



Acquisitive CEO
enters scale up
mode p6

Eclipse chief shines
a light on ambitious
growth strategy p12



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This month's movers and shakers



MSPs advised to revise strategies

THE question of how to achieve better results through a fit-for-purpose tech, sales and marketing model has taken on greater urgency, say industry leaders who urge MSPs to review their strategic planning in line with market changes.

SPECIAL REPORT

An MSP's 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 they play out in terms of ICT buyer decision-making.

"The channel needs to embrace emerging technology now to meet customer demands, drive new revenue streams and remain competitive," said Gamma's Channel Sales Director Andy Smethurst. "Customers will increasingly seek solutions that give them an edge so MSPs that evolve will stay relevant."

A GTM sales and marketing model that supports these goals is also vital, noted Kathryn Platt, Head of Indirect Business, Vodafone UK.

"How to drive differentiation and value in a rapidly evolving marketplace has become a top priority for MSPs," she commented.

"There is an opportunity for MSPs to open up their sales and marketing potential if they remodel what they are traditionally known for and commit their GTM strategy to specific technologies and markets."

This year's Comms Vision (6th-8th November, Gleneagles Hotel) will focus on how tech and revenue models are evolving and what this means for MSP planning. **See pages 19-33**

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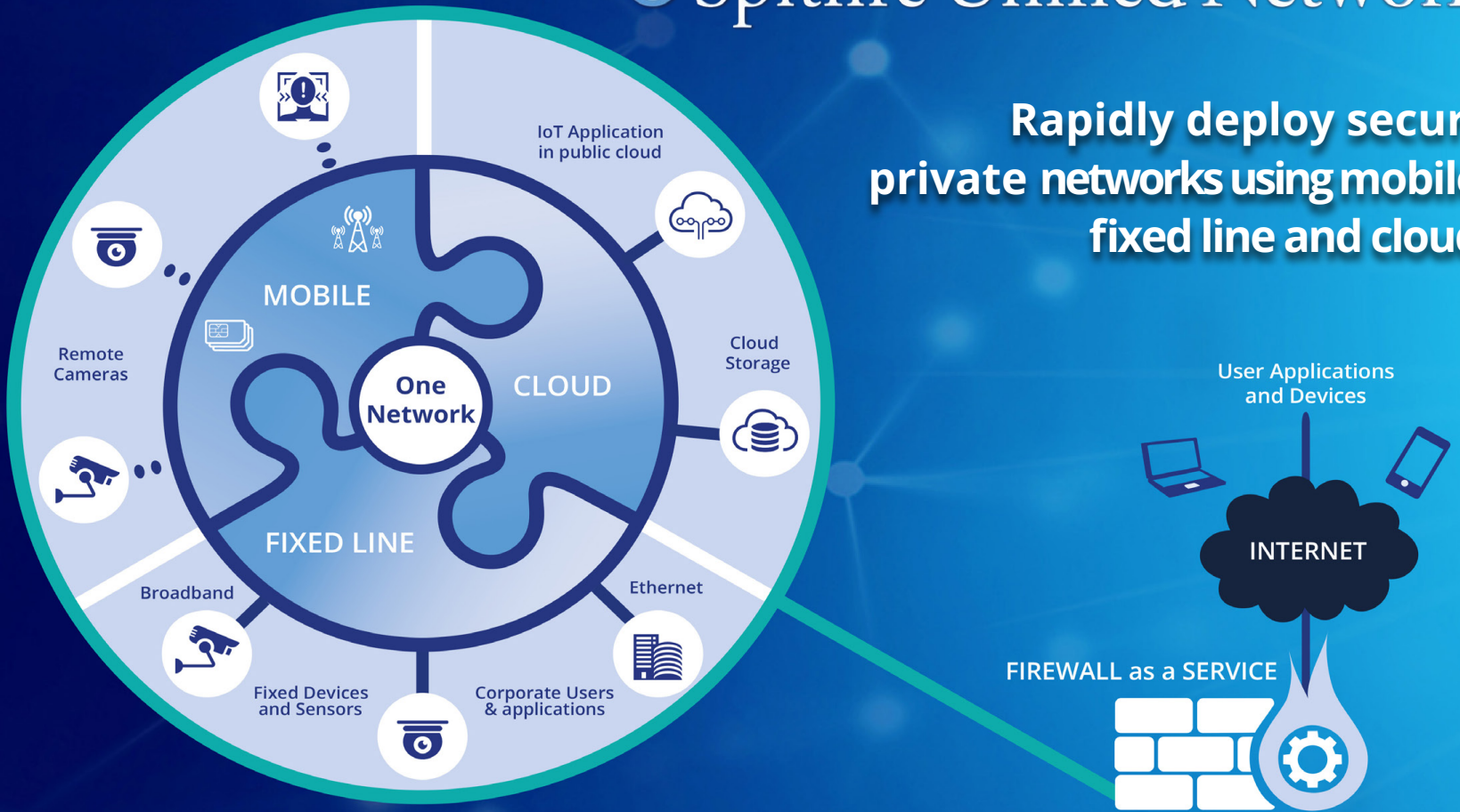
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Welcome comment



Stuart Gilroy

A WEEK probably doesn't go by without all of us fishing for something – a car boot sale, scouring eBay for a bargain, that sort of thing – but especially fishermen/women. My local river, the Welland, sometimes flows with crystal clear water, other

times it's brown as mud. When clear, I often see a big pike appear in the margin close to my feet which barely shows an interest in my lure – timing and presentation is everything.

Anyone can dangle bait, but reading the water, using the right bait and understanding the habits of target fish is something else. I'm a leisure fisherman, not a specialist. But there are some prize specimens in the river that the specialists land because they are niche experts with big fish knowledge and knowhow.

If we relate this scenario to the comms market and channel, many resellers and MSPs of course want to catch the big fish, but few get the most important bites with specimen potential. Only those with knowledge and expertise, who know how to read the market, present the right bait, understand the habits of their targets and have a knack for good timing will land the big contracts.

In the channel, we're all sitting on the same bank facing the same opportunity. But what separates the most successful MSPs from the non-catchers is their tactics, their focus on specific success factors, their investment in the right kit, which is determined by their full understanding of target customers. Having the right tools for the job and knowing what to do with them creates a specialist – there is no luck involved. It's about strategy, decision making and investment in the wherewithall, processes and skills – and having the ambition to go big.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

To keep up to date with the latest channel news, as it happens, visit www.comms-dealer.com daily

MSP frames OptivTy buy



Redsquad COO Vince Mignacca (left) and CEO Sohini Raitthatha

REDSQUID'S acquisition of OptivTy is its biggest deal to date and puts the Borehamwood-based MSP squarely in the film industry frame.

OptivTy supports some of the biggest film productions in the UK and according to Redsquad CEO Sohini Raitthatha the transaction marks a significant milestone in the company's development as an MSP.

"This acquisition is a pivotal moment for the Redsquad group, propelling us into our

next phase of growth," he commented. "With OptivTy we are entering a new industry and welcoming some of the most prestigious global brands into our community."

As well as emerging as a key acquirer Redsquad has also established a growing reputation for its 'purpose' and sustainable business practices as a B Corporation.

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

Editor's picks

BIG contract wins for Advantex in the manufacturing, hospitality and education sectors have doubled sales revenues in the last 12 months and boosted FY24 turnover to £12 million, spurred by hot demand for enhanced systems and tech expertise, including the recently launched DMARC service for greater network and email security. The north east based firm has also increased its headcount to 70 and forecasts a 30% rise in numbers by the end of next year. Dave O'Connell, Operations and Finance Director, commented: "We have created a strong platform for expansion and business development on the back of new contracts, and we are seeing strong performances across all our operations with sustainable growth in current markets and expansion into new ones, notably renewables and sustainability."

WINDSOR Telecom's national expansion campaign has progressed with the acquisition of Leeds-based Yoozoom, a deal that gives Camberley headquartered Windsor Telecom a northern hub. Yoozoom is best known for providing unified comms, IT services and networking for businesses of all sizes.

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Editor's picks

EVOLVE is gearing up for expansion following its first investment deal. Having secured BGF backing the MSP expects to double turnover via big inroads into the UK market but primarily through US expansion. Evolve currently operates 1,200 sites in the US across multiple states, mainly in the fuel forecourt industry but is looking to move more into the quick-serve restaurant sector. Evolve has grown significantly in the past few years taking its headcount from 23 in 2020 to 117 this year. The company hopes to boost national and international headcount by 40 per cent over the coming three years.

LITTLEFISH'S play in the Microsoft space received a capability boost following its acquisition of Ireland-based Microsoft partner Storm Technology. Littlefish CEO Steve Robinson stated: "We've evolved from a bedroom start-up to an alternative to the multi-billion pound IT outsourcers. This acquisition marks the next part of our story, expanding our presence and footprint with a like-minded organisation that will enhance our Microsoft business solution capabilities." Storm Technology CEO Karl Flannery added: "Joining forces with Littlefish supports our growth ambition and facilitates entry to the UK market."

CREATIVE ITC's securing of LDC backing puts the London headquartered cloud service provider on track to accelerate its organic and acquisitive growth strategy. Creative ITC has a global data centre and operating footprint and provides cloud computing solutions to the architecture, engineering and construction sector. In the last two years the company has boosted annual recurring revenues and its customer base by 90-plus per cent, and broadened its international footprint which now extends into the Middle East, North America and Australia. Creative ITC CEO Keith Ali said: "Having grown rapidly in recent years we're now perfectly placed to explore new markets."

TALK Straight (trading as Schools Broadband) has bolstered its education sector presence with the acquisition of E2BN Protex, best known for its Internet4Schools brand. Talk Straight CEO David Tindall stated: "E2BN Protex's experience in the education ISP and safeguarding industry will add value to our services." Talk Straight is a £13.5m turnover business and supports more than 3,000 schools and 275 multi-academy trusts.

Smith named TalkTalk CEO



James Smith

A MAJOR leadership revamp at TalkTalk Group followed a refinancing deal that leaves the organisation 'well-funded to deliver the strategic plans of PXC and TalkTalk', it said in a statement.

The agreement in principle delivers £170m in addition to £65m of interim funding already provided.

As part of the transaction, Chief Executive Officer Dame Tristia Harrison becomes a Non-Executive Director, making way for Group CFO James Smith who steps into the Group CEO position and will also become CEO of PXC, taking over from Tom O'Hagan who is now functioning as PXC's Executive Chairman.

Susie Buckridge remains CEO of TalkTalk, the Group's consumer business while Sir

Charles Dunstone continues in his role as Group Chairman. See next month's Comms Dealer magazine for a full strategic interview with incoming CEO James Smith.

Deal news

FLOTEK Group's regional advances have extended into the midlands with the acquisition of Colbek Systems, its 12th deal in under two years. Flotek Group CEO Jay Ball stated: "This acquisition also enhances our service offerings in IT support and cybersecurity. Colbek's expertise in Microsoft and Google G Suite platforms adds a valuable dimension to Flotek's portfolio, particularly in the area of Google cloud solutions. We remain focused on identifying further acquisition opportunities throughout the UK with an emphasis on expanding into the Bristol region."

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Acquisitive CEO enters sca

Project Edge, Risc IT Solutions and Novem IT CEO Alex Heslip is ramping up his hunt for comms and IT companies in a bold bid to build a £50 million-plus revenue business by 2028.

As part of Heslip's acquisition efforts he will look to purchase comms and IT resellers that fit his strict criteria... small MSPs and telecom businesses, typically turning over £3 million to £5 million and employing 15 to 30 people. This acquisition agenda is progressing under the Project Edge name, an investment company led by Heslip and backed by TDC. "We have access to significant funding which will help us accelerate our acquisition strategy and go nationwide," stated Heslip. "We are in the process of acquiring a third MSP and hope to complete by the end of the year, and rebrand the group in 2025."

He first started looking for SME focused IT and telecom firms to acquire in January 2022. It took 18 months to buy the first company, Risc IT Solutions; and Project Edge completed its second acquisition, Novem IT, in July this year. "Both businesses have been around for 20 years and we acquired them from the original founders," said Heslip.

Accelerating market consolidation is the biggest

factor influencing his strategy. And he says the high number of comms and IT business owners coming up for retirement represents a big opportunity for potential acquisition targets. "There are many thousands of managed IT and telecoms business owners in the UK who will be considering how they exit their business, typically due to retirement," added Heslip. "When they are ready, we want to be there to see if we're the right fit for them."

He aims to create a single business that provides a one-stop-shop for IT, telecoms and cybersecurity, serving UK SMEs employing 20-250 people. "In five years time I see us supplying thousands of customers, turning over more than £50 million with a 200-plus headcount," said Heslip.

A key metric behind Project Edge's acquisition drive is of course growth. Risc IT Solutions grew by 12 per cent last year and Novem is growing by over 20 per cent a year. "We aim to continue to grow those businesses at the same rates," stated Heslip. "Between the two companies we serve over 700 customers with our



Alex Heslip

We have access to significant funding which will help us accelerate our acquisition strategy and go nationwide

typical 20-250 headcount. However, we have many very small customers as well as some that employ over 1,000 people."

Heslip noted that Microsoft is the dominant player and is a key partner with Risc IT being a tier 1 CSP. Both acquired businesses are accredited Modern Work practices. "We partner with many other vendors such as Redstor, Eset, Wavenet, Gamma and Giacom," he added.

Heslip also has a clear and focused strategy on organic

growth within the existing customer base. "The key to unlocking that potential is in establishing trust," he explained. "Furthermore, winning new customers in IT is all about having a good reputation, continually delivering a quality service and being a partner that can help customers remain secure. Most SMEs do not have the right technology in place to protect their data and infrastructure from cyber criminals. Over the coming years we'll be helping to educate SMEs on what they need to be putting in place."

At an industry level Heslip expects annual growth in IT to remain in double digits, driven predominantly by increased cybersecurity risk. He is also investing in AI and automation technology to improve customer service – technologies that were unimagined when he first entered the comms market in the early 1990s. "So much has changed since then," he added. "However, many things remain the same. Businesses still need to communicate, they still want good service and they still need selling to." ■



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le up mode

Just a minute with Alex Heslip...

Role model: My dad: He is such a kind and calm man.

Your main strength and what could you work on?

My superpower is a positive mental attitude, but I have to work hard on organisation.

Three ideal dinner guests: My fiancée Olivia, an amazing woman who is wonderfully supportive; Kevin Sinfield, a top rugby man, and I'm amazed at the support he gave to Rob Burrows; Winston Churchill, for his quirky character and fascinating life.

If you weren't working in the ICT sector what would you be doing? I'd be in the fitness industry.

Your favourite comedian or comedienne? Michael McIntyre.

Best advice you have been given: It's never as bad as you think, and never as good as you hope.

What talent do you wish you had? The ability to tell a joke.

The biggest risk you have taken: Starting Project Edge: It took 18 months of effort, no income and a lot of capital at risk... just to get to the start line.

Your biggest career achievement: Bringing people together to serve a common purpose. At Verastar and Project Edge I built strong teams both organically and through acquisition. I believe in openness and honesty; if you're straight with people you build trust.

One example of something you have overcome: Divorce.

What is today's top leadership priority? Communication is critical. I want our people to be plugged into what the business is doing, why we're doing it and what it means for all major stakeholders.

If you could change any aspect of the tech revolution what would it be? Faster Internet speeds, available to more premises, delivered in shorter timeframes and at a lower cost.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I go to the gym before work every day.

With the benefit of hindsight what would you have done differently? I did a tech start-up in the early noughties and exited too early – other people made a lot more money than me. Timing is everything.

What do you fear most? Ill health.

Top tip for resellers: Keep your business growing to increase its worth and be more attractive to acquirers.

Editor's comment...



A COMMS Dealer survey of channel leaders underlines a critical point made by Heslip in this article – that the key to unlocking market potential is in establishing trust. In our study, the vast majority want their business to be famous for trustworthiness, but 82 per cent say trust between their organisation and customers has become more complex and multifaceted.

Meeting this challenge is key. To find out more download the free Leadership report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-leadership>

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Business Management Systems Explained

Why do leading telecom resellers use business management systems?

Anvil Business Management System (BMS) expert, Ian McNamara, highlights why leading telecom resellers use integrated business management systems and how this is leading them to wide ranging successes on all business fronts. In this, the first of a series of articles, Ian summarises the 5 key benefits of a BMS.



1. Costs cut, efficiency increased and errors minimised

The telecommunications industry is rapidly evolving. Resellers adopting integrated business management systems, such as telecoms-focused anvil, can now combine billing, sales CRM, ticketing and contract management on one cohesive platform. This not only reduces operational costs but also enhances efficiency and minimises errors, making businesses far more agile and competitive.

2. Overheads minimised

Telecom resellers juggle multiple processes. An all-in-one business management solution can streamline these operations, making it easier to oversee the entire customer lifecycle. By reducing the reliance on multiple, often incompatible tools, resellers can boost productivity and focus on delivering exceptional service, building stronger customer relationships.

3. Stay upright on the compliancy tightrope

Stay upright on the compliancy tightrope Anvil's BMS has the tools to keep OFCOM and OTS regulations and fines at arms' length. When choosing a business management system for your business, ensure that it also has the tools to provide alerts for contract renewals. Complying with industry regulations can help resellers stay ahead of potential issues. This proactive approach not only strengthens customer relationships but also safeguards revenue by minimising missed renewal opportunities.

4. Capitalising on the future of IoT with business efficiencies

IoT is the next big money-making initiative in telecoms, offering new revenue streams and business opportunities. However, given its low margin nature, telecom resellers need to be able to support IoT connectivity with BMS solutions that simplify the complexities of managing thousands of connected devices and allow customers and partners to self-service their estate.

5. Prepare now for your exit

Crucially, as we all ultimately want to ensure we are able to sell our businesses for the maximum return, having up-to-date and accurate data is vital. When presenting the business to market, presenting accurate figures from your BMS is essential. Anvil allows you to do this quickly and effectively.

If you'd like to find out more about how anvil, our integrated business management system works and how you can transform the success of your business, why not talk to our experts today?

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How eve Wholesale is helping Resellers gain a competitive edge

In a market buzzing with change, eve Wholesale is prioritising profitability, efficiency and differentiation to help Resellers stay ahead. Here, MD Steve Barclay discusses the bold moves eve Wholesale has made and why now is the perfect time for Resellers to sharpen their strategies to win.

Q. What are the key changes at eve Wholesale?

The first thing, and perhaps most obvious is our rebrand from eve Networks, which has built a strong reputation across hosted voice and connectivity, to eve Wholesale. This change is an exciting move to help MSPs and Resellers thrive in the channel.

Our new name reflects a dedication to being more than just a tech provider. We're here to be a wholesale partner that supports MSPs and Resellers in growing their business. We've always adapted to what our partners need, and this rebrand is just the beginning of a new focus on helping them boost profits, streamline operations, and build stronger customer connections.

In preparing for this change over the last few months we have been busy not just keeping up with the market trends but setting them. The big change started with our first acquisition and a complete restructuring of our group.

This isn't just a facelift; it's a full-on transformation. We've expanded our technical capabilities, added cloud services to our product set, and redefined our channel offering. This led to the creation of the new eve Wholesale brand, designed to make it crystal clear what we bring to the table for Resellers.

Our approach is straightforward: keep adding capabilities to maximise your product reach.

This process is by no means complete and we must continue to evolve to stay ahead. We're currently gearing

up for more acquisitions, because standing still just isn't an option. The market's demand for broader services has skyrocketed. We're making sure we can offer the widest breadth of products so our partners can capture every opportunity with their customers.

Q. What are the key market trends eve has identified?

Customer expectations have shifted dramatically, and that's putting it mildly. The convergence of IT and communications means you've got to do more for your customers, or risk losing them to someone who will. If you're only handling telecoms and not diving into the other communications or IT services, you're leaving the door wide open for competitors.

There's been a huge surge in creativity and investment in the channel, driven by how people now use technology to connect and communicate. The 2020s brought a tech revolution, especially with the rise of video and hybrid working models. Customers are more informed and vocal about what they want, and there's a new type of buyer out there – informed, switched on to what they want and expecting seamless communication options. If you're not meeting these new demands, someone else will.

Q. So, how do you stay ahead of the curve?

It boils down to three core principles: profitability, efficiency, and differentiation. Let's break these down.

Make more money: At eve Wholesale, we're all about helping our partners maximise their money-making



Steve Barclay

opportunities. Our products are designed to give you a wide range of essential business services to offer your customers—services that are not only best in class but also provide great margins.

Run lean: Efficiency is king. We've invested heavily in back-office services, so you don't have to. From managing customer support to handling billing and marketing, we take care of the heavy lifting, freeing you up to focus on growing your business.

Connect with customers: Clarity of purpose is crucial. Whether you're just starting out or looking to evolve, it's important that your team is aligned, and your customers understand exactly what you offer. We're here to help you fine-tune that message, ensuring it resonates with both your current and potential customers.

Q. In the current market, how critical is finding the right partnership?

In our industry, success isn't just about making sales; it's about building long-term relationships based on trust and mutual success. At eve Wholesale, we're all about creating deep partnerships where there's a high level of trust and consultation. It's not just about offering free licences and competitive pricing, but about providing a comprehensive service wrap. That's how we differentiate ourselves and build true partnerships.

We want everyone to win. When our partners succeed, we succeed. So, let's keep building those relationships, sharpening our strategies, and pushing the envelope on what we can achieve together.

Profitability

Profitability isn't just about bringing in more revenue; it's about smart financial management. We're helping our partners expand their service portfolios to capture as much wallet share as possible. It's all about offering a wide range of services to ensure you're meeting your customers' needs.

We also focus on high-margin products. It's essential to prioritise selling services that bring in the most profit, and sometimes that means selling lower-margin products to build trust and then upselling over time. With our licensing structure, for example, from September we're offering the Prime licence for our eve cloud phone system totally free of charge—an unbeatable offer to help Resellers land more business and maximise your margins.

Partnering with an organisation like eve Wholesale, which offers comprehensive support, can make all the difference. We aim to put our partners in a position where they can spend more time selling and less time worrying about the backend operations.

Efficiency

Efficiency isn't just a buzzword; it's the backbone of profitability. Every pound saved in operations is a pound added to your bottom line. That's why we've developed a suite of managed office services designed to scale with your business. Whether you need customer service, billing support, or technical assistance, we've got you covered with flexible options that keep your costs low and your profits high.

Differentiation

Understanding your customer base is key to differentiation. Take a good look at the type of customers you've attracted over the years—they reflect your business's strengths. Once you've found your groove, play to those strengths and hone your message. Whether you need to pivot to a new market or double down on what you're already doing well, clarity in your business strategy is crucial.

For more information please visit: www.evewholesale.co.uk

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Switch Me simplifies energy management

Steve Bieniek, the owner of Switch Me, is on a mission to simplify utility management for busy business owners across the UK. His company provides a wide range of services and with a diverse client base ranging from tree surgeons and funeral directors to car dealerships and laundrettes, Steve takes pride in managing the entire process—from initial quotes to onsite installations—allowing his clients to focus on running their businesses.



Steve Bieniek - Switch Me

Steve's journey with Fidelity Energy was a natural partnership and began through a chance connection. "I knew Fidelity Energy's CEO, John Haw, from Gamma and was aware of his energy aggregator business," Steve recalls. However, it wasn't until he revisited his supplier options upon becoming a Limited company this year that Fidelity Energy came into the picture. "Laura and Trevor from Daisy Communications kept badgering me (in a friendly way), so I decided to give Fidelity Energy a closer look," he adds.

The turning point came during Fidelity Energy's annual Partner Roadshow in early 2024. "Meeting the Fidelity Energy team and hearing positive feedback from other partners convinced me," says Steve. "I'd dabbled in energy as a side hustle before, but I saw this as a real opportunity to leverage my existing customer relationships and add value by helping them save more money."

With a background in selling energy, the onboarding process was smooth, intuitive and straightforward. "The partner portal is easy to use, and the personal account

management is excellent," he says.

Since joining as a partner in April 2024, Steve has seen tangible success, already signing up 36 meters and generating a recurring revenue stream forecasted over the next two years. "I like to get personally involved," he notes. "It's where my value-add lies and what differentiates me from the competition."

For Steve, energy has quickly become a core product within his business portfolio. "The more services I can offer, the more value I bring to my customers," he explains. "Energy is particularly compelling because there's a clear financial incentive for clients to take action during renewals."

Steve encourages other companies to consider adding energy services to their offerings, noting its low administrative burden and the potential for high returns. "It's efficient, the revenue opportunities are a no brainer and it doesn't require tech support," he says.

For more information, please email partners@fidelity-energy.co.uk

CHANNEL UPDATE

Giacom renews Big Goal pledge

Giacom has renewed its headline sponsorship of The Big Goal for the upcoming year, reaffirming its commitment to tackling youth homelessness and fostering community integration through the power of football.

This news follows the recent sponsorship renewals by Comms Dealer and Sky Business Wholesale, with all companies urging other channel businesses to throw their support behind the ICT industry initiative. Launched at St. George's Park in October 2023, The Big Goal aims to empower at least 1,600 young people (the number of holes in a full size football net) facing homelessness by providing them with access to the nationally acclaimed Street Soccer Academy programme (run by the Street Soccer Foundation) in partnership with professional football clubs across the country. These academies offer training, mentorship and pathways into education or employment, giving participants the skills to successfully reintegrate into society.

The Big Goal has achieved remarkable success in its first



The Big Goal supporters Nigel Sergent (Comms Dealer) and Terry O'Brien (Giacom)



Team Giacom on The Big Goal ball

year, funding the delivery of 44 Street Soccer Academies and directly benefiting over 400 young individuals, providing them with life-changing opportunities. Giacom itself has sponsored five academies near its offices, deepening its ties with local communities while supporting its broader Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) goals.

Industry involvement

Channel companies that sponsor academies also have the chance to enter teams into The Big Goal national football tournament. Following the completion of the regional finals tournaments, 12 teams will compete in the inaugural national finals at St. George's Park on 1st November, where The Big Goal National Champions will be crowned.

Giacom CEO Terry O'Brien commented: "The Big Goal is

a prime example of how we can catalyse positive change together and become a force for good in our communities. As headline sponsor, we are immensely proud of how the channel has united in support of this cause, bringing positive changes to communities and young lives nationwide. I urge other channel companies to follow suit – as Comms Dealer and Sky Business have recently done – and join us in this vital initiative to make an even greater impact."

To become a new member of the nationwide campaign to sponsor disadvantaged young people in your local community and take part in The Big Goal national football tournament, please visit: www.thebiggoal.co.uk to register.

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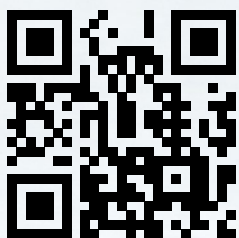
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Eclipse chief shines a light on growth plans

Eclipse Wholesale Group Managing Director James Drake established the business 20 years ago (to the month) with a partner centric approach that continues to underpin his growth strategy and ambition to become the number one channel aggregator for small to medium partners.

Eclipse Wholesale (originally known as Eclipse Telecom Networks) was established in 2004 by Drake after he took a sabbatical to explore career options. “I was considering a career in law when a former retail client reached out for help with a communications project that had gone wrong,” he explained. “Realising that we could deliver the services they needed better than the incumbent provider I decided to set up the business. Navigating the challenges of owning and managing a telecoms company is demanding, but the satisfaction of solving partners’ business issues is what motivates me to come into the office every day.”

A name change to Eclipse Wholesale Group was introduced in 2023 along with expansion into Scotland, offering resellers a new FTTP proposition which Drake says has been a ‘great success’ with 70 per cent of the guests invited to the launch now onboarded as partners. The company’s headcount has also grown substantially over the last 12 months (by 33 per cent) with the sales and customer



James Drake

Navigating the challenges of owning and managing a telecoms company is demanding, but the satisfaction of solving partners’ business issues is what motivates me to come into the office every day

service teams doubling in numbers. This growth trend is reflected in Eclipse’s last financial year which saw a 26 per cent revenue boost while partner onboarding increased by 48 per cent.

Ultimately, Drake wants Eclipse Wholesale to be known as the number one channel aggregator for small to medium partners. He hopes to

get there by consistently growing the channel partner base, onboarding the latest technology and building strong relationships with vendors. “Our biggest opportunity lies in connectivity and communications,” stated Drake. “Other factors in our planning include the rapid evolution of mobile and UC, the shift towards cloud-based solutions and the ongoing

digital transformation across industries. These trends guide how we will steer Eclipse Wholesale’s future direction.”

Driving value

Drake believes that the key to long-term success is ensuring that Eclipse’s wholesale model remains adaptable and value-driven for partners. “We are always assessing gaps in our portfolio to help partners achieve their goals,”

he added. “For example, we recently onboarded a new mobile network enabling Eclipse Wholesale to offer all major networks. We’ve also seen significant success with our 8x8 partnership, selling 439 licences since Q2. Additionally, 90 per cent of our resellers are now actively using our ESS portal which has been instrumental in our growth.”

Continued on page 14

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RAMPing up your margin potential

COTU's vendor agnostic call recording archive solution, called RAMP (Recording Archive Management Platform), gives partners and MSPs an opportunity to not only serve enterprise CX customers but also address the SME UC space where we are seeing significant growth, writes Al Peacock, Partner Manager, COTU. These customers want easy access to calls to improve customer service and/or manage complaints. And as customers move between cloud-based CPaaS platforms RAMP is retained as a single location for all calls.

RAMP can be leveraged as a pull through solution as it helps partners to close a

Pricing is designed to be low cost of setup/startup then grows as the archive increases in size – providing an excellent MRR boost for partners. Customers can dictate how long recordings are retained making it easy for partners for forecast margins.

All customers with a compliance requirement (whether FCA or other regulation) need to store calls for years. So the key markets for RAMP also include finance and insurance, along with healthcare and customer service. Retail too because of the new transcription features. Transcription is all about speed – it's much

"All customers with a compliance requirement need to store calls for years."

Al Peacock
Partner Manager, COTU

CX/UC deal because it ticks the compliance box. It's also useful to help partners with retention. The customer may move to another UC solution with a competitor but by retaining RAMP the partner keeps a foot in the door.

RAMP is agnostic to vendor/source, so MSPs can import archives from anywhere, either as one-off imports or on-demand. This allows partners to win deals by offering an end-to-end solution no matter what CX/UC product they are selling (or even multiple ones). We've also had partners offer RAMP as a standard solution with their UC offering to differentiate against competition.

easier to read a 10 minute call than listen to it. Also in the roadmap we have a feature to upload transcripts/summaries to CRMs.

Because call recording files and associated metadata are uploaded directly via integrations with a range of UC and CCaaS vendors, end users have a simple to use portal from which they can search, play, download or delete recording files - all based on individual user permissions. Existing archives can be migrated into RAMP from many sources, allowing your customers to utilise a simple service and to reduce archaic support contracts from existing or old vendors.

Contact Al Peacock via partners@cotu.uk

BUSINESS INTERVIEW



James Drake

Our greatest successes continue to be in mobile, UC, voice and connectivity – these areas will drive our growth in the future

Continued from page 12

Developing the partner programme has also proven to be key, along with a strong emphasis on the self-service portal. These factors underpin Drake's immediate priority which is to ensure a smooth transition for partners and their customers from analogue lines as part of the nationwide switch off. Although the deadline has been extended Eclipse Wholesale is still working towards a 2025 switch-off with its own project.

"This initiative is critical to our partners' success and we're committed to making it as seamless as possible," added Drake. "Long-term, we're focused on continuing the growth of our mobile offerings which have been our fastest growing product for two years. We recently onboarded a mobile specialist

and added all major networks to our portfolio. UC and voice is another key growth area that we will continue to develop after a successful first year with 8x8."

Pivotal moves

For Eclipse Wholesale Group the last five years have been pivotal, shifting to a channel-only approach, expanding into Scotland and exploring new areas across the UK with its growing sales team. "We identified that the channel was under serviced and knew our expertise could add substantial value," stated Drake. "Our greatest successes continue to be in mobile, UC, voice and connectivity – these areas will drive our growth in the future. Our channel-only approach, full partner programme and self-service portals are also major factors driving our evolution." ■

Just a minute with James Drake...

Role model: Roger Federer, a supremely talented individual who was at the top of his chosen field for two decades and remained incredibly humble.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: My left foot is half a shoe size smaller than my right foot.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? I would love to be involved in TV, film or theatre.

What do you fear most? Spiders.

Two ideal dinner guests: I recently lost my Mum (Sheila), a great and entertaining dinner guest; and Tom Jones to give us a little number.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I'm reliable, determined, resilient and have a strong work ethic, but I can be unpunctual, moody and messy.

If I could, I would... Transform the industry's approach to customer service, ensuring that all companies prioritise transparent communication and proactive support.

How did you get into the comms industry? I began my career as an apprentice technician with Kingston Communications having struck a deal with my parents that enabled me to drop out of A levels if I found a job with a reputable company.

In hindsight: I might have embraced the channel-only approach earlier or invested more in certain technologies sooner.

Your biggest career achievement? My longevity in the industry. Over 30 years later, I'm still passionate about making an impact in the channel. Establishing Eclipse Wholesale in 2004 and having the company still thriving and breaking its own records year after year is something I'm proud of.

How do you relax? I ski, cycle and run a little. And I love to spend time with Eclipse Wholesale's Welfare Officer, Maple the Goldie.

Top tip for resellers: Don't bank on future contractual revenue.

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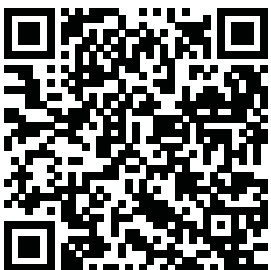
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Tech giant empowers channels

Currys Business Director Dean Kramer explains how resellers and small businesses can leverage the backing of a technology giant to feel safe in their investment and supercharge their businesses.

Small business owners and entrepreneurs

Currys Business understands that technology investments are a hugely significant decision for any company, especially microbusinesses with less budget and less room for error. This has historically led to a lack of spend in this segment as businesses see adoption and maintenance of new technology as cost prohibitive. However, this has not diminished this market's appetite. Kramer said: "We know that these customers are on the hunt for latest tech and great deals with innovative hardware and solutions because they are increasingly seeing the benefits larger organisations are reaping from modernising their systems."

"To unlock the same benefits in smaller markets we need to showcase breadth and affordability, so we work across all the B2B network operators looking for the best deal and solution to support our customers' needs."

"We also know that adopting technology is complicated and smaller businesses might not have the expertise or knowhow to properly gain the most from their investment. That's why we have dedicated business advisors on hand, who'll be able to help you every step of the way."

Currys Business offers the latest manufacturer hardware through to back up connectivity like connected mobile WiFi routers. This means teams can get up and running immediately and work from anywhere.



Dean Kramer

Currys Business empowers companies by providing them with great technology. Our mission is to bring these benefits to organisations of all sizes, from sole traders to large corporates, across all sectors. Central to our strategy is ensuring that the UK's microbusinesses and SMEs can leverage the same technology as large enterprises.

Did you know?

Currys Business covers all networks with connectivity on a 5G router. Prices from £14 per month for unlimited data.

For more information visit: <https://business.currys.co.uk/>

currys Business

el to supercharge small firms

SME Market from 10-50 employees

Technology is the key for supercharging growth in organisations with 10+ staff looking to grow to the next level. However, the process of searching and adopting this technology can cause a distraction that focused business leaders can ill-afford.

Kramer stated: "Something we emphasise to SMEs is how Currys Business can help business leaders to maintain a laser focus on their growth strategy, whilst giving them the tools to bolster them."

"We can do this by taking the fuss and the hassle out of mobile communications through our expert account managers and specialist mobile teams. We will look for flexible deals and value for money across all the key mobile networks, so they don't have to."

Currys Business works with the networks to ensure as little disruption to its customers' services as possible. Once it's up and running, the company has its expert Account Managers and trusted Customer Service team backed by the Currys brand to manage in-life support.

Currys Business boasts an 'Excellent' rating on Trustpilot. Kramer added: "Not only can we help manage the mobile solution, but we can help with broadband; offering market leading broadband products. Couple this with offering cloud voice solutions so SMEs can take their office anywhere using their business number wherever they are."



Currys Business has dedicated SMB Account Managers who provide support with all networks for customer choice, flexible pricing and regular account reviews.

What you need to know about Currys Business...

CURRYS Business is part of Currys, Europe's leading specialist electrical and telecommunications retailer and service provider. We're here to provide expert advice, so you can find the right technology to suit you and your business. From sole traders to large businesses, we work with businesses of all sizes, across an array of sectors. We understand that no two businesses are the same, so we tailor our products and services to find the right solution for you. Whatever technology or service you're looking

for, we can help. There is comfort to be had from the backing of a technology giant like Currys Business, which is part of Currys, Europe's household name electrical and telecommunications.

With over 30,000 business products available, whatever you need we've got it covered

For more information visit: <https://business.currys.co.uk/>

What 'Price' Is Customer Loyalty?

Many of us will be familiar with the discount customer reward programmes run by the major supermarkets – where reduced prices are available in return for personal information and data to gain more insights about our shopping habits.

But this is nothing new, especially for those of a more mature generation! It's a lot more sophisticated and tailored in today's digital world.

Productive Partnerships

Here at Evolve IP we believe customer loyalty should be recognised in the business world too, forging deeper relationships to drive growth in mutually beneficial ways.

get our partners engaged.

They want to be able to showcase their efforts and we are looking at ways of celebrating with them. How we can provide them with a pre-packaged marketing tool-kit to elevate and shout about their status, is one example. We're also reviewing how we can launch certain products within the programme. They value being part of the programme and see the value in providing structure and a clear journey for them to take.

Raising The Game

Evolve IP is all about keeping business simple, enhancing and differentiating our platform, solutions and most importantly our team. For example, we've just tripled our marketing team to provide enhanced levels of reseller

“ We boast an international carrier-grade network to deliver integrated remote workforce technologies that enable employees to perform anywhere ”

It's why we're launching an enhanced Partner Programme this month to recognise, inspire and reward our growing partner base, whatever stage of the journey they are on with us.

The initiative was officially launched this Spring and has been very well received so far. All our resellers are automatically enrolled and benefit from several incentives to support their growth. As their relationship grows, the recognition and incentives grow too to support them even further.

Sales enablement, marketing resources, and training academy access, to enhance the levels of account management support, are some of the many areas available. Based on the positive feedback we have developed phase two with even more benefits. Our partners are finding it very useful with a competitive element weaved in to

support. We're investing not just for the short term but the longer term and our partners recognise that too.

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, spearheaded by the latest version of our Partner Programme.

To hear more about the Partner Programme, join us at our webinar on Wednesday 18th September at 11:00 am GMT - evolveip.net/en-gb/webinar-events-page

Spotlight on FTTP market

Megabyte Chief Analyst Philip Carse spotlights the latest developments in the FTTP and altnet space, providing key insights based on analysis of new data.

Since the FTTP M&A fireworks of recent months (Netomnia/Brsk, FreedomFibre/VX, CityFibre/Lit Fibre), the subsequent period has been much quieter – more business as usual – with the main newsflow being the role of the UK state in subsidising broadband (Project Gigabit contract awards) as well as (the often related) supporting build through debt from the UK Infrastructure Bank (UKIB).



Philip Carse

Even the better funded altnets are tweaking plans to preserve cash.

totals to 15 million and 5.09 million respectively for a 33.9 per cent penetration rate, versus BT's premises target of 25 million by the end of 2026. Meanwhile, for the same quarter, VM02 added 295k full fibre premises, similar to the December 2023 rate including upgrades to the cable network taking the cable network taking full fibre to five million of its 17.5 million premises.

Gaining ground

But altnets are gaining ground. Openreach and VM02 collectively lost a record 208k broadband subscribers (of all flavours) in the June quarter, presumably a decent proxy for altnet gains. Even so, annualised, this is just three

per cent of the incumbent's broadband bases.

With commercial FTTP funding scarce, the state-backed UKIB is filling the void, leading funding for Quickline (£250 million) and Wildanet (£35 million), both accompanying Project Gigabit awards, Fibrus (£55 million out of £100m million package, and also has Project Gigabit contracts) and Hyperoptic (£150 million). The latter highlights the private sector funding logjam with Hyperoptic calling on the UKIB despite being one of the longest established altnets.

Our latest data highlights also include an estimated altnet roll out of premises passed of 14.9 million (CityFibre 3.7 million), up from 14.1 million last quarter. The altnets had collectively spent £7.5 billion Gross Book Value as of latest accounts (versus £7.1 billion last quarter). We estimate this is now £8.5-plus billion. Many altnets have yet to report customer numbers, with circa 10k a typical reportable milestone. Openreach has 5.1 million FTTP customers (across BT Retail and ISPs such as Sky, Vodafone and TalkTalk) versus 1.96 million combined altnet customers (1.7 million last quarter), led by Hyperoptic (400k) and CityFibre (300k). ■ philip.carse@megabyte.com

The environment otherwise remains tough for UK FTTP altnets (with a strong Openreach, ambitious VMO2, funding challenges, interest rates, cost inflation etc) with many rethinking their rollout and go-to-market strategies. Even the better funded altnets (CityFibre and Community Fibre for example) are tweaking plans to preserve cash, focusing on cost and capex efficiencies, routes to profitability and some even pausing or slowing their build. The recent lack of M&A is surely temporary given the inevitable industry consolidation.

Recent FTTP developments include Openreach setting the pace. The June 2024 quarter saw Openreach upgrade similar levels of premises (1,014k) and add subscribers (387k) as in the March quarter, taking the

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COMMS VISION CONVENTION 2024

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CONFERENCE UPDATE
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Remodelling technology and GTM planning

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Turning the dial on custo

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. Here, Damian Saunders, Managing Director, Sky Business Hospitality, Mid-Market & Wholesale (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor), shares insights into today's competitive technology marketplace and why getting closer to customers and understanding their future intentions is vital to securing new business and long-term growth.

The days of standalone connectivity businesses, voice and mobile firms are numbered, according to Saunders. Largely because the industry is moving from transactional technology upgrades to organisations requiring tangible value-creating

outcomes, which closes the gap between the customer's technology and business strategy. "Everything has converged, so MSPs must be prepared to broaden their offering and provide holistic solutions if they want to remain competitive," stated Saunders. "It's imperative for

MSPs to adopt a more consultative role, working closely with their customers to understand their business challenges and opportunities. This can involve offering strategic advice and customised solutions rather than one-size-fits-all products."

Marketing strategies therefore need to leverage digital channels to engage customers through personalised and targeted campaigns. "This is crucial for positioning the brand as a thought leader by providing valuable insights into industry trends and solutions," added Saunders. "Sales strategies are shifting towards a more consultative approach and should emphasise recurring revenue models, such as subscriptions and service bundles, to create stable income streams while aligning pricing with customer value through performance-based pricing models. Solution-selling is the future."

Backing the right horses

To drive value, MSPs must possess the knowledge and access to the products needed to build solutions, noted Saunders. "This means finding future-facing suppliers that 'get it' and can stand with them through an evolving market," he added. "Building confidence is key therefore MSPs should look to work with service providers they can trust. MSPs need to lean on product innovation, customer service and longevity. Building and maintaining strong partnerships is essential to enhancing market reach and meeting diverse customer needs effectively."

As a result, there then becomes a responsibility to feedback any insights upstream at partner



Damian Saunders



Customer engagement



COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK MSP community. To find out more visit www.commsvision.com

Sky Business Wholesale shares strategic insights with conferees at Comms Vision 2023

and provider level so they can be taken into the consideration of future business objectives, strategies and even roadmaps – and help sales, commercial and marketing leaders to overcome challenges. “It goes without saying that customers want value for money,” added Saunders. “This increasingly doesn’t necessarily mean the cheapest. As we are facing more and more into a digitally converged world, scalability, flexibility, security and trust are becoming more and more important. Customers need solutions that can flex and react in an easier fashion.”

To stay ahead of the go-to-market curve and to ensure a competitive advantage, the priority areas MSPs should be reviewing today include challenging themselves to be clear on what they’re doing to drive competitive advantage, and make sure they’re as close as possible to the latest market developments to inform their view of tomorrow, believes Saunders. “It’s critical to invest in the right external relationships – upstream and downstream,” he added. “With

How you are innovating could be a great starting point when considering a GTM approach

awareness of the market context and the right inputs from those in a better vantage point, the right path is often obvious.”

Winners defined by customer proximity

Saunders noted that the MSPs that will win in the future will be those that are closest to their customers and have the clearest understanding of their evolving needs. “As the world gets more complex, the partners who can distil complex into simple, making it as easy as possible for their customers to win and grow, will be the ones that prevail the best,” he added. “In order to achieve this, often there will be tough

choices as driving simplicity is hard. Often saying ‘no’ is the hard, but right thing to do.”

Saunders observes ‘plenty’ of MSPs having change thrust upon them, putting them on a defensive footing. “For those who face into the changes our industry is experiencing there is an opportunity to present as experts and specialists,” he said. “There’s still an early-adopter advantage in doing so. Those with their head in the sand risk being left behind.”

For MSPs to create differentiation in their GTM approaches it’s necessary to stay in tune with what makes them competitive, believes Saunders. “Innovation is what drives success,” he said. “How you are innovating could be a great starting point when considering your GTM approach. Shifting market dynamics present an opportunity for MSPs to revisit what makes them competitive. And if we as an industry are doing that as a collective, then we can be excited by the impact on our customers and the markets we serve in the years ahead.” ■

Comms Vision Special Feature continues to page 32



Top five technology forces

The technology trends and developments at the forefront of industry change are reshaping how the channel views and addresses the market – and to help resellers and MSPs steer a course Gavin Jones, Channel Director, BT Wholesale (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor) draws on the results of the company’s latest research as he navigates a route through his top five channel change-drivers.

We all know that being in the channel means adapting to rapid change. Approaching Comms Vision yet again, it’s incredible to think about what has been achieved over the past year. As the channel continues to evolve – driven by emerging technologies and shifting business priorities – resellers and MSPs must embrace tech innovation and foster strong relationships with customers.

To understand the tech forces shaping the channel’s future it’s crucial to link customer priorities to tech investment. Businesses today are laser-focused on enhancing customer satisfaction and retention and

need to invest in the right solutions to support this. With 75 per cent of IT decision makers planning tech investments within the next year, there is a shining opportunity for channel partners.

BT has identified five interconnected tech forces reshaping the channel:

1. Keeping it simple with UCaaS

It’s now the norm to have at least one remote work day per week. With positive impacts on employee mental health and work-life balance, hybrid work models will persist. To support this, Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS)

are critical. Our Partner Plus report found that many IT decision makers agree they need fewer applications (75 per cent) and simplified ways to collaborate (72 per cent), yet less than half already have a UCaaS platform in place. With the UCaaS market set to be worth over £155 billion by 2030 there’s a massive opportunity for MSPs and resellers to educate customers about all of the positive impacts of collaboration, wellbeing and productivity. To stay on top of growing customer demands partners must guide their customers towards value add features like integrated phone calls, fraud management and call analytics.

2. All-IP is happening

It’s impossible to talk about tech forces in the channel without mentioning All-IP. Customers want All-IP but sometimes don’t fully understand the benefits. It’s the job of the channel to educate them. Our research shows employees want better connectivity – 65 per cent say they need faster connectivity and 70 per cent say they want more reliable connectivity. My message to the channel



Gavin Jones

With the UCaaS market set to be worth over £155 billion by 2030 there’s a massive opportunity for MSPs and resellers to educate customers about all of the positive impacts of collaboration, wellbeing and productivity

es reshaping the channel



BT Wholesale updates delegates during a boardroom session at Comms Vision 2023

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is simple: Act now to future-proof your operations and reap the rewards of being a digital business.

3. Completing portfolios with mobile

Today, smart channel players are investing in both All-IP and 5G to maximise the strength and reliability of their connections. As the 5G rollout continues at pace, 78 per cent of channel players say that their customers are asking about 5G. This need is one of the key drivers of BT Wholesale's Complete Mobile solution for the SMB market, bringing EE to the channel.

4. The AI hype

The buzz surrounding AI has created a demand for solutions within businesses. 60 per cent of IT decision makers expect to make investments in AI in the coming year – and over half of employees are asking for such investments. This growing interest in new technologies means client conversations should be focused on the network requirements to make AI adoption a success. Whatever customers use AI for they need their network to be built on a rock-solid foundation.

My message to the channel is simple: Act now to future-proof your operations and reap the rewards of being a digital business

5. Building a more sustainable future

Finally, sustainability is rightly gaining traction. Around 40 per cent of resellers and a third of customers view sustainability as a real priority. This is driving investment in All-IP and cloud solutions which play a significant role in achieving sustainability goals by reducing reliance on physical infrastructure. For MSPs and resellers it's important to partner with vendors that align with their sustainability goals and are actively driving the agenda.

The growing complexity of technology underscores the vital role channel partners play as educators, enablers and problem solvers. MSPs and resellers must bridge the knowledge gap for customers, translating tech jargon into business benefits. Simplifying the communication of tech propositions and demonstrating clear ROI will be essential for driving customer action and preventing inertia.

By emphasising the unique value of services and adopting go-to-market strategies that highlight their expertise and customer-centric approach, channel partners can differentiate themselves from competitors. Building strong, face-to-face relationships with clients will further enhance trust and loyalty, providing a competitive edge in an increasingly digital world.

The key to success lies in aligning with customers' priorities, addressing evolving tech requirements and embracing new technologies. And maintaining channel partners as trusted advisors is crucial in navigating this landscape and driving meaningful, long-term success. ■



Optimising technology r

Here, John Chester, Director of Wholesale, Fixed, Virgin Media O2 Business (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor), assesses the key technology developments MSPs would be wise to prioritise and the critical importance of reviewing tech stacks and roadmaps through an innovation and future-focused lens.

As we move from transactional technology upgrades to solutions that provide tangible value-creating outcomes, MSPs are seeing a significant shift in customer engagement strategies, observes Chester. "More MSPs are selling an increasing number of services that are deemed mission-critical by their end users," he stated. "The recent Microsoft-Crowdstrike outage exemplifies how crucial reliable services have become across various industries. Technology is no longer merely an enabling function, it adds substantial value to a business strategy. This shift is closing the gap between technology and business strategy, making quality connectivity an essential foundation."

Chester has also witnessed MSPs getting on the front foot earlier in the process, which allows for more significant value creation opportunities. "For example, one of our partners is currently shaping a 200-site service offering, engaging us early to help develop the best possible response

in terms of value levers for the end customer," he added. "This early engagement with connectivity providers ensures a comprehensive approach to customer engagement, helping businesses meet their strategic objectives more effectively."

Understanding the evolution of marketing and selling is key and demands that resellers and MSPs make it easy for customers to buy and consume their services. To facilitate this requirement Virgin Media Business Wholesale has invested in APIs and its Smart Planning Tool (SPT) to streamline this process. "Customer experience starts with pre-sales and extends through delivery and service management, ensuring everything performs as expected from SLAs to outage management," added Chester.

He also noted that to meet the demands of business transformation and customer experience it is crucial to layer differentiated CX approaches on top of price-driven services like Ethernet.

"Embracing digital innovation is key," stated Chester. "Those who can offer a seamless digital portal journey are making the most progress. Automation and the ability to provision services with minimal friction are critical factors for success in this evolving landscape. Finally, binding the above ambitions into innovative commercial arrangements with partners should create a willingness to increase enjoyment in revenues."

Keeping up with the pace of change

Currently, one of the biggest challenges facing sales, commercial and marketing leaders in the channel right now is maintaining pace with customer experience demands amidst delivery and pricing pressures, believes Chester. "We've improved our delivery performance significantly over the past year and keeping up with the evolving needs of our customers remains a priority," he confirmed. "Additionally, the national Ethernet market is price sensitive, with competitor economics having the potential to impact our competitive landscape."

Chester believes that price certainty fosters mutual success. "However, these challenges also present opportunities to work with partners with whom we can create mutual value," he added. "By picking the right partners and focusing on mutual value creation we can address substantial



John Chester

Automation and the ability to provision services with minimal friction are critical factors for success in this evolving landscape

roadmap strategies



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Virgin Media O2 Business' Head of Business Partners Raza Baloch talks culture at Comms Vision 2023

backlogs and manage large-scale projects more effectively. For instance, implementing project management around multi-site orders enhances customer experience and ensures better delivery outcomes and increased financial benefits for our partners. This strategic approach helps us convert challenges into opportunities for growth and improved partnerships."

Identifying priority areas

To stay ahead of the go-to-market curve and to ensure a competitive advantage, the priority areas MSPs should be reviewing today include identifying the sectors they want to serve and the composition of their service stack, noted Chester. "Capital availability also plays a significant role," he added. "Those selling connectivity with a narrow spread must manage working capital diligently. Businesses investing heavily in their portals and core networks, while also offering their own and third party services, need to focus on capital accessibility and allocation. Partnering with wholesalers allows MSPs to benefit from pre-invested networks, enabling them to divert their capital towards enhancing their core business. Capital allocation

Technology is no longer an enabling function, it adds substantial value to a business strategy. This shift is closing the gap between techn and business strategy

should align with the areas where MSPs have the most expertise and capacity for innovation."

MSPs may face tough decisions as they remodel for future growth. Key to this is knowing exactly where their strengths are and where they can create shareholder value. "Focusing on a narrow range of solutions with broad flexibility in commercial and delivery terms is often more beneficial than expanding into areas outside

your core competencies," commented Chester. For example, we've chosen to dedicate ourselves to supporting our partners' growth rather than diversifying into non-core areas. MSPs need clarity in their sector focus and product offerings and must be pragmatic about whether to build or buy. By aligning their strategies with core strengths and leveraging partnerships effectively MSPs can make informed decisions that drive future growth."

The big opportunity for MSPs is choosing how to deploy capital and knowing exactly where the levers for creating shareholder value lie, reiterated Chester. "Ultimately, any remodelling needs to be in the best interest of MSPs' own end customers," he commented. "Furthermore, drawing an effective line between underlying connectivity and overlay services creates an opportunity for MSPs to stick to their knitting. On the connectivity side, Virgin Media Business Wholesale is able to create and foster effective partnerships that allow MSPs to focus on their core service stack. This approach creates a strong opportunity for MSPs to double down on their own end customer demands, creating a trusted partner environment." ■



Strategic responses that

Understanding the tech forces reshaping the channel's future is a top priority for all resellers and MSPs, and making the right strategic choices in terms of proposition development is key, writes Neil Wilson, Chief Product and Marketing Officer and Paul Smith, Chief Sales Officer, PXC (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor).

When looking at the tech forces reshaping the channel it's crucial to consider the economic environment in which they exist.

In a world of high interest rates, inflation and rising costs of living, juxtaposed with highly competitive and commoditised markets, UK businesses must position themselves as lean, responsive and adaptable, to effectively serve evolving customer demands in such tough climates. Technology is critical to deliver these benefits, while also vital in helping businesses achieve their goal of doing more with less.

The pressures being put on professionals to remove business costs through automation, diversify portfolios to sell more to those we already sell to, and remove legacy to provide products that

suit evolving customer requirements, all feed into that agenda. The challenge is in delivering these outcomes while staying within budget.

This provides a huge opportunity for the channel to help businesses make the most of what they've already spent and to help them invest their future money wisely. As such, much potential can be realised by directing people away from CAPEX investments to OPEX investments, so that costs grow and decrease as a business does.

The growing role of channel partners

As customer needs evolve, IT must follow suit – which we've seen in the drive towards full fibre, calling for connectivity to be more reliable, plus quicker and safer to use. It's no surprise then, that the ICT world and the range of solutions on offer

is only getting bigger and more complex. Yet, to make matters more complicated, many businesses have stripped out their expert knowledge in recent years, opting instead to buy in services as managed solutions. This puts emphasis on the growing opportunity for channel partners to act as technology educators and enablers, to fulfil the skills gap that exists for end customers today.

While a business might be clear on the strategic direction they want to go in, they may not have the skills to undertake the vendor selection piece, which provides opportunities in consultancy. In contrast, a business might know the direction they want to go in but not have the bandwidth to project manage that, providing opportunities in service implementation. However, while great opportunities, there is still more channel partners can do to close that knowledge gap. As the telecoms ecosystem continues to expand it brings with it rapid convergence. This means that while conversations like connectivity and voice used to be separate and distinct, they now overlap as the products and services work in tandem, calling for businesses to have multidisciplinary expertise which isn't always the easiest talent to find.

We believe that vendors have an important role to overcome this issue and empower the



Neil Wilson

With services now more intertwined than ever, if you're not embracing new technologies you're going to get left behind

harness market change



Paul Smith

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channel by providing them with the skills or the backup to support their services. At PXC, we offer a pre-sales team, partner training and comprehensive service literature to upskill our partners so that they have the knowledge and expertise to effectively serve their end customers.

Embedding new technologies

It's true that the telecoms market has always been, and will always be, driven by emerging technologies because it's a fast-moving market that is continually growing with customer demand and innovation. With services now more intertwined than ever, if you're not embracing new technologies you're going to get left behind because other companies are. Because of this, managed services providers should always be looking ahead to what's coming to be able to diversify their offerings and give the channel what it needs to stay competitive. The caveat is in striking the right balance between focus and diversification – having the products that suit your customer base yet finding complementary products and solutions to what you already offer to tap into new revenue streams.

When it comes to embracing any new technology, the priority should always be the customer

When it comes to embracing any new technology, the priority should always be the customer. With so many new technologies out there, it's easy to get involved in technology for technology's sake. The trick is to continually review your tech stacks alongside your customer's strategies to ensure they align. It's about being rigorous from the beginning to ensure what you're onboarding is right for your market to give you the best chance of generating a return.

Once you've onboarded a product it's then about not jumping to the next one too quickly. Launching a product is not just about being able to sell it,

but having it natively embedded into everyone's pitch so that your people are comfortable selling it, and your customers are comfortable using it.

You must give a product time to succeed which sometimes means getting comfortable moving at a pace different to the channel if it helps serve your customers better. The difficult task, that needs to be achieved by MSPs, is keeping one eye on the future while not losing sight of the present.

Finally, it's inevitable that as technologies age they become more commoditised, but that doesn't mean you stop focusing on them. At PXC our backbone is connectivity, an incredibly mature product offered by lots of providers. To diversify our offering we look for solutions that are complementary to it – like DDoS Protection and Zoom – to give our customers more of what they need in one solution. It's about continuous consultation when considering your go-to-market approach – why do my customers want the products they're asking for – rather than simply focusing on products because if you focus on products, you're very easy to compare against. ■

Multifaceted priorities to

To harness industry change and secure long-term progress it is imperative for resellers and MSPs to reimagine their business communications and GTM approaches, writes Andy Smethurst, Channel Sales Director, Gamma (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor). Here, he identifies the critical priority areas for channel firms to consider and shares insights into the strategic interventions that could have the biggest impact on driving sustainable growth.

Balancing today's strategic priorities means looking at the market and its many opportunities and challenges through a multifaceted lens, which calls for fresh thinking and holistic decision making. Consider this: Businesses are navigating a complex mix of emerging technologies, cybersecurity concerns and the need for agility in a rapidly changing environment. They are also facing into challenges and opportunities around digitalisation, customer engagement, cloud transformation and grappling with what AI means for them, alongside 5G technologies and the IoT – as well as ongoing efforts around sustainability. End users lack the expertise to fully understand and implement these solutions. Therefore channel partners will be increasingly required to educate customers on the value, capabilities and best practices of these newer technologies. Understanding these drivers and how they will shape end user tech requirements over the

next three to five years is going to be crucial to the future success of MSPs and their revenue models.

MSPs are already seeing customer revenue models differently. Gone are the days of selling 'things' on a contract period. MSPs are now on a consultative journey, constantly sharing solutions and services that could benefit customers. So channel partners need to become trusted advisors, helping end users understand which technologies align best with their strategic goals; while advising how to integrate systems as seamlessly as possible, often with the adoption of hybrid or multi-cloud environments taking into account security and compliance. This way, channel partners can help businesses solve complex problems with comprehensive solutions, rather than just sell products.

A key question for MSP to ask is whether they are keeping up with technological

advancements in their portfolio. And with ever greater importance placed on the integration of these technologies, along with scalability and personalised solutions, are MSPs mindful of the opportunity to keep customers supply chains trim? These questions should also be considered in the wider context of the increased emphasis on security and sustainability.

With all this comes a need for upskilling, talent acquisition and talent management. A supplier's role is to offer comprehensive and ongoing training, whether that's webinars, online courses, hands-on workshops or accreditations that can help partners differentiate. MSPs and resellers should also weigh up the quality of partner portals and the resources available to them, including product documentation, case studies, competitive analysis and marketing materials. Suppliers also need to work with channel partners to feed into product development as they are the ones engaged with customers. This can be done directly or through creating forums and communities between supplier and partner



Successful business transformation is reliant on potential synergies between emerging and mature technologies and how MSPs help organisations to successfully balance their adoption

define MSP action plans



Matt Worboys, Business Development Director – Channel, Gamma (centre), at last year's Comms Vision

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experts for sharing feedback and knowledge. Another question resellers and MSPs should address is the extent to which business and industry transformation is being driven by emerging technologies rather than more mature products and services. Gamma believes that emerging technologies are driving change but still very much in conjunction with mature products and services. Technologies like AI, 5G and IoT are pushing the boundaries, changing business models, enhancing customer experiences and driving efficiencies. But they need to be integrated with the more mature technologies that are foundational for stability, scalability and security. Therefore successful business transformation is reliant on potential synergies between emerging and mature technologies and how MSPs help organisations to successfully balance their adoption.

Time to embrace new technology

The channel needs to embrace emerging technology now to meet customer demands, drive new revenue streams and remain competitive. Moreover, end customers will increasingly seek solutions that will give them an edge, so MSPs that evolve will stay relevant. Those that stick to their traditional approaches could see their customers migrate to more forward-thinking providers. The good news is that most MSPs have embraced cloud solutions and many have invested heavily in improving automations. Understanding what AI

The channel needs to embrace emerging technology now to meet customer demands, drive new revenue streams and remain competitive

means for them, and possibly branching out into areas like cybersecurity and the IoT are other ways of entering the emerging tech landscape. The key is to expand into these technologies strategically by starting small, recruiting the capability or making small acquisitions that provide those skill sets and capabilities (while aligning new services with the needs of your existing customer base).

This also means keeping tech stacks under constant review, and strategic partnerships play a huge role in this process, allowing MSPs to expand portfolios, share risk and innovate. By staying agile, forward thinking and collaborative MSPs can maintain their relevance and drive success. In summary, this winning formula prioritises a

mix of customer-centric support, the adoption of emerging technologies, optimising operational efficiencies, making the right decisions on strategic partnerships and developing (or acquiring) talent.

Another big challenge facing resellers and MSPs is combating commoditisation through the right technology and GTM approaches. In fact it's the biggest challenge. But it can be achieved by leveraging newer technologies and being innovative with go-to-market strategies – both of which will help to differentiate, increase value and margins. A good starting point is operating in niche markets or verticals, honing in on specific solutions that solve specific challenges within those verticals. Bundling services into tailored solutions can make it harder to be compared to on price alone. And proactive, verticalised customer engagement with commercial innovation means resellers and MSPs become more of a partner than a provider.

A relatively novel and fairly new commercial model can involve outcome-based pricing. For example, charging based on up-time, proven cost savings through cloud adoption or increased turnover metrics. These all serve to underline the value delivered rather than simply the cost of the service, which strengthens the MSP and customer relationship, helping to maintain pricing power, combat commoditisation, while driving sustainable growth in a competitive marketplace. ■



Driving differentiation t

With competition for new customers growing fiercer by the day it's prime time for MSPs to reassess their sales and go-to-market (GTM) strategies, says Kathryn Platt, Head of Indirect Business, Vodafone UK (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor). Here, she discusses the pivotal GTM success factors and strategic actions that will drive differentiation and competitiveness for ambitious MSPs.

The need for MSPs to more deeply engage with customers and fully understand their requirements has never been so critical. And establishing how to drive differentiation and value in a rapidly evolving marketplace has also become a top priority for MSPs. From the outset, GTM strategies should be focused around creating differentiation through the full spectrum of customer engagement approaches, whether it be simplified user platforms, excellent customer service or a unique digital offering that makes MSPs easier to do business with.

Vodafone believes there are three interconnected success factors for resellers and MSPs to focus on as they transition their GTM strategies towards closer customer engagement, business transformation and the CX demands of end users. Firstly, MSPs need to consider how they

can position their service within a TCO (Total Cost of Ownership) model (for example, investing in a new technology to drive savings elsewhere and/or open new revenue streams). Secondly, customers are now familiar with self-service portals, and their expectations are that 90 per cent of interactions will be digital and visible in one place (as part of a digital ecosystem). Thirdly, MSPs must be creative in adapting to inflationary pressures, such as an increasing cost base and sustainable business model, and lean on the expertise of technology partners.

Customer engagement is not just about how much MSPs can save customers, but how they can leverage technology to enable a seamless and efficient service. Understanding the future intentions of customers is also vital to securing new business and long-term growth. Businesses

are more tech-savvy than ever and with that comes the expectation that technology will help them drive productivity and develop even closer relationships with their own customers.

Overcoming challenges

But there are several challenges facing sales, commercial and marketing leaders in the channel. The commoditisation of mobile and fixed connectivity services against a backdrop of rising costs caused by the current economic climate leaves little room for innovation or adding value. In addition, the inflationary impact on price rises driving pre-to-post (P2P) erosion means customers are demanding better prices at renewal as their spending becomes more restrained.

Moreover, transactional technology upgrades have effectively commoditised pricing for a long time. While this offers great savings for customers it does reduce the MSP's ability to layer on additional value. This requires MSPs to make tough decisions about their future growth. To stay ahead of the GTM curve and to ensure a competitive advantage they need to make the right long-term commercial decisions by investing in the strategic relationships that will help drive their business.

In a competitive landscape, MSPs need to play to their strengths to stand out from the crowd.

How to drive differentiation and value in a rapidly evolving marketplace has become a top priority for MSPs



Kathryn Platt

through GTM strategies



Vodafone's Sustainable Business Manager Emma Kidd outlines green strategies at Comms Vision 2023

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This may mean making a commitment to new technology rather than focusing on existing tech. If MSPs are delivering unique value they need to be prepared to charge more rather than chase lower margins. A great example of this would be the rise of exciting AI solutions like virtual assistants, large language model chatbots and automated response systems.

This means that an informed and effective customer engagement strategy is vital. These approaches must pivot towards offering bundles and best of breed services backed by a compelling narrative to outline how they can unlock real value that helps the customer achieve their objectives. At Vodafone, we understand MSPs are expected to become experts and we can support them with the right infrastructure (for example, digital portals) to support their customers.

We must also remember that the competitive landscape for MSPs is more aggressive than it has ever been. And there are some 'false truths' to contend with, such as the misconception that it is difficult to change providers, which

There is a huge opportunity for MSPs to open up their sales and marketing potential if they remodel what they are traditionally known for and commit their GTM strategy to specific technologies and markets

only creates hesitancy for customers even when presented with new offers that can potentially provide greater savings.

Yet with challenges always come opportunities. While customers are more aware of the

role technology can play in developing their business, there is still uncertainty about how to bring these benefits to life. It is also becoming increasingly difficult for MSPs to keep pace with the technological demands of customers due to complex back-end systems. MSPs need to work with their technology partners to meet the growing expectations of their customers, helping them stitch together complex engagement strategies across IT and managed services, ensure slick integration journeys, create better customer experiences and develop bundle propositions that address customers' growing technology requirements, allowing them to refocus on their core business.

There is also a huge opportunity for MSPs to open up their sales and marketing potential if they remodel what they are traditionally known for and commit their GTM strategy to specific technologies and markets as a specialist. The most successful MSPs will retain their core strengths but diversify quickly into different areas. This agility will enable them to partner with strategic suppliers and provide opportunities through mergers and acquisitions to combine services. ■



The industry change drivers

Industry leaders representing this year's Comms Vision Gold and Silver sponsors unravel the transformational forces reshaping the channel and technology landscape and why they should not be ignored.



JOE MCSTRAVICK
HEAD OF CHANNEL
AND STRATEGIC
ALLIANCES EMEA
ZOOM

ZOOM sees the overriding tech priorities as customer experience, collaboration and AI. As more customers are exposed to technologies designed to aid their work experience, they are seeking services that consolidate their needs into a single user interface. Unlike mature products that may string together different applications, the wider industry is turning to single-source solutions that are reliable, pervasive and easy to use with a common look and feel. Partnering with the right vendor is important in providing customers the best-in-class applications with a product set that meets their needs and growth plans.



Cally Beaton speaking at the 2023 Comms Vision Convention



NICK KEWNEY
CTO
LAYER SYSTEMS

BUSINESS transformation is increasingly driven by technologies like AI and machine learning. These enable businesses to refine strategies, uncover insights and innovate faster. Resellers can use machine learning to improve efficiencies, such as training service teams and auto-provisioning supplier services. Employees can access real-time answers to customer questions using a knowledge model built from their data, accelerating learning and improving accuracy, resulting in better customer satisfaction. Strong supplier relationships, high quality data and customer trust remain key. Successful transformation blends these fundamentals with cutting-edge tools.



DIMITRI OSLER
CTO
WILDIX

BUSINESS transformation is being driven by emerging technologies and companies need to understand what works, quickly. MSPs are the answer. It's vital that MSPs embrace emerging technologies to understand what the market needs and act as trusted advisors. MSPs who don't do this will find themselves left behind. They need to focus on the technologies that work, not those that make the most noise. Continuous assessment is the way forward and MSPs must reject solutions that no longer fit their needs. AI services are everywhere but you must have a great vendor partnership to deliver them.



CHRIS ROMEIKA
CO-FOUNDER AND
CTO
PANGEA

THE demand for innovation and competitive differentiation is pushing the adoption of emerging technologies like AI, 5G and LPWAN to optimise operations, reduce costs and enhance customer experiences. While mature products provide stability, it is emerging technologies that are reshaping the future of business transformation. For MSPs, there's never been a better time to tap into this emerging tech landscape. Predictions indicate opportunities to offer new services, modernise legacy infrastructure and enhance existing solutions. Success will depend on building expertise in sector-specific applications and forming strong partnerships. The right partners will guide MSPs to make strategic tech stack decisions that differentiate them and help build agile roadmaps.

s that should not be ignored



NATHAN RONCHETTI
CTO
VOICEFLEX

NEW technology comes with new challenges for security and compliance. Identifying risks and implementing robust security in solutions must be a top priority. To compete against the self-serve model you need to adapt quickly and be flexible in your offering. Gathering regular feedback on solutions will allow you to adapt and provide upselling opportunities. Combining different products into tailored solutions for customer problems will lead to higher customer retention and less churn. The pieces of the puzzle might be commodity products but the solutions will be bespoke. solutions to fulfil customer needs.



JAMIE HUGHES
UK SALES DIRECTOR
EVOLVE IP

THE role of a reseller continues to evolve in an increasingly converged world of connectivity and collaboration. The days of separate voice and IT specialists will diminish as partners juggle more integrated skills and services. This convergence of technology has triggered an increase in cross-sell and up-sell opportunities and created a few challenges. It's crucial to remain agile and fit for the future. Avoid the race to the bottom on price and focus on the value that you provide the customer.



DARREN GARLAND
MD
PROVU
COMMUNICATIONS

WE are seeing partners begin to broaden their portfolios. Discussions are also being had regarding the resilience of communication solutions. Linking communication tools while ensuring they are independently resilient might be a wiser strategy. End users now seek streamlined, all-in-one services with a single contact for support. While these changes require adjustment for MSPs, they also open up new opportunities. To stay competitive, channel partners must constantly evolve and diversify and make technology accessible.



ELLIE ALLSEYBROOK,
BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT
DIRECTOR, INFORM
BILLING

THE priority has always been identifying solutions that solve customers' problems. What's changing is the need to solve additional problems using technology such as AI and analytics. Most companies are sitting on large volumes of data but aren't familiar with the tools available to optimise their business intelligence solutions. Providing solutions to these problems through strategic partnerships will be a necessity. Commoditisation can be combatted by creating product and service combinations that add real value. By wrapping up multiple product types and services, MSPs can price and bill these in a way that avoids comparison and commoditisation of individual elements and helps reduce churn.



DAVE REYNOLDS
MANAGING
DIRECTOR UK
XELION

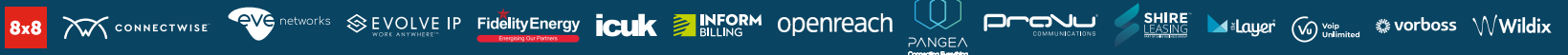
THE biggest drivers of transformation are more mature technologies like cloud. Businesses are looking to integrate and unify cloud services in a more connected environment. Emerging technology like AI is increasingly important, but the transformations we see are more about maximising the potential of existing cloud services. MSPs should always be looking at emerging technology, and most will already provide software that uses AI in one way or another. It's important to establish whether the technology has a real-world business application. It's easy to fall into the trap of adding gimmicky AI features for the sake of it.



MARK PILLOW
MD
VOIP UNLIMITED

ICT buyers are prioritising solutions that deliver seamless integration, ease of management and long-term reliability. This has also led to buyers focusing on consolidating their technology stacks. This shift has prompted MSPs to adjust propositions to accommodate a broader range of services and act as the lynchpin between them. Nowhere is that more critical than in the AI space where buyers are interested but often without a clear understanding of its purpose, potential or pitfalls. This shift underscores the critical value of channel partners in educating, enabling and solving problems for clients.

SILVER SPONSORS



Join us for the party of the year at Westminster

The comms industry's most coveted awards returns to the Park Plaza in Westminster – be part of it!



The Comms National Awards, acclaimed as the UK ICT Channel's top awards event, returns to the Park Plaza Hotel in the heart of Westminster, London on the 26th of September 2024. The 2024 finalists have been announced so now is the time to book your place at the ICT channel networking event of the Autumn.

Now in its 23rd year, the Comms National Awards is the ICT channel's most respected and coveted awards process, recognising the success of UK resellers and the suppliers who support them in providing top class solutions to public and private sector business customers. Headline sponsored

for the fifth year by Giacom and independently judged by our selected panel of distinguished industry experts, the process rewards quality across the channel spectrum with awards in both reseller (customer solutions) and vendor (service to the channel) categories.

As ever, the entertainment on the night will be top notch. Last year, broadcaster Vernon Kay was the consummate entertainer and awards host, and who could forget the 2018 event, when Spandau Ballet legend Tony Hadley provided a 'Gold' curtain raiser and this year, 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 have always been a key event in our industry, recognising exceptional channel businesses that deliver outstanding solutions for their partners and customers. 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 awards.

Terry O'Brien, Chief Executive Officer, Giacom

For all the finalists and to book your place visit www.cnawards.com

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A word from our sponsors



"ANS Group is thrilled to be a key sponsor of the Comms National Awards 2024. As always, it promises to be an amazing evening uniting the channel to acknowledge and celebrate the dedication within the industry. I wish all finalists the best of luck and look forward to celebrating with you at the event!"

Richard Thompson, Chief Executive Officer, ANS Group



It is a pleasure to be once again supporting the Comms National Awards. These awards are a key event in the channel calendar and it's wonderful to come together to celebrate the success and achievements across our community. Gamma is delighted to sponsor the UC Customer Solution category, and we wish all the finalists the best of luck.

Andy Smethurst, Channel Sales Director, Gamma



Cherie Howlett, Jola CMO, of the Best Enterprise Mobile/IoT Customer Solution and Best SME Mobile/IoT Customer Solution category sponsor commented. "We help partners to find and win profitable mobile data, and M2M and IoT opportunities providing innovative solutions you cannot buy from anyone else. We are looking forward to celebrating resellers who have excelled in this area. The opportunity for the channel is massive."

Cherie Howlett, Chief Marketing Officer, Jola



At Sky Business, we're determined to make a positive impact on the world. Through Sky Up, we help people fulfil their potential by giving them access to the internet in our 70 Hubs, as well as providing access to digital training and bespoke events, unlocking opportunities in our industry. Through Sky Zero, we're reducing our environmental impact and inspiring others to do the same. That's why we're delighted to be sponsoring the Positive Impact category in this year's Comms National Awards.

Damian Saunders, Managing Director; Sky Business Hospitality, Mid-Market & Wholesale.



"TelXL are proud to be sponsoring the Best SME Contact Centre Customer Reseller Solution at CNA 2024. We are also honoured to be finalist nominees in the best CCaaS Vendor category for our continuing work in the channel to impact small and medium contact centre CX. Looking forward to it!"

Aaron Fox CEO TelXL Ltd.



A word from our sponsors (cont'd)



"BT Wholesale is proud to be nominated in the Sustainability and Best Network Service Provider categories at the highly anticipated CNA's this year. We're also sponsoring the after party for the second year in a row, and we can't wait to catch up with old and new friends on the night. Best of luck to all the finalists – see you on the dance floor!"

Gavin Jones, Channel Director, BT Wholesale



Inform Billing are proud to be once again sponsoring the CNA Awards, recognising excellence within our industry. This sponsorship reflects our commitment to fostering innovation, growth, and success. We look forward to celebrating the achievements of all the nominees and supporting an event that showcases the best in our field.

Shaun Bodsworth, MD, Inform Billing



CNA sets the gold standard for awards in the ICT channel. In our work, we see the exceptional talent, effort and creativity that represents everything that is great about our sector and it's important to recognise and celebrate this success. We are proud once again, to be sponsoring the Entrepreneur of the Year Award at this year's CNAs and look forward to congratulating all the finalists.

Adam Zoldan, Director, Knight Corporate Finance



The Comms National Awards always brings the best of the industry under one roof, and it's a great platform to recognise and celebrate the remarkable achievements of our peers. PXC is proud to be sponsoring the Business Innovation award, to shine a spotlight on those who are changing the future of the industry.

Neil Wilson, Chief Product and Marketing Officer, PXC



Paul Taylor, CCO, "We're thrilled to be sponsoring the Best SME Vertical Market Customer Solution category at this year's Comms National Awards. As a key event in the industry, these awards celebrate the outstanding dedication and success within the Channel. As we continue our move from Telco to Techco, we're excited to support innovative solutions that drive the SME sector forward. Best of luck to all finalists—we look forward to celebrating with you on the 26th of September!"

Paul Taylor, Chief Commercial Officer, Voiceflex



"Xelion are honoured to be a part of this year's Comms National Awards. We're proud to be a channel business, and these awards are a chance to recognise and celebrate the dynamism and innovation of our sector.

These awards bring the channel together to forge relationships and recognise the pure excellence within the industry. Good luck to all the finalists, and here's to an amazing event."

Craig Howell, Sales Director, Xelion





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CrowdStrike's global IT outage in July impacted circa 8.5 million devices and showed us that security threats can come from all angles – providing food for thought among channel leaders.



CHARLIE BOISSEAU
CTO
COMMSWORLD

WE encourage businesses to enquire with their service providers about what goes on 'under the hood' of the infrastructure they provide and signpost the areas where risk might be introduced. This incident underlined and reinforced messages to our customers when designing their digital infrastructure solutions, which ultimately come down to risk management: Yes, your Windows devices should be secured, so CrowdStrike might be a sensible option, but using third party software may introduce additional risk. The same might be true of decisions to move your hosting to the cloud or your network to SD-WAN. All these solutions mitigate risks in some areas but may also add risks in other areas.



RICHARD MAY
CEO
VIRTUALDCS

BUSINESSES must proactively implement strategies like diverse vendor use to safeguard their operations against future outages. The recent outage highlighted the challenges of relying solely on automated updates and single-provider solutions. It underscores the need for improved testing protocols and more flexible update mechanisms. One potential solution for organisations is to adopt a multi-provider strategy. By utilising two different antivirus vendors across different systems, companies can mitigate the risk of a single outage impacting their entire platform. This approach both limits the scope of potential disruptions and enhances security, as one vendor might detect threats that another misses.



ROY SHELTON
CEO
CONNECTUS
BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

THIS has made clear the need to prioritise operational stability and emphasised the risks of relying on a single supplier. While larger enterprises were significantly impacted most UK MSPs, being SMEs, were largely unaffected. This incident underlines the economic importance of the MSP sector, which contributed £52.6bn in revenue in 2022. Many of these providers were small or micro-sized businesses that used lesser-known but cost-effective alternatives to CrowdStrike. I believe that the industries most affected like transportation, utilities and financial services should focus on thorough testing and strong regression planning to prevent similar disruptions in the future.



BRITT MEGAHEY
MD
BARCLAY
COMMUNICATIONS

NO matter how big or small an organisation, the importance of rigorous disaster recovery planning is paramount. We invest heavily in our security measures but have still initiated a full review of all our third party suppliers to ensure they are adhering to their advertised standards and Service Level Agreements. The issues seem to have been focused on the Global Presence Enterprise organisations but of course this has a ripple effect right down to SMEs and micro business that rely on their services. SaaS providers from all sectors must ensure they stick to their defined testing and deployment processes, even for the smallest release.

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Multi-faceted security concerns



CHRIS THOMAS
CEO
INCOVO

DISASTER recovery should be a priority for any business that cares about its operation. We did see a surge of issues in critical areas such as the health sector, travel and manufacturing. When such sectors can't operate the wider public faces problems as well. On our level of SME, we need disaster recovery and resiliency planning to know exactly what steps we take in these types of events. We're always thinking about ways to improve and this case sparked a wider conversation. Adaptations are constantly being made to reposition us stronger.



MIKE IANIRI
MD
CLOUD GEEKS

THE incident highlighted the vulnerability of organisations dependent on one cybersecurity provider as any disruption can lead to widespread operational and security issues. It has prompted many businesses to reassess their security frameworks, placing greater emphasis on diversification and contingency planning. The sectors most affected rely heavily on real-time data and uninterrupted cybersecurity, making them particularly vulnerable. To prevent future incidents businesses should diversify their IT vendors to avoid single points of failure. Enhanced monitoring tools, regular disaster recovery drills and clear communication channels between IT vendors and clients are essential. It also raises concerns about vendor accountability and may lead to increased regulatory scrutiny.



MARK MITCHELL
CTO
CWSI

THIS event has reinforced the importance of cybersecurity and operational agility, not only for businesses but also for end users, driving a more serious consideration of these aspects in IT strategies. The sectors most severely impacted were healthcare, travel and finance, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive support and protection strategies in the aftermath. To prevent future occurrences it is imperative to adopt a Zero-Trust approach, ensure regular updates and backups and employ AI-powered security analysis tools. It is necessary to develop and test recovery and business continuity strategies.



ALEX COBURN
SECURITY PRACTICE
DIRECTOR
NODE4

ALL businesses must evaluate their preparedness for disruptions whether caused by malicious acts or system failures. Accepting these failures as unavoidable is not sufficient, especially for smaller enterprises unfamiliar with operational resilience. Financial market participants prioritise security and resilience based on important business services. Understanding and protecting critical assets including people, processes, technology, facilities and third parties is essential for minimising disruption impacts. Any organisation should have workaround plans, backup plans and parallel efforts to maintain operations during crises. This is a business challenge based on the premise that 'severe but plausible' events are becoming more common.



SOHIN RAITHATHA
CEO
REDSQUID

THIS incident exposed the risks of relying on a single technology, prompting many to rethink their cybersecurity strategies and business continuity plans. It's crucial to continuously assess and strengthen IT systems, diversify technology choices and implement robust security measures. The disruption to sectors like film production, education and pharmaceuticals underscores the need for IT partners with industry-specific expertise and tailored solutions. We advocate for developing resilient IT infrastructures and keeping business continuity plans up-to-date. Keeping proactive measures in place is essential to protect operations and prepare for future challenges. This outage reinforces the need to embed cybersecurity and resilience at the heart of every strategy we create with our customers.



IAN DUNSTAN
MD
COBALT

THE recent outage had significant repercussions particularly in critical sectors like healthcare, finance and transportation. The impact of 8.5 million devices being unavailable was at the top of anything we had imagined for one day. Total or partial loss affected every system we used. The technical element was fixed very quickly but the human effect took somewhat longer. The impact has been little to none at many small to medium enterprises. They saw it as a freak situation that probably won't happen again. This will happen again, like a giant mobile provider forgetting to renew a security certificate. It's down to us as an industry to educate and not use it as a fear-selling technique.

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Exertis AV's three-year evolution

In 2022 Exertis AV unveiled a new leadership team to drive growth in a stagnant distribution market. Here, the team shares how it stripped back to basics to rebuild a strategy prioritising both profit and purpose and is now reaping the benefits.

Exertis AV's evolution was driven by its reimagination as a distributor that focused on delivering quality not quantity, according to Chief Sales and Commercial Officer Jamie Brothwell. This was informed by ongoing conversations with its resellers and vendors regarding their needs for enhanced support.

"This required going back to basics," she said. "We looked at our vendor portfolio and rationalised it to have two or three key vendors in each space. This process showed that many of the smaller brands we had were providing a distraction to sales and enabled us to focus on what Exertis AV can bring to customers that ensure a point of difference."

Exertis AV's streamlined portfolio enables it to put more resources behind its vendors with specialist teams. For example, when the distributor onboarded Epson Business Projectors, it invested in product experts who joined as Projection Business Managers.

Alistair Coyne, Commercial Director at Exertis AV said: "With a specialist team in place with Product Managers and Product Specialists, we

have dedicated people behind brands or technologies which adds an extra layer of value to our customers."

Its quality-over-quantity approach also sees Exertis AV work closely in partnership with vendors to ensure the stock profile is correct. Alongside investments in its warehouse facilities, this has enabled the company to triple its stock profile and offer a 99.4% next-day shipment rate.

This makes it easier to maintain dialogue with customers around their pipeline. Brothwell added: "We understand that this is a project business so need to hold a longer stock cycle and ensure customers receive exactly what they need."

Mark Sanderson, Head of Strategic Marketing at Exertis AV highlights how this manifests with its key strategic relationship with Microsoft. "We meet very regularly to discuss market patterns and seasonal trends," he said. "We can utilise this information to help our customers in shaping their strategy."

Exertis AV has also invested over £100,000 in demonstration equipment

and is currently fitting out a demonstration suite in Burnley. It has invested heavily in marketing and now has an AV marketing team to add value by bringing to life assets for customers.

Jon Grundy, Head of AV Solutions, highlighted that this approach has been driven by customer needs. "Our evolution focused on becoming an extension of our partner's businesses so we could take away some of their pain points and give them additional capacity," he said.

"Whether it is looking at our customer base or our vendor base, we want to be the true value add that sits in the middle"

The second critical pillar of Exertis AV's evolution has been ensuring that the company puts purpose at the forefront of activity, both through its moral duty and to add value for its customers.

"On this front, the company is almost unrecognisable from the organisation I joined 10 years ago," said Brothwell. "I have had the honour of watching the company grow and evolve from the inside, but you can also see it from the outside looking in.



Al Coyne & Jamie Brothwell



Jon Grundy & Mark Sanderson

"Today D&I and sustainability are two of the first things I end up talking to customers about because they have become so relevant to buying decisions and partnerships due to tendering rules."

Exertis AV has developed several schemes around culture including employee resource groups and events that boost education for staff around diversity and inclusion. This included bringing in external speakers during Pride Month and Black History Month to ensure that all staff feel belonged.

"We are focused on staff bringing their 'whole self' to work and not worrying about being discriminated," added Brothwell.

With distribution playing such a central role in the

supply chain, Exertis AV has also prioritised its sustainability play. The company has a dedicated team of eight within the business and is working externally with customers and partners to help educate and share best practices.

Brothwell added: "It is important that we have an open policy to share what we are doing but also develop these strategies alongside our customers and vendors."

Exertis AV is also working toward ISO 14001. It has renewable energy resources within all its sites, LED lights within its warehouses and an EV fleet.

"As much as operation changes, this all helps to add value to our clients," adds Brothwell.

For more information go to: www.exertis.co.uk

exertis | AV

Walker's big stride



Sarah Walker

CISCO'S UK and Ireland business is now led by Sarah Walker who strides into the Chief Executive role, taking over from David Meads who's heading up operations in the Middle East and Africa. Walker's experience includes 25 years at BT in various senior leadership positions across the public and private sectors before joining Cisco two years ago to lead its enterprise business in the UK and Ireland. Oliver Tuszik, President, EMEA, Cisco, said: "Sarah brings not only a proven track record in technology to solve problems and create value for organisations, but also a wealth of energy and innovative thinking."

Walker added: "AI is creating clearer lines between the outcomes that technology can support, the strategic objectives of organisations and the needs of society. The way we utilise and build for AI now will shape the next decade and Cisco will ensure that we do so securely and responsibly."

Also on the move...

WITHSECURE'S (formerly F-Secure Business) appointment of Samantha Cotton as Head of Channel for UK and Ireland adds ten years cybersecurity experience and brings a sharper focus on expanding the firm's partner network around security products and services. Cotton joins from Bitdefender and previously held channel manager roles at Claranet and e92plus. "Businesses face a host of new challenges in discovering and acting on cyber threats," she said. "They need solutions that provide fast and effective action, and their partners are a vital lifeline in supporting them with this." Dean Porter, Regional VP, added: "Samantha's experience and market knowledge makes her the ideal leader as we focus on the next phase of channel growth in the UK."



Samantha Cotton

CLOUD services company Brightsolid has pulled in Mike De Souza as Business Development Manager, bringing over 36 years IT business development experience to the role. His new remit is to focus on developing solutions and partnerships primarily in the north west local authority, energy and clean tech sectors.

COMMS veteran Tom Hassan has joined Voiceflex's Partner and Vendor Engagement team, adding 30 years industry experience with an emphasis on transitioning from legacy telecommunications to UCaaS and CCaaS technologies. His prior roles include stints at NICE Systems UK, TruStack, ShoreTel and Mitel. Voiceflex CCO Paul Taylor commented: "Tom's experience will be instrumental as we continue to expand our services and support for partners." Hassan will work alongside fellow Partner and Vendor Engagement Managers Rob Mitchell who also has 30 years industry experience and John Walford who boasts 34 years working in engineering and consultative roles.

SHIRE Leasing's appointment of Martin Ardern as ICT Sales Director bolsters the firm's vendor finance capabilities in the ICT and technology sectors, according to Managing Director Helen Lumb. She stated:

"Martin's ability to forge strong relationships and develop bespoke finance programmes with channel partners will help drive growth and investment in this dynamic industry." Ardern brings over 30 years experience in asset finance



Martin Ardern

including 20-plus years focused on the technology sector having held senior positions at BNP Paribas, GE Capital and Lloyds. He added: "My expertise and network will enhance the accessibility of finance solutions for ICT investments."



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