



Bluecube gets in shape for managed IT services p6

Comms National Awards winners celebrated p32



VOL 29 ISSUE 5 OCTOBER 2024 www.comms-dealer.com

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This month's movers and shakers



Trends catalyse rise of the MSP

GIACOM CEO Terry O'Brien has urged resellers to get ahead of the curve as end user technology requirements continue to evolve towards more sophisticated cloud and AI solutions with cybersecurity becoming the top priority.

SPECIAL REPORT

Accelerating market and technology trends dictate that the channel must pivot towards the full range of managed services and cloud solutions to remain competitive and drive ongoing revenue growth, according to Giacom CEO Terry O'Brien (pictured above).

He also noted that the SMB technology landscape will continue to grow in complexity as more ICT buyers prior-

itise cybersecurity, cloud and managed IT services. "SMBs are increasingly looking for a single strategic partner with a comprehensive range of managed ICT services and a simple monthly, predictable fee per employee," stated O'Brien.

"It's what I call 'the rise of the MSP', with market data showing that MSPs are growing three times faster than traditional resellers."

O'Brien also emphasised that MSPs must always be

'ready, willing and able' to embrace emerging technologies to stay competitive. "A proactive approach is essential for maintaining relevance and driving growth," he added.

"By positioning themselves as a dynamic strategic partner, MSPs not only strengthen customer relationships but also create a sustainable, long-term recurring revenue model."

These key themes will be fully explored at November's Comms Vision conference – see p24

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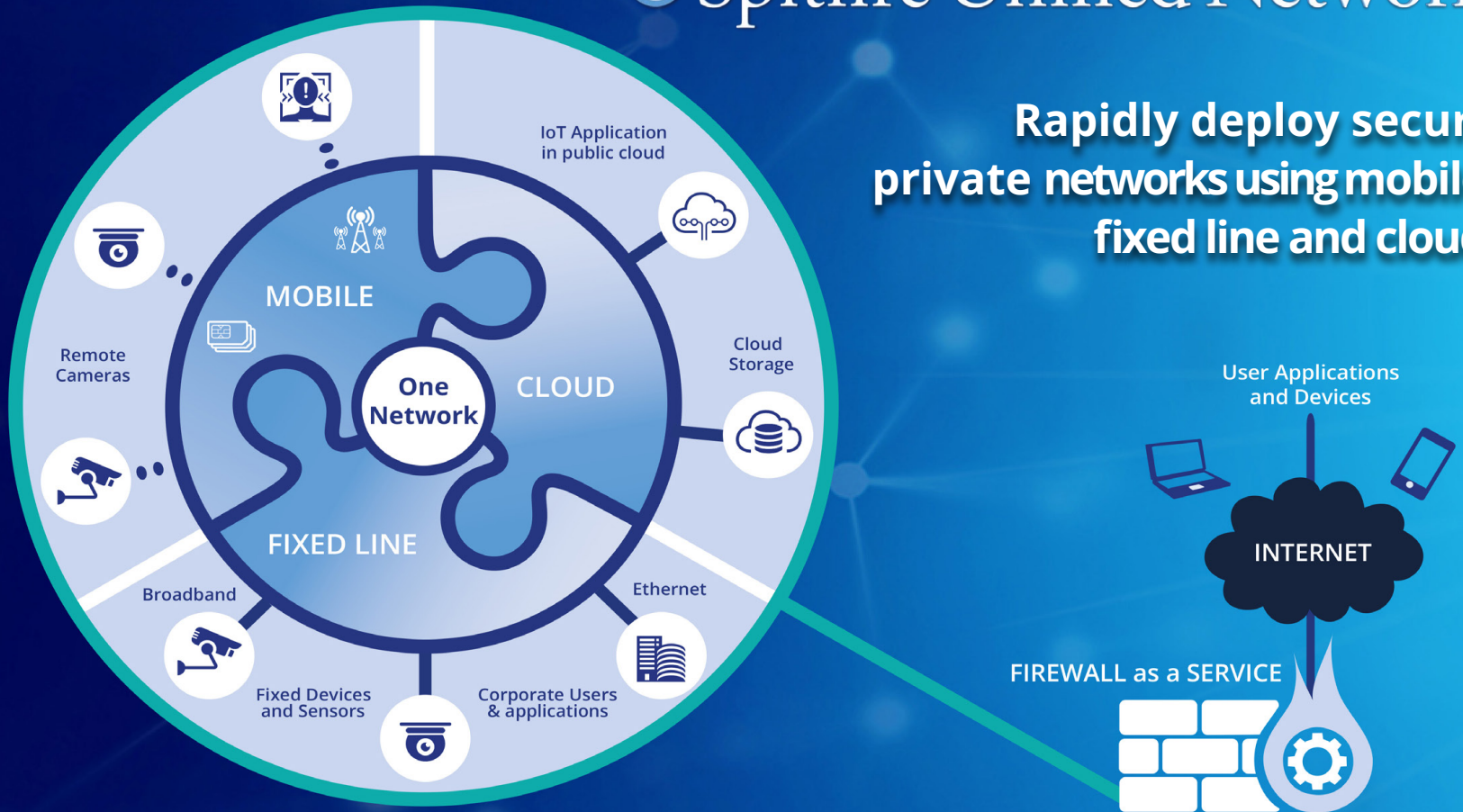
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Welcome comment



Stuart Gilroy

I WILL never forget that public toilet I had to use in a hurry years ago. It was an experience burned into my brain thanks to the professionalism, dedication and pride of the man cleaning the facility. All surfaces sparkled like a diamond and it was spotlessly clean like an operating

theatre. I said to the man responsible that he's doing a great job and his pride and professionalism almost outshone his handiwork. It doesn't matter what you do for a living – what really matters is whether you approach the task with high personal standards of professionalism while striving for excellence and self-improvement. That toilet and its keeper will stay with me forever.

Especially against a backdrop of what I generally see as falling standards wherever you look – from politicians to the person shoving a drive-through burger at you. The upshot is that nice, positive experiences with people and companies stand out further than ever and are becoming more memorable. Therefore, executing your functions with the highest professional and personal standards could become the biggest differentiator in the market – and ensure that you are remembered for all the right reasons.

Which is why we should celebrate this year's Comms National Award winners, all recognised for achieving stand-out excellence and professionalism across the full range of categories. Hats off to Uplands OneTelco which scored an award winning hat-trick including the Reseller of the Year gong. And a special 'well done!' to SCG Executive Chairman Paul Bradford who received the Entrepreneur of the Year award. To find out more about the comms channel's premier awards evening see pages 32-35.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

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

Growth push spurs Aspire

ASPIRE Technology Solutions has reaffirmed its commitment to expand in the Scottish market and reported a 23.6% increase in revenue, nudging towards £40m for the year ending 29th February 2024.

Aspire received a funding boost following a significant minority investment from LDC in March 2022, which valued the business at £85m.

The deal enabled Aspire to acquire Glasgow-based Cloud Cover IT this summer, and Aspire has since made plans to move to a larger Glasgow city centre office this autumn.

CEO Chris Fraser stated: "Glasgow is a dynamic and rapidly evolving city and our new office will mark a new chapter for Aspire.

"Our investments in technology and cybersecurity also ensure we are positioned to meet the needs of businesses throughout the region."

In FY24, Aspire invested £1.7m to advance its private cloud technology stack and expand its connectivity network. The Group's SOC saw substantial growth, contributing to a 97% year-on-year increase in security related revenues, building on the



Chris Fraser

98% growth already registered in the previous year.

"Our focus on cybersecurity and modern workplace solutions remains a top priority as businesses increasingly rely on secure and accessible data in an ever-evolving threat landscape," added Fraser.

Aspire's customer base expanded from 1,700 to 1,900 clients in FY24, with recurring revenue growth performing well at 24.5%.

Gross profit margins were reported at 29.6%, a slight decrease from 30.1% in the previous year, attributed to the Group's ongoing investments in enhancing its business operations.

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

Editor's picks

FOCUS Group has bagged its tenth acquisition this financial year, netting Hampshire-based voice and IT reseller Silver Lining. The deal expands Focus' service portfolio, technical capabilities and market presence, and also includes channel-only provider Atmoso which specialises in managed cloud services and PCI compliance.

COMMUNICATE'S acquisition of York Data Services marks its fourth deal since gaining investment from Rockpool in June. The transaction boosts Communicate's network coverage across northern England and London, and opens up cross-sell opportunities around IT support and cybersecurity services.

FLUIDONE'S influence in the north west region has strengthened following its acquisition of Lancashire-based Orca IT. The deal also bolsters FluidOne's professional services, IT and cybersecurity managed services play and is its first transaction since securing an acquisition facility with Pemberton in June this year. The deal is FluidOne's ninth since the MBO led by CEO Russell Horton in 2019 and boosts revenues to over £113m.



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Editor's picks

OPENREACH has been accused of 'worrying and diversionary' tactics ahead of Ofcom's Telecoms Access Review 2026. In its Blueprint for Continuing Success in the UK's Telecoms Market, Openreach stated, 'Ofcom and Government should require Virgin Media O2 and others to open up their duct and pole networks on the same transparent terms including price as Openreach's duct and poles product'. A Virgin Media O2 spokesperson told Comms Dealer: "Calling for regulatory intervention on others who are building alternative networks is a worrying and diversionary tactic. The ability to use Virgin Media's ducts on a commercial basis already exists, but Openreach has significant market power in the UK and a footprint that covers almost all of the country so it is right that it remains appropriately regulated."

CONISTON-backed Equity Networks' buy and build campaign continued last month with the acquisition of Newbury-based MSP Create IT. The deal marks Equity Networks' seventh transaction (the second since partnering with Coniston) and follows the acquisition of Trust Networks in May this year.

RYDAL Group's acquisition of Merula strengthens its service portfolio including access to dedicated rack space and the ability to leverage multiple broadband options like traditional broadband, mobile and satellite services through Merula's data centre. Rydal Group CEO Steffan Dancy commented: "By bringing data centre and ISP capabilities in-house, and with the launch of our partner portal, we're able to control our infrastructure." Merula MD Richard Palmer is now Group Technical Lead focusing on infrastructure development.



SCG Executive Chairman Paul Bradford collected the Entrepreneur of the Year award at this year's Comms National Awards (26th September, Park Plaza Hotel, London). He said: "This industry has looked after me over the past 36 years and I don't think there's a better place to be. My advice is to focus on your people

– people are at the heart of any business." See pages 32-35 for the full Comms National Awards report.

Vautier takes over from telco legend

FREEDOM Fibre founder, CEO and industry veteran Neil McArthur has stepped down, making way for Chief Exec' Nathan Vautier who was latterly CEO of Box Broadband.

McArthur assumes a more strategic role and remains on the company's board.

"After nearly 30 years in the telecoms sector it's time I stepped down from the front line," stated McArthur.

"My move into telecoms started with deregulation in 1996 at Opal Telecom which teamed up with Carphone Warehouse to form TalkTalk.

"I've had a splendid career at an interesting time in the industry's history, and the opportunity to set up Freedom Fibre was too exciting to resist. Being involved at the start of deregulation and broadband, and now being able to step down as fibre reaches well over 50% of the UK has been my good fortune. It's time to let someone else take the reins."

Vautier brings 25-plus years industry experience and held senior leadership roles with Ericsson, Sony Ericsson, EE and Brightstar before moving into PE backed businesses.



Neil McArthur



Nathan Vautier

He stated: "It is an important time in the industry and for the continued development of critical UK infrastructure. Neil's vision has laid a strong foundation."

Freedom Fibre is backed by investors InfraBridge, Equitix and TalkTalk. The altnet has geared up for its next growth phase following the merger with VX Fiber's UK operations.

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ISSN 1366-5243

bpl. | A BPL Business Publication

BPL Limited
The Market House, High Street, Uxbridge. Middlesex UB8 1JN
T: 01895 454 444

Subscriptions
Subscription rates for 12 issues:
UK, £65; Overseas: £80 (incl p&p)
Back issues can be obtained:
UK £6 (incl p&p), Overseas £10 each (incl p&p)
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Printed by Pensord Limited

Xelion rolls out future-fit partner experience plan

A NINE month period of strategic and go-to-market (GTM) development at Xelion has culminated in a future-fit and more streamlined proposition for channel partners, according to UK MD Dave Reynolds.

He says the vendor's close attention to long-term modernisation is certain to change perceptions of the business following the launch of new tools during its What's New partner event staged at the Louwman Museum in the Hague (2nd October), which

drew 500-plus attendees along with 400 virtual guests.

Xelion's repositioning as a 'modernised partner experience powerhouse' became official with a rebrand that also emphasises a refreshed GTM approach that makes it easier for partners to transact with the firm. "We have made all aspects of the reseller experience as easy as possible while providing a cleaner looking product that reaffirms we are not a legacy telephony company," said Reynolds.



Dave Reynolds

"Much work has gone into developing a bank of tools that will be released in one

tranche to boost the entire partner experience."

The roll out includes new contact centre dashboards and administration tools that enable resellers to better manage tenants.

Reynolds also noted that Xelion has developed a new partner portal and introduced a training academy that provides partners with online courses on the vendor's evolving product set.

"These tools make it easier for resellers to manage their

customers with more support provided by new self-service elements," said Reynolds.

Xelion has also shifted up the gears of its marketing engine in a bid to become more proactive and targeted in generating leads for partners direct from end user marketing campaigns. Reynolds noted that all leads will be distributed among partners.

The What's New launch event also pointed up the release of Xelion 9 planned for later this month.



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How Bluecube shapes up

The strategic move in 2022 to refocus Bluecube for a stronger future was a timely decision made by Managing Director Paul Reames who, like his company, is also evolving as a business leader continuously navigating the right route ahead.

To say that channel companies and their leaders are under pressure to evolve would be to greatly understate the transformations currently under way – and Bluecube is no exception. “In 2022 we decided that adding managed IT services and support to our service proposition was the right strategy for the future,” explained Reames. “We could see there was an appetite from our customers for a single technology partner therefore we acquired Techbox Managed IT Services in 2023. This is the fastest growing revenue stream across our business right now.”

Reames puts meticulous planning front and centre of every step forward for the company, which has also influenced his own development as a leader. “My role has changed beyond recognition over the past few years,” he added. “I’ve gone from being very hands on and helping with key account sales and customer management to being

completely focused on the business growth strategy and ensuring we grow quickly and responsibly.”

Bluecube’s technology and service portfolio is always under review and this has become a critical factor in the company’s long-term future, but in a controlled and well managed way. “Our approach has historically been to stick to doing a few things really well and that’s the way we intend to move forward,” commented Reames. “Launching IT was a bold step forwards for us because of that culture. We were perhaps overly cautious in our approach but when broadening our portfolio we need to make sure we get it right.”

Only a small percentage of Bluecube customers currently use its IT services because that’s the newest area of the business. “However, this is the immediate opportunity,” commented Reames. “Customers like having one partner to manage their connectivity, communications and IT requirements. The proposition of a single



Paul Reames

There was an appetite from our customers for a single technology partner so we acquired Techbox Managed IT Services in 2023

technology partner, a single support team and one clear invoice is hugely attractive to SMB and large enterprise organisations. We have historically targeted the SMB market but are now attracting more large enterprises than ever before.”

Growing IT revenues quickly but at a speed that doesn’t negatively impact customer support levels means bringing in new talent, which is a challenge, so Reames is considering further acquisitions as a solution to this issue – which has

become a priority following 18 months of fast growth. “The pandemic, followed by a difficult economic environment meant that growth between 2020 and 2023 was relatively slow,” said Reames. “However, growth in the last financial

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in managed IT services

year and the current one has been fantastic. We recorded a 59.7 per cent increase in sales in August this year compared with the same period in 2023, and growth in the year to 30th April 2023 was more than the previous four years combined."

Reames' primary growth lever is to initially establish a 'foot in the door', enabling Bluecube to go on and sell

In 2008 I lost my father which despite being a terrible chapter in my life was also the catalyst for taking the plunge and setting up in business on my own

a full suite of technology services. "We often start with an easy sell, fast but inexpensive connectivity for example, then go on to complement that service with other technology that we offer," he explained. "Managed connectivity and managed Wi-Fi has enabled us to win a lot of new business in recent months. This is another potential area for fast growth."

Reames also noted that there are a number of other revenue opportunities to pursue, but in good time. "We're not in any rush to broaden our services further – first we plan to establish ourselves as a leading managed IT services provider," he added. "That's

our main focus right now. Managed print, security services and AI are all on our radar but timing is key."

Service wrap

When Reames started the business from his lounge in 2008 he was guided by the same strategic considerations and one critical factor especially remains constant. "The technologies we provide may have broadened

and developed but that service wrap proposition remains intact," he stated. "When Bluecube was incorporated as a mobile provider our initial pitch was adding value through VIP service and support for SMBs, which they weren't getting direct from the network. We were soon selling line rental and calls, broadband and phone systems installation and management."

The company delivered its first hosted telephony services in 2013 and within a few years became a leading provider of cloud based communications. "Our

approach will enable us to become one on the UK's leading MSPs with a large base of content customers that have total faith in us as a partner and trusted advisor," added Reames. "How do we get there? We have a plan, a detailed plan at that, but I'm not sharing it!"

It's not common knowledge that Reames' career background is steeped in a mobile heritage. In the late 1990s one of his former colleagues became Sales Director at Project Telecom and she asked him to work for her. He went from Project Telecom to Vodafone for several years in corporate sales and in 2007 moved to T-Mobile also working in top end sales.

"In 2008 I lost my father which despite being a terrible chapter in my life was also the catalyst for taking the plunge and setting up in business on my own," noted Reames. "Now, we have just picked up a regional award where we were voted Best Managed IT Services Provider for the Midlands and we're in the advanced stages of the Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 awards."

Just a minute with Paul Reames...

Role model: My father: He started and sold a business, bought and sold a football club and did things his own way. He left a positive legacy and a proud family behind him.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I don't procrastinate and I get things done, but I can be too impulsive and need to slow down at times.

Three ideal dinner guests: Henry Ford, Ray Kroc and Bill Gates would offer some great inspiration and insight.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? I'd be a league two footballer. I'm realistic even in my dreams.

Your favourite comedian or comedienne? Micky Flannagan – so wrong but so right.

Best advice you have been given: Nothing good comes easily. You have to work really hard to hit targets but it will be worth it in the long run (Nigel Waddell, Regional Sales Manager, Project Telecom in 2001).

What talent do you wish you had? To break 90 in golf.

The biggest risk you have taken: Starting Bluecube. I gave up a really well paid job and was broke for two years.

What do you fear most? Not completing my business journey. We're on track and have a clear finishing line but there's still much to do.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

My guilty pleasure is still an occasional sneaky game of FIFA after my wife has gone to bed.

How do you relax? Spending time with my wife and the rest of the family. Watching Lincoln City play with my son and playing golf with my friends.

Your biggest career achievement: Going from a performance programme to becoming the number one sales person at Project Telecom consistently in a sales team of more than 100 BDMs. I got a letter from my manager at the time congratulating me on my performance. It's still framed in my office 25 years later!

Industry wish: We still need to attract more women into the industry. Our business like most is heavily weighted with male staff and that's not a conscious choice. We need to redress the balance of the team but we just don't get female applicants very often. It's a problem our sector needs to figure out as a community.

One thing you couldn't do without in your job? The backing of my wife who's been supporting me from the start.

If you were to write a book, what would it be about? Having a clear strategy to succeed in business, one that the whole team understands what their individual contributions are and the importance of delivering them.

What are you most looking forward to?

Championship football for Lincoln City.

If you were to be reincarnated, what in living nature would you like to come back as? The Arctic Tern flies about 25,000 miles on its migration journey every year. I've always enjoyed travelling!

Top tip for resellers: Don't spread yourself too thin and build a network of trusted partners that you know will look after you. Have a significant base with a few rather than a bit here there and everywhere.

Editor's comment...



THE DECISIONS made by Bluecube Managing Director Paul Reames clearly underline how making the right, carefully planned strategic calls could mean the difference between success and failure; but data from a Comms Dealer survey of channel leaders suggests that the importance of more focused and strategic decision making is largely underestimated. In this business interview, Reames provides us with insight into the criticality of meticulous and timely planning and decision making, and how a step-by-step strategic approach to generating more growth enables him to move forward with confidence. Download the free Leadership report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-leadership>

Channel challengers ente

Industry challengers PXC and Zoom have thrown down the gauntlet in a bid to reshape the future of wholesale, moving beyond beta trials towards general availability across geographies and markets, driven by an all-in-one comms platform, unprecedented automation and a big ambition to scale.

To achieve its aims PXC is banking on the scale-up power of its automation strategy to be more impactful than rivals, and more responsive to the market opportunities opened up by its deep relationship with Zoom. PXC Sale Director Graham Kedzlie is driving the partnership and shaping the wholesale model and go-to-market framework. He noted that Zoom's high level of API integration was a clincher, along with its automation and scalability. "Automation is critical to success," stated Kedzlie. "This was key in our decision to partner with Zoom. We want to scale and replicate what we have achieved in the connectivity space with voice. And PXC aims to become the most heavily automated service provider on the planet integrating the Zoom ecosystem. This is just three months away from being a reality."

PXC signed a distribution contract with Zoom 12

months ago and launched the venture at Comms Vision last November. "Since then we have worked hard to develop the proposition and we're now open for business," said Kedzlie.

A six month beta trial saw 130 deals registered and £3.5 million ARR. Kedzlie also noted that 4,500 Zoom licences have been sold and over 1,000 contact centre licenses. Most notable however, he pointed out, is the potential to layer 21 additional Zoom products on top, ranging from contact centre to quality management and AI.

PXC is itself consuming Zoom and collapsed 12 different relationships (with call recording and analytics companies, for example) into the single Zoom platform. "This streamlined the business and delivered a 30 per cent cost reduction," said Kedzlie. "We're aiming for general availability at the back end of this year."



Graham Kedzlie

PXC aims to become the most heavily automated service provider on the planet integrating the Zoom ecosystem. This is just three months away from being a reality

Kedzlie reiterated that PXC is fundamentally wholesale but the Zoom GTM includes a referral model if required depending on the size of the opportunity. He also outlined additional margin opportunities linked to professional services (PXC has partnered with Accelerate which lives and breathes Zoom and has a channel model). Tiered pricing and other elements are all integrated into the partner programme, pointed out Kedzlie, also noting that

cloud peering, portfolio bundling, end to end automation and hardware (handset selection) are pipelined for next year.

Refocus on voice

PXC realised that it needed to refocus on voice to tap into digital transformation opportunities and decided to adopt a collaboration and targeted partnership model that fully leverages the Zoom ecosystem, explained PXC CSO Paul Smith. "Voice is complementary to all

things data and many of the other services we provide," he stated. "So we began conversations with Zoom around two years ago, working through commercials and legals, thinking about how to bring Zoom into the UK market in a true wholesale fashion. We're now coming out of the trial phase, flicking the switch and driving volume."

According to Zoom there are substantial revenue opportunities to capitalise

er the ring

on during the coming three years, derived largely from cloud-to-cloud migration and taking a hybrid approach to vendors like Mitel and Avaya, layering services over the top of existing investments. And Zoom's newly appointed Head of EMEA Steve Rafferty affirmed that the company

We're now coming out of the trial phase, flicking the switch and driving volume

has the investment, intent and staying power to get this opportunity right through end-to-end channel enablement and support.

Rafferty joined Zoom in July from RingCentral where he was Vice President International, bringing 35 years industry experience including spells at comms provider, IT reseller and MSP organisations. He was identified by Zoom as a seasoned channel builder with the capabilities to achieve its goals in what is a new market for the company. "There are many areas of the market to

go after – contact centre, collaboration, business comms and workloads – and more opportunities to add features," said Rafferty. "We're investing in a high touch channel model, we're here to learn and our facilities at the Zoom Experience Centre are yours," he told delegates at the joint PXC-Zoom partner kick off session staged at the London-based centre last month.

Reflecting on the cost savings and efficiencies achieved by PXC having adopted Zoom, James Scotton, Upmarket CX Specialist at Zoom, reiterated that a major opportunity for the channel is the consolidation of technology to drive new revenue streams. He claims that Zoom is a born in the cloud market disrupter and challenger to the status quo, advancing an end-to-end single platform service that optimises the employee and customer experience, and is inclusive of AI and workforce management and quality management services.

"Zoom has invested over \$814 million in R&D," commented Scotton. "Zoom's single consolidated development roadmap appeals across all verticals and sectors, and enables outcome based conversations with customers." ■

Editor's comment...

TRUE, Zoom is a new entrant to wholesale and the channel but it is working hard with PXC to become established as a go-to single platform for all business services, and is already making inroads into the business comms space. It is collaborations and partnerships such as this that could prove to be the winning factor and catalyse real disruption in the comms wholesale space. Both are challenger brands on a mission to drive the market in a new direction unencumbered by legacy, accelerating the shift towards open platforms and integrations, enabling channel partners to transform their end customers.

Daisy lines up crucial jobs for Big Goal grads

Daisy Communications has lined up jobs for two young grads ahead of their participation in the Street Soccer Foundation (SSF) academy to be run at Sheffield Wednesday FC this month. And CEO Dave McGinn has urged all founding members to follow suit.

McGinn believes The Big Goal is a perfect opportunity for ICT companies to recruit disadvantaged young people who graduate from The Big Goal academies with the basic skills they need to enter the workplace. And he is now urging other founding members to contact the SSF and advise them of job vacancies they have. "By doing this, the SSF can work with their partner football clubs and identify youngsters suited to certain roles," he said.

"Sponsorship of The Big Goal is not just about your team playing in a tournament or young homeless people playing football at the academies, it's about the bigger goal of giving a young person a chance and creating another tax payer, which chimes perfectly with our mantra of keeping Britain working."

McGinn has instated qualified mentors primed to help young people who need



Dave McGinn: Everybody deserves an opportunity to work and get their self-worth back

first-hand experience of a work environment and, fundamentally, a chance to change their lives. "We want to make sure that we develop the best individual once they come to work for us, whatever they may have been through in their life," he added. "We've got the right induction process, the right mentors and the right people ready to look after them and create a career journey. Everybody deserves an opportunity to work and get their self-worth back. The Big Goal is an awesome initiative which many more businesses in our industry should get behind."

McGinn's passion for the project is echoed by Andrew Jackson, inTEC Group Marketing Manager, who enthused: "The Big Goal has been an incredible initiative for us. It demonstrates that we can unite our broader team through a world class sports event, all while contributing to the vital cause of ending youth homelessness." ■

To register for The Big Goal visit www.thebiggoal.co.uk

THE BIG GOAL

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Cyber Security and IT, Unite!

The Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2024 reports 50% of businesses suffering from a data breach or cyber attack over the past 12 months. As businesses rely more on digital infrastructures, the risk of a cyber attack or breach also increases. Therefore, integrating comprehensive cyber security solutions is not just advisable, it's essential.

Cyber threats are on the rise, with common attacks including phishing, ransomware, and supply chain vulnerabilities. As Cyber Security Awareness Month highlights, businesses and individuals must prioritise best practices, optimise human behaviours, and ensure their systems are running as they should be to effectively secure their data and devices.

MSPs are dedicated to their clients' digital protection. By offering services that incorporate advanced real-time monitoring, penetration testing, awareness training, phishing simulations, and Cyber Essentials certification, they can proactively address and mitigate vulnerabilities. Citation Cyber's portfolio of security solutions are designed to meet these demands, providing tailored support that validates MSP's services and ensures resilience against cyber threats.

As cyber threats become more complex, ensuring data protection and operational continuity is crucial for a reliable MSP. By leveraging Citation Cyber's offering, MSPs can strengthen their role in safeguarding and boosting their clients' resilience. In fact, 75% of businesses now report cyber security as a high priority for their senior management (gov.uk) – offering cyber security services not only meets client needs, but



"As cyber threats become more complex, ensuring data protection and operational continuity is crucial for a reliable MSP."

Paul Leybourne

also enable MSPs to differentiate their service offering.

Paul Leybourne, Head of Partnerships at Citation Cyber, highlights the proactive approach required in developing a cyber security strategy: "The key to managing cyber risks lies in preventative defence measures. Our suite of services complements the offering of MSPs and supports in the delivery of an effective service by managing the elements of cyber defence."

Cyber Security Awareness Month has the protection of data and devices at the top of business' priority list. Integrating Citation Cyber's suite of services complements and optimises the MSP offering. Partnering with a cyber security provider who can support with the testing, training, and certification fundamentals ensures your clients have an effective cyber security strategy.

For more information on how you can work with Citation Cyber, reach out to the Head of Partnerships, **Paul Leybourne**, via paul.leybourne@citationcyber.com

CHANNEL UPDATE

Gamma moves closer to Cisco

Gamma's accelerating partnership with Cisco has entered a new phase with the launch of Horizon with Webex across the UK and Europe.

The move brings together the connectivity and voice elements of Gamma's Horizon product with Cisco's Webex collaboration features. According to Chris Wade, Chief Marketing and Product Officer at Gamma, this development marks an evolution of an already strong relationship with Cisco across hardware and software solutions. "Building on our experience of working with BroadSoft and Meraki, our tighter collaboration will deliver augmented value to new and existing customers," commented Wade. "By delivering the Webex client on top of telephony we bring to life solutions for businesses of all sizes."

The Horizon with Webex solution is available to channel partners via Gamma (the single point of contact) and comes with full provisioning and training support. Wade also noted that the closing Gamma-Cisco partnership has extended into cross-border strategic MA& activity.

In July, Gamma acquired BrightCloud, a key European Enterprise partner of Cisco's best known for its CCaaS expertise. Furthermore, Gamma has entered into an agreement to purchase Germany-based Cisco partner Placetel, which also operates in the cloud PBX space and post-completion will see



Chris Wade

Our tighter collaboration will deliver augmented value to new and existing customers.

Cisco collaboration solutions sold through local partners.

Staunch partnership

Another sign of strengthening ties came when Cisco awarded Gamma Premier Provider Partner status and Cisco Powered designation for Meraki Access, Meraki Security and Meraki SD-WAN. Wade noted that the next phase of the Cisco partnership will increase the 'richness of collaboration and experience'.

"The relationship has been piecemeal to date, but we are working hard to create an offering that aligns all places that a business does

business," explained Wade. "We are going to work hard to enhance our partnership on a technical, educational and operational level."

As part of its ramped up market education campaign Gamma is targeting Horizon with Webex plus other Cisco solutions at smaller firms. "Larger companies are already asking for the Cisco partnership as it has a reputation in the enterprise space," said Wade. "SMEs can also realise the benefits. For example, there are certain industries where the noise cancellation and transcribing features are critical to businesses of all sizes." ■

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"ipSCAPE enables partners to target larger UC deals with a complementary CX solution"

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CHANNEL UPDATE

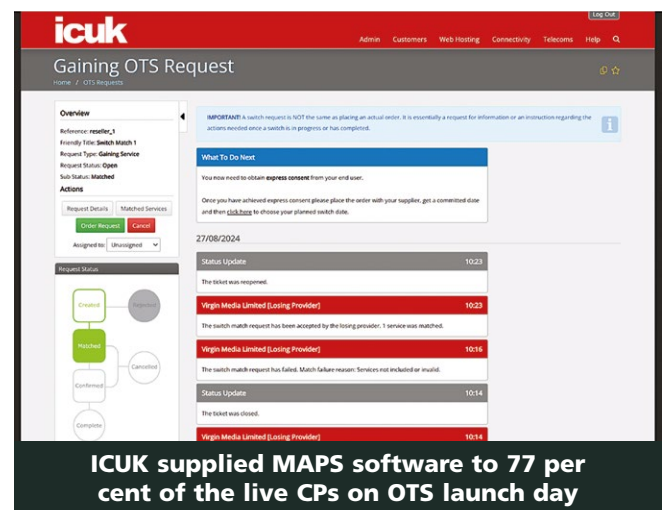
Time to act on OTS says ICUK

ICUK chief Paul Barnett has issued a wake up call alerting broadband providers to the new One Touch Switching (OTS) service that went live on September 12th.

The move was delayed from March and due to continued industry unpreparedness Ofcom has introduced a six week post-launch transition period where existing switching processes are kept in place as a back-up protection. OTS initially affects providers of broadband or voice services to residential customers with business users expected to fall under OTS regulations by 2025. According to TOTSCO (Telecoms One Touch Switching Company), the body supporting OTS, there is industry inaction on the matter which Barnett says is largely down to Ofcom's 'mixed messages' leading to confusion rather than defining a clear pathway forward.

"The One Touch Switching journey hasn't been smooth for the industry," stated Barnett. "There has been too much emphasis on the big four providers and confusion is rife with Ofcom failing to communicate clearly how OTS works and who needs to act. CPs yet to address OTS should waste no time in finding a software provider, or at least understand the process better because it's set to impact businesses at some point next year."

ICUK is one of a number of Managed Access Providers



(MAPS) supporting the messaging software that enables the seamless transfer of services to-and-from suppliers. And Barnett reported that on launch day ICUK supplied MAPS software to 77 per cent of the live CPs. The company is also claiming a wholesale provider first by offering this service without additional charges beyond the standard TOTSCO fees for services within the ICUK network.

"We didn't want to direct our reseller partners to a third party software solution for One Touch transactions," commented Barnett. "We chose to develop an in-house solution integrated with our connectivity and voice services without imposing a financial burden on partners. This approach gives our existing resellers an advantage."

Barnett also noted that customers and services from third party wholesale suppliers can be uploaded into the ICUK portal for the purpose of One Touch Switching. "Whether you intend to transfer a service from another provider or a client is set to leave, our software can handle these messages and keep parties informed," explained Barnett.

Integration opportunities
ICUK Director Leslie Costar added: "By creating third party support communication providers using multiple suppliers can unify their estate for OTS within our portal. OTS also presents opportunities for greater integration with popular CRMs and rival wholesale suppliers to automate One Touch associated tasks such as order placement and service loss."

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Building an everyday culture of ND inclusion

The comms channel has come along way over the past year in its general awareness of neuro-inclusion as a priority area, but 2025 will be the real measure of how much practical progress has been achieved, writes neurodiversity (ND) champion and Train to Win CEO Julie Mills.

It's been a remarkable year for neurodiversity in the comms sector, but the coming 12 months will reveal whether positive reactions are more neuro-washing than stepping stones towards building a culture of everyday neuro-inclusion. When I think back to the summer of 2023, ND wasn't a topic discussed in workplaces. Since then, awareness has shot up and much of the old stigma is in retreat. People seem more ready to talk about autism, ADHD and other aspects of ND in a work context. What's more, colleagues and peers who live neurodiverse lives are more likely to be visible as they gain confidence in showing who they are.

This shift in ND awareness reaches way beyond the limits of industry discourse. We've seen prominent business leaders and celebrities from Ryan Gosling to Heston Blumenthal proudly emerging from the woodwork. July's general election even saw each of the main UK political parties addressing ND in their manifestos. The engines of ND awareness are gaining momentum and I want to pay tribute to those who carried the ND torch when it was generally an issue



Julie Mills

Cutting off talented neurodiverse people because they behave differently or you don't know how to manage them is borderline criminal, and at the very least a waste of precious human potential that's proven to have commercial value

swept under the carpet. That includes charities like MIND of course, but also bodies like the Institute of Telecoms Professionals (ITP) and our very own Comms Dealer.

Now, businesses are interested in asking the right questions about ND

and finding solutions that fit them and their people. Leaders want to get better at creating an everyday ND-inclusive culture for all their staff. That said, we still have a huge distance to go before talented neurodiverse people are embraced by all organisations. Best

practice still only exists in pockets and we may need to see new workplace legislation to ensure equality of opportunity.

Avoiding complacency
Another block to progress could be complacency and the threat of what I call

'neuro-washing' – businesses making the right noises about ND equality but only paying lip service to this important matter, latching onto popular buzzwords for the sake of positive perceptions rather than true commitment.

This can lead to double standards as organisations present the best version of themselves to stakeholders, while doing the least amount possible to bring about real change. We've seen it with green-washing and pride-washing, and I sincerely hope that this isn't the price of going mainstream with ND. The less cynical part of me likes to think that ND really cuts through and appeals to peoples' sense of injustice.

In fact, cutting off talented neurodiverse people because they behave differently or you don't know how to manage them is borderline criminal – and a waste of precious human potential that's so often proven to have amazing commercial value. The skills crisis isn't getting any easier and recruiting talent is still a huge issue for many organisations in our industry. This makes neuro-inclusiveness more valuable than ever and something every business should ensure they get right. ■

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November Channel Forecast Session: Getting fit for a Net Zero future

Committing to Net Zero is a big but necessary step for channel firms, especially as transparency on green strategies becomes a growing requirement for business partners as well as end users. In this Channel Forecast insight session, channel leaders assess where the industry

sits in terms of the journey to Net Zero, and they open the window on their sustainability progress, success factors and best practices, providing food for thought and action points that could accelerate sustainability practices across the wider channel as well as your own business.

Join the debate!

To participate in this Channel Forecast session, contact **Heather Miles** on **07955 313 700** or hmiles@bpl-business.com for full details.

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Incoming PXC chief shifts

TalkTalk Group's transformational refinancing deal has created a springboard for PXC to accelerate its expansion and set a more focused agenda around go-to-market, altnet aggregation, enhanced channel partner engagement, product innovation and development alongside a greater emphasis on growth-focused leadership strategies, according to newly appointed PXC CEO James Smith.

2024 is shaping up as a defining year for PXC. Yet while there have been no fundamental shifts in how the wheels of the business turn, an acceleration of strategic moves and investments will prove to be uniquely transformational and innovative, according to Smith. He joined TalkTalk Group as CFO at the start of 2023 and worked on the demerger of the network wholesale business to create PXC as a standalone entity in March this year. Smith's hands-on role in developing the strategy and business plan prepared him well for the CEO position he adopted in September. "We've renewed our debt facilities and attracted an additional

£400 million investment," stated Smith. "This enables us to accelerate our strategy and fully leverage our market positioning."

Before joining TalkTalk Group, Smith was CFO of a FTSE-250 energy business for nine years, where he led a portfolio transformation to decarbonise and future proof the firm against a changing macro backdrop. This followed a career in investment banking working on M&A and financing projects for firms in the infrastructure and energy spaces. "I've specialised in big strategic change projects which is what we have done by creating PXC out of the TalkTalk Group," added Smith.



James Smith

We already have a national scale network and nearly 1,000 wholesale partner channels, so the opportunity is to deliver new and more products over that strong base

His primary aim right now is to establish a process of simplification and clear prioritisation in the context of a customer base approaching four million. "What we do day-to-day

across our national scale network is operationally and technologically challenging and can make us feel like a large and complex organisation," said Smith. "We will always deliver

the scale, resilience and reliability we are known for but need to ensure we can be entrepreneurial and nimble enough to respond rapidly to new demands from the market, our partners

Speed up the strategic gears

and their customers.” Ultimately, noted Smith, PXC is serving a fixed line connectivity market that constantly demands higher speeds and greater resilience, which is a major driver for an accelerating strategy around the key connectivity markets. “Altnets are an increasingly important part of our strategy as we rapidly increase our FTTP penetration and Ethernet base, which is

As business leaders, the most valuable assets for continued success are openness to change and the ability to learn and adapt

a key differentiator for PXC as the only scale wholesale aggregator platform in the UK,” claimed Smith.

Much of the necessary large scale capital investments into a full fibre future are now behind PXC, perhaps most notably a multi-year dark fibre investment in its backhaul network which enables the firm to scale its backhaul capacity while lowering its operating cost model. “Our investment focus is now on new product delivery and innovation,” added Smith. “We already have a national scale network and nearly 1,000 wholesale partner channels, so the opportunity is to deliver new and more products over that strong base as we move to an all-IP product set. My job as CEO is to focus down

and deliver on the strategy that will drive the business further into the future.”

He also pointed out that Ethernet has long been one of PXC’s strengths, boosted by the acquisition of Virtual1 in April 2022. “The base was built on a 100MB product set but nearly half is now on 1Gb+ speeds – there is a huge opportunity for 10GB Ethernet,” added Smith. “The

pace of that transition to products 100x the speed is incredible and symptomatic of the demands that we’re meeting in our industry ever year. But while connectivity demands grow, it’s also critical that we continue to build on our overlay products in cloud, security and voice. We’re making sure our partners have access to products from industry innovators like Zoom

so they can continue to see future growth and meet emerging opportunities.”

Increasing demand

Smith underscored the extent to which demand for faster connectivity is accelerating by citing FTTP uptake figures in PXC’s residential consumer bases, which are already at 25 per cent adoption – a quarter of which is through altnet partners. “There has been amazing growth from what was a low base over the last couple years,” added Smith. “In our B2B customer bases we have recently launched business grade FTTP as well as our altnet offering at scale, and the clear market feedback is that this will grow fast.”

Another path to accelerated growth being explored by

PXC is the potential of AI to transform processes, and over the past six months the company has developed several proofs of concepts. “The ones showing the most potential across sectors are those that offer co-pilot and chat-based capabilities,” explained Smith. “Within PXC, we have developed a knowledge bot which acts as an AI co-pilot for new engineers, driving up their speed to competency across complex areas such as network configuration and issue resolution in our front-line operations teams.

“We are also working with some of our technology partners to deploy Gen AI across software delivery such as automated test data generation, basic code creation and in operations anomaly detection and machine learning to proactively identify and ultimately avoid incidents and service disruption. It’s early days, but as a tech company we see real potential, given the right use cases, for AI to drive growth for both our business and partners.”

Smith is just as enthusiastic about the potential for proactive business leaders to adapt and innovate, especially in times of industry transformation. “Over the past few years our industry has had to quickly rise to the challenge of a once in a generation development in fixed line infrastructure, ever growing bandwidth demands, new working structures, the widening range of IoT, AI and so much more,” he added. “As leaders, the most valuable assets for continued success are openness to change and the ability to learn and adapt on the go.” ■

Just a minute with James Smith...

Your main strength and what could you work on? Resilience is a strength: I’ve been through some upending situations in my career and learned to be thick skinned and calm. But time management and prioritisation is always a challenge.

Three ideal dinner guests: Isambard Kingdom Brunel, as I’m fascinated by the Victorian transport revolution which was probably even more transformational than the communications revolution in our own life time; Lafayette, I’ve been listening to podcasts about the American War of Independence and the French Revolution – he was at both; and David Bowie because I spent much of my youth listening to his music.

If you weren’t in the industry what would you be doing? I was a keen pianist at school and nearly didn’t go to university because I thought I wanted to be a professional musician. So if I hadn’t led this life I’d probably be a second rate musician trying to scrape together a living.

Your favourite comedian or comedienne? Kevin Bridges: I’ve lived in Scotland for the last ten years and blunt, self-deprecating humour is the country’s best asset.

Best advice you have been given: Understand what you can control, and what you cannot. There’s a good book called *Dance with Chance* written by a professor I met at Insead. It’s about how we delude ourselves about what we can control, and then don’t spend enough time focusing on what we can actually influence.

What talent do you wish you had? To be a good swimmer. I just splash and don’t get anywhere fast.

The biggest risk you have taken: Earlier in my career I moved jobs for the promise of a promotion and some money at a time when we had just taken on a big mortgage and my wife was expecting a baby. It was 2007 and the new job was at Lehman Brothers, so that didn’t work out brilliantly.

How do you relax? Boxing, which I took up in my early 40s in what my wife would describe as a moment of mid-life crisis. But I love it. Relax is probably the wrong word but it’s great therapy.

Your biggest career achievement: When I made the transition away from my career in investment banking ten years ago to become CFO of one of my clients. Anyone who has made the transition from being an advisor or a consultant to becoming involved in running an actual business will know that it’s followed by a massive dose of ‘real life’ and a steep learning curve.

One example of something you have overcome: A derelict house: We bought it in lockdown without really understanding what we were taking on. It’s been brutal but we’re nearly ready to move in.

In three words, what are today’s top leadership priorities? Openness, authenticity and vision.

Industry bugbear? We need to drive for more diversity, not just for the societal responsibility we have, but because all the evidence and research proves that having teams of people from a wide range of backgrounds, abilities and experiences leads to better decision making and innovation.

Top tip for resellers: Only do profitable business. That sounds obvious but it’s easy to focus on volume growth and market share which doesn’t necessarily make you money.

Harnessing hybrid leadership

Bringing different executive responsibilities into a hybrid C-level leadership model is an emerging trend that provides food for thought for MSPs. Here, we explore the rationale behind the convergence of traditionally separate top level accountabilities under one remit based on two recent appointments that deliver strategic strength around consistency, focus, alignment, streamlined accountability, communication, efficient and productive leadership.

In June this year Westcon-Comstor adjusted its leadership approach and for the first time converged C-level responsibilities with the expansion of Chief Financial Officer Callum McGregor's remit to include COO accountabilities and duties. This encompasses IT, supply chain operations and ESG (in addition to existing responsibilities for finance, legal, data and analytics). McGregor joined the distributor in 2015 and became CFO in 2021, and he says the rationale behind his extended remit is to unlock high value cross-functionality for all stakeholders.

"Combining these roles creates an opportunity to free up our CEO, David Grant," he stated. "Hybrid roles such as mine – with their expanded remit and opportunity to drive synergies across the organisation – also allow the CEO to empower the executive leadership team to have a greater impact."

McGregor noted that Westcon-Comstor scans the operating models of the world's best businesses and the recurrent theme that emerges is hyper-consistency in base operating models. "My role change gives us the

opportunity to re-evaluate all areas of the business through this lens," he stated. "As well as deriving more value across different functions and ensuring we are optimised operationally, the key for me lies in enabling an ever greater focus throughout the business on our partners."

McGregor's additional appointment as COO continues a trend at Westcon-Comstor where a number of executive leaders have hybrid roles. For example, the CTO or CMO also have overall responsibility for business performance within a particular region. "This, however, is the first time that two C-suite functions have been combined into a single role," he added. "I wouldn't be surprised if other companies in our sector realise the benefits of this hybrid model and decide to follow suit."

But how can a business recognise if a hybrid C-level approach is right for them? McGregor says a lot depends on the size and maturity of the organisation, the strength and capabilities of potential candidates and an honest assessment of whether the operational gains are there to be made.



Callum McGregor

Hybrid C-level roles offer many advantages, including a clear and resolute focus on strategic priorities as an executive leadership team

One such area for potential gains identified by McGregor is the additional return on investment available through further leveraging Westcon-Comstor's data and digital assets. "We see our data-driven approach as a key differentiator and part of my expanded role will be to ensure that we

maximise the opportunity that this presents through our technology and operating platforms," he added.

McGregor believes that hybrid C-level roles offer numerous advantages, including enabling a clear and resolute focus on strategic priorities as an

executive leadership team. "For a hybrid C-level role to be successful one needs the ability to effectively join varied dots across the organisation," he added. "This is particularly challenging in a multinational entity with multiple business units, but is valuable if done well. I will also be focusing on inspiring strong leadership across the company so that every colleague is empowered to develop, learn new skills and maximise their potential."

In July, Tollring's Chief Marketing and Experience Officer Hilary Oliver also adopted the Chief Customer Officer role, becoming responsible for existing customer revenues as well as ensuring consistency in CX, client satisfaction and retention. "The benefit of converging responsibilities is to enable alignment across the teams and encourage consistency in approach," she stated. "The challenge is that the more responsibilities under one remit, the less leadership time can be dedicated to each department. However, our team leaders are empowered through less micro-management and more ownership of their roles."

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Partnership models



Hilary Oliver

Converging responsibilities enables alignment across teams and encourages consistency in approach

This approach creates a dynamic where the hybrid role delivers strategic strength rather than a dilution of focus. Of course, strategic focus is imperative across every team, and as an organisation matures and aligns every team on the direction, vision and strategy the leadership structure that works best becomes apparent. "For example, it made sense to separate our new business from customer success," added Oliver. "This is not a traditional approach, but it works well for Tollring as we enter new marketplace-based customer journeys. Our end user marketplace customer success activity has always sat in my remit, but it didn't make sense to separate how we look after end users from how we look after partners. Therefore becoming Chief Customer Officer was a

natural extension to my role, helping the whole team to be more customer focused." Tightening decisions at the top also helps to improve communication, observed Oliver. "Everyone needs strategic direction and to understand business priorities," she added. "Communication is critical to strategic alignment and

efficiencies in delivering priorities across departments. This could be a driver for more combined top level remits. If everyone is rowing in the same direction a business can be more efficient, work effectively as a team and drive forwards to successfully hit revenue targets. If just a few people are rowing in the wrong direction the knock-on effect across the business can be significant."

When executed well, a hybrid C-level model can greatly benefit the CEO who has a tighter circle of trust at the top. This is true of Tollring where all top level executives have more than one remit and manage multiple departments. "Our C-level execs put time aside weekly for business and product strategy, creating alignment across departments from the top," added Oliver. "As a leadership team we are aligned, work together and have deep consideration of other departments and the impact of our decisions on the whole business. Our unity helps us to make smart decisions across all departments – which in our industry, with the amount of daily change both technically and within our partners, can be a challenge." ■

Editor's comment...



THIS article crystallises how the convergence of different executive responsibilities under a hybrid C-level leadership model can lead to more focused accountability. This is important because a survey of channel business leaders conducted by Comms Dealer found that over three quarters feel more accountable to people, communities and the environment compared to three years ago. Therefore a reassessment of traditional leadership structures may become a high priority for MSPs. Download the free Leadership report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-leadership>

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

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MSP leader amplifies B C

Embracing business and technology transformation by putting people and the planet at the heart of strategy is key to long-term success and differentiation, says IT Naturally CEO Julie Bishop who is on a mission to reimagine the traditional MSP model through an inspirational, sustainable and human-centric lens.

If you were to ask Julie how she started her own IT firm you'd certainly be in for a mild surprise. "It was never my intention to run my own business, but when the opportunity came along to form an MSP to serve an airline I grabbed it," she stated. "For me, that means running an ethical company that puts people and the planet first. I think like a customer not a supplier which has helped me build IT Naturally into the people-focused organisation it is today."

IT Naturally was born out of the liquidation of Thomas Cook in 2019 where Julie had carved out a successful corporate IT career. Her new company began life by providing uninterrupted IT support to Condor (one of Thomas Cook's airline companies) and went from start-up to a multi-million-pound organisation with more than 30 employees

within the first year. This remarkable achievement is made even more extraordinary given that all this happened in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Julie founded the business alongside Richard Gardner, and their main focus in year-two was to establish the firm as a Managed Service Provider, gaining ISO 9001/27001 accreditations, Cyber Essentials and Investors in People Silver. "We wanted to reimagine how an MSP runs," added Julie. "It's about putting people first."

Last year IT Naturally became a B Corp and went on to win an Employer of the Year award. "We now want to focus on working with likeminded customers and suppliers," added Julie. "We want to work with other B Corps or companies with 200 to 5,000 seats who share the same ethos and values. We are currently looking at



Julie Bishop

It was never my intention to run my own business, but when the opportunity came to form an MSP to serve an airline I grabbed it

our partners and suppliers as we investigate our Scope 3s and head towards B Corp re-certification (companies are required to re-certify every three years and attain a higher score). Everyone we work with needs to operate as we do.

"When we discovered B Corp we knew it was for us, it mirrored what we were already doing. Knowing our brand, ethos and values has allowed us to focus on this area of the market and is

proving to be fertile ground for long-term growth. Tech can be green if you choose the right partner."

Prioritising processes

Another priority area for Julie is the standardisation of products and services. "Two years ago we set our sights on 50 per cent growth which we achieved but soon realised we had grown too quickly to maintain our people-first values and high customer service ratings," she explained.

"So we applied the brakes, put growth on hold and started to standardise our processes so every customer and end user gets consistent delivery and service."

The company generated £3.3 million revenue in year one rising to £5 million in 2023, and currently has a 50 headcount. Its technology partners include Microsoft, ServiceNow, Azure, CrowdStrike and Proofpoint. And in terms of new tech, Julie is a natural techie and

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excited by the rise of AI. "It's what everyone is talking about," she enthused. "We are currently investigating how AI can improve our service without losing the human touch – we never want to move away from that. I believe a mix of AI and advanced tech will streamline operations but highly trained friendly people will always be needed by our users."

In terms of market trends, Julie firmly believes that hybrid models are where things are headed, with bespoke options that enable companies to maximise the balance between budget and required expertise. "When we used to think about outsourcing it was often for the cheapest cost possible, but by using a hybrid model companies can keep some elements in-house while others are outsourced," she commented. "For example, customers may still want to use their own service desk from 9am to 5pm but outsource to IT Naturally overnight to get that 24/7 service. It's about flexibility to give the customer exactly what they want."

But the biggest opportunity facing IT Naturally, says Julie, is to be known for changing the face of the MSP market by prioritising people and the planet. "I'm proud of our recruitment policy and unlimited training budgets to give everyone a chance," she added. "This has resulted in delivering a high quality customer service with an average CSAT of over 90 per cent. We hope to retain our B Corp certification and have a wider range of customers that reflect our values and ethos. We are already on that journey of growth so watch this space."

Just a minute with Julie Bishop...

Role model: Timpsons (the shoe repairers) and its upside down business management philosophy. It has a culture based on trust and kindness and recruits people (like we now do) with the right attitude for the job, and focuses on everyone being happy in their work.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I always try and see the good in people and give people a chance, but I could work on my patience.

Four ideal dinner guests: I would love to have dinner with my grandparents. One died before I was born and the other three passed away when I was a teenager so I never got to have an adult conversation with them.

If you weren't working in the ICT sector what would you be doing? Engineering – back to where I started and studied.

Your favourite comedian or comedienne? John Julie (he's not a relative!)

Best advice you have been given: Be more confident. In my early 30s I was a woman in a man's world. I faced more challenges than I should have because of my sex but this advice made me believe that I was in the right place. Now I use being a woman to my advantage.

What talent do you wish you had? Not exactly a talent, but I have always wanted to be taller so I could see over the heads of other people.

The biggest risk you have taken: Taking a job with Etihad and packing my bags to go and live and work in the Middle East. Maybe more of a challenge than a risk.

Your biggest career achievement: Setting up IT Naturally and ultimately saving Condor from liquidating alongside Thomas Cook.

What could you not do without in your job: My business partner Richard Gardner.

Industry wish: To get more women into technology. IT is my passion, tech is always evolving and makes the world a better place and I want more girls to realise that they can be involved and make massive changes.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: In my spare time I am a Street Pastor – a trained volunteer who patrols the streets at night to care for and help people.

Top tip for resellers: Be honest: Only do something you'd be happy to tell your grandmother about.

Editor's comment...



IN A COMMS Dealer survey of channel leaders 81 per cent agreed that greater accountability around ESG and D&I relates specifically to trust, but 65 per cent lacked a Net Zero strategy and 47 per cent had no immediate intention to increase female representation in their boardroom. Our interview with IT Naturally CEO Julie Bishop underscores why meeting expectations around ESG and D&I is a priority. Download the free Leadership report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-leadership>

The future of UCaaS has arrived - and it's called Cross Connect



Jack Michalski - Director of Channel Partnerships

"The same wine in a different bottle." This is a phrase you may have heard regarding UCaaS products – they essentially all do the same thing with a lack of flexibility.

With Cross Connect, we wanted to shake up the entire wine rack and do something a little bit different.

Here's how

Cross Connect is powered by NetSapiens, a Crexendo Company. We spent an entire year building the platform so it was completely tailored to TSI, giving us the power to change almost anything to suit partners' needs.

Partners using the NetSapiens platform experience growth at twice the industry rate, and with 5 million users, it's full steam ahead on market acquisition.

100% uptime since launch

We're an incredibly reliable provider because we use multiple carriers and data centres for failover if ever there's an issue. With no downtime experienced since launch, Cross Connect is a robust and stable platform which won't let you or your customers down.

Mix and match for the perfect solution

A variety of Cross Connect subscription types mean partners can 'mix and match' licences, allowing resellers and MSPs to present a financially viable proposition for hotels, schools or any environment where there are endpoints with high/low usage.

Integrates with 300+ CRMs

In a matter of seconds,

Cross Connect can be integrated with the most well-known CRMs, and an API can be set up to integrate with in-house systems.

Zero-touch additional revenue streams

PromptVoice is fully integrated so partners can offer AI-voice call recordings and royalty-free music - instantly. Call Cabinet compliant call recording and analytics is also integrated for easy additional revenue streams.

Billing and contracts

Bills are tailored completely to the partner's needs, whilst also meeting compliance requirements. Contracts are 30-days in length, which gives ultimate flexibility. There are no minimum targets we require partners to meet, and we therefore make it incredibly easy to become a partner and sell Cross Connect.

SIP

Cross Connect also allows partners to bring over their own SIP trunks with another provider, including international SIP termination so the platform is suited to global players.

5 million users can't be wrong

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Inside the strategic mind

Celerity Chief Operating Officer Craig Aston became CEO of the BGF-backed MSP last month and wasted no time in sharing his strategic plans to accelerate business growth on all fronts.

North West-based Celerity began its commercial life in 2002 and is best known today as a provider of intelligent cybersecurity, data protection and data visualisation services. Its reputation as a fast growth MSP is certain to strengthen following Aston's appointment as CEO. He plans to further leverage the £15 million investment he secured from BGF in 2021 as the company doubles down on driving organic growth, diversifying its service offering, expanding into new sectors and strategic M&A activity.

Aston's appointment had been on the cards for some time and forms part of a long-term plan that enabled former Chief Executive Chris Roche to step back from the day-to-day business as it moves through milestone growth phases. "There will be no major changes but I will put my stamp on the culture of the business and its trajectory," stated Aston. "The next phase encompasses organic growth through sales excellence, widening our market and looking for additional acquisitions following the

Chilli IT transaction we completed in May 2024."

Aston characterises his leadership model as being based on a blend of trust and empowerment allied to accountability. "Ensuring this is reflected in the culture of my team and how we measure progress is my first task," he added. "People need to become experts in the areas they are working in rather than wear many hats as can be the case in smaller businesses. The other changes will be done over the next quarter as we prepare to hit the ground running in 2025."

Aston originally trained as a chartered accountant with PwC and moved to IBM in sales and sales leadership roles across financial services and infrastructure. He then joined a start-up in the recruitment software sector before setting up a financial services division for a distributor and reseller business where he was approached by the Celerity founders in 2017. "The bedrock of my experience is around data," stated Aston. "Making decisions based on data is my way of doing things."



Craig Aston

There will be no major changes but I will put my stamp on the organisational culture of the business and its trajectory

Celerity has built a reputation for providing solid support in business critical environments, mainly in the large enterprise space. Its key technology partners include IBM, Dell Technologies and RedHat, targeted at financial services, utilities, the public

sector along with new verticals added through the Chilli IT deal (logistics and retail). "We transformed the business from a reseller into a combined MSP and reseller and are famous for service delivery as well as driving customer satisfaction

in legacy environments," added Aston, who forecasts approximately £40 million revenues in 2024.

"We're ahead of our goals at the mid-year point and looking to deliver a positive result, adding fuel to our

of a new CEO

longer-term strategy to grow organically and through M&A. In three years time I would like to see Celerity complete at least two more acquisitions and have over 150 staff. As would be expected, given our investment by BGF, there will be another investment transaction at some point in the medium-term."

Hot trends

In terms of market trends that interest Aston most, the convergence of data protection and cybersecurity tools is right up there as more and more customers accept that it will be a question of when, not if, they will be hit by a cybersecurity incident. "This has led to an increase of minimum viable company solutions for backup recovery," added Aston. "Also, generative AI is a growth technology area which is starting to play everywhere. For our customers there are two areas where AI is making strides – automation through AI while the governance around data for AI is also becoming a big subject. IBM is taking a leadership position here with Watson Governance. Another area of growing interest is quantum cryptography and security which I expect to make large steps forward in the near-term."

Against this backdrop of innovation and transformation Aston firmly believes that the key to continued leadership success is agility and being constantly open to change, saying: "While we can all learn from the past it is important we do not hang onto it and embrace the rapid and ongoing changes in our marketplace."

Just a minute with Craig Aston...

Role model: My first boss at IBM who combined his expectations of staff with a fierce intellect while always caring about people.

Your main strength and what could you work on? My greatest strength is being able to take complex subjects or situations and explain them in layman's terms. But I could work on my preparation time.

Three ideal dinner guests: Barack Obama to understand what he thinks about today's world; my grandad, there are so many things I would like to ask him; and Billy Connolly to make me laugh.

If you weren't working in the ICT sector what would you be doing? Working in a leadership role in a different industry.

Your favourite comedian or comedienne? Billy Connolly.

Best advice you have been given: You have two ears and one mouth, use them in that proportion.

What talent do you wish you had? To look into the future.

The biggest risk you have taken: Leaving the security of IBM and becoming employee number one in a start-up.

Biggest career achievement: Investment for Celerity from BGF.

Something you have overcome: Painful shyness as a child.

In three words, what are today's top leadership priorities? Agility, trust and delegation.

Industry bugbear: The public sector is still weighted towards larger organisations and does not recognise the true value that smaller businesses can offer. Procurement frameworks with restrictive commercials make it difficult for small providers to derive real value from the work.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I was a regional finalist in the Entrepreneur of the year awards in 2022.

In hindsight: I would have moved out of the large company world earlier. While all my years at IBM were beneficial in terms of experience, the freedom and responsibility of working in and leading a small business means decisions have real tangible outcomes which brings true satisfaction.

What do you fear most? Forgetting to enjoy the journey I am on through being too busy.

Top tip for resellers: Work closely with the right vendors and don't underestimate the value you add.

Editor's comment...



IN THIS interview, Celerity CEO Craig Aston recognises the link between organisational culture and measuring progress as a competitive advantage. This echoes the findings of a Comms Dealer survey of channel leaders which found that 84 per cent see culture as a source of advantage, but, unlike Aston, only 36.5 per cent believe that culture is more important to performance than strategy and operations, when culture underpins all three.

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

Why are business management systems now revolutionising the telecom sector?

In the second of his columns, Anvil's business management system expert Ian McNamara, provides an insight into how real time, integrated reporting is revolutionising the telecoms industry and driving improved efficiency, cost savings and customer service standards to create competitive advantage.



In today's fast-moving telecoms industry, the ability to make informed, data-driven decisions can be the difference between thriving or falling behind.

This is where real-time reporting is stepping in to revolutionise business management.

Gone are the days when decision-makers relied on out of date or incomplete spreadsheet data from disparate systems. Which one is right I hear you ask, the sales CRM or the accounts package?

Telecoms businesses today are increasingly deploying 'always-on' reporting systems, such as Anvil (built specifically for telecom companies), to offer real-time insights into every aspect of their operations, in one, joined-up environment.

Real-time business management systems enable telecoms operators to track performance metrics instantly, from sales data and customer behaviours to billing and inventory levels.

And, crucially nowadays, because of OTS and OFCOM, contractual information.

Instead of waiting for end-of-month reports or compiling information from disparate systems, telecoms leaders now have access to a continuous flow of up-to-the-minute information. This constant visibility into operations fosters faster and more accurate decision-making.

One of the most significant advantages of always-on reporting in telecoms is its ability to identify trends and issues as they happen.

For example, if customer churn rates begin to rise or

if a network issue arises, these issues are highlighted immediately, allowing businesses to respond much more quickly. This agility is crucial in an industry where customer expectations for a seamless service are high and market conditions can shift rapidly.

Moreover, real-time reporting provides a holistic view of business performance.

Traditional systems often create silos between departments like sales, customer service and network management. But with a unified reporting system, all departments share access to the same real-time data, creating a "single source of truth." This shared visibility ensures that decisions are made based on comprehensive, consistent data, reducing the risk of miscommunication or errors caused by outdated and incorrect information.

The benefits extend beyond operational efficiency though. Real-time insights empower telecoms businesses to spot new growth opportunities, whether through identifying upsell potential, optimising pricing strategies or improving customer service. The always-on nature of these systems means that businesses are constantly informed, allowing them to stay competitive and responsive in an ever-evolving marketplace.

In summary, real-time reporting systems such as Anvil, are revolutionising decision-making in the telecoms industry by delivering deep, continuous insights into business performance. By embracing these advanced tools, telecoms companies can make smarter, faster decisions, improve agility, and drive long-term growth.

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? You can call us on **0800 048 4848** or scan the QR code to go to the Anvil website



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Giacom sets out MSP priorities

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, Giacom CEO Terry O'Brien and COO Nathan Marke (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor) set out the success factors that will help drive long-term growth for MSPs as ICT buying agendas become dominated by security, professional and managed services, infrastructure and applications, all underpinned by a desire to leverage cloud and remote IT services.

Getting to grips with SMB technology priorities and ICT purchasing trends will enable MSPs to make the right strategic decisions and steer a course through transformational times. According to the latest research from Analysys Mason, UK SMBs' spending on IT is returning to pre-pandemic growth levels with a projected CAGR of 5.6 per cent between 2023 and 2028. Within this, spending on cloud categories alone is expected to grow at a CAGR of 9.6 per cent. The research also shows that SMBs are adopting a more holistic outlook towards technology with cybersecurity, IT, managed services and infrastructure positioned as their top focus areas. These priorities contrast with pre-2020 when the emphasis was more on devices and peripherals as well as comms and collaboration tools.

That cybersecurity has emerged as the number one priority for SMBs should come as no surprise, emphasising the growing importance of safeguarding digital assets against increasing cyber threats. This is followed closely by IT and managed services which provide essential support and expertise for implementing and maintaining new technology, allowing SMBs to focus on core business activities with minimal disruption.

Key investments

Continuous investments in remote IT, infrastructure and cloud services have also become indispensable for SMBs, ensuring robust and scalable systems that can support business operations efficiently. Additionally, although SMBs have been somewhat late to the party in

investing in software, business applications are now a major focus, enabling organisations to streamline processes and enhance productivity.

Over the coming years end user tech requirements will evolve towards more sophisticated cloud and AI solutions, with a continuing emphasis on cybersecurity. The expansion of hybrid workforces and cloud-hosted resources, coupled with the rise in cyber threats, means that traditional security methods are no longer enough. SMBs are taking cybersecurity more seriously and developing comprehensive security strategies that require a high level of expertise to implement and maintain. As a result, we'll see an increasing demand for integrating various security solutions, including data protection, endpoint security, network defences, web and email security, mobile security and EDR/XDR.

Furthermore, spending on Gen AI will increase exponentially with every software vendor tying their offerings into one or more of the Large Language Model ecosystems to enable faster and better automation. It's crucial to integrate Gen AI with existing systems in a controlled environment, with ongoing testing and monitoring to prevent misuse, ensure information security and compliance with relevant regulations.

As a result, SMBs are increasingly adopting a more mature technology outlook, recognising the need to move away from fragmented purchasing. Instead, they are seeking strategic partners to cohesively manage their entire technology estate on an ongoing basis. As ICT



Terry O'Brien



Priorities in times of change



Giacom shares strategic insights with conferees at Comms Vision 2023

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

buyers focus on cybersecurity, cloud services and managed IT services, the complexity of the technology landscape continues to grow. SMBs are no longer just looking for products, they require strategic partners that can provide continuous expert guidance, helping them navigate, optimise and harmonise their technology solutions. This trend signals that the channel must pivot towards offering comprehensive managed services and cloud-based solutions to remain competitive and drive revenue growth. It's what I've been calling 'The rise of the MSP', with market data showing MSPs growing at more than 3 x the rate of traditional resellers.

While channel providers are pivotal in educating and enabling SMBs to manage these complexities, they themselves often face significant challenges, needing to go broader and deeper with their capabilities in an era of acute skills shortages. These shortages can limit their ability to expand service offerings and meet evolving customer demands effectively. To address these challenges, suppliers to MSPs must step up and provide targeted support beyond traditional training and product updates. A hands-on approach is essential, with continuous engagement and practical tools that enable partners not

Over the coming years end user tech requirements will evolve towards more sophisticated cloud and AI solutions with a strong emphasis on cybersecurity

only to understand but also to effectively implement and leverage new technologies.

Our growth accelerator packages exemplify this approach by helping partners identify significant opportunities within their customer bases, providing an end to end new service onboarding process, from identifying opportunities in an MSPs customer base, all the way through to enabling them to win, deliver and grow. Furthermore, vendors that provide sophisticated platforms that integrate with an MSP's own systems, automating

services from lead to cash and offering extensive, intuitive provisioning portals will significantly empower MSPs to adopt and integrate new products and services with greater ease.

Emerging technologies

Many conversations with buyers are initiated and driven by emerging technologies, largely due to their innovative capabilities and their potential to address new and evolving business challenges. The curiosity and focus on these technologies stems from their novelty and the promising advantages they bring to the table. They're an unknown quantity, which naturally captures the attention of buyers.

While emerging technologies like AI, IoT and cloud solutions may capture the imagination of IT buyers, it's important to recognise that mature products and services continue to play a fundamental role. These established technologies are critical, underpinning the foundations for other technology solutions. For example, robust connectivity is a prerequisite for the effective deployment of exciting new cloud and IoT solutions. So, the transformation in business and industry is not solely driven by emerging technologies,

Continued on page 26



Continued from page 25

there's a blend where new technologies build upon and enhance the capabilities of existing infrastructures.

A big topic of conversation for us with MSPs currently is encouraging them to consider offering their customers telco services. While these services are utility, being offered from the same supplier as part of a wider subscription service makes life more simple for an SMB and can be margin rich for an MSP.

MSPs must always be ready, willing and able to embrace emerging technologies to stay competitive and meet the demands of their clients. A proactive approach is essential not only for maintaining relevance but also for driving business growth. Investing in ongoing education and training is essential for building expertise in emerging technologies such as AI, advanced cybersecurity and cloud solutions. A comprehensive understanding of these areas will enable MSPs to offer more services and advice to their clients while ensuring successful implementations and increased profitability.

Strategic partnerships

Forming strategic partnerships with suppliers that are leading in these emerging fields will also provide MSPs with valuable guidance, additional training resources and access to the latest tools and knowledge bases. Good suppliers will also enable MSP partners with white-labelled marketing materials, versatile provisioning portals and complementary service offerings.

Against this backdrop of industry change and innovation, it is important for MSPs to review their tech stack and roadmaps, and reassess partnering strategies. MSPs must continually ensure that their offerings align with both current and future market demands. By regularly reviewing their tech stack, MSPs can deliver relevant, scalable and secure solutions to their clients.

Equally important is the review of partnerships. Collaborating with suppliers that offer a rich and varied portfolio of products and services, alongside enablement programmes that prioritise robust training, marketing support,



Nathan Marke

The channel must pivot towards offering comprehensive managed services and cloud-based solutions to remain competitive and drive revenue growth

and access to advanced procurement systems, will allow MSPs to maintain their competitive edge and deliver greater value to customers. This approach not only drives growth but also enables MSPs to remain agile, bringing products to market quickly and with minimal friction.

By positioning themselves as a strategic partner, MSPs can help businesses focus on their core activities while ensuring their technology solutions run smoothly and efficiently. This approach not only strengthens customer relationships but also creates a sustainable, long-term recurring revenue model for MSPs, making their businesses more valuable in the process.

Giacom outlines four winning strategies for MSPs that will make a competitive difference

Giacom believes there are four interconnected success factors that enable MSPs to drive differentiation...

- 1. Simplify your offering: SMBs don't need to know that there are 10 different ways with ten different vendors to secure their email. Choose the product that's right for you and make a recommendation to them as their trusted advisor. And don't compromise on this offering by customising your solution to the demands of individual customers. It will enable you to deliver a far more effective service to your customer and save you lots of money.
2. Deliver everything as a service: SMBs want simplicity in everything. Build a subscription stack for your customers built from common components across all of your clients. You will find that this delivers you significantly improved margins as customers are less likely to pick apart costs for individual components - if you like, this is a 'stickiness premium'.
3. Automate, automate, automate: Spend as much time working 'on' your business as 'in' your business. Seek to automate everything you do by thinking of your own tech stack as a platform, as the core product in your offering to your customers. Taking this approach unlocks the dream ticket of 'operating leverage' where the bigger you get, the more profitable you get.
4. Never forget that people buy from people: In an era of incredible technology innovation, it is easy to forget that the most important component of your differentiation is your people. An incredible team that your customer loves working with will always beat a super smart, but ultimately faceless platform offering.



Giacom sets out strategy roadmap during a Comms Vision 2023 Boardroom Session

More priority areas for MSPs to focus on...

WITH cybersecurity at the top of ICT buyers' agendas, MSPs must prioritise the integration of advanced security solutions. This includes offering multi-layered defences such as network and endpoint security, AI-driven threat detection and data protection. MSPs should also explore AI-powered solutions to drive operational efficiencies for their clients as this will be a key consideration for buyers in the coming years. This includes leveraging AI for process automation, predictive analytics and customer service enhancements, enabling businesses to operate more effectively. Partnering with an MSSP specialist that provides XDR (Extended Detection and Response) services that create real value out of an SMB's investment in cybersecurity software is an essential component of any MSP's toolkit moving forwards.

It's not just about what you offer, but how you deliver it. SMBs are increasingly looking for a single strategic partner with a full range of managed ICT services, including IT support, remote monitoring and infrastructure management, ideally through a simple, predictable monthly fee per employee.





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Assessing the evolution of sa

In today's competitive technology marketplace the question of how to achieve better results through a fit-for-purpose sales and marketing model has taken on greater urgency. Here, Comms Vision Gold and Silver sponsors unravel how go-to-market approaches are evolving and what this means for MSP strategic planning.



LOUISE ABBEY
MARKETING
DIRECTOR
EVE WHOLESale

MSPs can get ahead by understanding their market and their customers with data analysis. Get smarter with the data you have and use it to make informed decisions. MSPs may also need to be thoughtful about prioritising the most profitable and strategically valuable services. Aligning with market demand could involve shifting resources to areas with strong growth potential, such as cloud services or cybersecurity. Customers appreciate suppliers who can anticipate what they need, offer proactive solutions, and bring insights that go beyond the norm. A deep, authentic relationship built on a shared commitment to success makes it tough for competitors to displace them.



Cally Beaton speaking at the 2023 Comms Vision Convention



RUSSELL TILSED
VP SALES EMEA
8x8

MSPs need to have open minds and flexible thinking around their go to market plans to ensure long-term success and survival. One of the obvious growth areas is the cloud and SaaS. So many businesses in the UK haven't moved over yet and this means MSPs have an opportunity to sell new services to these businesses as part of digital transformation efforts. Cybersecurity, CX and transformation are perpetual projects: they are not one-and-done solutions, so there's continual revenue generation in these areas. Also, sales and marketing should be aligned around outcome-based, value-driven messaging that enhances differentiation and customer retention. You need to make sure you are measuring everything you are doing to see what lands well with customers.



ANGUS ROBERTSON
CMO
CONNECTWISE

MSPs now need to focus on understanding their customers' business strategies and align their technology solutions to deliver tangible value. This requires a more consultative approach where MSPs shift from product-centric to customer-centric approaches. The channel must also embrace digital transformation as digital channels and technologies are essential for effective marketing and sales in today's landscape. Investment is needed in digital marketing strategies, automation tools and data analytics. There are opportunities to be found in niche markets or specialised technologies as MSPs can differentiate themselves from competitors and position themselves as experts in those areas, developing deep domain knowledge and building strong customer relationships.



PHILIPPE DU FOU
EMEA SALES
DIRECTOR
INTERMEDIA

UNDERSTAND your audience as different generations will favour different channels. Gen Z will prefer to communicate via live chat or WhatsApp while Gen X will prefer a voice call or SMS text. It is therefore imperative to offer an omnichannel solution offering different channels. The UCaaS market is becoming a commodity market, and many partners are therefore seeing margin erosion. To prevent this, have a differentiated offer that provides UC but also CC in a single solution and talk about customer experience. We see a trend towards business intelligence where companies want to see what's going on with both their customers and their employees so have a centralised archiving solution that can capture calls, video meetings, chat as well as email.

Sales and marketing models



CHERIE HOWLETT
CMO
JOLA

IT'S easier to sell to existing customers than find new ones. Everyone knows this but few do it well, often because their approach is too one dimensional. Jola works with partners on a multi-level approach called the Mobile Data Revenue Generator (MRG) designed to find, close and deliver mobile data opportunities to existing customers. It's a GTM strategy for mobile data solutions that could be applied to any new product introduction. The MRG helps partners identify low hanging fruit and ensures the company can sell, provision, support and bill the product



SEAN DIXON
CHIEF REVENUE
OFFICER
FIDELITY ENERGY

MARKET saturation is a challenge as channel partners with the same vendors are struggling to stand out from the competition. This can be overcome through specialisation in a certain industry or geographical region. This strategy involves building a strong branding narrative and brings business through client referral in the same niche. Utilising analytic technology allows for better customer insights and targeted marketing for new business. Also, find out why customers are choosing to move to your company and are leaving their incumbent. Pricing aside, find out why you are winning business from your competitors and ensure it is clearly defined in your GTM approach.



DAN MACKRELL
NATIONAL ACCOUNT
MANAGER
SHIRE LEASING

OFFERING tailored finance options has become a key differentiator. Our programme enables MSPs to provide advanced solutions that align with customer demands while ensuring affordability through flexible terms that match product lifecycles. This approach meets evolving customer needs and supports sustainable business growth through increased sales conversions. We support MSPs in making long-term strategic decisions by providing immediate cash flow benefits. Financial stability enables MSPs to invest in new technologies and market opportunities confidently, positioning them ahead of the competitive curve and ensuring a strong, future-proofed go-to-market strategy.



MATT DEXTER
HEAD OF CLIENT
PARTNERSHIPS
OPENREACH

DIFFERENTIATING yourself through account and back-office teams has become critical due to increased competition. Having reliable and fast connectivity to support business offerings and messages is also key. The channel has changed significantly, but the fundamental aspects remain the same. Companies may have rebranded and connectivity has now evolved, but essentially it just makes stuff work. Software is where we've seen the biggest transformation with a drive towards video and the increasing adoption of AI will continue to drive this. What remains vital is meeting the customer's expectation of great customer service for the right price. AI is a huge opportunity that will bring challenges around integration and attrition.



JASON O'MALLEY
CHIEF OF
COMMERCIAL
OPERATIONS
VORBOSS

INCREASINGLY, big strategic decisions will focus on achieving efficiency through technology. Portals, bots and AI hold huge appeal for cost reduction. But it's too easy, surrounded by these shiny toys, to lose sight of what made our businesses great in the first place: good people, well trained and empowered to deliver for their customers. It's vital to choose carefully when implementing technology-driven capabilities. Make them work for you. The moment tech dominates your customers' experience, loyalty, recommendations and growth will reduce. Whatever the future holds, our industry will be driven by people buying from people. Customers want to get hold of someone who understands them, understands their challenges and can get things done.



RYAN MARTIN,
HEAD OF INDIRECT
ANS

MARKET saturation makes differentiation tough, while rapid digital transformation demands constant adaptation. Navigating data privacy regulations like GDPR adds complexity. Yet, these challenges also present opportunities. By leveraging data-driven insights, companies can better understand customer behaviour and optimise strategies. Omnichannel marketing creates cohesive customer experiences, while innovative technologies enhance efficiency and personalisation. Embracing sustainability can attract eco-conscious consumers. Staying ahead requires prioritising cybersecurity, expanding cloud services, enhancing customer experience, implementing automation and investing in talent. Tough decisions will be necessary, such as reallocating resources, making strategic technology investments, focusing on lucrative markets, evaluating partnerships and considering restructuring.

SILVER SPONSORS



Future growth planning

Next month's industry leading Comms Vision Convention (6th-8th November, Gleneagles Hotel) charts the Road to Future Growth and brings into focus the priority areas for MSPs to consider in their long-term strategic planning.

ICT buyers in the private and public sector are more tech savvy than ever before and more likely to rethink how they engage with MSPs. This means that an MSP's approach to the technology forces reshaping the future not only requires a sharp eye when reading the market, it demands a deep dive into the tech factors transforming businesses and how these drivers will play out in terms of IT buyer decision-making.

A sales and marketing model that supports these goals is also vital – and where these two conference tracks (technology evolution and GTM strategies) successfully converge leads us onto the Road to Future Growth.

Key points to be addressed include what's topping the CEO's technology agenda, the extent to which business transformation is being driven by emerging technologies rather than more mature products and services, and what a successful skills and tech partnering strategy will look like in five years time.

The conference will also bring into focus evolving

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

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

Remodelling GTM and revenue creation strategies

The question of how to achieve better results through a fit-for-purpose sales and marketing model has also taken on greater urgency. But what strategies should MSPs focus on as they transition their GTM towards the evolving business transformation and CX demands of end users? This question becomes



The world famous Gleneagles Hotel is a fitting venue for the channel's premier conference.

more pressing when considered in the context of a shift from transactional technology upgrades towards organisations requiring business transformation with tangible outcomes, which closes the gap between the customer's technology and business strategy.

Understanding the market's changing dynamics and how they impact marketing and selling is crucial and will be fully explored at this year's Comms Vision conference, alongside how MSP sales and marketing leaders could most propitiously target their resources and planning.

More broadly, the conference agenda will also consider the biggest challenges facing MSP sales/commercial and marketing leaders, while spotlighting their golden opportunities and how to meet opportunities with confidence. Comms Vision will also ask whether MSPs who are focused inwardly on a cross-selling strategy are perhaps missing new

organic customer acquisition opportunities. And gauge whether there is a strong case for the channel to recharge new organic customer acquisition as a primary growth driver. Furthermore, given the need to fully understand the end customer business and get closer to ICT buyers, Comms Vision will explore how MSPs' commercial resources are evolving, including pre-sales, and whether these functions need to be re-engineered.

To help MSPs stay ahead of the GTM curve and ensure a competitive advantage our intention is to underscore the priority areas that MSP sales and marketing leaders would be wise to consider in order to make the right long-term commercial choices when setting out on their growth journey. This may involve tough decisions when remodelling sales teams for a brighter future, and will certainly involve an assessment of the impact of growing end user demand for tangible outcomes and value versus deliverables.

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

About Comms Vision...

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

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The ICT channel's best performers were celebrated at this year's Comms National Awards ceremony (main sponsor Giacom) on September 26th, staged at The Park Plaza Westminster Bridge and hosted by Journalist Clive Myrie. This year's stellar event saw Uplands OneTelco scoop a trio of gongs including the Reseller of the Year award.

SCG Executive Chairman Paul Bradford was crowned Entrepreneur of the Year. He said: "I am honoured to have received the Entrepreneur of the Year Award, although as I said in my speech, I accept the award on behalf of the 800+ people that work so hard to make SCG such a fantastic business.

"This industry has looked after me over the past 36 years of my career and I don't think there's a better place to be. As I reflect on the journey I've been on to get here, my main advice to others is to focus on your people, people are at the heart of any business. I would like to extend my thanks to the judges and Comms Dealer for the recognition."

Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent said: "The Comms National Awards once again demonstrated why the ICT channel is so special. The judges reported another uptick in the quality and quantity of entries and the teams who put the submissions together deserve the utmost praise, regardless of the final outcomes. During the awards, the feeling of togetherness in the room was tangible. This truly was our industry united.

"Many congratulations to all the winners and highly commended teams and special thanks must go to all our sponsors, especially our headline sponsor Giacom which continues to support the channel in so many positive ways." Before the Awards Ceremony began, guests were treated to House of the Dragon themed pre-dinner drinks sponsored by Sky Business Wholesale and Giacom. Celebrations continued late into the night at an afterparty sponsored by BT Wholesale and DJ'd by DJ Jazzie B.



Giacom's Dale Parkinson introduces the evening's awards presentation



The night offered countless opportunities for memorable selfies



Cobalt MD Ian Dunstan explains to Judge Nikki Freeman why he should win



Xelion's UK Managing Director Dave Reynolds presents the Managed Services awards



The legendary Jazzie B, DJ's the BT Wholesale afterparty

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"I've started so I'll finish", awards host Clive Myrie



Gamma's Demi Clinch networks over dinner



How did we get that in the service lift?



Cheers from the Mdee team (and BT!)



Gamma's Andy Smethurst congratulates the F One team



Photo opportunities on the Iron Throne of Westeros



Guests were serenaded by the House of the Dragon orchestra

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Entrepreneur of the Year sponsored by
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Entrepreneur of the Year – Paul Bradford, Executive Chairman, SCG

Software Solution Category



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Inform Billing

Distribution Category



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Nuvias UC

UC & Collaboration Category



Best UCaaS Vendor
Voiceflex



Best CCaaS Vendor
Intermedia Cloud Communications

Intelligent Network & Connectivity Category



Best Network Service Provider
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Service Provider Category



Best Wholesale Service Provider (Up To £10m)
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UC Solution Category sponsored by
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Best SME UC Customer Solution
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Best SME Contact Centre Solution – Start Communications



Best Enterprise Contact Centre Solution – Onecom

Positive Impact Category

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Diversity & Inclusion Award – Vorboss



Sustainability Award – Bt Wholesale

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Best Reseller Innovation Award – Fidelity Group



Best Supplier Innovation Award – Gobig Online

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Best Partner Programme (Up To £10m) – Ms3 Networks



Best Partner Programme (Above £10m) – Jola



Best Channel Business Service – Channel Sales Academy



Best Channel Portal – Jola

Business Success Category

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Reseller Business Transformation Award – Core Technology Systems

Business Success Category

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SME Reseller Deal Of The Year – Cloud Geeks



Enterprise Reseller Deal Of The Year – Windsor Telecom

Reseller of the Year

sponsored by



Reseller of the Year – Uplands Onetelco

Leveraging the power of

Emerging technologies hold great promise for the channel but their adoption cannot be separated from risk factors. Here, channel leaders highlight the priority innovations to focus on and emphasise the critical importance of planning ahead and supportive vendor partnerships as being key to success.



JAMIE LAKE
CEO
PURE CLOUD
SOLUTIONS

AI remains front and centre for discussions on new technology adoptions due to its substantial benefits across efficiency, productivity and cybersecurity. We believe the biggest opportunity currently lies in maximising the Microsoft 365 product portfolio, coupled with Azure Virtual Desktop and MDR/SOC services. Adopting new technology inherently carries risks, but these can be mitigated through an onboarding process that ensures due diligence is conducted, thereby keeping risks as low as reasonably possible. Our strategy involves investing in employee education and training, enhancing sales enablement and leveraging resources from vendor partners such as professional services, marketing materials and growth funds.



COLIN LEES
CTO
GAMMA

As businesses transition to high-speed fibre over the next few years, Gamma will expand its portfolio, bringing on board a range of fibre providers. This will ensure our partners, and their customers, can harness the power of faster connections. We are closely monitoring developments in 5G and IoT, with plans to launch new mobile solutions soon. In partnership with Cisco, Gamma is actively exploring AI-driven solutions to enhance customer experience, streamline operations, and reduce costs. The key challenge in adopting these technologies is the skills gap. Gamma mitigates this by partnering with trusted suppliers. We are committed to equipping our resellers with the training and resources they need to adopt and implement these cutting-edge technologies.



STEFAN BAGIENSKY
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
OPUS TECH

NEW technologies on my radar include Native Voice AI engines, which process voice content and respond to context in near-real time, eliminating the need for transcription that compromises accuracy. Messaging technologies such as IMS and RCS hold the potential to form the basis of a universal rich messaging standard across the market. The greatest opportunity lies in the rise of open platforms which offer unparalleled flexibility for integrations, allowing the development of tailored solutions with minimal overhead. Adopting new technologies involves heightened risk. Product lifecycles have shortened significantly and rising M&A activity within the vendor market has compounded risk factors. To capitalise on emerging technologies, we plan to monitor vendor innovations, actively engaging, evaluating, and trialling them at early stages.



PETER OOSTHUIZEN
HEAD OF PARTNER
SERVICES
SPITFIRE

As businesses connect more devices to the internet, they must look at how their networks are deployed, how they can be managed as they are scaled up and how they can be secured. IoT connectivity facilitates modern concepts such as automation and AI, both of which are well positioned to revolutionise the business world. A key driver for adopting new tech such as IoT connectivity solutions is to reduce risk to the business. The IoT market is still in its infancy. Focusing on an IoT connectivity solution that is simple to deploy and manage, is cost effective, and secure, allows partners to spend more time developing their solutions with confidence. A key part to this is having a vendor you can work with closely.



SIMON FOGAL
HEAD OF UC&C
ALFONICA

IoT is a standout technology as it can be used in different ways to help support the telco industry, especially with the switch off. Other opportunities are more available, but as far as new technology goes, IoT offers endless opportunities. The risk of adoption is minimal. While there are marketing costs involved in the equation, most telco companies provide the essential multi-SIM management platforms which are the engine of the IoT solution. The investment is relatively small compared to the potential positive ROI. Building strong relationships with vendors to ensure alignment with company goals and support will be essential.

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emerging technologies



RICHARD SCOTT
SALES DIRECTOR
START
COMMUNICATION

AI is the obvious buzzword within the industry. We are seeing light touches of AI being deployed across applications such as meetings and processing tasks, and the winners in the market will be the ones who can productise revenue from this. Adopting new tech poses a huge risk and a full assessment with testing must be carried out before introducing this to any proposition, which is where relationships with vendors are crucial. Knowing the good, the bad and the ugly before you deploy any new technology is the only way forward.



JAMIE HUGHES,
UK SALES DIRECTOR
EVOLVE IP

ONE of the new technologies that we have brought into our suite of products is to support PCI compliance, replacing 'pause and resume'. We have also seen a demand to consolidate technologies. One of the biggest risks when adopting new technology is around deployment. Having effective staff training programmes in place so they quickly understand the value of that technology, know how to use it and therefore can minimise any associated business costs, is crucial. For us, helping partners adopt the latest propositions comes down to education and support, so that they understand the technology benefits and can identify new market opportunities.



SCOTT DUNCAN,
BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER
ADVANTEX

WE'RE closely monitoring advancements in AI-driven Auto Attendant systems and call analytics as these technologies are set to revolutionise communication strategies. The biggest opportunity lies in leveraging AI to interpret a customer's emotional state from their tone of voice, speech pace and choice of words. This capability can enhance customer engagement by tailoring responses more effectively. AI-driven auto attendants also streamline call routing, reduce wait times and handle high call volumes with consistent service quality, while offering valuable insights into call patterns and customer preferences. Although adopting new technology introduces risks, the benefits far outweigh these concerns. We are committed to mitigating risks through robust security measures and close collaboration with vendors.



PHILIPPE DU FOU
EMEA SALES
DIRECTOR
INTERMEDIA

AI is a key focus for Intermedia as it enables smarter, more efficient interactions. For example, AI agent call summaries with sentiment analysis or video meeting insights can highlight key action points to ensure meetings are productive. We mitigate risk for new technology adoption with strict adherence to privacy and security, ensuring all innovations are implemented safely and reliably. We offer training, flexible branding and integrated solutions that empower partners to own customer relationships and leverage new technologies seamlessly.



RYAN MARTIN
HEAD OF INDIRECT
ANS

AI continues to revolutionise industries with automation and data analysis meaning that resellers can offer more innovative, efficient and secure solutions to their clients. AI presents the biggest opportunity due to its versatility and can optimise processes, enhance decision making and create personalised experiences. AI also creates opportunities in other parts of the tech stack, like CRM or security. Adopting new tech involves risks such as security vulnerabilities, implementation costs and potential disruptions. However, risks can be mitigated by partnering with the right vendor. To maximise opportunities, we've invested in employee and partner training, immersing in industry trends and fostering a culture of innovation in our own organisation and partner community.



JAMES SPENCER
VIDEO SOLUTIONS
DIRECTOR
JABRA

AI-driven tools, such as Microsoft Copilot, which automate tasks like transcription and drafting emails have immense potential. Generative AI will fundamentally change how workers operate by acting as a virtual colleague that handles tedious tasks like taking notes and transforming productivity. One way that AI will change the future of work is through voice. This can unlock new levels of productivity. Intelligent video conferencing solutions that provide more accurate transcriptions and input for AI-powered tools will be the gateway to generative AI. Adopting new technology may carry risks but we know what customers want and have responded to demands.

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Contact us to explore how you can grow your partner community with Comms Dealer bespoke events.

Simon Turton
sturton@bpl-business.com
07759 731 134

Aston named CEO



Craig Aston

CELERITY'S Chief Operating Officer Craig Aston is to lead the MSP's upcoming growth push as CEO, taking over from Chris Roche who assumes a non-executive role. North west-based Celerity was founded in 2002 and provides cybersecurity, data protection and data visualisation services. Since securing a £15 million investment from BGF in 2021 the company has accelerated growth through service diversification, strategic partnerships and acquisitions. It generates over £40 million revenue and has a headcount of 90. Phil Male, Celerity's Non-Executive Chair, commented: "With Craig's appointment Celerity will double down on its growth strategy focused on diversifying the service offering, expanding into new sectors and strategic M&A activity. The company's strong organic growth, combined with its ability to integrate complementary businesses, positions it well."

Full interview with Craig Aston on page 22

Also on the move...

TELENT'S long-standing Finance Director, John Kimpton, is stepping down at the end of December for health reasons. He will be replaced by Gillian Bonthron who has more than 25 years experience working in finance, including spells at Mitie, KPMG, Smiths News and Healx. She joins as Chief Financial Officer of Telent Technology Services, the operating company for Telent in the UK and Ireland. Bonthron stated: "Joining Telent at this stage in its development is an exciting challenge." Kimpton worked for Telent and its predecessor business for over 30 years. He joined GEC in 1991, initially in defence operations before becoming Financial Director for the Marconi Value Added Service business in 2001, which formed the core of Telent in 2006.



Gillian Bonthron

SCC has pulled in Andy Dunbar as UK General Manager, Software. He brings 20 years experience working with SIs, ISVs, VARs and vendors, and moves from SoftwareOne where he was Software & Cloud Services Director for EMEA West & Africa. Jean-Philippe, Head of EMEA SCC Software Strategy, commented: "I can't think of anyone better equipped than Andy to lead our UK software strategy."

JUSTIN Carl is to head up distributor ProVu as Managing Director, bringing over 20 years experience in IT and telecoms. ProVu Chairman Darren Garland commented: "Justin's appointment gives us more resource at a senior level, and his background combined with management experience makes him an invaluable addition to our leadership team. I am confident he will play a crucial role in ProVu's next chapter." Carl added: "I will engage with customers and vendor partners to forge strong relationships that help achieve our own and our partners' strategic goals."

HR PROFESSIONAL Victoria Jackson has joined BCN as Chief People Officer. She brings 20 years experience in the HR industry in a career that includes spells in the TV, technology, retail and hospitality sectors.



Victoria Jackson

Jackson is a Chartered Fellow of the CIPD and a board member at Octagon Theatre Bolton. "BCN has built up a people-first ethos over the years," stated Jackson. "Ensuring that existing and new staff members feel supported at all times will help maintain the quality of work and technical expertise at BCN. I can't wait to get settled in and nourish the company's people culture and promote employee growth and success."

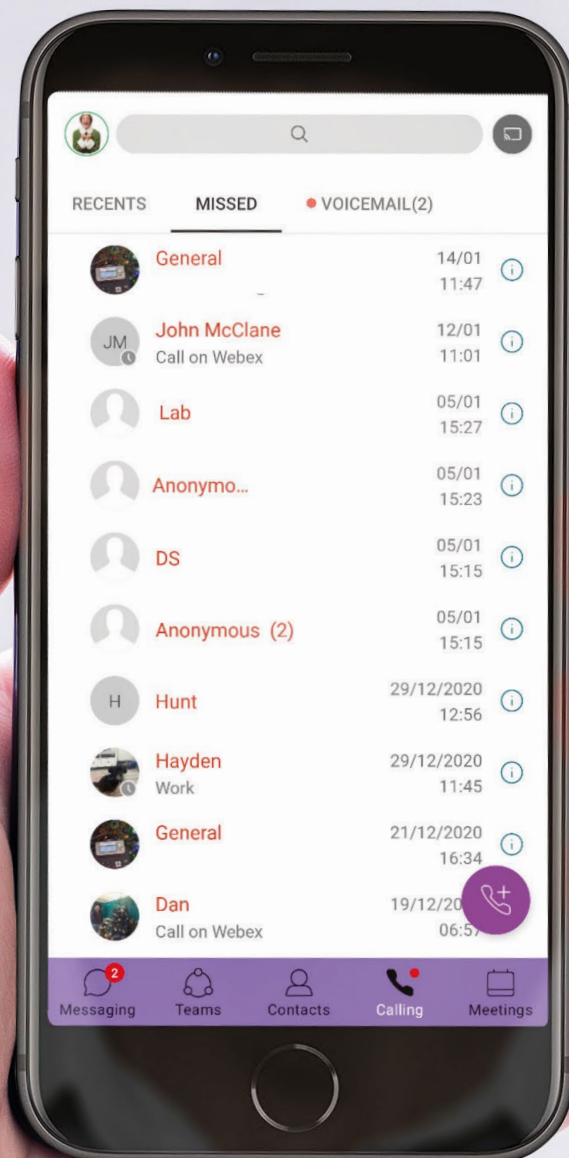
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- Harnessing analytics and AI to drive growth.
- Harnessing Mobile and IoT opportunities to drive growth.
- Mid year update: What's new and interesting in the Channel.
- Harnessing Software integration opportunities to drive growth.
- Why will a Sustainability-led business practice be key to future success?

Don't miss out on being part of the conversation! Contact Heather Miles at **07955 313 700** or hmiles@bpl-business.com for full details on how to participate. Seize the opportunity to shape the future of the channel!

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