of Pile as CEO is a tremendous coup for SCG and has created palpable excitement throughout the business. He's been at the heart of Gamma's rapid growth and displays the breadth and depth of experience, expertise, commitment, drive and energy Bradford was looking for as part of his forward planning. "Daryl is joining the team at a time of aggressive fast growth, both acquisitively and organically," stated Bradford. "SCG needs someone of his calibre and experience."

It is perhaps a little known fact that SCG is the only

independently owned MSP of stand-out scale. In May 2016, 32.5 per cent of the company was sold to Livingbridge and in 2021 an Ares backed management buyout brought ownership back in house. "Owning the whole of the business is a unique position to be in, and with Ares behind us we have huge firepower when making the right strategic and scale acquisitions," stated Bradford. "As the market shifts into all-MSP, that's where we will evolve to."

The company began its commercial life in 1965 and Bradford joined the business in 1995, boosting headcount to four with a

**Daryl's been instrumental in rapidly scaling Gamma with energy and enthusiasm and his track record and leadership distinction aligns perfectly with our trajectory**

£100k turnover in the first year. Today, SCG has EBITDA approaching £50 million with run rate revenue of over £160 million and operates out of 12 offices including one in South Africa. Its core focus is the UK where it serves the SME, public, third sector and enterprise

markets via a channel of over 450 partners and its own direct sales and shared service support centres. The company employs 750-plus people servicing over 30,000 customers supported by its own SIP platform (Fuse2), Tier 2 ISP network and two hosted telephony platforms.

Having joined up its foundational technology infrastructure SCG now provides a holistic solution model supported by its own IP and centred on the customer. With all this in place the business is going full steam ahead with its strategy – and

# d by Pile swoop

you won't be surprised to learn that Bradford is forecasting another strong performance from SCG this year and beyond, with continued organic and acquisitive growth spurred by the appointment of Pile whose catalytic role is to

## As the market shifts into all-MSP, that's where we will evolve to

supercharge the existing growth model into its next phase rather than reinvent the wheel.

"We doubled our business in the last three years and will follow the same strong growth plan," stated Bradford. "SCG is growing aggressively and not slowing down so we need a leader with Daryl's qualities to drive the business along the pathway we have been successfully following. He's been instrumental in rapidly building and scaling Gamma with energy and enthusiasm and his track record and leadership distinction aligns perfectly with our trajectory."

Bradford also noted that SCG is a thriving software and development house and that another strategically pivotal differentiator for the business is that it owns its IP. "Having our own IP gives us full control," added Bradford. "That's important because the customer is at the centre of SCG's universe and our 4.9 Trust Pilot rating is hard won, underpinned by having full control over the services and products we offer."

To reiterate, SCG is one of the comms sector's most

active acquirers with 40 acquisitions completed to date. "The SCG team is good at catching the evolution of the market at the right time and our acquisition strategy supports this approach," explained Bradford. "Two examples are the purchase

of MyPhones in 2018 which gave us our hosted telephony platform and the acquisition of X-on and its Surgery Connect platform in

2022. Completed deals to date also include IT services businesses and we're bringing these together as an offering, building out our IT and cyber capabilities."

### Core quality

Bradford emphasised that 'quality' across a range of metrics resides at the core of SCG's ongoing acquisition strategy. "We're looking for next generation, solid, well run, low churn businesses with long-term customers at the centre of their universe," he added. "Owning IP is also attractive along with a long-term track record of commitment. The average tenure for an acquired business owner is 22 years."

Bradford also took a characteristic long-term view in his search for the right fit CEO, looking at

a ten year horizon and taking the necessary steps to ensure continued long-term growth and that SCG's people remain comfortable with the business' stability and continuing success. He announced Pile as SCG's incoming CEO (expected to take post in September) ahead of taking up his new role as Executive Chairman. As part of the leadership change Non Exec Chair David Goldie, who's been with the business since 2016, becomes Non-Executive Vice Chairman.

A key focus for Bradford will be developing verticals including the health sector where SCG is driving hard and boosting its presence in the English medical vertical underpinned by X-on's hosted telephony platform, which is fast expanding into Scotland and Wales. Bradford will also double down on SCG's acquisition strategy while realising the full potential of its IP.

"We will explore more verticals and leverage our own IP which makes us nimble," added Bradford. "I will also drive forward with X-on while Daryl comes in as CEO with a focus on the telecoms aspect which is the fastest growing and biggest part of the business. Daryl's experience, depth of knowledge, reputation and energy is fantastic." ■

### Editor's comment

**FOR many years SCG has been one of the fastest growing MSPs in the market and continues to forecast significant levels of organic and acquisitive uplift. In preparing for tomorrow's horizon today Bradford has shown astute powers of succession planning while continuing to provide a high level of day-to-day strategic influence. Pile takes the CEO role at a time of unprecedented accelerating expansion and momentum and adds significant depth to the team. His appointment also highlights the importance of the CEO in driving sustainable, profitable long-term growth.**

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# Blakemore's big plan

**Intercity Technology's acquisition of Microsoft specialist Centrality created a £60 million turnover business with a 325-plus headcount serving over 1,300 customers. And according to CEO Charlie Blakemore the deal marks the start of a campaign to hit £100 million turnover by 2030.**



Charlie Blakemore

practice. Another huge focus area for us is making sure we keep delighting customers. We've got a net promoter score of +93, we're a Best Company to Work For 3 Star, and we've got an EcoVadis Framework for ESG. We're doing all the right things as a business and seeing the benefits. In 2023 we had a record level of new logo businesses joining, over 80 new businesses on top of our loyal customer base. In terms of target markets – because of our broad portfolio we have customers across many sectors including construction, logistics, charities, manufacturing and the public sector. That in itself builds good resilience.

**W**hat are your broader strategic objectives following the Centrality acquisition?

We've seen significant organic growth over the last three to four years across all of our product solutions and services. That's given us the ability to target acquisitions such as Centrality. This wasn't a short term transaction, it's about long-term growth. Intercity is aiming to be a £100 million turnover business with 500-plus employees by 2030. We've already gone from a 160 headcount and £28 million turnover in 2021 to almost £60 million and 325 employees.

The Centrality acquisition is also a key strategic step in broadening our services to meet the demands of customers and the market. We've got a strong customer base and now have an opportunity to offer them an almost complete one-stop-shop for all ICT needs.

**What was the rationale underpinning the deal?**

We planned this acquisition for over 12 months. The Microsoft area of our business was growing quickly and demand was outstripping our ability to keep up. So we did a deep analysis of external factors, the market growth in technologies, customer demand and our ability to grow. It became clear that to accelerate and propel our growth in this area we needed an acquisition.

But we were strict in terms of the type of business that we wanted to buy. Have they got the breadth of capability that we wanted in the Microsoft space? More importantly, do we have aligned values? Are they the best technology partner to work for and with? Centrality fit the bill and adds strategic value to our growth plans.

**What trends are you tracking in the market that interest you most?**

The adoption of AI and cybersecurity. But more

## In the next few years the cyber threat is going to be one of, if not the most, significant risks to businesses

generally, businesses are becoming strategic about technology. They are seeing technology as a key enabler for growth, allowing them to do more and be more productive – but they are also doing that in the most efficient manner, in some cases outsourcing aspects of their IT to a trusted partner.

We've dealt with many fantastic IT teams unable to think strategically because they are too busy keeping the lights on. We're working with these teams to free up their time and support their strategic outlook.

**Where are you seeing the greatest success?**

The market is challenging but we're seeing growth in almost all areas of the business. We've got a good portfolio of communications, managed IT, cloud security services, and now a Microsoft

**What big change do you want to see in the ICT sector?**

We need a culture change on security, from the device to the cloud. We need every single user to think more and be more secure because in the next few years the cyber threat is going to be one of, if not the most, significant risks to businesses.

**What are today's leadership priorities for channel execs?**

You've got to provide a compelling proposition that's competitive and enables customers to do more with the technology you provide. And embracing AI is key. But ultimately it's all about being a trusted partner. ■

### Editor's comment

**IT GOES** without saying that customers are far more reliant on MSPs that provide a one-stop-shop for their technology requirements combined with excellent service. And because ICT buyers are becoming more strategic in their deployments – seeking outcomes versus simple deliverables – MSPs such as Intercity Technology will be the long-term winners, able to give customers what they want efficiently and provide strategic guidance alongside value-driven outcomes.



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# Goodman on today's critical

**Focus Group co-founder and Director Chris Goodman talks frankly about three of today's most pressing leadership priorities – organisational culture, diversity and inclusion (D&I) and Net Zero – and he underscores the critical importance of getting all three right with authenticity and strategic holismism.**

**L**eadership approaches to organisational culture can either support or hamper a business' growth prospects, especially if leaders fail to back their cultural declarations with authentic actions. According to Goodman, authenticity starts by understanding the true role of leadership, and he believes that traditional assumptions about the link between leadership and organisational culture are best turned on their head. "A common misconception is that a successful culture starts from the top, but there are risks associated with a top-down cultural organisation," he stated. "If your culture is top down, rigid and authoritarian, then you'll probably have a disengaged workforce and high staff turnover.

"This approach can stifle innovation, be disconnected from reality and lack adaptability. To build a successful and sustainable

culture you need to involve your employees at all levels. I have seen so many businesses owned and run by tyrants, and they wonder why they have a poisonous organisational culture with high absence, low employee retention and unhappy customers. For me it's simple, lead by example, be present and show people how you want them to behave."

Goodman emphasised that a values-centric culture that delivers rewards and recognition – and allows people to flourish – will improve the outlook for business leaders wanting to realise their strategic goals and ambitions. "That's what we've done at Focus Group from the outset, ensuring that organisational culture emerges organically from the collective values, beliefs and behaviours of the workforce," he added. "As leaders it is our job to facilitate and nurture the culture, rather than impose it from the top."



Chris Goodman

**I have seen so many businesses owned and run by tyrants, and they wonder why they have a poisonous organisational culture with high absence, low employee retention and unhappy customers**

To fully understand its cultural progress Focus Group holds People & Culture workshops and carries out regular employee surveys to assess its eNPS. These activities

also provide an opportunity for Focus Group people to give open and honest feedback about where the group might be falling short as an organisation.

According to Goodman this approach ensures the business can walk the walk rather than pay lip service to cultural declarations. "It's not good enough to

# ical leadership priorities

talk about your values, the organisation needs to live them," he added. "By clearly defining your purpose, strategy and vision, and then weaving them into the fabric of the business, they sit at the forefront of how you operate."

Goodman believes that all decisions should be made through a cultural lens and that culture should not be seen as a hindrance in the

## If you're talking carbon offsetting it's a con, a license to pollute, lazy and worsens global heating because emissions are allowed to continue

decision making process. "If your business values are a true reflection of your own values, that should be inherent within your decision making," he added. "If you have members of your board or senior management team whose personal values are inconsistent with your company values then the answer is staring you in the face – get rid! I don't see culture as 'the' enabler, but the right culture will improve your chances of achieving your strategic goals and ambitions."

Ambition is one of Focus Group's stated values, and Goodman could talk all day about the company's 'high performance culture' which rewards people in a way that aligns their success with that

of the business – an example being the introduction of a Save As You Earn (SAYE) share scheme. "Workforce behaviours become far more aligned when your employees feel like they are personally benefiting from the growth of the business, either in terms of opportunity creation or financial reward," added Goodman.

The leadership priorities of D&I and Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) are also interwoven with organisational culture and company values. And on the question of global warming Goodman is characteristically straight talking. "Net Zero is a contentious topic," he commented. "If you're talking carbon offsetting it's a con, a license to pollute, lazy and worsens global heating because emissions are allowed

to continue. Achieving Net Zero is about changing how you do business and who you do business with to materially lower the amount of emissions you generate. The best approach is to get a third party in to assess how you can achieve it over time and make a commitment in terms of timescale."

Goodman pointed out that Focus Group has undergone an independent assessment of its ESG in terms of performance, commitment and effectiveness. "We received a rating of 'Established' and have implemented plans that will take us to 'Excellent'. This rating designates a company that is deemed to have strategically developed and integrated key areas

of ESG that are important to business operations," explained Goodman.

Focus Group currently has circa 1,000 employees across the UK and D&I is a priority across the business. The company has recently launched a series of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) including an Inter-belief Network, LGBTQIA+ and allies Network, and a Women's Network. These ERGs provide a collective space for like-minded individuals to come together.

### Raising awareness

"The networks will drive initiatives and events to raise awareness and celebrate the things that matter the most to our people," commented Goodman. "I am also a firm believer in meritocracy. We employ the best people for the job regardless of their gender, class, race or sexuality. We do not positively discriminate in order to have a more diverse workforce, however we do value the diversity that exists within our workplace. Forbes magazine published an article citing that diverse teams make better decisions up to 87 per cent of the time."

Goodman says there is no resource barrier to embarking on a journey of culture development and management. The process can be started simply through having the desire to become a better business. "We didn't have to wait until we had a People & Culture team or a Chief People Officer to define our values, create a vision or decide how we wanted to run our business," he said. "Bring together a small team and set about defining your mission, vision and values. Ensure you consult with your

## Editor's comment...



**IN A COMMS Dealer survey of channel leaders conducted last summer to support 2023's Comms Vision conference, nearly 90 per cent of respondents recognised that their culture needs to evolve, but just 50 per cent said they have the scope to give culture development the time it needs, and only 53 per cent had targeted their cultural development strategy on certain critical areas. Almost 95 per cent**

**agreed that organisational culture is key to survival, with 50 per cent of business leaders conceding that their cultural objectives only partially reflect the experience of employees and customers. Culture was confirmed as a priority leadership topic for 76.5 per cent of respondents, but 47 per cent have no plans to develop their desired cultural traits and behaviours, perhaps because they have not identified them. We hope the insights provided by Focus Group co-founder and Director Chris Goodman in this article provide food for thought and action points that could help culture-challenged business leaders in the channel move forward with confidence.**

**Download the free Culture report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-culture>**

employees and ask them what they feel the values are that matter most. Use examples of how you might see those values displayed in your interactions with each other, or with your customers. Publish them, put them on your walls and on your website. Make them part of employee onboarding. But most importantly, lead by example – be the embodiment of that culture and of those values."

Goodman noted that all aspects of Focus Group's workplace culture combine to create a competitive advantage, which he refers to as 'stardust'. "We used to call it 'work hard, play hard', but it really is about that high performance culture...

ambitious, entrepreneurial, driven, not afraid to fail, honesty and integrity – the list goes on," he added.

"The organisational structure, the accessibility of senior management, how hierarchical you are – they all influence whether you will get the most out of your people. The challenge is how to maintain the stardust as you grow, and that's about empowering your management teams at all levels to be proud of the business they work for, to live and breathe the values, and to disseminate that way of working down through the business. Your people are your greatest asset – nurture them and they will do the rest." ■

Fast-forward to high-performance

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## Focus on Technology not Telephony

**S**tanding still in today's fast-paced world of communication will ultimately leave you behind your rivals. It's one of many reasons Evolve IP is urging more resellers to become technology rather than telephony players in an era of rapid innovation.

We've already become a technology-first organisation rather than telephony and we are attracting more and more partners who want to join us on the journey.

Telephony is becoming less relevant with the shift in technology requirements from customers moving on-net. Business expectations and keeping up with technology enhancements, providing ease of integrations and ease of doing business are just some of many examples.

### Tripled Support

Evolve IP is all about the customer experience in enhancing and differentiating our platform, solutions and most importantly our team. For example, we've just tripled our marketing resources to provide enhanced levels of reseller support. We're investing not just for the short term but the longer term and our partners recognise that too.

Evolve IP recently held a successful Partner Day that attracted over 150 guests for key insights, market analysis and more details about the company's future roadmap and technology innovations.

We believe in making the future of work better for everyone. That starts from the bottom up! We boast an international carrier-grade network to deliver integrated remote workforce technologies that enable employees to perform anywhere, based on a series of white-label solutions. Evolve IP generated unprecedented growth and attracted record numbers of new partners last year. We are determined to go even further this year.

Our customers can enhance their customer communication strategies by providing the latest in UCaaS technology and collaboration tools. World-class collaboration is natively integrated with Microsoft Teams and Cisco Webex. Industry-leading solutions connect them to a range of best-of-breed tools.

### Do More With Less

We recognise it's nearly impossible to stay on top of every technology

change. By partnering with Evolve IP you gain the combined experience of our global specialists, all acting as an extension of your business – helping you do more with less.

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. The future is bright. But are you ready to take advantage?

We're not afraid to push the boundaries, drive forward and adapt, based on a best-of-breed ecosystem of partners that keep innovating too. The investment, the drive and the passion to be the best, beat the best and strive to achieve is what drives us forward.

Evolve IP's international network is live in 57 countries, providing resellers with a one-stop shop central resource. We're also an ethical and carbon-accountable company. This matters greatly too.

There are currently 107 UK cloud providers, where Evolve IP is part of a dominant top 10 holding over 60% market share. Second-generation users are making up more and more of the market switching from a competitor's solution rather than coming from on-premise PBX migrations.

### Millions More Users

Which specialist has the best UCaaS solutions will prove crucial in the future, as the race to win new customers increases in a 'cloud v cloud provider' battle. Millions more users are on the way – which is why developing market maturity means differentiating from other cloud solutions is becoming more important. We're listening, improving and investing in our team and services all the time.

The market is moving at pace, and we've got to keep innovating, looking ahead and navigating a clear path forward. There's no crystal ball but we want to take more customers on the journey. We've got the solutions for today and the future. There's a lot of complexity around going into certain verticals and international markets. We bring that all together and firmly believe we are the technology of the future.

To find out more about our technology, contact a member of the Evolve IP team. Find out more here: [www.evolveip.net/en-gb/](http://www.evolveip.net/en-gb/)

## NEWS INTERVIEW

# Fidelity Energy set to scale up

**Fuelled by investment from PE firm Blix, Fidelity Energy CEO John Haw's scaled up growth ambitions include a £100 million revenue target, an acute focus on sustainability, a European acquisition campaign and greater support for partners.**

**F**idelity Energy has 'come of age' following a 45 per cent growth spurt over the last year and an investment deal sealed last month with Blix, according to Haw. "We're ready to go to the next level," he stated. "To achieve our lofty aims we needed backing from an organisation with similar ambitions. The credentials of Blix's board, its experience of M&A and its financial firepower will enable us to scale the business."

Haw noted that Fidelity Energy is already seeking to enhance its flexible trading and hedging capabilities for larger clients and add Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting (SECR) to its service stack as part of a wider sustainability play. "Sustainability is one of the key pillars of our next phase and we want to make sure we're ticking that box," added Haw.

"We're already adept at Net Zero reporting in the SME and mid-market and now we're looking to add the enterprise space to that stack and drive EBITDA multiples. Sustainability is going to be a core part of



John Haw

### Sustainability is going to be a core part of the business and acquisition strategy

the business and acquisition strategy moving forward."

Blix and Fidelity Energy are busy defining acquisition targets in the UK and Europe, confident in the firm's capacity for international expansion. "We've got the right platform for acquisitions and believe our company will be capable of scaling across Europe," added Haw. "There are few European-scale organisations with our offering."

He noted that target acquisitions will add skills as

well as scale and drive cost savings alongside revenue growth. Meanwhile, a plan has been laid out to align service priorities defined by third party surveys based on partner needs and priorities. "It's about refining our current services and making them more accessible, then bolstering other areas to ensure we provide customers with everything they need to remain committed with us," added Haw.

"This plan will inform how we enhance our customer support, reduce churn and improve our service wrap and product portfolio, altogether driving mutual growth for us and our partners. We're going to get slicker, sharper and further develop the platform."

The scale up will be facilitated by a recruitment drive, bringing new senior roles into the business including the appointment of ex-Gamma Financial Controller Helen Higgons as CFO. Fidelity Energy is also working on a training academy for partners to enable them to accredit their own businesses ahead of increased regulation coming in later this year. ■

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# Crucial action points for a

**In the midst of continued market change resellers and MSPs would be wise to pause, reassess their strategies and reset where necessary, focusing on key issues such as sustainability and market growth hotspots like UCaaS and security, urges Nimans Marketing Director Stephen McIntyre who provides expert insight into the key issues and trends reshaping the channel.**

**T**he drive for resellers to become UCaaS experts is a top priority among the technology and go-to-market imperatives underpinning the channel's future success, according to McIntyre. "As cloud-based UC dominates, partners who can advise on and implement these solutions will be in high demand," he stated. "Embracing recurring revenues is also key. The UCaaS subscription model requires an evolution of sales to focus on long-term client relationships. And prioritise security. With cloud migration comes security concerns, so offering robust solutions alongside UCaaS will be a major differentiator."

However, barriers to positive advances in these hotspots still exist in the channel but they can be removed with

the right strategic actions, believes McIntyre. "Many resellers are accustomed to traditional business models and may resist adopting new technologies or processes," he added. "Overcoming this resistance involves promoting a culture of continuous learning and innovation within organisations and providing training and incentives for staff."

"There is often a lack of professionals who can manage advanced technologies like cloud services, AI and complex integrations. Investing in education and certification programmes for employees, partnering with educational institutions and offering attractive career paths can help bridge this gap."

As well as challenges, more positive trends and bright



Stephen McIntyre

## **Continuous education, strategic partnerships and a proactive approach to market research are essential for resellers to maintain a strong grasp of the evolving ICT landscape**

outlooks for the channel are emerging fast, including the growing adoption of cloud-based communication solutions which offer scalability, flexibility and cost savings. "Organisations are leveraging tools like Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Slack for seamless collaboration,"

stated McIntyre. "The emphasis on security and compliance with robust encryption protocols and data protection measures represents another big opportunity. Furthermore, integrations with business applications are enhancing productivity, allowing users to

access communication tools directly within their workflow.

"Overall, the channel is witnessing innovation and customer-centric approaches that benefit all businesses. The channel's focus on sustainability is also a great development – we all need

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# brighter future

to play our role in avoiding a global disaster. Our smaller actions collectively add up to so much more."

Education, collaborative partnerships and sustainability centric channel ecosystems are all key to unlocking the

## The channel's focus on sustainability is a great development – we all need to play our role in avoiding a global disaster

channel's growth potential, believes McIntyre. And the most successful channel players are already building Net Zero planning into their strategies. He firmly believes that the channel needs new ecosystems to effectively link Net Zero planning with the supply chain and manage the growing complexity of the ICT market.

"These ecosystems should focus on collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders including vendors, suppliers, customers and regulatory bodies," stated McIntyre. "Such alliances would emphasise open communication channels, shared sustainability goals and joint innovation projects, enhancing the ability to meet Net Zero targets through combined efforts and resources.

"Sustainable practices and certifications are also critical, along with adherence to rigorous sustainability standards. This includes eco-friendly product design, energy efficient operations and

obtaining certifications like ISO 14001. These measures enhance credibility and appeal to environmentally conscious customers."

Implementing circular economy models can help minimise waste by focusing on recycling, refurbishing and reusing ICT products and components. This approach reduces environmental impact and achieves cost savings. "Additionally, comprehensive

education and training programmes focused on sustainability and Net Zero goals can empower the workforce," added McIntyre. "Workshops, webinars and courses on green ICT practices and technologies ensure employees are well equipped to drive sustainability initiatives."

### Advanced analytics

To achieve Net Zero success, advanced analytics and reporting are essential to leverage big data for detailed tracking and reporting of sustainability metrics. "Financial incentives and funding programmes can also support sustainability initiatives," added McIntyre. "Integrated technology platforms that bring together diverse ICT solutions and supply chain management tools are also essential. These platforms should be cloud-based for real-time data sharing, incorporate AI for predictive analytics and use IoT for monitoring and managing resources.

"This integration improves efficiency, transparency and

the capability to track and reduce carbon footprints across the supply chain. By building these new ecosystems the channel can more effectively align Net Zero planning with supply chain operations, address the growing complexity of the ICT market and drive sustainable growth."

But capital constraints can hinder resellers from taking the positive actions discussed in this article. To counter this challenge McIntyre advises resellers to explore financing options alongside forming strategic partnerships to share resources and adopt technologies incrementally to mitigate impacts.

"Moreover, market awareness and customer education are crucial as customers may not fully understand the benefits of new technologies or be hesitant to move from legacy systems," reiterated McIntyre. "Engaging in customer education through webinars, case studies, personalised consultations and demonstrating clear ROI can help alleviate these concerns. At the same time, diversifying vendor partnerships and staying updated on regulatory changes ensures flexibility and compliance, enabling the channel to adapt more effectively to industry changes.

"Ongoing education, strategic partnerships and a proactive approach to market research are essential for resellers and MSPs to maintain a strong grasp of the evolving ICT landscape. And by proactively adapting to industry trends and shifts resellers and MSPs can unlock new opportunities and maintain a competitive edge in the evolving market." ■

# cyberlab

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# Driving MSP business mo

The impetus to reinvent MSP offerings and keep pace with partner and end user demand is intensifying, and at the vanguard of this reinvention imperative is IT management software firm Kaseya, claims VP of Business Development EMEA Greg Jones.

## Give us some background on Kaseya

Kaseya was founded in 2000 by technology entrepreneurs who recognised the need for a better way to manage IT infrastructure. Over the years it has grown from a small start-up to a global company with 5,000 employees and over 50,000 customers using our unified IT and security management solutions. As a business we are always evolving – and regardless of their size we work closely with MSP partners to help them grow and scale.

## Why the name 'Kaseya'?

The name was chosen from a Sioux word meaning 'protect and defend'. This still remains a core part of Kaseya's mission, but now we also document, backup and much more. Our full profile of software makes managing and securing IT infrastructure efficient and cost-effective. And our integrated IT management platform comprises solutions from vendors including Datto, Unitrends, RapidFire Tools, Spanning Cloud

Apps, IT Glue, ID Agent, Graphus and RocketCyber.

## What were Kaseya's UK objectives last year?

Our focus was very much on empowering partners – upselling and cross-selling solutions in our partner base to enable them to do more. We overachieved on our targets. The biggest growth areas were security and automation, tied closely with productivity. Going forward, security and compliance will be hot growth topics.

## What are your 2024 goals?

This year we announced Kaseya 365, a subscription offering that was in the making for 10 years. It has everything MSPs need to manage, secure, backup and automate their clients' endpoints. With Kaseya 365 the solutions for remote monitoring and management (RMM), antivirus protection, endpoint detection and response (EDR), managed detection and response (MDR), patch management, ransomware rollback and endpoint backup are all joined under one subscription,



Greg Jones

**More MSPs are coming into the market, mergers and acquisitions are continuing, there's a lot of movement and it's an exciting place to be**

integrated and live within the unified interface experience of IT Complete.

## What is your biggest opportunity?

It's always the opportunity that lies ahead for MSPs... their growth and success in the marketplace. A lot of that currently relies on being able to deliver first-class cybersecurity, cyber

resilience and Compliance-as-a-Service. MSPs who can deliver those will win more business and retain it.

## Where do you see Kaseya in three to five years time?

We want to be the only player in the marketplace that is an essential go-to, not only for every MSP but for any business that takes cybersecurity and

management of their IT systems seriously.

## What got you into ICT?

My journey began with IT and business studies and a part-time job at PC World when I was 17. I've always been fascinated by technology and tinkered with computers since childhood. This path led me to a career in tech where the



# Model reinvention

constant innovation keeps me engaged. Anything is possible in IT and the rate of change is incredible.

## Which new technologies are on your radar screen right now?

AI and ML are a big focus. We have a huge R&D team continuously enhancing all our products and services with a view to keep partners ahead of the curve. One example is the launch of IT Glue Copilot, an AI engine for IT documentation. This was developed from the ground up to address the complexities of modern IT environments and to free up IT professionals from manual and time consuming tasks. By leveraging AI this tool automates the entire lifecycle of IT documentation, from creation to intelligently compiling and organising the information. In this way, the platform is constantly evolving to make sure it stays complete. Our business never stands still and the roadmap is in direct correlation to what partners need.

## Your biggest career achievement?

Seeing the impact I've had on others has been amazing. Whether that's MSPs' successes or seeing staff growth and progression. I am proud of the 35-plus industry awards I've won as they are proof that I am making a difference in the industry. What's also important to me is my involvement with the Alder Hey children's charity which raises vital funds for Alder Hey Children's Hospital.

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

I am a big snowboard fanatic. I started on dry slopes and have been snowboarding for over 20 years now, including

a lot of heliboarding in Banff where they take you to remote areas and drop you out of a helicopter.

## Your role models?

Businessman Warren Buffet, entrepreneur Ed Mylett and author and coach Tony Robins. I like the way they lead and are always looking to the future. Never reactive, always progressing and empowering other people.

## What talent do you wish you had?

To predict the future.

## Give one example of something you've overcome

Transitioning from the MSP side of the fence into the vendor world was a total transformation. I still look out for the MSP community.

## Your three ideal dinner guests

Robbie Williams because he is so entertaining; Nelson Mandela for his insight, wisdom and knowledge; and Michelle Obama who leads by example, inspires everyone around her, is bold and has a great sense of humour.

## If you could transform any area of the IT industry what would it be?

Security and compliance.

## Your favourite comedians

Paul Smith and John Bishop.

## What do you fear the most?

Not being able to keep up with the fast-paced technology developments of the future.

## In hindsight

I could have taken more risks along my journey. Looking back, many of them would have come to fruition. ■

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

People skills are my strength, but I could work on my attention to detail.

## What are today's top three leadership priorities?

Data analytics, empowering people and getting results.

## The best piece of advice you have been given?

Don't react in haste, you will only repent at leisure.

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

Stocks and shares, and property development.

## What's the biggest risk you have taken?

Transitioning from central and local governance in the public sector into the private sector, which was a different, less secure and stable world.

## How do you relax?

I spend time walking in the mountains. I'm rarely at home... I love to travel and be with people.

## Top tip for resellers

Push your targets and goals beyond what you think is achievable.

## Parting comment...

We are in a very good, buoyant market despite the global economic challenges. More businesses are increasing their spend on technology solutions to drive their transformation and succeed through, for example, the automation and digitalisation of their processes. More MSPs are coming into the market, mergers and acquisitions are continuing, there's a lot of movement and evolution – it's an exciting place to be. ■

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# Cybersecurity shoots up

Getting to grips with the all-important cybersecurity question is fast becoming an obligation for ICT service providers, but meeting this challenge could be far easier than expected if a managed services approach is taken.

A sharp rise in cyber threats is on the cards according to a PWC survey of circa 3,800 security, technology and business leaders. The surge in security breaches will be catalysed by GenAI which has the capability to create advanced business email compromises at scale. So much so that over half of PWC's survey respondents expect GenAI to cause 'catastrophic cyber attacks' in the coming year. This is just one reason why resellers and MSPs should put cybersecurity at the centre of their portfolios.

According to the observations of Britt Megahey, founder and Managing Director, Barclay Communications, too many public and private sector organisations are 'woefully under-protected'. "The channel has a vital role to play in changing this situation," he stated. "Of course, cybersecurity is a revenue opportunity, but it's also a responsibility. We provide the technology that keeps businesses running, and the job has to involve protecting that technology and its users from harm. If an employee falls for a phishing email and clicks a malicious link, what stops them from downloading ransomware? If

they do download it, what's stopping it from encrypting files? If it does encrypt files, where are the backups? These are the questions we ask our customers."

Traditionally, the biggest obstacle faced by resellers and MSPs was convincing businesses to take cybersecurity seriously. "We have all encountered decision makers who insist that it couldn't happen to them, or that anti-virus is all the protection they need," added Megahey. "This attitude is changing, but it's still prevalent and there is a gap in knowledge and understanding around the need for enhanced cybersecurity.

"Even customers that have an element of security in place – be it anti-virus on endpoint PCs or a managed firewall – still aren't aware of the new and ever-evolving threats that are commonplace across the Internet. Hackers are getting more sophisticated when customers' networks are, for the most part, remaining static."

To keep pace with the dynamic requirement for cybersecurity solutions Barclay Communications follows a policy of constantly



Britt Megahey

**We provide technology that keeps businesses running, and the job has to involve protecting that technology and its users from harm**

evaluating the market and the latest threats. "It helps that we have a technical team skilled at assessing new innovations and filtering out the noise," commented Megahey. "Partnerships are also key. We choose suppliers carefully and their R&D and insights also helps to inform our decisions. We

maintain close relationships with all of our partners."

Megahey concedes that there is no 100 per cent bulletproof security posture, but he reiterated that it is possible to reduce the risk at every layer and make sure that no one is an easy target. "The opportunity comes from

the risk," he commented. "Businesses need more than one layer of protection. The key is understanding how to find what's right for them and explaining that clearly and honestly."

The success of this approach will likely depend on resellers and MSPs developing

## Editor's comment...

**NOT too long ago, getting input for editorials around security was a challenge because cybersecurity was too peripheral. Now, security has emerged as a comms channel reality and should be elevated as a critical component in all reseller portfolios.**



# the channel's agenda

strategic partnerships with the right vendors and distributors. "This has been key to our growth, alongside the development of our own IT and cybersecurity offering," added Megahey. "My advice is to ask suppliers what they can do for you."

Jon Selway, VP of EMEA Channel Sales, Aryaka, also believes that cybersecurity in general hasn't been given enough attention by resellers and MSPs, and that the pendulum is starting to swing the right way. "Cybersecurity is inherently fraught with risk," he stated. "No reseller wants to be blamed for a customer experiencing an attack after being promised they are secure. But as core product margins continue to be squeezed resellers are becoming more open to offering security services."

He says that a margin squeeze is not the only motivator as more resellers are wanting to become long-term partners with their customers. That said, keeping ahead of the evolving threat landscape is one of the biggest challenges facing resellers, along with having the confidence, resources and expertise to sell solutions effectively. "The right vendor will take those challenges away by supporting the entire lifecycle of products, from sales and marketing to in-life management," added Selway.

He noted that customers are currently facing risks from ransomware, phishing attacks and vulnerabilities in remote working set-ups. "AI-enhanced attacks are also growing, but security vendors are increasingly leveraging AI to accelerate threat detection and mitigation," added Selway.



Jon Selway

He is also witnessing growing demand for vendor-managed security services. "This enables customers to enjoy a hands-off approach to their security posture, safe in the knowledge that true security experts are keeping a vigilant eye over their operations," stated Selway. "Zero-trust architectures are also proving popular, adding an extra level of assurance that all data is scrutinised as it enters or exits the network."

### Future of security

A surge in cloud services means that the future of cybersecurity will be software-defined and network-enabled to ensure scalability and secure access to cloud platforms. "It's a complex arena therefore vendors must support partners and invest in their success – that's a given," said Selway. "Resellers should focus on comprehensive security solutions that offer high ROI, especially those from vendors that take responsibility for managing the service, enabling them

to focus on lead generation, not resource-sapping in-life management."

Despite managed security services being readily on hand for resellers, cybersecurity is still 'settling' into the channel, observed Anton Le Saux, Head of IoT and Cyber, Zest4. "It takes time to get into the mindset," he said. "The biggest challenge is a lack of understanding of the marketplace and not having the resources and technical support needed to manage solutions in-life. With a fully managed proposition we can negate these concerns and give partners the tools they need to succeed in cybersecurity."

Le Saux pointed out that 91 per cent of all cyberattacks start with a phishing email that's been opened by a staff member, and 81 per cent of hacking related breaches leverage stolen passwords. "A common assumption around mitigating risk is that businesses just need to keep on top of software updates,

## Resellers should focus on comprehensive security solutions that offer high ROI, especially those from vendors that take responsibility for managing the service

so they overlook the biggest threat which is their own staff," commented Le Saux. "There's an opportunity to train workforces to be vigilant and attentive. They need to know how to spot a phishing email."

Le Saux also noted that 46 per cent of UK firms have experienced a cyberattack and that the average cost to

a business is over £10,000 per attack. "We can stop that from happening with the right resources and solutions," added Le Saux. "Moreover, channel partners can make margin selling cyber solutions. If resellers are cash strapped, lack resources and have time constraints they should look for services with no upfront commitment and are fully managed." ■



Anton Le Saux

## A common assumption around mitigating risk is that businesses just need to keep on top of software updates, so they overlook the biggest threat which is their staff



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# Shaping a more inclusive future

Here, ND champion and Train to Win CEO Julie Mills maps the company's inclusion journey and how it's shaping up as a beacon for best practice in driving neurodiversity.

**W**e've transformed our diversity and inclusion strategy in the last two years from a standard compliance-based approach to one that fosters our entire culture and values, and embraces not only our staff but also our customers and partners. At the root of our approach is the belief that D&I flourishes when all prejudice is removed and barriers to mutual understanding are dismantled.



Julie Mills

**We have committed to neuro-inclusion as a core part of our identity moving forward.**

In particular, I feel that the penny is dropping for many people when it comes to neurodiversity because they can see there are real benefits associated with embracing it. So much so that we have committed to neuro-inclusion and see this as a core part of our identity moving forward. This reflects our leadership philosophy and impacts how we look at D&I in its broadest sense.

Our passion for neuro-inclusion also benefits inclusion in every other area. It would be fantastic to see if we can bring the same strategic focus to all other aspects of D&I in the coming two years to ensure we can be as happy and successful as possible through growing the best team and maximising their individual talents. It's all interconnected.

We are proud of our record on neurodiversity, particularly the difference it's made to our existing neurodivergent employees who have felt more safe, valued and challenged (positively) in ways they've never previously experienced in their careers. We'd like to become a beacon for best practice in the industry and are undergoing a Neurodiversity in the Workplace accreditation which we expect to receive later this year.

**Practical guidance**

There's no shortage of good intentions in the ICT channel. The challenge is translating the goodwill we see in the shape of awareness weeks, social media campaigns and charity events into tangible

change within businesses. In order to make D&I real in their workplaces many channel business leaders need practical guidance and support. This is the motivation behind launching Exceptional Minds, the Train to Win programme for neuro-inclusion that enables tech industry professionals to maximise the human potential surrounding them.

But the single factor that has driven the greatest change in terms of our diversity and inclusion efforts is passion. We care about this because it's personal to us. This has inspired us to educate ourselves and implement changes that make a tangible difference to individual employees, our team and the future of our business. ■

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# Why aligning cultural values

The business growth ambitions of channel execs will likely be stymied without the right culture underpinning strategy. So take special note of the following insights because the alignment of purpose, strategic planning, organisational culture and workforce behaviours will ensure that your business is fit for the future, according to our panel of culture leaders.

The alignment of organisational culture and employee values is more important than ever, but nurturing desired cultural traits and matching a business's purposeful commitments with the personal ethics of its people remains a potential challenge – especially after an acquisition such as boxxe's purchase of Total Computers in January (with more acquisitions in the pipeline). The firm's Interim People Director Clare Gates says the task in hand is very much work in progress, but she is confident that the MSP's cultural development plan will pay significant dividends.

With two organisations and two different sets of values, goals and cultures to align, Gates is under no illusion about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. "We're going through a period of rapid change so it's a great time to remind ourselves of what is important about being part of boxxe," she stated. "Change is inevitable and our values, behaviours and way of thinking will evolve and adapt. When businesses transform so does the culture. We won't get everything right, but we're learning."

Identifying an organisation's desired cultural traits and

how they can impact the business is a strong foundational catalyst for long-term cultural development, observed Gates. "Our values are the cornerstone of boxxe and should be the soul of who we are," she added. "But like many organisations there's work to be done in order to truly live them. That's why we're focusing our efforts on leading by example, taking responsibility for our actions and holding ourselves accountable. Although the current transformation has brought its own set of challenges, we know that if we've got the right team by our side then building a strong culture is completely achievable."

The cultural building blocks include formal and informal employee, customer and partner feedback initiatives to assess and monitor boxxe's cultural position. "We regularly talk with our 'boxxers' to gain a better understanding of what they love about boxxe, and also what could be better," explained Gates. "Asking for feedback from people who have decided to leave the company may appear too little too late, but their honesty during exit interviews has been invaluable. They help us to understand what we do well and what needs to be improved."



Clare Gates

## It's about creating a company that is inclusive and grounded in trust and appreciation

A culture that lacks direction is rudderless therefore closing the gap between strategy and culture is imperative. "Culture enhances strategy and vice versa," commented Gates. "Each part of the business – cultural, operational, commercial or otherwise – feeds into the others. It's about creating a company that is inclusive and grounded in trust and appreciation. We are doing

this by nurturing a great set of leaders, those who are thoughtful, eager to lead by example and keen to build a culture of excellence. They inspire their teams to be passionate about boxxe, its purpose and the role they play in making the company a success.

"We put our people, our customers, our partners and the environment at the heart

of everything we do, and our people are the difference that makes the difference. The real impact comes from living these words in our everyday lives. We've still got a little way to go, but as long as we continue to listen to our people and understand what matters most to them we can build a culture of trust and safety for every single boxxer."

### Positive impact

boxxe also recognises that its DE&I practices have the power to positively impact Net Zero goals, and Gates says that having a workforce that is free to share concerns and aspirations shapes decisions on how the MSP reaches Net Zero. "Communication and consistency are key and we factor this in from the start by hiring people who believe in our purpose and want to build a great community," added Gates. "We're always looking for new, diverse talent and ways to remove barriers to enter work, whether that's through family friendly policies, flexible working practices or development programmes."

Westcon-Comstor is focused on embedding a culture of ambition and accountability based on the values of integrity, innovation, excellence, partnership and inclusion. "The key to



# Values with strategy is key



Erna de Ruijter-Quist

## Culture lives and breathes and is always evolving. Being aware of this helps us to fine-tune how we operate

bringing these values to life is in our mindset and day-to-day behaviour," stated Erna de Ruijter-Quist, Chief People Officer, Westcon-Comstor. "This includes the way we interact with each other as colleagues and has to be driven by people managers, which is why we are placing a strong emphasis on inspiring leadership as part of our global people strategy. I'm a firm believer that a positive culture comes from the top, so it's vital that leaders within any business showcase the right behaviours and lead by example."

### Gold dust

According to Ruijter-Quist, empowering teams to try new things and experiment

without fear is 'gold dust' for any business – whether a startup, a medium sized domestic business or a large multinational. To help nurture this environment Westcon-Comstor has 10 different Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that provide a safe space for people to talk openly and share experiences. "The themes of the ERGs are broad but one thing they all have in common is that they are designed to empower our people and give them a say in how different challenges and opportunities are approached," added Ruijter-Quist.

She also encourages all leaders to hold skip level exchanges and meet colleagues outside of their

function in small informal settings. "No agenda, just free dialogue because human connections matter," said Ruijter-Quist. "It is their voice and how they talk about our organisation that creates our biggest competitive advantage. Culture lives and breathes and is always evolving. Being aware of this helps us to fine-tune how we operate. Our colleagues' advocacy, commitment and support is key, with trust at the heart of it all."

### Celebrating diversity

As a business with employees in more than 50 countries Ruijter-Quist says it's vital that Westcon-Comstor celebrates its cultural diversity. "We do this through various events and activities such as our recent Stories & Plates cookbook whereby colleagues from all corners of the world shared their favourite recipes and dishes," she stated. "And through our One Westcon programme colleagues can attend events, take part in different awareness activities and learn about different heritages and traditions."

Inclusion is one of Westcon-Comstor's stated values and this year it is combining its annual employee survey and DEI survey into one questionnaire available in multiple languages. The company's people strategy forms part of its wider Responsible Business programme which also includes sustainability. "There is a natural link between our culture and approach to inclusion and sustainability," said Ruijter-Quist. "This is crucial because we are committed to creating a more sustainable channel. Last autumn we became the first major global technology

distributor to have our target of achieving Net Zero by 2050 formally validated by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi)."

Jola assesses the strength of its cultural standing against core values also brought to life through leading by example. "Our culture influences how we approach problems and find solutions, and is driven and demonstrated by the company founders," stated Cherie Howlett, co-founder and Chief Marketing Officer, Jola. "It's about how we and our team behave, and success is highlighted in our monthly company meetings, rewarded in our annual appraisals and reflected upon in our annual surveys."

According to Howlett, these values are not advertised on company walls, they are ingrained in behaviour. "We are accountable and

do what we say we are going to do," she added. "Culture is something that is learnt. It's how things are done and how you get things done – and it does not require a big budget."

Aligning cultural priorities and values with workforce behaviours and the day-to-day is key to giving partners what they want, pointed out Howlett. "This is important as our partners trust us to respond quickly and appropriately," she stated. "We are also focused on the growth plan for financial year 2024/25. To achieve our high targets we need to recruit additional resources in sales, marketing and support. We will be recruiting against our values to find innovative, ambitious individuals. These values include solutions to common challenges such as flexible working hours, working from home and a range of support." ■



Cherie Howlett

## Our culture influences how we approach problems and find solutions, and is driven and demonstrated by the founders of the business

# Remodelling tech and GTM

**This year's gold standard Comms Vision Convention (6th-8th November, Gleneagles Hotel) doubles down on the technology drivers transforming the channel's portfolios alongside how go-to-market (GTM) and revenue models are evolving – and what this all means for the channel's strategic planning.**

In today's competitive technology marketplace getting closer to customers and understanding their future intentions is vital to securing new business and long-term growth – and how MSPs connect with ICT buyers and influence their decision-making will ultimately determine whether customer relationships stand the test of time. ICT buyers in the private and public sector are more tech savvy than ever before and more likely to rethink how they engage with MSPs. This means that an MSP's strategic approach to the technology forces reshaping the future not only requires a sharp eye when reading the market, it demands a deep dive into the tech factors transforming businesses and how these drivers will play out in terms of IT buyer decision-making.

A GTM sales and marketing model that supports these goals is also vital. Therefore

this year's Comms Vision Convention will delve into how revenue models are evolving and the implications for MSP strategic planning. This conference track will also examine the rapid and far-reaching changes in sales, marketing and customer experience models that new technology is enabling, and explore ways to succeed through an agile, trusted and relevant GTM strategy that reflects changes in customers' buying behaviours.

### Steering the right strategic course

Where these two conference tracks (technology evolution and GTM strategies) converge leads us onto the Road to Future Growth. But astute decision-making on mapping the route ahead demands critical insights into the technology transformations accelerating channel growth, along with the inside track on pivotal factors that will steer MSPs towards making the best strategic choices



The then Minister for Implementation Oliver Dowden  
CBE opening 2018's Comms Vision Convention

## Astute decision-making on mapping the route ahead demands critical insights into the technology transformations accelerating channel growth, along with the inside track on pivotal factors that will steer MSPs towards making the best strategic choices around propositions, GTM and target markets

around propositions, GTM and target markets. Among the many hot topics to be fully considered and explored at Comms Vision is the cardinal question of which technologies are driving (and will continue to drive) business model reinvention, and how end user tech requirements are evolving. Key points to be addressed include what's topping the CEO's technology

agenda, the extent to which business and comms industry transformation is being driven by emerging technologies rather than more mature products and services, and what a successful skills and tech partnering strategy will look like in five years time.

This track will also bring into focus evolving cloud models and how far data, AI, analytics, security and

intelligent applications will impact channel and end user businesses; and how these trends underscore the growing role of a channel partner as technology educator, enabler and problem solver. Furthermore, last year's Comms Vision Convention highlighted the technology and market knowledge gap that can exist between suppliers and their partners. Given that bridging



# GTM planning

this gap and enabling MSPs to succeed as educators and problem solvers in this evolving world is vital, what more can vendors do to help MSPs get closer to customers and maximise growth opportunities?

Among the risks facing ICT resellers and MSPs is the rise of commoditisation (supported by ICT buyers' growing preference for a more frictionless purchasing experience) which means that the drive for differentiation takes on a new urgency. Questions to be addressed include whether specialisation and verticalisation through the deployment of sector specific solutions will become more critical as a differentiator – and which technologies will provide MSPs with the best differentiation opportunities both today and tomorrow.

Comms Vision will also gauge how important it is for MSPs to review their tech stack and roadmaps and reassess partnering strategies, while identifying the priority focus areas for MSPs to consider when deciding on the right tech-enabled approach to differentiation.

## Remodelling GTM and revenue creation strategies

The question of how to achieve better results through a fit-for-purpose sales and marketing model has also taken on greater urgency. Understanding the evolution of marketing and selling is crucial. But what strategies should resellers and MSPs focus on as they transition their GTM towards the business transformation and CX demands of end users? This pressing issue will be considered in the context of the big

shift from transactional technology upgrades towards organisations requiring business transformation and tangible value creating outcomes, which closes the gap between the customer's technology and business strategy. The impact of these expectations on MSP sales and marketing approaches will be fully under review at Comms Vision, alongside how MSP sales and

## The question of how to achieve better results through a fit-for-purpose sales and marketing model has taken on greater urgency

marketing leaders could most propitiously target their resources and planning.

More broadly, this conference track will also consider the biggest challenges facing MSP sales/commercial and marketing leaders; and spotlight their golden opportunities and how to turn challenges into meeting opportunity with confidence. We will also assess whether MSPs focused inwardly on a cross-selling strategy are missing new organic customer acquisition opportunities. And gauge whether there is a strong case for the channel to recharge new organic customer acquisition as

a primary growth driver. Furthermore, given the need to fully understand the end customer business and get closer to ICT buyers, we will explore how MSPs' commercial resources are evolving, including pre-sales, and how far these functions need to be re-engineered.

To help MSPs stay ahead of the GTM curve and ensure a competitive advantage our

intention is to underscore the priority areas that MSP sales and marketing leaders would be wise to consider in order to make the right long-term commercial choices when setting out on their growth journey. This

may involve tough decisions when remodelling sales teams for a brighter future, and will certainly involve an assessment of the impact of growing end user demand for tangible outcomes and value versus deliverables.

As well as commercial topics such as these... the emerging technologies requiring most attention will also be under the spotlight during an MSP-led insight panel where high profile MSP business leaders will provide first hand perspectives on navigating challenges and addressing market opportunities through the right technology, value propositions, GTM and revenue creation strategies. ■

## About Comms Vision...

**COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller and MSP community. To find out more about this year's conference please visit – [www.commsvision.com](http://www.commsvision.com)**



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# Enabling your culture

**Are your cultural enablers firing on all cylinders? If not, Vizst Technology Head of HR Evonne Pemberton shares insights into how the flourishing MSP is successfully pulling all the levers of culture enablement.**

**A** Comms Dealer survey of channel execs revealed that the power of organisational culture as a strategic lever is being underestimated to the detriment of many businesses. And circa 50 per cent of survey respondents conceded that their cultural goals only partially reflect the experience of staff and customers, indicating a disconnect. Against this backdrop, Pemberton noted that culture makes a 'vast difference' to the commitment and engagement of people to deliver against organisational value expectations and the broader strategy, and she put a spotlight on how Vizst Technology is acting on its cultural imperatives.

"Our priorities are interconnected with day-to-day workforce behaviours," she stated. "It's dynamic rather than a set-and-forget mentality. Each month our team votes for the Employee of the Month and votes are linked back to our company values. Our SLT leads by example and displays the values we want to see day-to-day from our employees. We worked with the SLT and

our Culture Committee to create those values – they are not dictated at board level. This ensures that the entire business is behind them and we are clear on how we expect our team to behave. These values are then used as cornerstones for our reviews and reward processes."

**Assessing progress**

To assess the strength of its cultural standing and monitor progress Vizst Technology runs quarterly employee surveys to gauge how people are feeling. "This allows us to nip any potential issues in the bud while proactively planning improvements where needed," added Pemberton. "This is then followed up by the annual Great Place to Work survey. We carry out exit interviews for all employees to ensure we get a full and honest view of the business and can adapt accordingly. Feedback gives us a 360 review of our strengths and weaknesses, enabling us to stay on track with our culture objectives and ensure ample feedback to act on in real-time."

Pemberton also noted that Vizst Technology's current focus areas in terms of organisational culture are



Evonne Pemberton

**Our cultural priorities are interconnected with day-to-day workforce behaviours. It's dynamic rather than a set-and-forget mentality**

strengthening its social value proposition, giving back to the community and considering its impact on the environment. "We are also focused on people development – both personal and professional – and strengthening the connections between training, expanding roles, promotions and succession planning," she commented.

Vizst Technology is especially pulling the lever

of transparency because its employees want to know what's happening in the business and to feel part of it. "Transparency makes the job stickier," explained Pemberton. "We achieve this through objectives linked to our business strategy, interactive monthly updates, monthly newsletters and an open and transparent relationship with everyone in the business. Flexibility, wherever possible, is also key, giving people options

that make things easier for their life outside work. We accept that people have responsibilities at home and support them in balancing those with their working week. Being flexible gives us a wider talent pool to choose from and makes people more loyal to the business. Furthermore, support with wellbeing ensures people can be themselves."

Vizst Technology brings consistency and authenticity to its cultural efforts by rewarding good behaviours and calling out where standards are not met. "It's also vital to keep people involved at every stage and ensure our priorities are clearly explained during the interviewing and hiring process, so we only take on staff who fit our business ethos and objectives and align with our values," added Pemberton. "This includes diversity and Net Zero considerations. We are in a position to hold our head up high because we hold everyone accountable."

Pemberton put a spotlight on the critical importance of accountability when deciding which cultural levers to pull, and that all business leaders, no matter the extent or limitations of their resources, can fire up their cultural journey simply by talking to their people and getting them involved. "The more you do that, the more everyone takes personal responsibility for the outcomes and the entire team becomes accountable," she concluded. ■

**The Comms Dealer Culture survey report can be downloaded free here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-culture>**





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# Real opportunities in 5G

**The 5G revolution is accelerating fast and supercharged wireless connectivity is now a reality for resellers wanting to generate revenue in niche verticals and plug mobile not-spots, according to Telet Research Chief Commercial Officer Dr. Peter Gradwell.**

**G**radwell's primary focus is to help Telet drive the commercial deployment of private 5G and enable channel partners to address fresh opportunities in plugging mobile not-spots and specialising in specific verticals. As a mobile network technology, he says 5G is well suited to provide high quality wireless bandwidth outdoors across a large area, up to a few kilometers. "We're looking for partners, particularly those deploying fibre and-or servicing business parks and event spaces where they have a problem getting high quality Internet for the final 1,000 meters," he said. "Our plan is to provide coverage to 2,000 holiday parks, farms, marinas and show grounds in the next four to five years. That's circa 250,000 subscribers."

Telet Research was established by CEO James Body and Network Director Andy Smith in 2016. They'd previously completed a career in the Royal Signals and were

part of the founding team of the Truphone mobile venture. Telet was catalysed when Body, who lives in the Chalke Valley, lacked a mobile reception. And because mobile towers and thatched countryside cottages are not ideal bedfellows he sought a solution. This led to Telet winning a UK R&D grant to build an alternative mobile network in the Chalke Valley, near Salisbury.

"The grant allowed us to build out our vision of filling mobile not-spots," added Gradwell. "Too many people suffer from a lack of coverage and capacity in their mobile service and we believe they would be best served by building or pole mounted small cells that fill in the gaps, with single cells serving all operators to ensure equality. We've won further contracts and this year will go live with 5G networks in Bath, Shrewsbury, Cardiff, Liverpool, Worcester and Lancashire. At the moment we are mainly deploying Fixed-Wireless



Peter Gradwell

**Our plan is to provide coverage to 2,000 holiday parks, farms, marinas and show grounds in the next four to five years. That's circa 250,000 subscribers**

Internet for consumers in fibre not-spots."

**Commercial focus**

Gradwell joined in 2021 to help commercialise the business having closed the book on his own venture, turning a new page both professionally and personally. "At the end of 2019 I transitioned out of Gradwell Communications which I founded and worked on 24x7 for 20-plus years," he commented. "I shortly found myself, as everyone did, locked in the garden and unemployed with two young children. I underwent an identity crisis and I'm grateful for the support I

received from family and colleagues to help create the next venture and find the right balance in life."

He established Gradwell Communications in 1998 and having settled in a new PE majority owner started up IQ Mobile (a UK B2B MVNO) before joining Telet in 2021. "With two self-employed parents, it seemed obvious to me that I should start my own of company," said Gradwell, whose father is one of the original UK database architects and had his hand in the design of many of the original SQL databases that are used by big UK institutions. So

Gradwell grew up surrounded by diagrams and went on to study software engineering in Aberystwyth followed by a PhD at Bath University.

Telet's pedigree is also impressive. The company is privately funded, has grown to a team of 15 people and is exiting R&D mode with pilot deployments. Its next phase of development will display a strong focus on sales and customer operations and Gradwell expects headcount to reach 200 servicing 2,000 deployments of 5G for businesses. "We've already brought our first commercial customers online and we're actively building 5G networks



# business

in four major cities to go live later this summer," commented Gradwell.

As well as being focused on 5G technologies Telet is also keeping a sharp eye on the evolving regulatory landscape. "We don't think the Shared Rural Network will meet its roll out goals and there will be a follow on initiative – hopefully more grass roots," explained Gradwell. "We've heard a lot of talk around private 5G networks being too complex and expensive compared to Wi-Fi alternatives and living with existing 4G and 5G networks. However, many applications, in farming for example, are moving from a low data semi-autonomous model to a mode where they need to be permanently connected and uploading large amounts of data. We're concentrating on cost reduction and simplification."

According to Gradwell, Ofcom was 'previously asleep at the wheel' on coverage and spectrum reuse but is now taking steps to properly understand the level of service that can be accessed. Against this regulatory backdrop Gradwell also pointed out that the USA takes a very different approach to private 4G and 5G networks called CBRS.

"You can buy a \$1,000 radio and a \$100 per year licence and off you go within an hour," he commented. "In the UK it's a £10,000 radio, an £800 per year licence and the application process can take up to ten weeks. I was involved in the move from BT's and C&W's duopoly to over 1,000 voice providers, and 10 broadband operators to hundreds. We still have four mobile networks." ■

## Just a minute with Peter Gradwell...

**Role model:** My grandfather. He left Germany when he was 18, went back as a British commando, lost his leg and ultimately became a British judge who presided over many challenges in the family courts.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I got an E in Physics but still managed to get a PhD.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** I'd be a forensic scientist.

**Best advice you have been given:** In an old book called Sales on a Beermat, it said you don't have a product or business until your first customer has paid you.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Nelson Mandela, John Davison Rockefeller and Mayer Rothschild to find out what drove them to create so much and give back.

**The biggest risk you have taken:** Taking £1 million investment into my first business with a view to growing it rapidly. We needed the capital but the organisation wasn't setup to be a rocket ship.

**Your biggest career achievement:** The early Gradwell Communications team was forged in the heat of a fast growing startup, all in one room determined to beat the incumbent giants. We are still close knit.

**Your favourite comedian or comedienne:** Russell Howard.

**What talent do you wish you had?** To walk into a room of strangers and build connections.

**In hindsight:** I would have taken less external capital and grown more organically, but that's hard because deploying new tech can be capital intensive.

**How do you relax?** Outdoor sports and riding my mountain bike.

# Teams inspired by Big Goalers

With three regional tournaments now completed and 12 teams looking forward to finals day at St George's Park on November 1st, thoughts now turn to the positive outcomes founding members have witnessed from participation in The Big Goal.

Colleagues from The Big Goal's headline sponsor Giacom visited their partner Street Soccer Academy at the Tigers Trust to share careers advice, employability skills and inspiration for overcoming obstacles. Mike Boulton, Tracey Seymour and Will Simms joined the participants for a session at Hull City, where they enjoyed watching the group take part in a practical football skills session and then led a workshop and discussion on careers.

Customer Services Advisor Tracey Seymour said: "The visit to the Tigers Trust to meet academy members was a meaningful exchange for us all. Sharing personal stories is a powerful way to connect with others and although everyone's stories were different they were the same in many ways and totally inspiring!"

Henrik Snorgaard, Rachael Everett and Richard Caisley from Daisy Corporate Services joined young adults on the Street Soccer Academy course at Liverpool Football Club's LFC Foundation for a session, where they led a discussion-based workshop focused on careers and



Shooting for The Big Goal: Inform Billing visit the Derby County Community Trust Academy

employability and enjoyed a practical football skills session.

## Inspiring experience

Sales Team Leader Henrik Snorgaard said: "It was a very inspiring day, meeting the young people on the programme who were all engaged and determined. It was clear to see the value The Big Goal provides to the next generation, enhancing their life skills to boost physical and mental health."

Ellie Allseybrook, Rob Beenham and Richard Morse from Inform Billing visited the Street Soccer Academy group at the Derby County Community Trust at Pride Park, where they gave an insight into their company and led a discussion on self-belief, resilience and life in general. Allseybrook, who is Inform Billing's Business Development

Director, commented: "To see the impact The Big Goal is having on young people is special. From a profile perspective, it's a real positive for us and other companies in the channel to be involved as our industry is a strong community.

"All our team have recognised what we are achieving by supporting the Street Soccer Foundation, so it's brought us together as well. I know we can make this even bigger and more successful. It would be amazing to continue doing this in years to come and help change lives for the better." ■

To join The Big Goal email [hello@thebiggoal.co.uk](mailto:hello@thebiggoal.co.uk) or to find out more, visit [www.thebiggoal.co.uk](http://www.thebiggoal.co.uk)

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# Combatting cyber risk

**A shift of emphasis from cybersecurity product features and complexity to use cases and value driven outcomes is key to unlocking new security opportunities for resellers and MSPs, argues Andrew Napier, Head of Cloud and Security Products, PXC.**

Cybersecurity is not, in general, given the attention it demands by a large number of resellers and MSPs, believes Napier, mainly because it's not seen as an enabler, more as an unwelcome additional cost. "Cybersecurity is an insurance type of proposition," he stated. "However, there are many aspects of modern next generation firewall monitoring, for example, that can inform better business planning. More messaging about the operational benefits of a properly maintained security posture, rather than the 'what ifs' implications of not doing so would be good to see."

Another reason that cybersecurity may be sidelined is the perception that it's difficult, logistically time consuming, expensive in terms of personnel and perhaps even legally dangerous territory for a traditional telco or ISP to get involved in, pointed out Napier. "These are all areas that can be de-risked with proper outsourcing," he explained.

Napier also observed that security vendors can be too focused on pushing features that create a perception of complexity which can be off-putting. But the greatest challenge is customer knowledge and awareness of their own security posture, he believes. "Too often we see customers with outdated equipment and no experience or capability to fully understand the risks they face, how to scope out what they need and budget for a remedy," commented Napier. "The challenge for the reseller or MSP is to deliver a secure environment for the customer in this context without any disruption. It's a tall order."

**Consultancy**  
This scenario is made more challenging by the fact that customers with the lowest levels of awareness are also at the highest level of risk, and have the least amount of assigned budget, noted Napier. This means that the most successful customer engagements are those that are front-heavy on consultancy, engagement and tactical assessments to



Andrew Napier

prove the state of risk and therefore get budget. "A reseller needs to understand how an organisation functions in order to deliver a solution that will be secure," he added.

"Overall, there is a growing awareness among businesses that cybersecurity is a real issue and should be taken seriously. However, there is a wide gulf between a business that understands something needs to be done and a business that understands what needs to be done. Therefore there is growing demand for managed services around regular, appropriate security housekeeping tasks undertaken by a third party that can advise on this increasingly confusing and noisy marketplace."

Napier explained that security risks broadly fall into two categories: Attackers are either after bitcoin directly for ceasing disruptive activity such as DDoS or unlocking files following a ransomware attack. These are both on the rise. Or they are being paid by someone else to lift sensitive data and will want to remain undetected for as long as possible. "In the latter example the breach is more likely to come from a poorly secured firewall or non-hardened web application such as O365," said Napier. "Humans are ingenious creatures and the arms race in the cybersecurity area is one of the most fast paced."

But the security trend that most interests him is personal

and corporate identity theft. "The vast majority of security incidents are made possible through human error," he added. "It's far easier to persuade someone to open the front door rather than smash it in. Examples include badly secured O365 environments that enable hackers to impersonate people inside an organisation and spoofed websites that look genuine and collect payment information."

**Relatable use cases**

To effectively combat and contain threats such as these vendors should take a step back from box feature battles and think more about real life use cases that make sense to the average SME and enterprise customer, believes Napier. "More investment emphasis should be put into robust management, orchestration and monitoring platforms to make it easier for end customers and resellers to really deliver the benefits of their technology investments," he commented. "A good GTM strategy needs to have a holistic 'secure through and through' cross-product approach."

"Don't forget that a customer who doesn't think they have a security issue probably does, but will be unlikely to respond to a security-first message. It all comes down to perception of value in the supply chain. If a customer's MSP can make them more operationally agile and improve decision making as a result of the vendor's investment in making their device easier to manage, then that customer is unlikely to look around for a cheaper deal for any of the services the reseller delivers, security or otherwise." ■



# comms national awards

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We are keeping our celebrity presenter's identity a closely guarded secret, but as ever the entertainment on the night will be top notch. Last year, broadcaster Vernon Kay was our stellar awards host, and who could forget the afterparty set DJ'd by Fat Tony. Previous presenters have included Jeremy Vine, Anton

Du Beke, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre, Marcus Brigstocke, Vernon Kay, Gabby Logan, Stephen Mangan and James Nesbitt, so guests can be assured the entertainment will be top drawer.

All these ingredients add up to the Comms National Awards being acknowledged as the evening the channel assembles in style to recognise success and network with industry friends and colleagues. "The Comms National Awards is the UK's leading awards process for the ICT channel and whether companies are winners or finalists, the prestige and PR they can gain from participating is huge. I would urge everyone in the channel to get involved and put their name into the hat," said Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent. The CN Awards is the ultimate channel celebration.

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We are thrilled to announce our headline sponsorship of the Comms National Awards 2024!

The Comms National Awards have always been a key event in our industry, recognising exceptional channel businesses that deliver outstanding solutions for their partners and customers.

In the coming years, the communications landscape will continue to evolve rapidly, driven by the transition to all-IP and the incredible possibilities it unlocks. This change will

also be fuelled by business customers' growing expectation to find one strategic partner for all their technology needs, from communications and connectivity to cloud, cybersecurity, and modern working solutions. The organisations that will thrive are those that embrace new technologies and adapt to their clients' changing needs. This forward-thinking approach is at the core of what we honour at the Comms National Awards.

At Giacom, we are continually

inspired by the brilliance and dedication of our channel partners. These awards offer an opportunity to showcase the remarkable achievements of those channel providers that are setting new standards and driving progress. The ability to innovate and implement transformative solutions distinguishes the winners, and we eagerly anticipate celebrating the success of these outstanding businesses at this year's Comms National Awards.

Terry O'Brien – CEO of Giacom

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# Postcard from Margin

**The high potential SMB space, the rise of software-centric solutions, unlocking the security market and the shift from telco to a techco model are just some of the channel opportunity hotspots spotlighted by industry experts at this year's Comms Dealer Margin conference (20th June, Forest of Arden Hotel and Country Club).**

**H**aving a tight grip on SMB ICT requirements is a top priority for resellers, according to Voiceflex CEO James Arnold-Roberts, who also pointed out that this sector makes up 99.9 per cent of UK businesses. "With the enterprise market becoming saturated and margin-poor, SMBs are increasingly important to partners who want to grow," he stated. "Channel companies should evolve their traditional telco offering to ensure they can serve the sector, which is growing at eight per cent CAGR towards a £68 billion valuation."

Voiceflex is currently transforming from a telco to a techco model and Arnold-Roberts cited research that shows 75 per cent of comms service providers will have undergone the same transition by 2025. He also highlighted Teams and WhatsApp as having huge and growing penetration

rates in the voice enablement market; and noted that UK IT spend per user is growing with businesses allocating a significant portion of their IT budget to UCaaS, leading to £70 APRU by 2027.

But loyalty in the SMB space is at an all-time low, according to Giacom COO Nathan Marke. He pointed to data from Analysis Mason that shows 22 per cent of small companies are currently switching their telco provider, compared to just five per cent in 2019. "The top reasons cited were the provider's lack of vision, strategy and breadth of product," said Marke.

Currently, traditional telecoms accounts for just four per cent of SMB ICT spend, observed Marke. And communication services have (for the first time) become smaller than IT services as a percentage of overall global technology spend, according to Gartner. "Telcos have



**Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent welcomes delegates to Margin 2024**

**If you are a telco and have wonderful relationships with your customers, then get into software because that is where the growth will be**

traditionally had the lion's share of technology spend as they have been automating business functions for years," added Marke. "Now, everyone has telco and software has taken over the world. It is an exciting market space because we are nowhere near exploring how software can automate business processes. If you are a telco and have wonderful

relationships with your customers, then get into software because that is where the growth will be."

The benefits of an MSP model were also underscored at the conference. MSPs are growing at three times the rate of traditional resellers when it comes to spend in the channel, and Knight Corporate Finance Director

Adam Zoldan highlighted the growing dominance of MSPs as they drive most mergers and acquisitions within the sector.

So where are the highest growth areas for resellers and MSPs looking to diversify? Security was an area discussed by most speakers, and stats suggest that half of all organisations experienced a successful cyber attack in the last year, with an average £10,000 cost per attack. Furthermore, 82 per cent of organisations don't expect this to ease. Anton Le Saux, Head of Cyber and IoT at Zest 4, said: "Adding cybersecurity will stop churn as customers will look elsewhere for these services. Cybersecurity is also an easy sell if you can show the threats customers face."

Zest 4 has launched a proposition, called Cybersight Dark Web Monitoring, that functions as a door opener for partners to talk to their customers about cybersecurity – it scans the dark web and highlights breaches against a company's security posture. Le Saux also noted that firms with a cybersecurity offering are valued with multiples of 10 times, opposed to six to eight for telecoms.

Voip Unlimited Head of Sales Paul Gibbs drew attention to the impact of Covid-19 on digital communication tools like Teams, which saw user numbers skyrocket from 13 million in July 2019 to 300 million by April 2023. He said: "Teams has been able to grow due to its rapid innovation and the increasing demand for business critical applications. There is margin to be made from the ecosystem of services that sit around these applications." ■



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# PSTN switch off push back

The PSTN switch off delay gives channel firms more time to calibrate right-fit solutions for non-standard migrations, but the January 2027 deadline must not be seen as an excuse to ease up on IP migration, according to this month's panel of industry commentators.



**CAMILLA KARM**  
SALES AND  
MARKETING  
DIRECTOR  
REDSQUID

THE extended deadline didn't come as a surprise to many, and therefore it hasn't changed our strategy drastically. We see this as an opportunity to make a greater difference to even more businesses, and it'll provide a greater experience for large organisations that are yet to start their transformation. It sends a clear message that the plans can change with little warning and emphasises that sooner is better when it comes to the switch over. We have migrated most of our current customers, and those who are yet to move are primarily waiting for the rollout to come to their area.



**RICHARD SCOTT**  
SALES DIRECTOR  
START COMMS

THE PSTN switch off delay was disappointing, but not surprising. The additional time will assist with identifying and aiding complex use case scenarios. Eighty six per cent of our PSTN migration strategy has been completed and we are on course to fully complete before the end of this year. We are still seeing businesses that have legacy services with their incumbent provider and it appears that many resellers have been dragging their heels with educating customers when the migration pace needs to be picked up across the UK. Hopefully the extension does not hinder the positive momentum the industry was starting to gain.



**IAN DUNSTAN**  
MD  
COLBAT

THE extension was not a major surprise, considering the denial by some industries. The deadline pushback must be treated as a bonus rather than a reason to slow down. Education about the switch off is essential for the entire industry, moving away from scare tactics. We sold our first SIP trunks in 2008, leading to the migration of our last ISDN line two years ago. This shift allowed us to focus on new customers and niche markets reliant on analogue technology.



**ALASTAIR RALPH**  
TECHNICAL SALES  
PRE-SOLUTIONS  
AVOIRA

THE delay was a welcome surprise because limited access to FTTP in some locations had presented challenges. The delay allows us to be more flexible and explore alternative technologies alongside FTTP as they come to market. Around 80 per cent of our customers are already using technology compatible with the switch off and we have further plans to handle the remaining migrations. However, when the deadline was pushed back we implemented a strategic pause so we could continue to monitor the market and ensure the most appropriate solutions are offered to those few customers yet to migrate.



**HARRY BOWLBY**  
MANAGING  
DIRECTOR  
SPITFIRE NETWORK  
SERVICES

THE delay was to be expected. It provides more time for more customers to migrate particularly using FTTP but increases service provider costs and the period of uncertainty. The key is making business leaders and decision makers aware of the need to make the switch sooner rather than later. The delay only provides a one year extension and we are still likely to experience resource bottlenecks. Prices are also likely to continue to increase on the old network services for analogue, ISDN and broadband. We are endeavouring to have completed as soon as we can but anticipate the delay will reduce the sense of urgency from customers.

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# provides breathing space



**DAVID WARDELL**  
CEO  
EVOKE TELECOM

FOR many, the delay has come as a relief as they wait for carriers to provide fibre access in their local areas, not wholly seeing satellite or mobile networks as reliable. There are cloud solutions out there aplenty, but for some it is the carrier services that are holding them back. Most of our customers have already made the logical switch away from traditional lines. The pandemic was the inciting agent, shaping 'the new normal', and encouraging a focus on flexible off-site working. Some companies chose to sweat their assets and upgrade to SIP, others invested in the future and made a full move to the cloud. However, some smaller companies have been left behind. They are either nervous or simply don't have access to affordable fibre circuits.



**PETE JURY,**  
INTERIM MD  
ELITE GROUP

THE delay to the PSTN switch off was expected and gives us a critical opportunity to reassess and fine-tune our strategic approach. Elite Group has been transitioning large and small customers to IP-based services for nearly two years while ensuring minimal disruption. With this extension, we can include more enhanced customer education and support. This delay underscores the necessity for adaptability. With comprehensive readiness and innovation, we can ensure a smooth transition and set a benchmark for quality and reliability.



**STEPHEN AYERS,**  
HEAD OF PRODUCT  
AND VENDORS  
RAZORBLUE

THE delay seemed inevitable due to areas that do not have a replacement offering available. I was expecting a temporary service called SOTAP to be made available. For most clients there is no benefit to keeping the old technology and Openreach is increasing pricing to encourage the move. We would have completed customer migrations before the 2025 deadline and have a plan to ensure all clients have a smooth transition should the PSTN switch off affect them. We are continuing with our original plan.



**KERRY KNOTT,**  
MANAGER, VOICE &  
DATA SERVICES  
ITRM

ITRM has made steady progress in transitioning from PSTN and we were on target to complete this by 2025. Our migration strategy can vary depending on the organisation's goals and specific needs. Typically, the migration involves several stages. This starts with an assessment and creating a detailed migration plan. We then select an appropriate technology and ensure network infrastructure can support the new solution. At this point training and education becomes key before the full migration. Finally, post-migration support prevents follow-up issues. The delay hasn't prompted us to rethink this strategy and we are still pushing to complete the migrations as soon as possible.



**PAUL HOOPER**  
MD  
UPLANDS ONETELCO

THE delay didn't catch us off guard but rather aligned with our expectations and presents a strategic opportunity to engage our customers further. We're communicating that despite the extension, transitioning from outdated PSTN technology is crucial. The technology remains obsolete and unfit for modern demands. We've successfully transitioned most of our entire ISDN base to VoIP and our migration of PSTN services to IP-based solutions has surged. However, being rooted in Wales and Somerset our rural clients often lack access to superfast fibre and experience weak mobile signals, presenting challenges.



**DION O'BYRNE**  
UNIFIED  
COMMUNICATIONS  
CONSULTANT  
RYDAL GROUP

WE were not surprised by the delay as there were industry rumours, so were not caught off guard. Our strategy remains steadfast and the delay allows us to extend our support to even more businesses, helping them transition to solutions that deliver measurable benefits. We are on the cusp of completion as a proactive approach has ensured we are nearly there. We were well on track and acting swiftly to ensure a seamless transition well before the 2025 deadline.

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# MSP brings in CEO

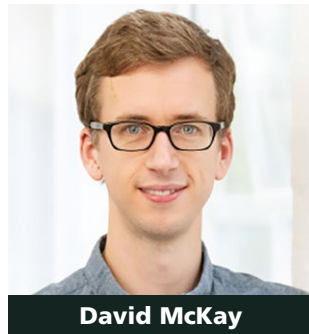


Vince DeLuca

CHARLESBANK-backed Six Degrees Group has appointed Vince DeLuca as Chief Executive Officer in a move that sees the departure of former CEO Simon Crawley-Trice following a three year spell in the top job. DeLuca moves from Sapphire Systems where he was CEO and led the business to the point of exit. His senior leadership experience also includes stints at Logicalis Group, Infocrossing and Marconi. "It's more important than ever that businesses place digital transformation at the heart of their strategies," stated DeLuca. "Optimised cloud services, intelligence-led security and agile connectivity between workplaces and workspaces are no longer nice-to-haves, they are essential. With its experience in secure cloud technology and connectivity roots, Six Degrees is positioned to be the go-to digital transformation partner for UK businesses. I'm joining the team to help make that happen." **Full interview in the next issue**

## Also on the move...

THE career experience of David McKay is a perfect fit for TelcoSwitch as it ramps up its growth strategy, says CEO Howard Stevens. McKay's appointment as Chief Financial Officer adds 10 years experience working in growth stage technology businesses including stints at BDO and e-commerce SaaS provider Venda (later acquired by Oracle NetSuite) where he led finance activities across EMEA and APAC. Most recently he spent five years as CFO-COO at Causeway one.network. Stevens stated: "David's experience in private equity backed software businesses operating across multiple territories makes him the ideal candidate as we enter the next phase of growth."



David McKay

JOLA'S Head of IP Telephony and Development Ben Merrills has been promoted to the Chief Technical Officer role 12 months after former technology chief Adrian Sunderland was appointed CEO. Merrills has worked in the channel for over 20 years and joined Jola in 2022. He was previously Managing Director of Zapappi (which Jola acquired the same year). Sunderland commented: "I have worked closely with Ben for many years and am confident in his ability to develop and deliver differentiated solutions creating profitable, recurring revenue streams for partners."

WESTCON-Comstor Chief Financial Officer Callum McGregor's remit has expanded across IT, supply chain operations and ESG following his promotion to the COO position (in addition to



Callum McGregor

his existing responsibilities for finance, legal, data and analytics). McGregor joined the distributor in 2015 and became CFO in 2021. "I'm taking on this expanded remit at a pivotal moment in the Westcon-Comstor story," he stated. "As a value added and data-driven distributor

we are at the heart of the technology ecosystem, capitalising on opportunities across our key technology domains of cybersecurity, networking and cloud, while building on the foundations we have in place across IT, supply chain operations and ESG functions."

PAX8'S promotion of Eric Stevens to the newly created role of Chief AI Officer sees him take responsibility for the cloud firm's AI strategy and implementation, infrastructure and practices. Stevens was previously Pax8's SVP Engineering, a position he held since July 2021. He commented: "AI is about to revolutionise the world and the vision for an AI-empowered marketplace cannot be underestimated."

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