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This month's movers and shakers

# Comms Dealer February 2019

## Click to open 2018 M&A deals break all records

ICT sector mergers, acquisitions and investments hit a new record last year and the pivotal surge in dealmaking is forecast to continue during 2019.

### SPECIAL REPORT

Among the 800-plus ICT and software companies tracked by Megabyte the number of deals last year escalated to 420, up 19% on 2017 figures.

M&A accounted for 266 deals, 111 private equity and 43 capital market transactions, up 12%, 46% and 8% respectively, according to Megabyte.com Chief Analyst Philip Carse.

"The reasons for the high level of activity are numerous, including the need for strategic

change in such a fast moving world," he stated.

"This is facilitated by a wall of money in the asset management industry looking for high quality assets, along with historically low interest rates and banks eager to lend for M&A purposes. Trade buyers are also in a strong position with the tech sector generally enjoying organic growth, decent profitability and good cash generation."

The coming 12 months could be pivotal for the channel

in shaping the M&A landscape for years to come, believes Knight Corporate Finance co-founder and Director Adam Zoldan (pictured above). "We experienced a record year in 2018 and continue to see high levels of transaction activity," he stated.

"We fully expect the M&A market to flourish again this year, primarily as a result of continued and sustained levels of funding into the sector."

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## M&A deals hit records

Investments hit a new record last year and are expected to continue during 2019.

a fast moving market. Hindered by a wall of uncertainty in the asset market, many are looking for exits, along with high interest rates and a need to lend for liquidity. Trade buyers are in a strong position to acquire the sector general-organic growth, stability and good value.

in shaping the M&A landscape for years to come, believes Knight Corporate Finance co-founder and Director Adam Zoldan (pictured above). "We experienced a record year in 2018 and continue to see high levels of transaction activity," he stated.

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Other content discussed on the day:

**Navigating the growth landscape**

Adam Zoldan and Paul Billingham, co-founders and Directors, Knight Corporate Finance

**M&A value creation - how to get it right for buyers and sellers**

Interview with Chris Russell, CEO, Arrow Communications

**Choosing the right financing option**

**Grab Life: Aligning business with personal**

Adam Carolan, Managing Director, Xentum .

**Is your firm ready to harness future expansion opportunities?**

Philip Carse, Chief Analyst at Megabuyte

**DEALTalk: The Simon Jack interview**

Daisy CEO Matt Riley on becoming a comms channel tour de force

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE closest parallel to today's step-changing marketplace is perhaps the advent of ISDN in the 1980s which I well remember as taking the industry in a new direction that demanded a near immediate response from the reseller community. In terms of industry trends back then, ISDN was basically it with a smattering of

CTI integration from the likes of Siemens and the Hicom system. In a nutshell, resellers were wise to form an ISDN strategy to maximise the market opportunity and book as many PBX PCIs (Pre-Connection Inspections) with BT as possible and invoice just as many annual maintenance contracts. Thus the industry functioned, with customers forking out fortunes for leased lines.

Not too long before this time, prior to deregulation, end users were happy to spend eye watering amounts of money on renting answer machines and in some cases, such as Drs surgeries, renting at sky high cost giant CPE call diverters with a huge floorspace footprint.

Fast forward to post-deregulation and speed of change was best seen in the almost overnight transition from a Mercury Smart Box to a chip that slotted into the system. Then followed murmurs of mobile and the odd assessment of roof robustness to support a mast atop a reseller business.

The 2025 PSTN and ISDN switch off truly marks the end of an epoch in the calendar, but in reality that era ended long ago. The contrast between past and present could not be starker in terms of the multiplying opportunities faced by the channel in cloud, contact centre and mobile to name a few. But the single constant that links then and now is the imperative to respond quickly and strategically to the changing dynamics of the ICT marketplace. In days past there was no option but to get on board with the rise of ISDN. Today, there is no choice over whether to react to its demise sooner rather than later as we move towards the cliff edge.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• White Horse Telecom breaks into a gallop (p38)

# Connectus in Shelton hire

FORMER ITS Technology Group CEO Roy Shelton has joined forces with Doncaster-based Connectus as MD, taking the helm of a strengthened management team and pushing forward with a SME and mid-market targeted growth campaign based in large part on the firm's local fibre network.

His appointment follows the hires of ex-Daisy Group Director Kate O'Brien who leads marketing, Andy Marsden who heads up sales and Scott Taylor, boss of a new compliance and security team. Incoming Jessica Murray leads the finance operation.

These moves follow the acquisition of cyber and data specialist Cybersity and a £150k funding boost from the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF) by FW Capital in December 2018.

Shelton commented: "Connectus has a great history, diverse customers and with a key strength in connectivity and our own network across Doncaster the business is well positioned for growth.

"We have invested heavily in our infrastructure, vendor relationships and our people, and with the acquisition of Cybersity



Roy Shelton

and its team of engineers we can offer a real point of difference."

Connectus was formed following the acquisition of Eximus Solutions 12 months ago and Shelton's appointment comes soon after the retirement of Eximus founders Maurice Lee and Elaine Gellion.

"With its own full fibre network in Doncaster the business has evolved and enhanced its existing product suite to focus on services delivered over IP including voice as well as CCTV and detection," said Shelton.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

FINTECH player Anchor Computer Systems has completed the acquisition of MSP VTG Cloud in a seven figure deal. The acquisition includes the assets and contracts related to the managed services side of VTG Cloud which will continue to operate the other aspects of its business. Anchor CEO Mike O'Sullivan said: "VTG provided the managed services for our SaaS related business for over eight years. When the opportunity came up to acquire that side of the business it was a natural fit for us and our future strategy."

CYBER security provider Foresite's UK partner strategy is ratcheting up following the roll out of a strengthened EMEA Partner Programme. The channel-only company is targeting MSPs, ICT resellers and security consultants. "Foresite enables partners to address the growing security concerns of their customers on a pay-as-you-go subscription basis," said Jason Humphreys, SVP of Managed Services. "Using their own branding partners can realise recurring high margin revenues while unlocking additional opportunities such as software customisation and compliance projects."



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COMMENT: MANAGING CHANGE



Steve McIntyre

WHATEVER your views on the great Brexit shenanigans there's one thing most business leaders can agree on – that disruption and uncertainty are some of the biggest obstacles to growth. But it's not just the 'B' word that affects the 'D' word as 53 per cent of CEOs say a highly competitive environment is their top challenge to

growth. That's according to a Frost & Sullivan report detailing the top five things keeping CEO's up at night.

Finding strategic technology partners is another major area of concern but it's the ability to remain agile and fluid in an ever-evolving world that often makes the difference between success and failure. It's true you can't prepare a business for unknown disrupters but you can prepare to move quickly. In an age of agile software development and 'products as a service', it's a lot easier than it used to be.

New digital technologies are emerging at an unprecedented rate and changing the way we work and live. Often the key to success is not to focus on implementing each technology change, but instead to become change-resilient, to implement processes platforms and solutions that keep you one step ahead.

The long awaited arrival of 5G isn't too far away and it's already being hailed as a game changer, putting even more power into the hands of an increasingly mobile workforce. In addition, the development of flexible screens will open up new applications and solutions, as well as additional revenue streams. Technology never stands still and this speed of change is another top challenge.

Digital transformation continues at pace and its influence will further grow. But how businesses prepare for and embrace change often determines their prosperity. That's one thing we can hopefully all agree on, whatever our political persuasions.

Steve McIntyre, Chief Marketing Officer, Nimans

# Arrow nets Abica in Scottish expansion

ARROW Business Communications has bolstered its presence in Scotland with a third acquisition in the region and a new office in Aberdeen following its purchase of Abica and subsidiary business PCR IT.

Abica has over 650 customers and provides solutions covering connectivity, mobility, IoT, and UC for private and public sector organisations. Its November 2014 acquisition of PCR IT added more IT capabilities into its solution portfolio.

All Abica's Directors and employees, including founders David Munro and Gregory Barnett, will be retained as part of the Arrow Group.

Barnett commented: "With Arrow's history of building successful businesses in the telecommunications sector we couldn't be happier about integrating Abica into Arrow."

Arrow CEO Chris Russell commented: "Abica strengthens our presence in Scotland and combined with our existing business we will create a Scottish Powerhouse."

Arrow first secured a presence in Scotland with its purchase of Orca Telecom in 2015 which was followed by Siebert Telecom two years later.



Chris Russell

Last month Arrow also announced the acquisition of European Utility Management

(EUM), an energy broker specialising in property development and management firms.

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# Ladybird spot on for T-Tech



Daniel Teacher (left) with Melvyn Bird

SUFFOLK-based Ladybird Communications has been acquired by London IT firm T-Tech in a deal that creates a one-stop consultancy and MSP to SMEs and bolsters T-Tech's Microsoft Teams proposition via the addition of telephony.

The transaction sees Ladybird remain a standalone division within T-Tech Group and the financials of the deal were not disclosed.

T-Tech MD Daniel Teacher and Ladybird Head of Telecoms Melvyn Bird have previously worked together on various projects for a number of years.

"This is a great development opportunity for both companies and will allow us to grow significantly together," commented Teacher. "We hear frequently that customers want one provider to manage their requirements and the merging of technologies makes this development a natural step forward."

Bird, who carries his job role into T-Tech Group, added: "Joining T-Tech will enable us to scale our business in a way that was not possible before, allowing us to not only develop our portfolio of services but branch out into new areas."

## Resilience built-in

AN UPGRADE to cloud telephony provider Xelion's hosted platform offers built-in resilience, building on an already strong uptime track record.

UK MD Dave Reynolds stated: "Telephony is a mission critical application for business users so resilience and redundancy is a fundamental component of the Xelion 7 service – not an afterthought.

"We are currently building a new monitoring portal allowing partners to have the same real-time view we have of the platforms. Partners will be able to configure alerts and triggers to optimise their service."

Xelion recommends the resilience service is hosted using the Amazon Web Services (AWS), although other options are open to partners.

Each Xelion platform supplied to a partner is deployed to one of four primary nodes within AWS, with the other three used redundantly.

"The entire AWS function is automatic and does not require the partner to do anything," stated Reynolds. "This model gives both maximum performance and uptimes for the customer."

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

CLARANET is rolling out MPLS superfast Broadband across Ireland, building on its current MPLS Ethernet and broadband offering. Dave Palmer, Head of Network Design at Claranet UK, said: "Businesses across the country are capitalising on the latest innovations, including cloud computing, the IoT and AI which all depend on a fast, powerful and reliable Internet connection."

NIMANS is to divert 100% of its waste from landfill following a link up with local firm JWS Waste. The agreement will see over 100 tonnes of waste reprocessed, including tonnes of card, paper, plastics and general rubbish. Nimans' Distribution Centre Manager Chris Musgrave said: "This new partnership strengthens our CSR strategy which operates alongside other initiatives such as Gold Investors in People status."

SCANSOURCE has added Swoop Datacom's lifecycle management systems to its product line card, giving resellers across Europe access to the ForgeServe solution which complements the AV and IP handsets from many of ScanSource's suppliers. The new ForgeServe tool will help ScanSource partners improve their ability to deploy IP devices, manage customer device estates and reduce overheads.

NEW additions to Avaya's Desktop Experience portfolio of smart business devices include a new line of headsets, expanded Broadsoft UC feature support, enhancements to the Essential Experience J100 Series, and the availability of Device Enrollment Service 2.0. "Avaya continues to make strides in the desktop space and advancing the Open SIP market," said Ard Verboon, General Manager of the Devices portfolio, Avaya.

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COMMENT: CHANNEL MATTERS



Nick Powell

AUTOMATED and streamlined processes are on the rise, but what happens when automated technology lets you down? Nowadays, most suppliers have a portal for provisioning, monitoring and raising tickets, and it's often the decider as to which new supplier is chosen. A good API should be built from the ground up – be simple, consistent and fit for the

future. But a clunky API will create hours of extra work and no end of frustration, so researching portals and processes when thinking of working with a new supplier is key.

Furthermore, automation is important for quick quotes and streamlining processes. By simply entering postcodes, bandwidth and bearer bandwidth partners can receive instant confirmation on service availability as well as real-time capacity checks. Some portals offer the extra option to save and review quotes online. From your point of view ordering is quick and pain free, and you can go straight from quote to order to save time and limit errors. Further validation checks are usually carried out behind the scenes by the supplier. And keeping up to date with your comms services is vital too, not only to monitor your client delivery but also to confidently offer updates to your customers.

For good reasons we are all in favour of partner portals and APIs, but the question is how much automation should be built into processes? Automation must not be an excuse to replace knowledgeable people. We need skilled people to answer our calls and deal with questions that the automated approach cannot manage. So it's important to have the right balance between automation and real people to keep partner frustrations to a minimum and efficiency at a maximum. Analysis still benefits from human knowledge, and we all know how annoying it is to be told 'Computer says no!'

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

# Pangea maximises 5G data transferal

THE challenges faced by 5G networks in maximising data transfer are being addressed by Pangea and the Kingston University following the formation of a Knowledge Transfer Programme Partnership which is supported by Innovate UK, the Government-backed public body set up to drive productivity and economic growth.

"The project's aim is to develop enriched video compression and data transfer techniques over 4G+ and 5G networks, unlocking groundbreaking speed and quality capabilities with huge implications," said Pangea MD Dan Cunliffe.

Pangea will recruit a top class graduate who will be based in its offices and tasked with leading the project and working with Kingston University's Professor of Wireless Communications Christos Politis and video compression specialist Associate Professor Nada Philip.

"Alongside speed increases which will rival those delivered by optical fibre, 5G will incorporate IoT technology which opens up many possibilities for the health sector and across the emergency services through the use of smart devices," stated Professor Politis.



Dan Cunliffe

Professor Philip aims to address the key challenges in delivering optimal high quality video consistently through wireless networks when travelling at high speed.

"When you stream multimedia content it will be affected by different network conditions," he explained. "We will be looking at how to ensure the moving images arrive in high definition, allowing for accurate medical diagnosis and enabling police forces to identify people from their body camera footage."

Practical applications cited by Professor Philip include ambulance video streams that will enable medics to triage patients before reaching A&E;

and always-on video streaming which would enhance crime scene assessments.

"By combining our connectivity, commercial expertise and channel access with the power and knowledge of Kingston University's academics, along with access to its 5G testbed, we aim to pave the way for data transferal over powerful 5G networks," added Cunliffe.

"It will transform how video and other data compression is used across industries and unlock fresh revenue streams for our partners and bring us a step closer to a 5G world."

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COMMENT: SIP TRUNK MIGRATION



Axel Kloessner

IN GERMANY we have seen the move from ISDN to SIP trunks through a mix of proactive quality implementations and reactive fast track ones. The latter being nearer the December 2018 deadline. But the former is where the UK can follow New Zealand and Germany in successfully educating UK businesses early about the benefits of moving to SIP trunks.

The benefits of using SIP trunks over ISDN are wide ranging, including

convergence, cost savings, integration with cloud services and resilience. And highlighting to end users the benefits of VoIP compared to their current voice services and bundling this with other products such as ultrafast broadband with VoIP built in, or offering a free replacement router, will result in a more successful voluntary migration from ISDN to SIP trunks in the UK.

Early traction is most seen where customers are nearing the end of their service contract or making changes to their current agreement – known as coincidental migration. Given the current UK switch off date of 2025, this is where the UK will have the greatest ability to transition current customers to SIP trunks by having sufficient time to transition them using a number of commercial solutions.

Ofcom has articulated the principle that ‘customers who do not migrate on a voluntary basis should be no worse off [as a result of forced migration] than they were before migration’. To reduce any cost impact it would be wise for UK resellers to begin clear and regular communications with customers now to explain the differences, the countdown stages to 2020 and 2025, and provide recommendations on how they can handle any potential migration issues with their current installed devices.

**Axel Kloessner, COO, FONtevo (Auerswald)**

# NGA's growth aims clear after key hire

WHOLESALE full fibre provider Nextgenaccess (NGA) has pulled in industry big cheese Steven Marshall as Chairman just weeks after appointing former Gamma CEO Bob Falconer as a Non-Exec Director.

Marshall was previously Group Executive Vice President of American Tower, a \$60bn Fortune 500, NYSE listed telecoms and broadcast infrastructure business.

His 35 year career also includes executive and public board experience in the power and gas transmission sector and international construction.

“There is a major digital connectivity deficit in the UK which needs addressing urgently to drive underlying economic growth,” said Marshall. “This is recognised by the Government and Ofcom which are encouraging investment in this area. The time is right for Nextgenaccess to scale up and leverage solutions that enable faster and more cost-effective full fibre infrastructure deployment.”

Marshall’s appointment follows a £22m investment boost for Nextgenaccess from the National Digital Infrastructure Fund (NDIF) to develop its UK 10Gb fibre network.



Steven Marshall

NDIF, a commercial fund established in 2017 by Amber Infrastructure Group, has acquired a significant minority shareholding in Nextgenaccess.

The Amber Infrastructure Group has over £8bn under management with interests in energy, property and transport.

Khalid Naqib, Senior Investment Director, Amber Infrastructure, said: “As Nextgenaccess enters this exciting new phase I can’t think of a better person to chair the business and help chart its growth.

“Following on from Bob Falconer’s appointment to the board, we now have two sea-

soned industry experts who have operated in some of the world’s key telecoms and infrastructure roles, and Nextgenaccess will benefit immeasurably from their judgment, insights and counsel as it builds out the infrastructure needed to deliver a gigabit future for the UK.”

Marshall is also on the advisory board of Allied Minds and is a Senior Exec’ Advisor to Federated Wireless. He is a member of the Chartered Institute of Building, the Institute of Management and the IoD.

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**800,000** Circuit users worldwide

**Circuit OS**

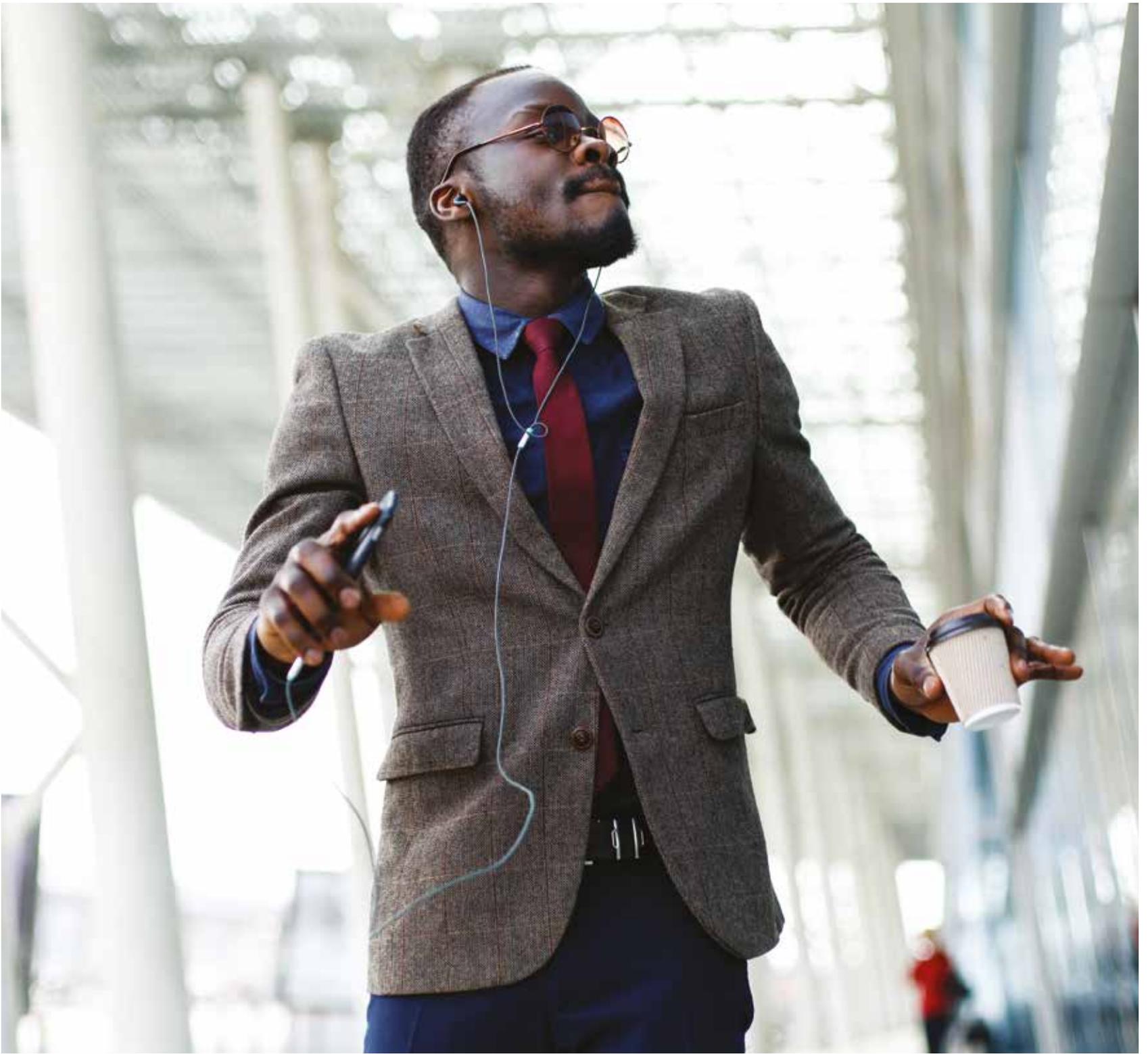
**1 million** Circuit Openscape extensions deployed last year

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# SME resellers: Fast-track

## Award winning leading German telecoms manufacturer puts UK first as part of its international expansion drive

A NEW and exciting company to the UK is set to make a big mark on the telecoms channel this year and is ambitiously looking for reseller partners seeking something uniquely different for their SME clients for up to 112 endpoints.

THE COMPANY has been working with SOS Communications, the leading UK telecoms solutions distributor to listen, learn and develop the right solutions, services offering and Reseller Onboarding Program with a long list of benefits to help resellers succeed.

UK resellers will be joining a family run business that truly listens to its customers. FONtevo is the international brand name of the award winning and leading German telecoms manufacturer, Auerswald GmbH & Co. KG. Auerswald was founded in 1960 and has continually won awards for Unified Communications Solutions, Services, Products and Training.

### What makes FONtevo different?

Last year, FONtevo won multiple awards for the 10th year in a row from the leading publication "Markt Intern". These included accolades for product, innovation, service, support and best in class, so it's no wonder the company has signed up 16,000 resellers across Germany, Austria and Switzerland and is now expanding internationally, with the UK being its main focus.

'Born in Germany', FONtevo solutions are designed, produced and manufactured to the highest standards,



'We are an agile and quality driven company and want to work with resellers to ensure we provide real revenue opportunities in the UK'

Axel Kloessner  
COO, FONtevo (Auerswald)

- Wireshark training
- FREE Sales and Marketing targeted support to define, communicate and secure end-user leads
- Sales support through the availability of Demo Kits and a simple to use Sales Configurator
- 'Real Choice'. FONtevo provides real choice to dealers with all systems integrating with many other popular manufacturers IP handsets. The FONtevo handsets also work with the major UK SIP providers for out

providing exceptional quality, reliability, responsiveness and support services for all reseller partners. FONtevo focuses on continuous quality, deliverability and customer satisfaction through developing solutions and systems that add value to the end-user whilst, providing a level of assurance that investment in their telecom system will continue to deliver state-of-the-art excellence supported by an exceptional technical support team.

The exclusive partnership with the leading UK Distributor, SOS Communications, brings two quality driven and experienced businesses together to provide an exceptional level of products, support, free training and new opportunities for resellers looking for an alternative, high quality SME telecoms solutions provider.

### What are the real benefits for resellers?

The Unified Communication solutions are focused on providing sales for resellers by delivering the following key benefits:

- An on-premise PBX solution that focuses on enabling SME businesses, up to 112 end points, to migrate to and from the Cloud, whilst protecting their business investments
- A solution that can provide an alternative for those SME customers not requiring a fully hosted system, but still requiring the benefits of on-premise solutions
- A solution which can easily be purchased by SME's over time without the usual 3-year lock-in requirements that



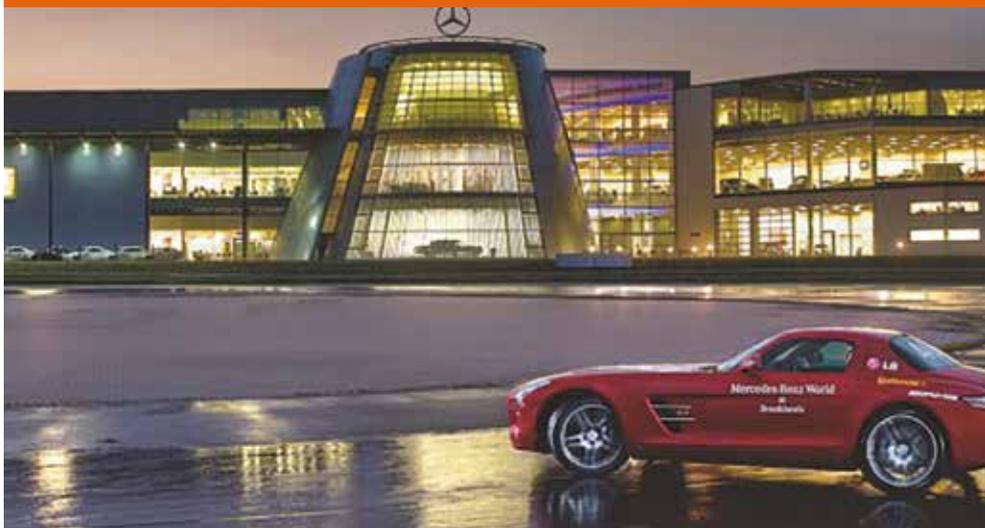
- hosted solutions require
- The launch of the NEW D-Series SIP handsets with exceptional quality, usability and UK SIP Trunk integration out of the box for the major providers
- FREE academy attendance for both sales and technical training, including free

- of the box configuration
- Efficient Architecture and Support. All systems are on the same software architecture, making installation and maintenance less complicated with direct access to FONtevo for additional support.

do you speak **FONtevo** Accelerate your telecoms sales in 2019 with FONtevo! Dealer Day 28th March 2019 @ Mercedes-Benz World Register at - [tinyurl.com/speakfontevo](http://tinyurl.com/speakfontevo)

# your telecoms!

## Want to know more about becoming a FONtevo UK reseller?



Resellers wanting to know more should come along to our Dealer Day on the 28th March 2019, at Mercedes-Benz World, the historical birthplace of British Motorsport and Aviation to meet the FONtevo management and technical teams. It's an exciting event for FONtevo, where the NEW D-Series SIP handsets will be launched to the world, so come along and touch and play with the solutions and products and see how FONtevo really are reseller focused.

As an added bonus, if you register early for the Dealer Day you will get the chance to choose from a FREE speed and skid ride or a 4x4 axle-twisting experience before

the main event starts. You'll also get the chance to WIN an amazing prize of an AMG GT Half Day Driving experience. The day starts at midday when you can grab some lunch from the buffet whilst waiting for your booked slot for the FREE passenger rides to start - don't forget to book your slot when you register! There are limited spaces available, so it's first come first served to experience the amazing facilities at the venue. Then onto an introduction, an overview of the FONtevo solutions, an interactive panel debate hosted by Nigel Sargent from Comms Dealer, a break out demonstration session followed by networking, drinks and finishing up around 6pm.

We are very pleased to be the exclusive distributor for FONtevo in the UK, who we see as the Mercedes of the Telecoms world

Colin Hepher, CEO SOS Communications



To register for the event, go to [tinyurl.com/speakfontevo](https://tinyurl.com/speakfontevo) and fill in your details, and don't forget to choose your passenger experience.

do you speak  
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## CALLING ALL SME DEALERS

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### Reseller Benefits

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- ✓ FREE Tech & Sales Training Academy
- ✓ Real Choice; easy SIP Phone integration
- ✓ UK Compatible high quality SIP Handsets
- ✓ Same architecture across all systems
- ✓ Direct access to the manufacturer
- ✓ Sales configurator and demo kits
- ✓ End-user Marketing campaign support

Want to know more?

Come and meet the team at our Dealer Day at Mercedes-Benz World on Thursday 28th March 2019 from Midday

- Hosted by **Nigel Sargent** from Comms Dealer
- **FREE** Fast lap or 4x4 passenger rides
- **WIN** a half day AMG GT Driving Experience

Register here

<https://tinyurl.com/speakfontevo>

# Splicecom slickens migration to cloud

SPLICECOM has greased the wheels of reseller application sales via a 'technology breakthrough' that enables customers to upgrade and migrate 'en masse' to cloud telephony with minimal disruption.

Director of Marketing Robin Hayman said the channel-only vendor's product and service roadmap has always been reflective of feedback from customers who expressed concern over the potential disruption of adopting new applications if it meant the provision of a new phone system or service.

"They bought Splicecom because its feature richness and architecture best suited their way of doing business," commented Hayman. "Eliminating any such disruption was a major benchmark for Select Voice and it has paid off."

Splicecom, the UK's only remaining manufacturer and developer of UC solutions and products, says any customer can now upgrade to its next generation Select Voice cloud platform seamlessly in minutes.

And Hayman believes that the simplified migration process advanced by Splicecom will encourage more resellers to become a Splicecom partner.



Robin Hayman

He said: "There's no new learning curve for users and the customer gets a feature rich suite of Splicecom apps, natively integrating Skype for Business, softphones, BYOD, contact centre, business reporting and recording and more, either with their existing Splicecom phones or integrated Yealink phones."

Hayman also noted that Splicecom has eased disruption further by introducing a per-user licensing structure on Select Voice.

"Irrespective of how it's deployed, in the cloud, on-premise or any blend of the two, the user licence is the same, the only difference being whether the customer wishes to pay monthly or as a capex purchase," explained Hayman.

"The same goes for the phones. Whatever the custom-

er's finance strategy is, Select Voice fits it and at the lowest possible TCO."

John Gillborn, founder and Director at ICS Communications, has welcomed the development and believes that Splicecom has bucked industry trends by realising the full potential of existing customers.

"Forget the 'new customers only' deals, Splicecom has demonstrated its commitment to existing customers by extending past investments well into the future," he observed.

Also lauding the upgrade project is Chris Grant, Technical Director at Intech Telecom. "This is like heart surgery on a major scale, but it's done in no time," he said. "Splicecom has made sophisticated migration to a future-proof platform as simple as an upgrade."

## Yeastar in quick lane to hosted

YEASTAR CEO Alan Shen has predicted a bumper year for hosted comms providers as more SMBs than ever gear up to migrate away from on-premise telephony systems.

Shen's trend analysis is supported by figures contained within an Eastern Management Group report which says hosted PBX sales now account for 18.1% of the total PBX market, up from 3.6% in 2010.

The report also states that small businesses with under 50 users will make up the largest hosted PBX market during the mid-term forecast period.

"These stats mean that right now is the optimal moment to capitalise on the soaring market," enthused Shen.

In a bid to help ICT resellers capture this 'optimal moment' Yeastar has developed a hosted platform, called Yeastar Management Plane (YMP), designed to roll out hosted PBX services 'faster and more easily'.

"In recent years hosted PBX services have advanced by leaps and bounds," added Shen. "The key is to find the right approach with minimum risk and maximum profit potential."

Yeastar claims to have developed such a key with its YMP platform which, says Shen, can create a full featured live cloud-based PBX system in seconds.

"YMP is the fast lane for service providers and telecom resellers with potential margins of 70%," he added.

## NEWS ROUNDUP

EARLY demand for video-in-a-box packages launched by Konftel have exceeded expectations, says the company, which cited the popularity of plug-and-play attributes as a key driver. The solution, which signals Konftel's first foray into the video market, works via a single USB cable that connects a conference camera, speaker phone and the room's screen to an app on a laptop. UK Sales Director Jeff May stated: "In the past many resellers have been reluctant to enter the VC market, avoiding complex camera and codec set-ups and sticking with traditional audio conferencing. Every reseller can embrace this type of technology."

IT EUROPA is gearing up to stage Channel-Sec 2019 (Royal Garden Hotel, London, 14th March), an event designed to reflect and address the challenges and opportunities faced by channel players who operate in the burgeoning security space. "The threat of cyber crime is driving an explosive growth in demand for security related products and services," stated IT Europa MD Alan Norman. According to IDC, worldwide spending on security will reach \$133.7bn by 2022.

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# Openreach gets set for full fibre push

OPENREACH'S full fibre roll out has received a significant boost following the activation of plans to hire 3,000 new apprentice engineers over the next 12 months and the opening of a new training centre for engineers in Peterborough.

Openreach also noted that 11 additional build locations have recently been identified, bringing the total number of towns, cities and boroughs in line for full fibre to 25 as Openreach seeks to advance its full fibre ambitions.

The company says it is on track to reach three million homes and businesses with full fibre broadband by the end of 2020. Openreach also revealed its intention to publish information on its website detailing build plans for the coming year, including the total number of exchange areas to be reached in each location.

It will publish details of the specific exchanges where FTTP is currently being built, has already been built, or it intends to start building within the next three months.

The company said it will update this information every three months. Minister for Digital Margot James comment-



Clive Selley

ed: "Openreach's publication of clear plans for where, when and how it will be investing in new fibre networks is an important step.

"Long-term commitments from the industry like this are important for local communities which need this kind of guarantee on when they can take advantage of the benefits that fibre brings. Demand for full fibre broadband is only going to increase, and through our modern Industrial Strategy

we've worked hard to create an environment that will encourage commercial investment like this."

Openreach CEO Clive Selley, added: "In the last year we've learnt to build to a high quality and at a competitive cost. This year we'll prove that we can build the network on a vast scale and connect customers seamlessly."

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# Vapour hikes voice licenses

THE sale of 3,000 Avaya licenses during H2 2018 marks Elland-based Vapour Cloud out as one of the fastest growing mid-market cloud voice partners in the UK, according to its CEO Tim Mercer.

Vapour has witnessed 500% growth in its cloud voice division over the past two years and the firm expects to sell 4,000 Avaya licenses this year supported by a just-signed collaboration with Manchester-based Avaya service firm IPNetix.

The link up aims to strengthen the pre and post-sales offering for Vapour Cloud voice customers in the UK. "There is more competition than collab-

oration in the IT channel, but in combining complementary resources and expertise, clients receive a far more value adding package from the experts in their respective fields," stated Mercer.

"We have a huge year ahead of us when it comes to the omnichannel comms solutions we provide to clients, and the relationships with Avaya and IPNetix are crucial components in our onward growth."

With net recurring revenue of 96%, Vapour grew by 51% in 2018.

Mercer said he aims to expand the company by at least another 50% over the next 12 months.



Tim Mercer

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NEWS ROUNDUP

FULL fibre alternative network provider ITS Technology Group has signed up north west-based Network Connect as a connectivity partner. ITS CEO Daren Baythorpe said: "Having capable partners such as Network Connect with the right skills, experience and market understanding will help businesses benefit from new full fibre and wireless services." Ryan Heys, Sales Director, Network Connect, commented: "Our aim is to encourage businesses to understand and embrace technology. Our partnership with ITS has opened up many new opportunities and is helping us to play our part in creating full fibre Britain."

DISTRIBUTOR Pragma has added Ascom VoWiFi solutions to its line card with an initial focus on the i62 WiFi phone. The move is expected to bolster the firm's Ericsson-LG portfolio and has been welcomed by Julian Burkhill, Technical Director at BDR Telecom. "We have been aware of the i62 for some time," he commented. "To know that this has been officially tested and approved to work on the UCP and eMG80 platforms by Ericsson-LG gives us the confidence that we need to add the i62 to our proposals."

# TIG acquires consultancy



Des Lekerman

GOLD Microsoft Cloud partner TIG's presence in the financial services sector will be more strongly felt following its acquisition of netConsult.

Finance sector specialist netConsult provides technology consultancy to global alternative investment clients, and will receive a boost from TIG's expertise in AI, data analytics and ML. Its customer base has assets under management of more than \$100bn.

The deal is the first in a string of buys enabled by a £6m funding boost injected by BGF as TIG seeks to become the UK's primary CSP for medium sized firms.

As part of the transaction Mark Nunny, a BGF investor, joins the TIG board. He stated:

"Many mid-market corporates will need to move to the cloud over the next five years and TIG is well placed to support them."

The acquisition doubles Watford-based TIG's headcount to 90 staff and netConsult's management, including co-founder and CEO Richard McDonald, will lead an expanded team.

TIG CEO Des Lekerman commented: "Bringing BGF on board provides us with backing from an investor with substantial experience and success working with companies in our sector. Its minority approach means that we gain from its financial support and expertise but retain full control."

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# Sabio pockets WFO experts

SABIO'S workforce optimisation (WFO) proposition and geographic reach have been extended with the acquisition of Spain-based Callware, which specialises in WFO, speech analytics, UC, cloud contact centre and also has a base in Mexico.

"We know that engaged staff and effective workforce optimisation processes are essential in enabling businesses to deliver brilliant customer experiences," commented Andy Roberts, CEO of the Sabio Group.

"WFO continues to be a major investment area for organisations looking to differentiate experience through customer engagement. The acquisition is a smart move as it helps to scale our global WFO activities



Andy Roberts

and establishes Sabio as Verint's leading partner in Europe."

The acquisition follows Horizon Capital's 2016 investment in Sabio to broaden its solutions portfolio and geographic coverage. Deals include the acquisitions of Rapport in March 2017, DatapointEurope in July 2017, Bright UK in March 2018 and flexAnswer Solutions in December 2018.

# Westcon sets up tech-only forum

A DESTINATION for technicians seeking peer-to-peer experience relationships and access to tech learning has been established by Westcon.

The free-to-join tech-only forum, called the Westcon Tech Xpert Community, aims to help all partners develop their technical expertise and solution selling capabilities in an environment free from sales and marketing talk.

"The Tech Xpert Community is for technical people only, vendor agnostic and led by Westcon's pre-sales solution architects," commented Mike Cox, who is Westcon's Vendor and Alliances Director.

"There is much pressure on partners to deliver ever greater value to customers in a more technologically complex world.

"By sharing experiences and building relationships with technical peers, the Tech Xpert



Mike Cox

Community gives individuals the opportunity to learn from each other and deepen their understanding of technologies.

"This is created by technical people, for technical people and all about sharing and learning together. Ultimately everyone will be able to design and build better solutions at the crucial pre-sales stage and deliver greater customer value."

# ExcelRedstone buys in Ireland

ONE of Ireland's largest IT network infrastructure solutions companies, Kedington, has been snapped up by ExcelRedstone.

Kedington operates from offices located in Dublin, Cork and Limerick in the Republic of Ireland, and also has offices in Derry and Belfast, along with a Copenhagen base.

ExcelRedstone itself was formed in June 2018 through the acquisition by Excel IT of Redstone Converged Solutions and Commensus from RedstoneConnect.

It specialises in the smart building and data centre markets and the purchase of Kedington brings additional expertise in IT network solutions, structured cabling and data centre engineering services.

"The addition of Kedington sees ExcelRedstone strengthen its position across the UK and Ireland, as well as expanding its presence in mainland Europe and beyond," stated ExcelRedstone CEO Barry Horgan.

"With Kedington's strong position in the vibrant mar-

ket in Ireland, plus additional European footholds including routes into the Nordic economies, we are also building a platform for ExcelRedstone/Kedington across the EMEA region and beyond."

Kedington MD Matt Porter said: "Kedington will now be able to provide our customers with the scale, breadth of capability and international dimension that they now require."

ExcelRedstone works out of offices in London, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Frankfurt.

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# Evolution Capital raises alert over high cost of exit pitfalls

BUSINESSES ill-prepared for sale risk losing 20% or more of their true value on deal completion, according to mid-market boutique TMT M&A advisory firm Evolution Capital.

Corporate finance whizz Gary Smith, Head of Business Sales and Divestitures at the company, is on a mission to match vendor expectations with deal outcomes and claims Evolution Capital's sector-specific valuation methodologies, developed over 17 years and built into a bespoke and managed service, provide a business value safety net for vendors based on 'clear and detailed data and audit trails'.

"If you are looking to sell a business, winning is 0% luck and 100% preparation," stated Smith. "Our research concludes that business owners who manage deals themselves or engage broking-style services achieve offers at lower levels than their counterparts who are advised by knowledgeable advisory firms. Even worse, the prices achieved and agreed at heads of terms are frequently reduced by over 20% by completion."

According to Smith these alarming stats are reflective of



Gary Smith

exit processes that do not leverage the forensic or strategic analysis offered by specialist corporate finance advisors who, for example, would as standard deploy robust methodologies that take into account not just current but intrinsic value, which is the potential value of future cashflows.

"Preparing a business to withstand the challenges of a well organised buyer investigation is similar to preparing a car to resist the brutal demands of a 24-hour race," added Smith.

"The grid position may reflect the price the business has achieved but maintaining position or moving up requires

investment in preparation. The key to winning is to start in the strongest possible position."

Smith took up his own strong position at Evolution Capital in October 2018, moving from the MD role of an online UK technology company with group revenues exceeding £100m. He is credited for turning around the business, growing profitability by 750%; and he led the three year value building programme and preparation for disposal, completing the transaction in 2016.

Prior to his career as an advisor Smith held a number of Director roles within multi-nationals in the digital

and technology marketplace with responsibilities for P&L.

He also brings international experience of both disposals and acquisitions for technology companies in the Asia region where he held the post of Regional Chief Executive with Saongroup, which he grew from two to seven integrated subsidiary companies within five years with revenue growth increasing over 600% during his tenure.

Smith's M&A and financial experience, his understanding of technology businesses and strength in strategy review add considerable weight to the message Evolution Capital advances to ICT company owners who are seeking the topmost value when they decide to exit and sell their business.

"Sellers generally have two things in common: They want to achieve maximum value and they have never completed a business sale before," observed Smith. "On the face of it, a sales agent or broker makes a compelling offer, comprising a low-cost entry process with no in-depth review and rapid acceleration to the thrill of the marketing phase. A quick memorandum and you're ready to

meet multiple buyers and talk up the price. But this dream scenario is likely to be no more than a sleepwalk into diminished value or deal failure.

"History also shows us that shareholders may not fully understand the many and varied obstacles and their significant impact on the realisation of maximum value."

A crucial stumbling block, reiterated Smith, is that broker propositions may not present a true picture of the likely outcome. "If performance doesn't dovetail with financial records, or projections aren't supported by contractual agreements, you could find your sale lost or the price dropped in the final hours of concluding a deal, right when you are at your most vulnerable," he warned.

"Smart entrepreneurs avoid these setbacks and demand bespoke solutions, forensic analysis and managed services to prepare for a buyer's due diligence. They also seek the assurance that the price they agree at heads is the price they will realise at completion." ■

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## The Entrepreneurs' Event Calendar -

# 2019



### Life after Brexit?

Will we leave Europe on the 29th March and what will be the impact on our sector? A seminar with special guest speaker Neil Parker, RBS Chief Economist, followed by luncheon at one of the world's oldest private banks. Child & Co, London EC4

5 Apr



### Evolution Capital 'Celebrity' Golf Day

Enjoy a golfing experience on the Goodwood Estate, one of the oldest golf courses in Sussex, followed by a two course luncheon. Goodwood, West Sussex

8 May



### The Five Secrets to Realising Intrinsic Value

Seminar and luncheon at the exclusive and historic supercar concours garden party. Honourable Artillery Company, City of London

6 Jun



### Le Mans Grand Tour - 13th - 18th June

Exclusive experience and memorable tour for IT business owners combining fine cuisine, luxury accommodation and a grandstand view of the greatest endurance race in the world. Le Mans and St Malo, France

13 Jun



### Festival of Speed Preview

Technology entrepreneurs' exclusive Festival preview and luncheon at our trackside suite. Goodwood, West Sussex

4 Jul



### Cowes Week Regatta

Jump aboard the historic HMS Medusa and learn how telephony and technology were used to save thousands of lives in WW2, followed by luncheon ashore. Portsmouth Harbour, Hampshire

16 Aug



### England Rugby International

Who better to play as a warm up to the World Cup than Ireland? Join us for luncheon at The Turks Head then on to the England vs Ireland match. Twickenham, Middlesex

24 Aug



### Maximising Value for your Business Sale

Learn how to win when completing a business sale transaction with our specialist speaker, followed by luncheon. The Rosewood Hotel, London WC1

5 Sept



### Rapidly Changing TMT Landscape & Valuations

Understanding how the landscape is changing to ensure you are maximising your key business metrics. Seminar and luncheon. Evolution Capital, West Sussex

3 Oct



### One to One Business Reviews

One to one business reviews with Evolution Capital's industry experts. Comms Vision at Gleneagles Hotel, Scotland

6 Nov



### Preparing your Business for 2020

Understanding the key areas to focus on for 2020 to ensure you are building maximum value, with guest welcome from Mark Mosimann. Mosimann's, London SW1

5 Dec



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## Talk Time benefits from energy boost

TALK TIME, one of the leading providers of mobile services in Scotland, started offering energy to its customers in association with Fidelity Energy in the autumn and the partnership is already yielding rewards.

It's always refreshing to get an honest answer to a question, even if it's not the answer you were expecting, so when we asked Head of Sales Gary Marzella what was easier to sell, mobile or energy, his response was unpredicted.

"In truth it's energy, for one simple reason. Customers can quickly and easily understand how much money they can save by switching suppliers and that's always music to a Scotsman's ears!"

Of course, a lot comes down to the rapport Talk Time has with its customers. When presenting something new it's vital to make an impact and that's where the strength of Talk Time's partnership with Fidelity Energy reaps dividends, as Gary explained: "All our existing customers are happy to listen to something new we have to offer as we already have their trust from looking after their businesses for many years. When presenting an energy proposition, Fidelity's process and portal makes it really simple to see the advantages.

"Due to the quote and how it is generated, a new client can select from the numerous options given which shows exactly what savings can be made from a wide spectrum of providers. When savings are made customers are happy to move. Equally, we can reduce

the increases being forced by their incumbent supplier."

Gary first met up with the Fidelity Energy team at the launch of the Carphone Warehouse 'Business Energy Saver Scheme' last October. As part of the energy service, partners get a choice of energy suppliers, no operational overheads, full training and support, and the ability to white-label the service in marketing campaigns.

"I was impressed with what John Haw, Sean Dixon and Oliver Holt from Fidelity had to say and for us it's been plain sailing into the supply of energy services. They came up to our offices and provided full training and their webinars have helped a lot too.

"As well as our loyal customers, we have been contacting many different types of businesses as any company will be looking to reduce energy costs. Overall, the move into energy with Fidelity has been extremely good for us as a business. It has enabled us to speak to our clients more regularly and offer a product that is allowing them to divert the savings we are making them into different parts of their business.

And Gary had a clear message to any telecoms reseller that sees energy as a departure from its core services.

"This isn't a diversion; if you treat it as an added benefit to the excellent service you are already providing them it's a win-win. To date we have an 85% conversation rate which says it all!"

# Chess set for major partner conference

NEXT month's Chess Partner Conference '19 will reflect a significant ramping up of the firm's channel growth ambitions and the expansion of its product, service and value proposition as it continues to transform away from pure comms towards being a reseller-focused ICT and security service provider.

As part of this restructure and realignment Chess has shifted the marketing support of its partner business to the Alderly Edge-based headquarters, a move that is reflective of Chess's recalibrated channel approach as it brings resellers to the core of its operations.

Building on such moves the company's conference, to be staged on March 14th at The Belfry Hotel and Resort, boasts an impressive line-up of speakers including IT sector sales supremo Adrian Webster, O2's Head of Digital Solutions Ant Morse, futurist and entrepreneur Peter Cochrane, and former British competition rower and Olympic champion turned sought after keynoter Ben Hunt-



Stephen Dracup

Davis. A number of Deep Dive sessions will delve into specific market opportunities.

Chess MD Stephen Dracup – who expects 100-plus delegates to attend the conference (which is branded 'Channel Mix: Helping Maximise Your Opportunities') – said the event is open to Chess partners and non-partners wanting to find out more about how Chess is turning the dial on its evolving reseller value proposition

with a particular emphasis on support and differentiation via new offerings such as Tech-as-a-Service and fresh billing options following its acquisition of TMS in September 2018.

"The conference offers delegates a day of thought provoking keynotes, networking opportunities and informative industry sessions," said Dracup.

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## St. Margaret's Hospice charity boosted by CNA fund raising

A CHARITY which provides care to patients with life-limiting illnesses and supports their families has received a £2,865 boost following a round of fund raising at last October's Comms National Awards (CNA) staged by Comms Dealer and supported by main event sponsor 9.

9's brand ambassador and former England international hockey player Maddie Hinch MBE delivered a stirring keynote during the event about her role in the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics which saw Team GB take home a Gold medal. She also champions St. Margaret's



9's Louise Abbey & Mark Saunders present the cheque

Hospice and selected the charity as the recipient of this much needed funding.

Hinch said: "St. Margaret's Hospice has always been a charity close to my heart. My mum

managed a small nursing home in Somerset for over ten years and during that time I witnessed how wonderful the hospice was in their care of the terminally ill and support of families."



Gary Marzella, Head of Sales, Talk Time

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NEWS ROUNDUP

GAMMA'S annual roadshow is gearing up to tour the UK, this year themed as The Sound of Gamma, a spin off from last year's Gamma at the Movies branded events, and again staged at cinemas in four key regions (Glasgow, 27th February; Manchester, 28th February; Birmingham 6th March; and London, 7th March). Highlights will be the launch of Gamma's new Horizon Collaborate solution and a keynote from CEO Andrew Taylor. Gamma MD Daryl Pile said: "The 2018 roadshow was our most successful to date and we aim to build on this."

THE Chinese owner of the world's biggest technology distributor Ingram Micro has confirmed it is in talks to sell the business, less than three years after acquiring it. In a notice to the Shanghai stock exchange Chinese conglomerate HNA Group said it was currently in talks with the aim of offloading the business, citing 'changing market conditions'. US private equity firm Apollo Global Management is believed to be in pole position to buy the distributor, according to reports from both Reuters and The Wall Street Journal.

A SMART road pilot in Newcastle developed by Connexin has been hailed for its innovation and recognised by an IoT Breakthrough award for Smart City Deployment of the Year. The awards scheme attracted more than 3,500 global nominations covering a range of categories including industrial and enterprise, IoT, smart city and connected car. Connexin CEO Furqan Alamgir said: "Smart technologies have come of age but no single organisation can make smart cities happen on its own. Governments, businesses, the education sector and citizens need to collaborate. This project is a perfect demonstration of all the parts working together."

# Grig talks up UCaaS move



Rufus Grig

MAINTEL has extended its suite of cloud and managed services delivered under the ICON brand with the roll out of ICON Now, a UCaaS offering aimed at firms with 100 to 1,000 staff.

Maintel's CTO Rufus Grig said: "Business is changing. Organisations need their people to be productive and available wherever they are, whatever device they are on, whatever network they are using.

"They also want to get value from the IT spend quickly and see an immediate return on their investment. With ICON Now, we put the tools previously the preserve of large enterprise into

the hands of small and mid-sized businesses."

Dan Davies, Maintel's Software and Cloud Technology Director, added: "We've taken everything we've learned from years of providing cloud-based communications services to tens of thousands of enterprise users and packaged it into an easy to buy, easy to consume service.

"ICON Now builds on Maintel's legacy of providing Unified Communications as a Service to businesses as diverse as banks, front-line hospitals, national retail brands and organisations across the public and private sectors."

# New offer developed by Spitfire

SPITFIRE is hoping to unlock a greater share of the hosted comms market with the launch of Hosted PBX 2.1.

The service is delivered over Spitfire's own Voice Approved Broadband circuits and comes with guaranteed call quality and SLAs, said the company.

"Using Spitfire's circuits guarantees the end-to-end call QoS and has guarantees on latency, jitter and delay upstream and downstream," commented Dominic Norton, Sales Director. "Should there be a service outage there is automatic failover to another number based on customer selected parameters."

Norton also noted that Spitfire is planning a series of no cost upgrades to the service.

A key factor of the proposition is competitive pricing, according to the company, which developed the service in-house enabling it to cut out third party costs and offer free set-up on one year contracts.

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# DXC gets tech titan for \$2bn



Mike Lawrie

DXC Technology is to acquire global technology services and consulting company Luxoft in a mammoth \$2bn deal.

The acquisition is intended to broaden DXC Technology's digital offerings portfolio, expand its presence in high growth verticals, enhance access to engineering talent globally and strengthen its overall digital value proposition.

Luxoft offers digital capabilities in areas such as analytics, UX/UI, IoT and blockchain, and is a key player in outsourced engineering services, cloud and devops. The company employs more than 13,000 staff.

Luxoft will maintain its brand and continue to be led by Dmitry Loschinin, President and CEO, who reports to Mike Lawrie, Chairman, President and CEO of DXC Technology.

"Our shared vision of digital transformation makes this strategic combination a great fit for both organisation," commented Lawrie. "Luxoft has a track record and expertise in producing measurable business outcomes at scale for global clients across key industries, including automotive and financial services.

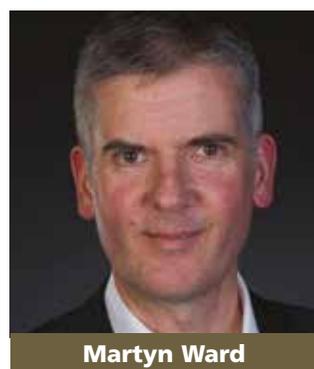
"The addition of Luxoft accelerates DXC's growth strategy as we equip the company to meet the digital requirements of our clients."

# Nimans nets Red Box deal to boost voice capture portfolio

NIMANS has augmented its call recording and voice capture portfolio following a link-up with Red Box.

"Organisations are recognising the value of captured voice as a data set and voice-based interaction is now being used to address a host of business use cases including automation, security, fraud and enhancing employee engagement and the wider customer experience," said Tom Maxwell, Nimans' Head of Channel Sales.

"With the Red Box platform resellers and their customers can capture and transcribe voice



Martyn Ward

communications from over 55 systems, both legacy and new, across worldwide enterprises and SMEs.

"Customers retain complete data sovereignty and are con-

nected to the broadest partner ecosystem to unlock the value of captured voice through seamless integration with archiving, storage, biometrics, analytics, AI, BI, CRM, and compliance tools and applications."

Martyn Ward, Red Box CRO, stated: "We capture and secure millions of calls daily for over 3,000 customers around the world and connect them to an ecosystem of application and value added service partners.

"The platform Nimans provides Red Box with is another significant step forward in our market progression."



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# Virtual1 hails new upgrade



Neil Wilson

VIRTUAL1 has put greater control into the hands of partners with the release of functionality (via IPortal) that automates the majority of moves and changes requested by partners.

“The release delivers features to optimise the flow of traffic, including control of Quality of Service settings and IPV4 routing,” stated Head of Products & Marketing Neil Wilson.

“It adds read only SNMP configuration to enable partners to use their own monitoring platforms and add further value to their solutions.

“Our partners can directly control their service experience

and not be beholden to legacy services with their long lead times. That is key in helping businesses differentiate in a tightly fought market.”

Wilson also pointed out that Virtual1 has introduced VLAN resizing to its flexible bandwidth functionality, meaning that bandwidth can be intelligently distributed across the services in use.

Virtual1 provides high speed connectivity solutions to over 180 UK towns and cities via its national SDN network.

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## Iovox in key buy

GLOBAL provider of inbound and outbound call tracking solutions Iovox has acquired France-based WannaSpeak, broadening its product portfolio and adding an impressive batch of European brands to its customer base including Orange, Axel Springer, Bouygues Telecom, Total (Direct Énergie), BNP Paribas and Audi.

Ryan Gallagher, CEO of Iovox, said: “2019 has the makings of a breakout year for Iovox due to the traction we’re seeing in the Asia Pacific region, continued organic growth through-

out Europe, the development and release of our new mobile solutions, and acquisitions such as this with WannaSpeak.”

All WannaSpeak staff are joining Iovox and in the near term services from WannaSpeak and Iovox will continue to be supported as standalone products. The financial details of the transaction were not disclosed.

“Deeper integration of the offerings and operational processes will occur throughout 2019 creating options for customers to add new features and functionalities,” said Gallagher.

## MS3 aims to widen its reach

HULL and East Yorks located fibre network operator MS3 Networks is ramping up its wholesale offering and channel ambitions following the completion of network upgrades that extend its reach into data centres in London and Manchester.

“MS3 has witnessed a sharp rise in the number of requests from other network operators and ISPs across the UK for wholesale connectivity in Hull,” said MD Tony Hales.

“By taking presence in London and Manchester MS3 is able to deliver its full fibre services to other providers so they can take control of the service to the end customer.”

The operator also plans to take presence in other data centres to increase diversity within its service offerings directly to customers and on a wholesale level. MS3 has also introduced a new website and sales portal.

## Rydal bags techno biz

RYDAL has bagged the comms and IT assets of Bury-based Cloudsource Technologies from Tower Leasing for an undisclosed sum.

“The opportunity proposed was a no brainer and a fantastic move for our Group,” stated Rydal MD Steffan Dancy.

“The acquisition adds over 400 phone system clients, all with network services and IT contracts to support.

“The majority are already supported on our flagship product Ericsson LG IPECs and IPECs Cloud. This means the migration for the customer base will be seamless.”

The deal builds on Peterborough-based Rydal’s pre-Christmas acquisition of Norwich located Link Solutions’ telecoms clients.

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# Tom cruises to ticket win



Tom Maxwell and his wife Sharon

A NEW award launched to commemorate Nimans founder Julian Niman and recognise stand-out staff achievements has been given to Head of Dealer Sales Tom Maxwell.

The introduction of the company's annual Julian Niman award marked the first anniversary of his untimely death in January 2018. Maxwell's 30 year career with the distributor

and 'outstanding contribution' secured him the inaugural accolade and a 'thank you' cruise with his wife Sharon.

"I was humbled to be given this award and recognition by the Board," stated Maxwell.

"Sharon and I look forward to planning our cruise holiday and will raise a glass to Julian and the Nimans team when we set sail."

# Wildix set for UC&C showcase

WILDIX is gearing up for its inaugural UC&C Summit which is to be staged on February 18-19th at the World Trade Centre in Barcelona.

The event aims to advance the adoption of opex revenue models and hone the sales expertise of delegates via an educational programme delivered by influential keynote speakers including Jim Roche, a leading expert in value selling.

"Many companies that sell UC are observing their turnover reducing in an alarming way due to fierce competition, a radical change in how companies purchase and manage technology and the rapid spread of cloud-based services," stated Steve Osler, CEO of Wildix.

"How to adapt to these industry changes? A radical rethink of the business model is required along with the transformation of system integrators from simple one-time suppliers to recurring revenue model operators.

"In some countries this evolution is already taking place, but many parts of Europe are still far from making the shift. This is why Wildix conceived and sponsored the organisation of a European summit dedicated to the UC&C segment."

# Exertis links to Blockchain

EXERTIS has secured Irish Government funding to support its 'Blockchain in the Technology Product Supply Chain' project, which was announced as one of 27 projects to be funded as part of the Irish Government's 75m euro Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF).

Exertis Supply Chain Services (SCS) will lead the project in collaboration with the Centre for Applied Data Analytics Research (CeADAR) at University College Dublin and Dublin-based software company Sonalake.

The DTIF funding will enable Exertis SCS to develop and deploy the technology on a commercial basis.

Brian Cassidy, who is Exertis' Supply Chain Services IT Director, stated: "Our intention is to bring to market a fit-for-purpose blockchain platform for the technology product supply chain within three years.

"This will complement Exertis' global market reach and supply chain expertise, while leveraging the research and



Brian Cassidy

implementation experience of CeADAR and Sonalake."

The benefits of the newly developed system include a shared visibility of orders across the supply chain, from component manufacturer to consumer; detailed product provenance information based on product serial numbers, which is key for reducing counterfeit and managing warranty liability; and simplified financial reconciliation for promotional rebates.

The Irish Government said the fund is a key part of its Future Jobs initiative, a plan to secure Ireland's economic success starting in 2019. >p42

# Storm's onto the big screen

SCREEN recording capabilities brought in by Content Guru are a big boost to security compliance, says the firm, which has rolled out the service worldwide via its storm platform.

"Whether deployed independently to recreate the flow of a digital interaction, or replaying screen activity in conjunction with audio recording, this new capability gives organisations a view of contact centre operations, enabling them to better understand their agents and optimise customer engagement



Richard Manthorpe

by improving agent training and scenario reconstruction around disputed events," said Product Director, Richard Manthorpe.

He also noted that across all sectors – particularly the finan-

cial, Government and health-care verticals – more organisations are legally required to provide full visibility over their customer interactions.

"Content Guru's new recording solution supports compliance to these evolving regulations, enabling organisations to record, store and replay screen activity, simultaneously with audio where required," commented Manthorpe.

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CHANNEL services provider Agilitas has teed off the new year with a new brand ambassador having tied up a sponsorship deal with reigning Women's British Open Golf Champion Georgia Hall, who is currently ranked eighth in the world. At the age of 22 Hall is the youngest player to win back-to-back Ladies European Tour Order of Merits. She also won The Sunday Times Young Sportswoman Award. Agilitas CEO Shaun Lynn commented: "Like the Agilitas journey over the past few years Georgia continues to go from strength-to-strength. Her global profile is aligned with our international business. We believe that encouraging young talented people to follow their ambitions, and assisting them along the way, is so important. Georgia Hall champions and inspires young people in golf and sport as a whole." Hall added: "From our initial discussions it was clear to see that the ambitions I have in sport are shared by Agilitas."

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# Tipping point nears in cloud

A SURVEY of eight European country markets by Mitel has revealed a high level of cloud awareness among a growing number of organisations which see greater scope for features and functionality in cloud telephony solutions compared to on-site systems.

The findings could indicate a mid-term swing away from CPE with 76% of UK companies (81% in Europe) rating access to innovative features that traditional telephony lack as their primary reason to pursue the cloud model.

“As cloud technology delivers faster and easier access to key productivity tools, companies now view certain functionality as indispensable in effective cloud communications solutions,” commented Jeremy Butt, Senior Vice President, International for Mitel.

“UC features including presence, instant messaging, voice and video calls are top of the must-have list with nearly 90% of British companies considering them essential. Advanced collaboration functions such as audio and video conferencing and seamless content sharing follow with 28% of companies citing them as essential.”



Jeremy Butt

In what can only be good news for ICT resellers and the channel, 71% of UK businesses want experienced advisors to help them migrate to the cloud, nine points higher than the European average.

“European countries are at different stages of maturity but the common point is that businesses already have a clear idea of which cloud model – UCaaS, hybrid or private cloud – will work for them,” added Butt.

“The important point is to give them a cost-effective and low-risk migration roadmap as well as the opportunity to choose between public or private cloud.”

## Tech heads unite

UNIFY'S fourth UK convention for techies, held at the Oxford Belfry Hotel, set out the vendor's technology roadmap, latest products, solutions and support developments to over 40 delegates.

The initiative was first thought up by Nimans' Unify Solutions Manager Jed Brewis who believed that such an event would provide engineers, technical managers and technical directors a more meaningful overview of strategic plans from Unify and Nimans while

also bringing together sales and operational divisions.

“The event was a platform for constructive engagement with members of our allied Unify Solutions Team and Solutions community,” said Brewis.

Outstanding Contribution awards were given to NIX Group for Solution Development; Datasharp UK for Solution Excellence and Tetcom for Solution Deployment.

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## Investor firm buys into Ideal

CBPE Capital has acquired a majority ownership stake in Ideal Networks, the provider of portable handsets for data cable and network testing, validation and certification.

CBPE is acquiring the business from its former parent, Ideal Industries, and will be investing alongside the incumbent management team led by Paul Walsh, CEO.

The terms of the transaction have not been disclosed.

Included in the management team behind the acquisition is Chief Finance Officer Scott Paterson, Development Director Peter Kent, Operations Director Russell Stratton and Marketing Director Tim Widdershoven.

“Business will continue as normal across the world with no interruption of supply through our distribution partners,” stated Walsh. “What will change is our ability to respond faster to market needs through innovation.”

## Midwich's Swiss coup

AV DISTIE Midwich's swoop on Swiss counterpart MobilePro AG adds almost £19.5m annual revenue and strengthens its European presence.

Midwich MD Stephen Fenby said: “The acquisition marks Midwich's entry into the Swiss market, enabling the group to trade with a broad customer base and provide solutions for projects in many of our key vertical markets.”

The deal pushes Midwich's operations into circa 75% of the European AV market.

Zurich-based MobilePro's portfolio includes projection, LED panel and interactive technologies. The company claims a particular strength in the large format display and technical solutions technology markets.

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# Bacon on mixing it up in

Pay heed to Martin Bacon: All resellers should waste no time in solving customer painpoints with a 'perfect mix' of unified modern day ICT solutions, says Chess's Cloud Voice Specialist.

**T**he rise of hosted comms has long fostered optimism and underpinned industry talk in the channel, but that does not undermine the strength of Bacon's message to partners, that they should, if not already, provide rounded solutions with cloud voice a key component. To prove the point he cited an IT reseller organisation that recently had its first cloud telephony experience courtesy of Chess Partners and is now generating enough revenue to justify hiring a cloud and connectivity specialist to drive greater business growth.

There is no doubt that the addition of cloud telephony to the resellers' traditional IT portfolio has vastly transformed its ability to open up a new front in adjacent market territory. But first it was necessary to open the eyes and mind of the reseller business owner who, although piqued by the prospect of cloud telephony and seeing no point in defying change, was stymied by hesitancy until Chess removed all barriers and let loose the force of product diversification.

It is time for all traditional resellers from all backgrounds to think outside their box, according to Bacon, because business communications is being reinvented as the meeting point for an expanding raft of technologies as the cloud telephony market continues to grow. "It's an important



Martin Bacon

## Cloud telephony is a solution with a greater purpose, but resellers must be sensitive to its full potential in order to build coherent long-term propositions that dovetail with the customer's wider growth strategy

opportunity for resellers to table a one-stop-shop solution," he stated. "Many partners have already moved away from selling just one product in one area and, for example, are taking the cloud PBX product line into a customer with connectivity at the back end while bringing in mobiles at the same time. The glue is a single carrier agnostic cloud-based billing solution

that brings everything under one roof and also caters for utility billing. This makes life easier for the business and all support is centralised, enabling partners to gain as much wallet share from the customer as possible."

### Distinct offering

To this end, claimed Bacon, Chess's one-stop-shop proposition has become a distinct offering, as different

from traditional on-premise products as services are from goods, but always retaining feature rich functionality while bringing greater scope for comprehensive and integrated solutions across all areas of a customer's business. "We leverage our pre-sales support and demonstration capabilities to build proof of concepts to show that we understand the customer's issues and

overcome their fear of cloud by explaining what this technology can do," commented Bacon. "Every proof of concept I have created has led to a sale."

The market potential for cloud telephony is broad and the commercial gain that will follow resellers who grasp the opportunity that sits under their nose is just as plain to see. But with a myriad of competing cloud telephony and infrastructure providers in the UK, for them to stand out in the crowd demands no other approach than to fully support partners with useful initiatives. "Everyone is on the cloud PBX bandwagon and one of our differentiators is free accreditation and internal demonstration accounts," explained Bacon, who carries out all accreditations himself.

Accredited partners qualify for an internal demo account consisting of five licences with DDIs, a mobile app and soft phone with the option to buy hardware attachments. "This elevates partners to the next level, enabling them to create customer scenarios with the client, work out their issues and show them first hand how the solution works," added Bacon. "There is nothing better than a live demo."

Chess's hosted comms proposition is based on the NFON platform which, says Bacon, provides commercial flexibility and the chance to develop international deals. NFON is currently

# cloud comms

present in 14 countries across Europe and Chess has customers working out of north and south America and Asia. Recently added to the proposition is a web-based UC client and unlimited conference bridge capabilities. Call recording and analysis is provided by Tollring's ICS platform.

## Keeping pace

"As with all cloud-based tech the development cycles are quicker than traditional on-premise technology," added Bacon. "Much of this is around premium call recording, monitoring of queues, statistics, interactive dashboards and reporting services etc, which all give partners something else to speak to their customers about, empowering them to lever an uplift in sales and increase margins."

Contact centre options and specialist sector packages are also on hand, along with out-of-the box CTI integration for around 15 different apps and CRM systems. "Chess performs bespoke integrations with any CRM as long as we can get to the database," noted Bacon. "Such projects include click-to-dial-out from records, screen pops on incoming calls, clipboard dialling and database lookups through the telephony platform."

Bacon also pointed out that TalkTalk Business and KCOM are primary connectivity partners with mobile solutions supported and simplified by Chess's relationships with Vodafone, O2 and EE. The end point line-up includes Snom, Yealink and Polycom handsets, while Gigaset and Panasonic provide DECT options. However, partners

are at liberty to source their own products if they wish and add them to the Chess cloud voice proposition.

Investment by Chess in partner support pillars is increasingly built-in, while efforts to be everything other than a 'faceless company' continue to soar, according to Bacon. After all, what can be achieved in isolation? "The concept of local support is strengthening alongside the role and presence of regional BDMs," added Bacon. "This policy is also evidenced by our push on airtime via introducer and dealer mechanisms, supported by a nationwide team of BDMs."

This rising sense of locality is also reflected in how Chess engages partners on all deal propositions no matter the technology, according to Bacon. "We work on bespoke deal building with resellers," he added. "On large deals when we are up against competition we get our heads together with partners and arrive at a strong commercial proposition."

Cloud telephony is a solution with a greater purpose, and resellers must be sensitive to its full potential in order to sell coherent long-term propositions that dovetail with the customer's wider growth strategy. These solutions could encompass, for example, mobile, billing, cloud voice, connectivity, airtime and tech sales. But this is about more than convergence. It is also about revamping reseller businesses as full blown solution providers, from hosted telephony in the first instance through to related products and services, and then to customer experiences. ■

## Just a minute with Martin Bacon...

**Role model:** Both my hard working and family focused grandfathers

**Big career achievement:** Growing a business through to a valuable and successful acquisition

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Something to do with cars or motor sport

**Best piece of advice you have been given?** Always have a plan before doing anything, then adapt and overcome the challenges

**How do you relax?** Getting my hands dirty with DIY or engines. I'm also a history buff

**What's the biggest risk you have taken?** Leaving a successful job to run my own business

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Winston Churchill, Nikola Tesla and Gordon Ramsay

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** I'm adaptable and can bridge the technology/sales divide to make things easy to grasp. But I try to squeeze too much into every day

**Top tip:** Tap and hold the space bar on your iPhone to turn it into a trackpad when editing text

**What possession could you not live without?** My Outlook diary

**Industry bugbear:** Implementing technology and not training people to use it. Businesses can save fortunes by investing in their biggest assets – people

**Something about yourself we don't know:** I'm into the outdoors and animals, with three horses, three dogs, two cats and more being added

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# Tuffs upbeat as rising At

Rocked by Avaya's fall into Chapter 11 Atrium soon bounced back and now, with the arrival of investor Barry Tuffs as Managing Director last October and bolstered by new shareholder SmartTasking.com the firm has turned the dial up on a two-phased growth plan.

In need of a shot in the arm rather than radical surgery, Atrium is in revival and expansion mode as Tuffs targets a doubling of revenues this year, a 100 per cent hike in staff numbers and the tripling of monthly service revenues. This first phase expansion plan includes analysis of the channel partner landscape and assessments of new and relevant technology areas – all in preparation for strategic decisions that will anticipate the future ICT requirements of channel partners and their end user customers. To help resellers meet these demands Atrium is working with new partner SmartTasking.com which provides experts, from individuals to full teams, that sit within or remote to a business, and their expertise may be flexed up or down as required.

When resellers profess their desire for long-term growth, chances are many of them will lack the skills to turn their vision into strategic reality. Traditional partners will only reinforce the closing walls around them and risk becoming a grim legacy of the digital transformation era unless they find a way forward. Enter Atrium, which supports traditional partners seeking a transition to UCaaS or CCaaS models based on Avaya products. "This is a fast growing area of the business and has Avaya's focus," added Tuffs. "Atrium sits behind the channel



Barry Tuffs

partner community offering a white labelled professional service portfolio from pre-sales, installation and support through to project management and customer life cycle management."

The new Atrium Managing Director knows more than most when it comes to channel and comms market matters. His first foray into the sector was in 1986 when he joined BT in the TAG Group. Nine months later he moved to Mercury Communications, then to Nynex and Telewest, Nortel, and latterly operated as Channel Sales Director for Avaya and Unify. He also spent three years running a BT Local Business. "All of the positions I have held, either in channel management, sales management or as the owner of a business, have given me

## Atrium was a sleeping business that needed guidance and direction to achieve its full potential

valuable experience and an extensive network," stated Tuffs. "I understand channel partners, the complexities of running those businesses and the challenges they face. These skills and insights are critical in helping me shape the growth of Atrium."

Following the sale of his family business (a comms VAR) in 2017 Tuffs sought

an investment opportunity, and existing relationships with Atrium Directors Kevin Beswick and Ian Smith meant the company was already on the radar screen. Alongside experts at SmartTasking.com Tuffs plumped for Atrium as a prime vehicle for investment and growth. "Atrium was a sleeping business that needed guidance and direction to achieve its full potential," stated Tuffs. "Atrium will evolve to deliver new service and support models and will be 100 per cent focused on the customer experience. The plan is simple – invest, grow and be the best we can be."

### Strong message

Atrium advanced the same message when it began its commercial life in 2007 in response to a yawning gap in the market for outsourced professional services and

the need for a business that promised to raise the customer service bar. Since then the portfolio has evolved from installation services to project management, maintenance, DECT surveys and fully managed outsourced contracts. During this time Atrium moved to larger premises with bigger demonstration and storage facilities, and kicked-off an award winning apprentice programme.

"Atrium has always been well run with a strong cash balance sheet, but Avaya entering into chapter 11 was a difficult period," explained Tuffs. "It changed the Avaya landscape as partners moved away from the vendor in the SME sector to form new relationships with cloud providers. Atrium needed to react quickly to the shift from on-premise to cloud deployments during this period and has come through with a better skill set and growing revenues. We also needed to adapt our go-to-market service offerings to include pay-per-user for installation and service. This will continue to evolve. As Avaya came out of Chapter 11 Atrium also saw an uplift in business – a 10 per cent increase year-on-year."

Phase 2 of the SmartTasking.com and Atrium plan is to evaluate fresh technology areas and assess the potential for developing new services or out-task propositions



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that match the channel's requirements. "That could involve replicating what we do with Avaya in another vendor portfolio or move into the security market," explained Tuffs. "There are many new trends and technologies that we are tracking – automation and AI in the contact centre and the integration of software to ensure compliance and better levels of customer service. Security is a massive growth area, accounting for large slices of the customer budget."

#### Partner engagement

Tuffs is also landscaping the channel community to identify partners who would benefit from Atrium's portfolio. "Partner engagement is likely to evolve from a simple installation or support service to offering a tailored out-task service that allows partners to focus on core skills," he stated. "In many cases strategic relationships will form where Atrium becomes front and centre for key partners."

Atrium's service model will develop to encompass not only the Avaya per-user model but a 24/7 365 bespoke all-encompassing service for partners. "We have an investment and growth plan that requires good people with the attributes and ethics to work within our organisation," added Tuffs. "Good people are still hard to come by – you do kiss a few frogs."

By leveraging the SmartTasking.com team, in addition to Tuffs's expertise, Atrium is benefiting from 100-plus years of strategic experience in ICT channel and professional services. So it would be wise to lend

an ear when Tuffs spills the beans on where he sees the greatest opportunity. "The mid-market is becoming increasingly competitive and customers are more demanding from their suppliers," he commented. "They implement technology quicker, make decisions faster and adopt quicker. This means that VARs and SIs will need to evolve quickly to meet these requirements if they want to compete in this large sector. They will need to become experts in some elements of the customer engagement and fulfilment process, but will certainly become more dependent on specialist partners to deploy and service the complete end-to-end solution. Atrium will evolve to provide these services."

The growing complexity of customer demands, compounded by greater levels of integration, automation and bespoke software builds ultimately means that the channel community must, as a priority, consider how to support this end user environment. "Will a traditional skilled engineer be able to handle these requirements? No: They will undoubtedly become better skilled – and more expensive – but there will be a greater need to out-task the service support and delivery to enable the partner to compete," said Tuffs.

"Atrium will fill that void with a multi-skilled in-house and connected community of specialists through SmartTasking.com. We will develop a service and support portfolio that allows partners to take small steps prior to leveraging our full service as a white label – an area where SmartTasking.com excels." ■

#### Just a minute with Barry Tuffs...

**Role model:** My wife Jane who is a superstar – business leader, successful entrepreneur, coach and loving best buddy

**What talents do you wish you had?** To run a 10K in under 45 minutes. I am currently five minutes off that target. And to play the guitar like Eric Clapton or Dave Gilmour

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Running a gin and whiskey themed bar in Cheshire

**Best piece of advice you have been given?** Coach, coach, coach – and always help others

**One thing you could not do without in your job:** The ability to listen to other people

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** Adaptability is one of my strengths. Change is an opportunity to do things better and I embrace this. But I need to be more tolerant and less vocal at home

**What's the biggest risk you have taken?** Leaving a great job and setting up a business. The house was on the line with the bank, no regular wage and a family to support

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Bill Shankly, Margaret Thatcher and John Paul Getty

**What do you fear the most?** Liverpool FC not winning the Premier League this year

**One example of something you have overcome:** A fear of spiders

**What possession could you not live without?** My watch is essential. You can tell a lot about somebody from their watch

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# Growth outlook positive

The ICT sector's robust M&A market is its barrier against economic uncertainty, and this month's ICT Investment Forum will go beyond the Brexit brick wall to maximise the potential of an industry with no boundaries to growth.

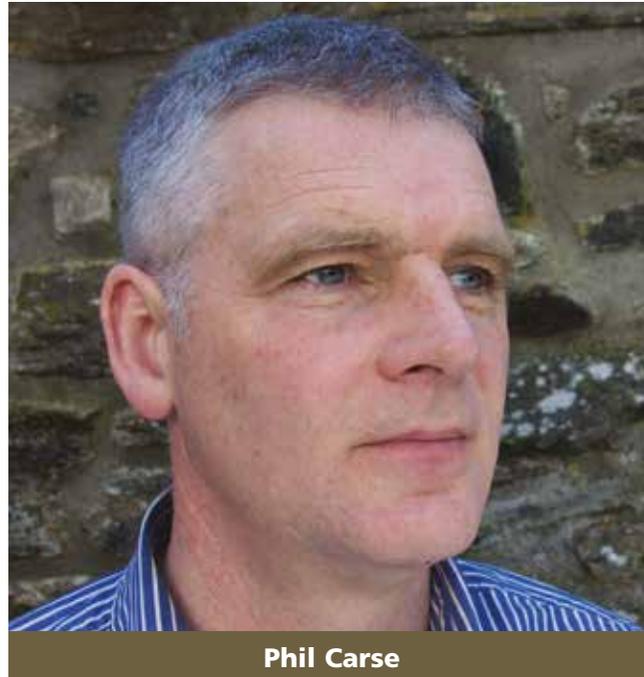
Innaded by Brexit upheavals and reeling from political head-to-head clashes, the political landscape is all but torn apart from the failure to find a workable agreement. Thankfully, the comms sector is much better at doing deals. "If Brexit is anything to go by 2019 will be an extremely unpredictable year for many," stated Knight Corporate Finance co-founder and Director Adam Zoldan. "However, we experienced a record year in 2018 and continue to see high levels of transaction activity. We fully expect the M&A market to flourish again this year, primarily as a result of continued and sustained levels of funding into the sector."

Zoldan observed that Private Equity has invested heavily into the sector typically as part of a 'buy and build' strategy. "This is supplemented by the increasing availability of debt finance from a wide range of traditional and new lenders," he added. "The impact of this has increased the number of buyers seeking acquisitions to grow, all of whom are competing for the best deals which drives valuation premiums. We have good

insight from our pipeline and are not expecting deal activity to let up in the short-term."

Of course, the comms sector is not divorced from the political and economic goings-on, and is almost certain to be impacted in some areas, believes Zoldan. "Consider the current performance of the retail sector or a migration of financial services companies overseas," he stated. "This could impact resellers exposed to those sectors. Yet, we also expect these challenges to represent an opportunity for the highly innovative and dynamic channel. Overall, we are expecting continued and sustained activity for the year but, as ever, we advise business owners to plan and consider their aspirations for their business."

According to Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabyte.com, the UK tech sector has gone through an unprecedented wave of corporate activity over the last few years, and 2018 was a record year with the 800-plus ICT and software companies tracked by Megabyte reporting a total of 420 deals of one sort or another, up 19 per cent on 2017. The 420 deals in 2018



Phil Carse

comprised of 266 M&A, 111 private equity and 43 capital market deals, up 12 per cent, 46 per cent and eight per cent respectively. The reasons for the high level of activity are numerous, including the need for strategic change in such a fast moving world.

"This is being facilitated by a wall of money in the asset management industry looking for high quality assets (in turn boosted by multi-year quantitative easing), historically low interest rates and banks eager to lend to either companies or private equity for M&A purposes," stated Carse. "Trade buyers are also in a good position, with the UK tech sector generally enjoying good organic growth (an average of 11 per cent across the Megabyte universe), decent profitability (13 per cent average EBITDA margins) and good cash generation (operating and free cash flow conversion of 94 per cent and 70 per cent of EBITDA respectively). Meanwhile, corporate balance sheets remained relatively unlevered. And if that wasn't enough,

the UK remains a highly attractive target for overseas buyers, even given Brexit uncertainties."

Subject to the caveat of considerable UK political and economic uncertainty, the drivers behind high levels of corporate activity remain very much in place, so what can we expect going forward? "Broadly speaking, deals fall into three camps – next generation infrastructure funding, strategic acquisitions to broaden product sets and capabilities, and good old-fashioned M&A for scale or consolidation," added Carse.

"First, next generation infrastructure. 2018 saw some fairly significant corporate moves in fibre (Gigaclear/Infracapital, and the CityFibre take private) as well as new entrant fundings (for example, Truespeed, Community Fibre, Nextgenaccess and Airband), and fundings for

existing players (such as SSE Telecoms) as infrastructure investment funds jostled for position. There have also been investments in related areas such as small cells/indoor networks. However, not all plans have come to fruition. We expect more fundings in 2019."

In terms of strategic deals to broaden product sets and capabilities, Carse noted that this second category is being driven by convergence, particularly around comms and IT, with many once primarily comms resellers adding IT skills (GCI, Timico and Adept to name just a few), while broad based businesses continue to add skills in niches particularly focused on hybrid cloud services (consider Claranet, Iomart and Node4). "Other active areas for this type of M&A include contact centre (such as Sabio, Connect, IP Integration) and UCaaS (for example, Vonage, Ringcentral and 8x8), while many companies seem to be on the lookout for cybersecurity skills," added Carse.

"Finally, M&A for scale or consolidation continues, with currently or previously active companies including Wavenet, Arrow, Southern Comms, Claranet, Iomart, Chess, Daisy, Six Degrees and Pulsant, alongside the aforementioned GCI and Adept. Provided interest rates stay low and bank debt or private equity funding continues, there will always be good returns to be made from M&A if companies buy for good strategic reasons and don't overpay." ■

## ICT Investment Forum

February 28th 2019, BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London

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

# Elevating partnerships

Few comms service providers elevate the business potential of call handling solutions, which makes Windsor Telecom's innovative and unique platform even more compelling.

**C**hannel Development Manager Darren Brown has embarked on a campaign to open up Windsor Telecom's reseller proposition to full view. He calls it the Partner Elevation Project, and puts great emphasis on the real value of partnering with Windsor and the potentiality on offer – to this end Darren is going for gold. "Windsor has some fantastic channel partners," he enthused. "With organic growth from our reseller base and the ongoing addition of partners alongside new technology and products to our portfolio, my intention is for Windsor to become the channel leader in terms of bespoke solutions and partner programmes."

Darren joined Windsor Telecom in September last year, his interest in the position piqued by the company's solid reputation and an opportunity to grow the reseller base at a time of unprecedented market receptiveness. "End users are far more educated on telecoms with the emergence of cloud telephony," he said. "Importantly, Inbound number technology sits neatly alongside cloud solutions to provide additional layers of call stats, inbound recording and the ability to add mobiles and remote users into ring groups from an easy-to-use platform. Educating resellers on the benefits of Inbound alongside their cloud offering is an exciting opportunity."

The objective of all customer-facing organisations should be to improve the customer experience, believes Darren, who says Windsor's proposition is perpetually evolved as

fit for purpose, designed to match solutions to customer demand and overcome the challenges faced by end users at the coalface. "If the current voice solution doesn't make it easy for organisations to handle peaks in call activity it's frustrating for customers and potentially costly for the business," said Darren. "Every customer gets to where they need to be quickly and easily. Furthermore, organisations can roll out the red carpet for their top customers by earmarking certain incoming numbers for special treatment. For example, bypassing queues to deliver calls straight to the right department or individual."

Windsor's bespoke solutions are designed by its own development team to completely fit customers' specific requirements (see side panel for one example). Such solutions are based on close collaboration with customers and future proofed, meaning that the contrast between less nuanced off-the-shelf options and Windsor's finely tailored offerings can be stark.

As a network-based platform Windsor's call handling services can sit alongside traditional PBXs and incur no upfront costs, support or maintenance charges. The services can be up and running in days rather than weeks and supplied at a fraction of the cost. Furthermore, the service contains no single point of failure, being logically and geographically resilient. "If you have a power outage you can instantly redirect calls to another location to maintain business continuity," said Darren. "With on-premise telephony, a fire, flood or even adverse weather



Darren Brown

**"My intention is for Windsor Telecom to become the channel leader in terms of bespoke solutions and partner programmes"**

could bring business communications to a halt. Downtime can lead to poor customer experiences, a lack of customer confidence and potentially high financial losses. Business continuity is crucial."

Thanks to the depth of Windsor Telecom's call handling proposition and the width of its channel support and account management the company has not seen reseller defections as some channel providers – which tread an unremarkable path – normally do. The scale of Windsor's partner loyalty is crystal clear in its 5 star

portfolio is designed to ensure service continuity in the event of a connectivity failure. "Offering Inbound with a disaster recovery call plan within the white label portal gives businesses a one button failover solution," noted Darren. "You can group this to call a secondary office or group of mobiles to keep a business in contact with customers, creating a robust solution if you couple an inbound number to every cloud offering."

Windsor Telecom has helped businesses talk to their customers for almost 20 years. "From the outset we have developed and extended the business phone services we offer," noted Darren. "From bespoke call handling technologies to hosted VoIP solutions, we evolve to stay at the forefront, giving our customers the best telecoms products available under one roof. In raising the Windsor flag to the top of the channel pole, I want us to be the first name on resellers' minds when they think of a channel telecoms provider that elevates relationships and partner businesses." ■

Trustpilot score, which is also reflective of the company's 'One provider, one bill for all your needs' mantra, an approach that sends out a reassuring message.

Cloud telephony also offers a compelling message, but it relies on connectivity, and like CPE, Windsor's

## Case study: Bespoke divert solution

A customer had multiple numbers they were managing and needed to regularly change their order of destination. This bespoke solution meant all numbers could be updated and changed with one click of a button using the following functionality:

- All numbers can be configured to have multiple destinations in a single divert node. So you could have Home, Office and Mobile destinations set up on each number.
- Using the Bespoke UI, the customer can manage the destinations across all their numbers easily from a single page.
- The Bespoke UI also allows the customer to change the order of destinations. A simple drag and drop interface was developed. Once they have pressed save all numbers will be queued on our system to be updated with the new settings.
- Once a change has been requested they can view the status of the request in the logs section of the Bespoke UI and check whether all the numbers were updated successfully.

# Think outside the phone

Resellers must forge staunch links with the fast evolving hosted comms marketplace, not remain chained to the past, according to NTA Channel Sales Manager Justin Blaine.

**H**osted comms is now the point of discussion wherever industry players gather, and the topic is just as hot among end users. In this, the role of resellers in harnessing the hosted market's potential for collective benefit is not in doubt. But Blaine remains ever puzzled by how much higher priority is awarded to traditional comms in some quarters. "Cloud technology is no longer considered bleeding edge, yet it is amazing how many resellers steer clear of the hosted space and stick to selling on-premise solutions," stated Blaine. "Another scenario is that some have a hosted provider but only offer cloud when customers specifically request it."

The cloud has assumed potency in the end user mind and not a day passes without a growing number of customers absorbing information about hosted communications and the benefits of cloud-delivered services. In light of all this, it seems incredulous that many resellers are hesitant about entering the hosted comms marketplace and they remain withdrawn from a new generation of business opportunities. On the other hand, NTA is witnessing growth in all areas as more cloud savvy partners lead with hosted rather than on-premise solutions. "We also see certain verticals becoming especially apposite for our partners," commented Blaine. "These include



Justin Blaine

## It is amazing how many resellers steer clear of the hosted space and stick to selling on-premise solutions

education, estate agents and recruitment to name a few. The flexibility offered by hosted solutions is unrivalled, and I do not believe any vertical is untouched now. Moreover, cloud resellers are positioned strongly against their counterparts selling

on-site PBXs, and the end customer is more aware of hosted and its benefits, which is another driver of demand within our market."

When customers engage with an ICT supplier they most likely expect to receive

the benefit of a consultant who is trained to assess their situation and draw strategic conclusions about their current and future comms requirements. Customers wanting to find out more about the hosted option will render their comms

or IT reseller ineffective if cloud comms is not on the table. Nothing will remove suppliers from this tight spot. "If resellers aren't selling the benefits of cloud solutions they risk losing potential new business and their own maintenance base to competitors," commented Blaine. "When sitting in front of a customer it is key to have all propositions packed neatly into the kit bag. Missing components leave resellers wide open to the negation of customer requests for a hosted solution. How can resellers in this situation offer best advice? The end result can only be lost revenue, lost profit, a damaged reputation and the ultimate risk of losing staff and going out of business."

### Channel model

Conventional resellers who do not turn a hair in the face of widespread hosted adoption will no doubt hit financial grief, reiterated Blaine. The question is how to guard against the eventual meltdown. To this end, NTA has slammed on the accelerator and is driving forward as it seeks to cohere strong bonds between resellers via a solid hosted proposition and a channel-focused model to match.

"NTA's partner proposition is our differentiator," said Blaine. "Our model enables resellers to effectively become a wholesaler in their own right. The proposition gives resellers the flexibility to choose their

# box, urges NTA

own connectivity partner, the router they'd prefer to support, the handsets, and by not dictating a buy price on a per seat basis NTA provides flexibility in terms of charging for the service resellers provide. Thus, resellers can mould their offering to their sales team and customer based on length of contract and the wrap around products and services, and the price being charged for the complete service. Our partners tell us they make margins upwards of 80 per cent."

The advance of cloud communications is creating an ever widening gap between margin making hosted champions and their opposites. Furthermore, the polarising tendency of hosted technology has never been so glaring, starkly reflected by the single fact of NTA's perpetual quest to be ahead of the pack at all times. "We always look forward in time and aim to visualise what's coming over the horizon, then consider how we might embrace new technologies and bring them into our existing portfolio," explained Blaine.

"This approach inevitably means that our roadmap is ever-expanding, which is not a reflection of holes in our current portfolio, rather a sign of new features and improvements to current services that altogether set us and our partners apart from competitors. Resellers must realise that all communication roads lead to the cloud. You only have to look at the overcrowded hosted market to see that the writing is on the wall – and my own message to resellers is that they must choose their channel partners wisely."

Many resellers are yet to table and mobilise a hosted strategy, but they must, as a priority, keep this option open as the market continues to transition to the cloud, emphasised Blaine. NTA's strategy for engaging and partnering with new resellers begins with words of reassurance that its platform will deliver all of the functionality required to serve their customers, and that the right support mechanism is in place. "From then on it's about

## You only have to look at the overcrowded hosted market to see that the writing is on the wall

delivering comprehensive sales and engineering training designed to give partners a full understanding of the hosted world and instil the confidence they need to thrive in this market, supported by our account management, marketing and technical teams, and offering support during customer facing meetings," added Blaine.

### Key opportunity

As we have seen, the comms channel is not immune to the expanding world of hosted comms and resellers have been warned against maintaining a stance of detached disinterest even as the demands of the market develop new opportunities under their noses. "One of the biggest opportunities since the liberalisation of our industry is the ISDN turn off

in December 2025," added Blaine. "Customers must switch to either SIP or hosted telephony during the run up period. With over 85 per cent of the end user market still needing to adopt one of these technologies the opportunity to make money is obvious. This not only gives NTA a massive opportunity to grow as a vendor organically, but also our partners. They would be wise to educate their customers about the switch-off and stress the business benefits of migrating to cloud communications."

Blaine put his finger on the reasons why some resellers could be reluctant to adopt hosted telephony, or lead with the solution if it is in the corner of their kit bag. "Perhaps they dabbled in the technology in the early years and got their fingers burnt putting voice across existing ADSL connections; or they might have chosen a vendor with an unreliable platform or one that did not provide the right levels of support," said Blaine. "Another perceived challenge is the move from selling on-premise solutions to a recurring revenue model. But there are many ways to mitigate all of the above to ensure resellers have the right partner, the right solution and the capacity to maintain cashflow."

NTA is keeping its strategic cards for 2019 close to its chest right now, but Blaine did reveal that two seminars next month will put partners in the frame for new products, services and features, with a promise of 'game changing developments' that Blaine claims will enhance partner propositions, provide better tools to win more business and increase margins. ■

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# Leach's case for cloud

Traditional comms and IT resellers should realise that all roads lead to the cloud, according to NFON UK Managing Director Myles Leach who sets out his case.

**A**lthough still in its infancy the market for cloud telephony is growing up fast. UK penetration sits at circa 13 per cent with growth expected to hit 27 per cent in 2022, driven by businesses seeking to consolidate voice and data and introduce flexible working. "This is only going to increase," stated Leach. "Demand for cloud communications is moving like never before. There is hardly an organisation, regardless of size or industry affiliation that is not concerned about digital transformation, and cloud communications is an essential building block of any viable digital strategy."

For non-cloud savvy comms and IT resellers moving into a new market can be intimidating. "The advent of cloud computing led to the rise of software-driven businesses and a shift from big hardware margins to smaller annuity revenues," added Leach. "IT resellers have had to fundamentally change their business model over the last decade."

Voice and data were distinct markets but the rise of cloud telephony has merged the two. "Ultimately, cloud telephony is just another software application running on the network," explained Leach. "As it's an out-of-

the-box solution it gives IT resellers a fast-track entry into the world of voice. Cloud telephony couldn't be easier for IT resellers to deploy and maintain."

#### Market hotspot

SMEs have been identified as a key growth area for NFON UK as it seeks to consolidate market expansion in the mid to large enterprise space. According to Leach such opportunities are being unlocked by important channel partnerships such as the link-up in October 2017 with Westcoast to offer Skype for Business as a Service. "With Skype for Business integration features such as IVR, time-controlled call routing, queue management and extension-to-extension dialling are available via the Skype for Business interface, along with all of NFON's other telephony features," said Leach.

"Having Skype for Business as a Service changes the economics for full-blown UC, lowers the barriers of entry for the SME market and enables partners to offer a fast rollout without any onsite hardware or software, on a monthly subscription with a 30-day rolling contract."

Other partnerships of note include Scansource, a relationship strengthened by



Myles Leach

## The key to unlocking hosted comms revenues is outlining the benefits and reassuring customers that the process is easy

the launch of Polycom into NFON's hardware range. The three year partnership with Chess is also a significant boost to NFON UK's market presence. "Our channel offerings and partnerships have grown over the last year," added Leach. "A few months ago we opened our first UK office outside of the London headquarters, in Manchester, which will

enable us to enhance our support for northern partners. Furthermore, our IPO last year has given us the financial firepower to invest more in sales and marketing."

Leach also noted that the switch-off of ISDN and the move towards all-IP networks as announced by incumbent carriers in Europe will drive further growth in the cloud PBX segment, and the best prospects sit under the noses of resellers, he believes. "Sales 101 dictates that the best opportunity is an existing customer," stated Leach. "The longest and most difficult part of the sales process is lead generation and qualification, but you bypass these costly and lengthy stages with an existing customer."

"Marry that philosophy to the fact that customers want to limit the number of suppliers they work with and you have a huge opportunity. Customers can opt for one

supplier for both their IT and voice communications. In this, the key to unlocking hosted comms revenues is outlining the benefits and reassuring customers that the process is easy."

Not long ago NFON lifted the curtain on a newly developed telephony solution, Cloudya, which provides an integrated user interface via a single login. "It's an important milestone for NFON that lays the foundation for a dynamic and constant development pathway towards comprehensive UCaaS offerings, including screen sharing, chat and video," commented Leach. "Modern customer communication services require solutions that are capable of integrating all communications processes into a single platform, while at the same time being adaptable to changing demands."

Reflecting on new market demands Leach observed that the contact centre space has evolved greatly over the last year. "Many organisations' technology and staffing plans have not kept pace with consumer demand for digital customer service," he said. "Contact centres and call centres must be able to scale rapidly, even as they develop their competencies. New digital channels and touchpoints are emerging, changing the way consumers interact with brands. Multi-channel, Big Data and the integration of the IoT pose new requirements on the visibility of customer related data. Digitalisation has become vital to succeeding in a highly competitive market, and the most straightforward signpost to digital excellence points at cloud technology." ■

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# Turbulence in the cloud

Bravo, non-cloud resellers who wear a strategic hat. Some early adopters can be so overrated, claims VanillaIP Sales & Marketing Director Iain Sinnott.

To date, most cloud players have brought simple one-size-fits-all solutions into play which are functionally light or too expensive, according to Sinnott. And far from being disadvantaged, a large section of resellers who are holding back from the hosted market may now hold the trump cards, and in doing so turn the 'first mover advantage' tenet on its head. Sinnott believes that it is too often said that non-hosted resellers are holding up the cloud telephony market because they are unwilling, but we must not confuse unwillingness with prudence and a strategic 'wait and see' stance which many resellers have adopted.

"In all probability this group will be the future driving force of the hosted marketplace," stated Sinnott. "When they do decide to motivate their customers to change current cloud players will need a more sophisticated proposition and better trained sales people to keep their customers. They must absolutely understand the differing needs within any business user group, what staff and customer experience elements will gain traction and where commercial gains can be made."

But the era of fragmented cloud uptake must come to a

close, observes Sinnott, who urges all non-cloud resellers to make their move within a matter of weeks. "Selecting supply partners should be resellers' biggest focus in Q1 this year and they should not make assumptions," warned Sinnott. "Not all BroadSoft's are created equal and not all marketing claims are correct. Diligence, meetings and demonstrations are required."

His note of urgency reflects the circa 80 per cent of UK businesses that currently lack a cloud solution. "When those customers enter the market resellers need to be well armed if they are to win market share," stated Sinnott. "We see a huge opportunity in developing our partners' marketing skills and activity to create sales opportunities. We are now up-skilling our resellers' marketeers to generate new sales prospects."

#### Listen, educate, advise

In this disruptive environment the strongest sales opportunities, says Sinnott, will be determined by the sales person's capacity to listen, educate and advise the customer before moving on to the solution design stage. Easier said than done: Devising a user proposition that works for the client and a commercial model that works for the reseller still poses a challenge, says



Iain Sinnott

## Selecting supply partners should be a reseller's biggest focus in Q1 this year

Sinnott. "Many a time the moan from a reseller with simple, one-size-fits-all propositions is that it is a race to the bottom on price," he added. "As resellers become more able to define their own cloud brand and services they will see bigger, more consistent business revenues and profitability. Once our partners are on this curve the full migration to cloud becomes attractive in every way. Encouragingly, we see growth in ARPU/reseller margin, so our

partners are refusing to join any race to the bottom."

It goes without saying that resellers who stand rooted on the sidelines of an expected cloud migration stampede will be left in a cloud of dust, but Sinnott's expectation of casualty numbers is perhaps surprisingly conservative. "I don't expect there to be many of them," he explained. "In the coming 18 months I would expect some non-cloud players to retire, some will partner with a future buyer to control a base move and then retire. The third camp will commit to a powerful and determined move to cloud service on behalf of their loyal customers.

"These resellers need to invest time – time to plan, time to train and time to educate customers and prospects. Our major investment this year is The

Class of 2019, a sales, marketing and support training programme designed to fast track committed resellers beyond the ineffective and undifferentiated norm. But training on its own is not the answer. Partners need a flexible product with breadth that allows them to leverage their solution design skills as part of the overall proposition."

#### Automation matters

We know it's folly to ignore the high potential of cloud PBX business, but it is fantasy to chase the dream with an expectation of rising revenue streams and wide open floodgates. "Margin and manpower are rarely discussed but the challenge of delivering an excellent customer experience meets with increasing pressure on the profitability of some players," stated Sinnott. "Automation will mean survival and, through the demise of competitors, survivors thrive. Automation is the only hope for the cross sale of app-based minor revenues, so Uboss development – which is undertaken by 80 per cent of our company's headcount – remains a core focus.

"We have created a portfolio of modular features from multiple suppliers which are unified within Uboss to create differentiation under the partners' brand. We encourage retail price independence and the inclusion of non-VanillaIP elements so that each partner emerges as a distinctive player in the market. We then support the growth of partners as they transition to a flexible portfolio rather than be reliant on a rigid one-size-fits-all product." ■

# The Simple, Flexible Phone System

Easy to install? Check. Easy to manage? Check. Easy on the bank balance? Check, but there's more. With a full suite of communications features and the flexibility to deploy how YOU want, 3CX offers you a better way to do telco.



**W**hen it comes to communications solutions, most vendors can offer a complete set of features whether included as standard or available as add-ons. In this respect, it makes choosing a system especially hard for businesses and decision makers looking for the best UC solution to suit their needs. But where vendors like 3CX are standing out from the crowd is in affordability, simplicity and flexibility. Three aspects that can make all the difference when it comes to what a PBX can really, tangibly do for a business and its employees. 3CX offers multiple deployment options; it can be installed

offer a level of flexibility and customization that most big names in the business communications industry just don't provide. For instance, rather than being locked into one manufacturer of IP phones, either a technology partner of the vendor or the vendor's own brand devices, open standards solutions like 3CX allow you to choose the IP phones you want to suit your customer's needs and budget. There are templates available for plug & play configuration of a number of popular devices including snom, Yealink, Htek and Fanvil, and unsupported devices can be provisioned manually so it's possible to make use of existing phones.



on-premise on Windows or Linux, on a mini-PC or virtualized with VMware, Hyper-V or KVM. This ensures that businesses can utilize existing servers or purchase a mini-PC for as little as \$200, making 3CX an easy-to-sell solution for resellers. If Cloud is the preference, 3CX is ready to be deployed with your choice of cloud provider including Google, Amazon, Azure and more. With the ability to use your own cloud account, you get to keep control of data and settings.

#### No Vendor Lock-in

Open standards software solutions

#### Saving with SIP Trunks

Certain vendors might require you to use their own SIP trunking service or that of a limited number of preferred technology partners. With 3CX, not only can you choose your own SIP trunk, but the development team is working constantly with providers from all across the globe to create templates for easy selection from within the management console, so you can have your SIP trunk up and working in a matter of minutes. This way you can choose the SIP trunk that provides the most reliable and secure service at a price that works for your customers.

#### Apps All Round!

The 3CX apps enable businesses to offer employees a seamless experience when it comes to their professional communications. Whether it's just another day at the office, working from home, or travelling for business, 3CX enables users to take their office extension with them. Available for iOS, Android, Mac, Windows and the Web, communication with colleagues, partners and customers has never been easier. The user-friendly and intuitive apps provide a full set of communications features including call management, status, chat, video conferencing and more. The smartphone apps offer PUSH notifications so employees can rest assured they will never miss an important call.

#### And What About Integration with Other Apps?

The ability to integrate with 3rd-party software is key to 3CX's value proposition. A variety of integrations with most of the leading CRM systems including Salesforce, MS Exchange and Zendesk enable easy synchroni-

zation between apps. Utilize this feature for your customers with 3CX's pre-configured templates or create your own integrations using the 3CX API. All of this can be done with just a few clicks within the management console, making configuration of the system easier and lowering deployment time.

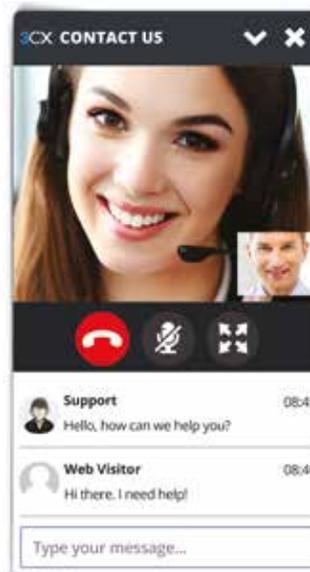
#### Better Customer Service with 3CX Plugins

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potential clients want instant communication and information, and what better way to get customers to commit than with 3CX's Live Chat and Talk plugin for Wordpress. Integrate your customer's website chat and video function with their 3CX PBX and have all communications running on a single platform. There are no subscriptions or additional charges; simply install the plugin to get started!

#### An Advanced Solution that Doesn't Break the Bank

3CX's UC solution offers substantial cost savings due to its unique pricing model, with yearly maintenance costs amounting to less than the monthly subscription fees of many hosted PBX providers. Resellers can make use of their own cloud accounts, avoid provider fees, and keep complete control over customer installations. And, with 3CX's PBX Express tool, PBX deployment couldn't be easier. It takes just five simple steps to have a brand new, fully functioning PBX up and running and with the first year completely free businesses can get started with their new communications today.



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# White Horse Telecom breas

For White Horse Telecom to fulfil its growth potential it must close the gap between Managing Director Paddy Coppinger's expansion ambitions and his firm's operational capacity to realise them. In this Phil Donigan is the harbinger of a step change.

**T**he appointment of Donigan, who was formerly STL Communications Sales Director, will shift White Horse Telecom's structural and strategic plates, and inject a potency boost as he seeks to take the company to the next level of sustainable and profitable growth. "I've known Paddy for a few years, we get on well and I've always admired what he's achieved with White Horse," stated Donigan. "The opportunity to join the business offered a fresh challenge and it was a 'now or never' decision. I'm currently immersed in systems, structures and procedures, but going forward we'll be focusing on growing existing base revenues through diversifying our product and service portfolio, as well as new customer acquisitions."



Phil Donigan and Paddy Coppinger

Donigan entered the comms reseller sector over 20 years ago, spending almost two decades at STL where he rose through the ranks and accrued priceless business experience. "I'm well versed in what's involved in taking a business from an established and strong starting point into sustainable growth," he commented. "I've also experienced supplier and partner management. These are well aligned at White Horse but there are new partnerships that I'll be looking to implement to broaden and strengthen our offering.

## I can't wait to do it all over again with Paddy and the White Horse Telecom team

"Furthermore, with the recent acquisition of fresh and experienced resource, new channel partnerships will almost certainly result as well as the strengthening and development of key existing relationships. Partners have proved critical in delivering and supporting solutions, allowing us to punch above our weight. Our portfolio will also develop. However, we'll still be focused on driving forward with the products that have formed

the bedrock of the business up to this point. It's an evolution, not a revolution."

### Unified vision

Donigan and Coppinger are unified in their vision of White Horse Telecom's journey and how to most propitiously go about strategising the road ahead. "I've come from a business which scaled significantly – that's the goal with White Horse Telecom," stated Donigan. "It's about

spreading the load, allowing both of us to be more strategic while adding scale to the business without losing the customer-centric ethos and strong reputation that White Horse has developed."

Hungerford-based White Horse Telecom was established in 2006 by Coppinger following a spell working at carrier level. The business has grown steadily from the outset with a number of significant

customer acquisitions under its belt. Donigan's arrival has now raised expectations in the power of White Horse to lead the field in its chosen markets, and his experience at STL brings a retrospective understanding of how to make an organisation more effectively deliver its goals. Such endeavours were manifestly displayed during Donigan's rise to influence at STL Communications. "Playing a significant part in STL's growth from a fairly small operation to the sizeable, high profile and well respected organisation it is today makes me proud," he said. "I can't wait to do it all over again with Paddy and the White Horse Telecom team."

Donigan will build on White Horse Telecom's achievements to date and show the channel – and customers – a roadmap that meets the demands of the market. "We are targeting a significant increase in revenues, the customer base and the team," he commented. "Growth will come from a select group of products and services and our choice of supplier will be absolutely key to success. We'll also expand the team. Paddy and I are committed to showing that it's possible to grow a comms reseller business successfully and sustainably while being first and foremost the 'good guys'."

Donigan is pursuing his goals with a fresh perspective,



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# ...ks into a gallop

again shaped by previous experiences that now serve to clarify his *modus operandi* going forward. "In hindsight I'd have been bolder with some of my decisions around the delivery of next generation products," said Donigan. "If I had my time again I'd have thrown more effort and focus into these and not spent so much time on maintaining an ageing base of hardware products. I'd also have

## Partners have proved critical in delivering and supporting solutions, allowing us to punch above our weight

hired differently, investing more heavily in specific skill sets rather than trying to 'grow my own'. Now, I see our opportunities in embracing new technologies where appropriate, commercialising them and growing the business."

In Donigan's book there's never been a better time for resellers to add value for their customers. "In a market that's becoming overcrowded with similar products we have an opportunity to simplify things for our clients and offer genuine best of breed services," he added. "Our key opportunity to demonstrate value lies in our service proposition: We're with our customers all the way – that's the White Horse Telecom message."

Donigan hopes to open a yawning gap between White Horse Telecom and its competitors in the hosted telephony and Ethernet arena over the way solutions are planned and implemented. "We deliver leading edge solutions that require a low touch once implemented," he explained. "That's one of our main points of differentiation. Every solution delivered is meticulously planned, ensuring a smooth migration.

"We've established a significant base of hosted VoIP clients in recent years and become experts in the delivery methods, with Ethernet now forming a major part of our customer offering. We're focusing on developing our established portfolio with some other key products and associated service offerings, including cloud computing and backup. We're also concentrated on mobile services, especially integrated 'joined up' mobile solutions."

The message of Donigan's appointment has been well heeded, but to make himself heard in certain far-off quarters he turned up the volume on what he rates as his overriding industry bugbear. "I'd encourage some carriers to recognise the real value of the reseller channel," he emphasised. "We are the experts when it comes to customer engagement, experience and ultimately satisfaction. Carriers are good at product – that's what they do. The VAR channel 'does' customers. That's why we exist and there's an opportunity for some of the major networks to see this and focus more on businesses like us to deliver their services in true partnership." ■

### Just a minute with Phil Donigan...

**Role model:** I take inspiration from people every day

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be more comfortable at public speaking. I'm told I'm good but it doesn't come easily to me

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Something to do with property and/or cars

**Best piece of advice you have been given?** Don't fall out with people. You never know what's going to happen in the future

**How do you relax?** Spending time with my partner and children, as well as exercise

**What's the biggest risk you have taken?** Leaving an established, successful and long-term position to pursue a new opportunity

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Jenson Button, a formidable competitor and top bloke; Steve Coogan, I'm a massive Partridge fan; and Eric Watson, my school teacher and the nearest thing I've had to a mentor

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** Tenacity is a strength, which can also be a weakness in terms of picking battles and knowing when to let things go. But I'm terrible at remembering peoples' names

**Top tip:** Successful selling is not about price

**One example of something you have overcome:** I didn't go to university whereas the majority of my friends and peers did. But I don't see this as a disadvantage, providing you have a vision of what you want to achieve



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# Will clients stay fixed on to



ALI MOHSIN  
WAVENET

**WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?**

5G is expected to transform our workplaces at a marginal cost of a traditional fibre leased line. This of course depends on the technology being used and the backhaul capacity of the network operators.

**WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?**

Autonomous cars, Augmented Reality Platforms, Smart Cities, Smart Homes, Artificial Intelligence, Supercomputing and Machine learning platforms.

**HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?**

It has never been more important for UC players to offer a mobile solution that allows customers to achieve a stable and reliable connectivity at a competitive price.

**HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?**

Gain a thorough understanding of 5G, educate staff and partners and prepare to productise correctly. Finally, explore synergies within their wider product portfolio and assign product champions internally to achieve "First Movers Advantage".



SIMON FORT  
9 GROUP

**WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?**

5G will have little impact on traditional landline services in the short term, however we will see changes to mobile broadband packages to cater for 'big data'.

**WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?**

As smaller manufacturers take advantage of niche markets in IoT they will be seeking new communications providers. Providing IoT cellular connectivity solutions could provide a new income stream.

**HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?**

Ensuring customers' mobile devices, tariffs and service options support their working practices and add value is key to a happy customer.

**HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?**

Take time to understand 5G. It's not just about higher data speeds. Talk to your customers about what 5G and IoT means to them and if they are playing a part in its evolution.

**A** quick internet search – try 'Mobile trends 2019' – will unveil a plethora of sites telling us that 5G is on the horizon and 5G Smartphones and tablets will start emerging in the year ahead.

In a nutshell, 5G is the next generation of wireless networking technology, promising to deliver ultra-fast speeds and responsiveness to connect everything around us in seconds.

According to Technology Hardware and Solution Provider Insight: "In order to prepare for 5G, operators are using software-defined technology to move functions around their networks, closer to customers. Operators will have national, regional and even local network infrastructure that will bring latency down to as little as 1 millisecond.

"This new spectrum will also boost capacity, which will ease congestion in



MARK RIDDELL  
ABZORB

**WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?**

There'll be significant impact. Installation of 5G will be infinitely quicker and hassle free compared to fixed line technology which is fraught with delays.

**WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?**

5G could account for as many as 1.2 billion connections by 2025. The impact on the mobile industry and its customers will be extraordinary.

**HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?**

Any UK reseller that chooses to ignore mobile within their portfolio does so at their peril. 5G networks will compliment and improve pre-existing services, and also introduce new applications and service capabilities to enhance businesses in every industry.

**HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?**

Don't rush in. Do your research. Start client discussions: Educate them now and build an upgrade path as the technology evolves.



NICK SACKE  
COMMS 365

**WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?**

5G has the capability to dramatically disrupt the fixed line market by enhancing broadband internet use with higher speeds, better user experiences, enhanced scale and reliability.

**WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?**

Transport (connected car, distribution fleets, containers, packages); healthcare (connecting ambulance systems), energy pipeline monitoring and systems control; augmented and virtual reality in factories, building sites, airports and hospitals.

**HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?**

Agile working practices are the primary benefits of a business-critical service offering that the Channel can facilitate and grow.

**HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?**

Becoming '5G aware' by educating yourself and your customer. Take advantage of 5G testbeds to test devices (handsets and more). Don't sell vapourware, be realistic about the time it will take for 5G to become mainstream.



LAUREN MCMANUS  
DAISY WHOLESALE

**WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?**

5G is not likely to replace traditional fixed lines any time soon. Most businesses prefer the stability and security of fixed lines.

**WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?**

IoT and AI will massively benefit from 5G as it brings the scalability, security and mobility that is needed for several services, aiding development in the IoT space.

**HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?**

Converged solutions, including mobile and hosted voice are essential offerings. Apps are cloud-based now, and the mobile workforce is reliant on data anywhere, any time and on any device.

**HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?**

All channel partners should be preparing for 5G by ensuring that key technologies are ready for the change. 5G also brings more potential for hackers to enter networks so it is important to restructure security protocols.



STEVE LOWE  
GAMMA

**WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?**

5G Fixed Wireless Access will make inroads against Fibre and Broadband. However, there will still be a place for fibre. The skill will be in recommending the right client solution based on specific needs.

**WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?**

5G will enable far greater tailoring of services. IoT, vertically segmented business applications etc. are clear examples of where 5G will offer enhanced opportunities.

**HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?**

The move from fixed to mobile will accelerate over the next five years. It is essential for channel partners to offer up-to-date mobile and mobility strategies.

**HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?**

They should learn about the benefits of 5G and the timescales. It is important to understand where 5G will sit within the overall channel partner portfolio.



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# Telephony or go all mobile?

urban areas and allow operators to connect more people and devices – something that will be crucial in delivering the Internet of Things (IoT).

“Low latency and high capacity will also power the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), which will see many, mission-critical, data intensive machines located close to one another. This will also allow for connected car applications, advanced robotics, drone piloting and maybe even remote surgery in the future.”

The big question for Kaleidoscope contributors this month therefore is: With ISDN switching off and 5G on the horizon, offering bandwidth and opportunities only dreamed of in the past, will customers choose to phase out fixed lines and on premises telephony and become mobile-only enterprises?

Viewpoints are polarised as you will see...



MIKE NUUD  
INCLARITY

#### WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?

Ultrafast wireless bandwidth will drive greater focus on using your mobile device as your primary business device. However, mobile platforms have some catching up to do to offer the same user experience as the desktop.

#### WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?

We will be aligning ourselves to support 5G connectivity, and to integrate with other mobile connections.

#### HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?

As the demand for cutting edge mobile data technology increases, it will be very important for our channels to expand their portfolios to meet these requirements

#### HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?

Anyone not already partnered with a mobile provider should find and build a relationship. There would also be merit in pressuring software application vendors to deliver greater value over mobile platforms.



ANDREW DICKINSON  
JOLA

#### WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?

5G could make some of the physical local loop redundant. The fibre backbone suppliers should sell significant backhaul bandwidth to the MNOs, however they may need to reconsider the business case for fibre in every home and office.

#### WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?

Most IoT opportunities are low value. Higher usage, more complex deals, with the right partner, can differentiate e.g. pre-Ethernet, multi-network back-up, Private APN and mobile broadband.

#### HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?

Mobile data should feature in most tenders these days, either for remote workers, as a back-up, or as a primary solution where fixed line is unsuitable.

#### HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?

Start selling 4G data. Every one of Jola's partners has at least one mobile data opportunity in their base of customers.



STEVE MCINTYRE  
NIMANS

#### WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?

In terms of data output, 5G is a viable alternative, particularly where traditional 'pipe' based connectivity isn't possible. There'll always be a need for fixed lines though.

#### WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?

There's no doubt 5G heralds a new connectivity era and because of the low energy requirements, it will drive IoT pick-up with repeaters on lamp-posts etc. providing much more volume-based revenue.

#### HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?

It's vital resellers have a compelling mobile strategy, but there's no need to panic as the technology isn't mainstream yet.

#### HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?

One of the most interesting aspects to consider is how the pricing models may change from the network providers. People may pay for the speed of their data not just the amount.



CHRIS ROMEIKA  
PANGEA

#### WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?

Providers put a lot of faith in fixed line due to the 'five nines' uptime. In a future wireless world, the market will have no problem relying on wireless technologies for connectivity.

#### WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?

V2X (Vehicle to Anything) communications and vital healthcare solutions such as remote-surgery and video triage.

#### HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?

Channel partners should examine their fixed line base. Having a good pipe to send data upwards to the Cloud is as important as download speeds and low latency, and 5G is perfect for this.

#### HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?

To really stay ahead of the game, they'll need to look at their current base—in particular those with ADSL—to identify opportunities to move customers away from fixed lines.



ROBIN HAYMAN  
SPLICECOM

#### WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?

Taken at face value, 5G should sound the death knell for both copper and fibre fixed lines. Wireless delivery also alleviates the pain of installation.

#### WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?

Businesses will still need a 'PBX' of some format on the end of wireless services – whatever it's called, whatever it looks like and wherever it lives (in the Cloud, on premises, or a blend of both).

#### HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?

The current unknowns will ultimately make 5G a success – or a failure. Expect businesses to 'sweat' their current assets if prices are higher than they're already paying for a fixed line delivery.

#### HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?

Resellers should track what's going on in the market and ask their mobile network/phone supplier what they're doing about 5G.



MANDY FAZELYNIA  
ZEST4

#### WHAT IMPACT WILL 5G HAVE ON FIXED LINES?

With no engineering costs as fibre is negated, 5G-GWA should be far cheaper to run. We could see office connectivity solutions being carried over 5G, leaving fixed connectivity as back-up.

#### WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES IN 5G?

Big data, IoT and new cloud technologies will explode. Instant connectivity will be the quick win but opportunities in manufacturing, energy, utilities and the public sector will be where the big gains come from.

#### HOW VITAL ARE MOBILE SALES STRATEGIES?

Partners should embrace convergence and package up quality cloud telephony solutions that can be operated via mobile devices intuitively.

#### HOW SHOULD RESELLERS ACT ON 5G NOW?

Find a supplier that can provide connectivity and mobility services across fixed and cellular networks and deliver an education programme to support transition into this space.

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# Blockchain unleashed

With Blockchain we can weave together an ecosystem of manufacturers, distributors and resellers, revolutionising the way we all do business, says Exertis Supply Chain Services IT Director Brian Cassidy.

**E**xertis has secured Irish Government funding to support its 'Blockchain in the Technology Product Supply Chain' project – which was announced as one of 27 projects to be funded as part of the Irish Government's 75 million euro Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF). Exertis SCS will lead the project in collaboration with the Centre for Applied Data Analytics Research (CeADAR) at University College Dublin and Dublin-based software company Sonalake. "Our intention is to bring to market a fit-for-purpose Blockchain platform for the technology product supply chain within three years," said Cassidy. "This will complement Exertis' global technology market reach and supply chain expertise, while leveraging the research and implementation experience of CeADAR and Sonalake."

The Irish Government said the DTIF is a 'key part' of its Future Jobs initiative, a plan to secure Ireland's economic success. Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar observed: "Today, everything is faster, more efficient and more easily accessible. We must adapt to a future of greater digitalisation and

automation. Today's school children will be employed in jobs and industries that don't exist yet. Technology will eliminate or transform existing occupations."

One of these revolutionary technologies will undoubtedly be Blockchain, emphasised Cassidy. "Ultimately, the platform will support all order fulfilment activity along the supply chain from component sourcing through to end customer delivery," he added. "A full lifecycle view of orders and shipped products will be available to the participants in the chain, albeit on a need to know basis. Smart contract will be deployed to automate activities like invoicing, and an analytics platform will be developed. We have built the proof of concept and are launching a full production build."

#### Integration

Cassidy noted that the platform will need to coexist with existing and legacy systems, at least in the short to medium-term. "So ease of integration will be key," he commented. "The platform will integrate with legacy systems like SAP and Oracle via EDI and web services and will be accessible through a mobile app and web portal.



Brian Cassidy

## Blockchain may entirely replace the existing technology paradigm

"Our solution has the potential to fundamentally change the supply chain paradigm, but without the necessity of replacing legacy IT systems or their functions. Blockchain promises to be disruptive in a number of industries, from banking and finance to healthcare and entertainment. In supply chain management, Blockchain enables parties to more closely manage the distribution channel, enabling transparency of information, providing incorruptible data, reducing risk and increasing efficiency."

Cassidy joined Exertis SCS in November 2016, assuming responsibility for the IT ecosystem. His previous experience includes spells in supply chain, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and banking in north America and Europe. In each industry the same challenge was apparent. "Business systems as they exist today are modelled on bilateral trading relationships," commented Cassidy.

"Data is often exchanged between contracting parties but systems are rarely shared. This creates tremendous issues in terms of visibility, product provenance and account reconciliation in multi-party environments. But commerce is increasingly reorienting itself towards multilateral peer-to-peer relationships (think Bitcoin); and Blockchain is a technology that can support this emerging commercial

model. Blockchain may entirely replace the existing technology paradigm."

There are several technology options emerging in Blockchain and, says Cassidy, it's hard to keep up with each new entrant. "It's early days but the main platforms gaining traction appear to be Hyperledger Fabric and Ethereum, with a range of more specialist industry specific platforms such as Corda in banking," he explained. "A key challenge is that the software platforms available on the market today are quite immature, so it's difficult to predict the implementation effort required."

#### Efficiency gains

The commercialisation of Exertis' proprietary Blockchain technology will deliver a number of efficiency benefits including shared visibility of orders across the supply chain from component manufacturer to consumer; detailed product provenance information based on product serial numbers which is key for reducing counterfeit and managing warranty liability; simplified financial reconciliation for promotional rebates; reduced IT integration overheads; and improved market analytics across the entire supply chain of a finished technology good.

Furthermore, the convergence of Blockchain and IoT are of particular interest to Cassidy. "Collecting sensor information from both logistics partners and from the sensors embedded in shipped products themselves and sharing that sensor data on the Blockchain platform will greatly enrich the user experience," he added. ■

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## Why settle for any less?

# It's time to recognise the ICT channel superheroes

Does your sales team walk through walls to make sure your company meets its revenue targets? Has your marketing team put together hard-hitting campaigns to supercharge your brand and generate red hot leads?

**D**on't let your company's superheroes go unrewarded!

Acknowledging the success of your sales and marketing teams should never be underestimated and the opportunity to give them the recognition they deserve has come around again.

Now in its 8th year, the Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards will once again give ICT channel businesses a unique opportunity to acknowledge the skill, determination and success of their sales and marketing teams.

Bigger and better than ever with new categories added, the 2019 Awards will once again ensure that effort and quality throughout channel engagement processes are recognised (see award categories).

Specifically aimed at teams rather than individuals, the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing awards will once again be fully supported by KCOM – who take up their position as lead sponsor for



Iain Shearman, Managing Director of National Network Services, Kcom

the fourth year running.

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

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

For the full line-up of award categories see:  
[www.cdsalesawards.com](http://www.cdsalesawards.com)

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**LAUREN MCMANUS – DAISY WHOLESALE**  
 "We're sponsoring the 'Reseller Sales Team of the Year' category because it recognises resellers in the SME space, which has shown phenomenal growth. Our partners, who are operating in this space, are crucial to our business so we want to encourage them to succeed and celebrate their achievements. I hope to see lots of entries across the entire category range this year and wish everyone the best of luck."



**JUSTIN BLAINE – NTA**  
 "NTA are once again proud to be sponsors at this year's prestigious Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards. This high-profile event rewards channel resellers and vendors alike for their hard work and dedication to delivering amazing products, sales solutions and marketing initiatives. We would like to wish all finalists the very best of luck and look forward to seeing you all on the day."



**VINCENT DISNEUR – UNION STREET**  
 "In an industry as competitive as ours, true dedication and perseverance is needed to succeed. It's a great honour to be able to help recognise the channel's top performers as a sponsor of this year's CDSMAs. We would encourage all the channel to embrace these awards and get involved. Wishing the very best of luck to all this year's entrants."



**PAUL TAYLOR – VOICEFLEX**  
 "The Comms Dealer Sales Awards is one of the highlights of the channel and we are delighted to support an event that recognises the hard work, dedication and achievement of staff and celebrate these accomplishments. It is always a pleasure to share success and network with colleagues and friends at an enjoyable and entertaining event. We wish everyone the best of luck and see you on the 2nd May."

#### Event Details

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

#### Table Booking

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

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# Ford set for next phase

Five months into the job, Marston's Telecoms Managing Director Tony Ford is eyeing a £2 million uplift in revenue this year and targeting £20 million by 2023 as he seeks to establish the business as a top rung channel focused ISP.

**F**ord, who was formerly Operations Director having joined Marston's Telecoms in 2017 as part of a succession plan, stepped into the MD position following the retirement of Mike McMinn last September. "In 2016 I was asked to write a paper outlining Marston's Telecoms' capability and whether I believed the overall market would allow us to develop and grow profitably," he stated. "That insight and forecast has matured into a full five-year business plan. The first phase took over 12 months to execute and involved suppliers, customers, products, the team and procedures – all now in readiness for growth. I have appointed two additional sales people with channel experience to start driving the strategy. It's a great feeling when planned elements all come together. We kicked off 2019 with a full order book that will see us grow by another 20 per cent this year."



Tony Ford

## Routes to new markets and products are essential if we are to utilise our infrastructures to the best return possible

Ford had worked as a consultant for Marston's Telecoms ever since it was established in 2008. But this engagement was not the first encounter between the two parties, as Marston's was one of Ford's first customers when he sold Internet services 20 years ago. "I cut my teeth on providing comms to pubs," stated Ford. "The early days of the Internet prepares you for anything, particularly problem

solving and innovation. Today, I appreciate the education I had, not so much the cost of grey hair, but how this industry works and the importance of keeping teams focused and customers happy."

Despite being 10 years old, Marston's Telecoms more resembles a start-up which has become leaner, meaner, hungrier and fit for growth, according to Ford.

"That meant optimising operations so that service and customers were king, freeing up capacity by acting smarter," he said. "Supplier assessments, self-sufficiency, organisational structure, training, productisation and marketing reviews are some of the areas we addressed"

### Key partnerships

Ford is playing to Marston's strengths and currently working with key partners

with an interest in the hospitality market, particularly the pub and restaurant vertical. "Retail and hospitality is a tough place to operate in and requires ICT providers that truly understand the sector and can match services to bespoke needs," he commented. "We are working with some close channel partners and taking them into these opportunities. We

are looking to add more partners in 2019."

As a Group Marston's generated £900 million turnover in 2018. It has a large customer base within the retail and hospitality sector, and adding telecoms to that portfolio proved relatively easy due to mature trading relationships and its deep knowledge of the vertical, which forms the cornerstone of an ambitious

# of growth plan

expansion plan. "We are aiming for turnover of circa £20 million," stated Ford. "Meeting our targets, subject to the market being stable enough over the next three years, is about our people and how we engage with customers."

Ford completed Marston's Telecoms product gap analysis early in the

**The day when the pipe entering a building is just a conduit and enabler for everything else is getting close enough to start focusing on products that exist on that infrastructure**

transformation process and has spent the last two years laying down foundations to take those products to their next iteration. "Our SD-WAN, including mobile hand-off and IoT capabilities, are mature and we are deploying SD-WAN services as standard," he said. "Mobile data is still interesting to us and we see a multitude of services and products emerging as part of the wider WAN market, either as back-up or bonded support to existing infrastructure, which is easier when you have a network that can

consume these services without changes to firewalls, IPs or established routes."

According to Ford, there is a 'fantastic opportunity' for specialist resellers and integrators to challenge their counterparts who are 'stuck in the 90s' and redefine how voice and data are sold and serviced. "The channel brings innovation and early market adoption, at least on the basis that new products will more likely be driven from the channel," he said. "The day when the pipe entering a building is just a conduit and enabler for everything else is getting close enough to start focusing on products that exist on that infrastructure rather than what's consumed. Routes to new markets and products are essential if we are to utilise our infrastructures to the best return possible."

The IoT represents a hot opportunity for Marston's Telecoms, and Ford noted that its UK network of properties could simply extend services that include the ability to monitor the surrounding environment within several kilometres of the base. Not so hot is hosted voice. For all the antics in the cloud voice marketplace, Ford says he is right to withdraw from the maelstrom and knuckle down on core business. "We looked at cloud voice early and formed some great relationships," he said. "However, the market is topsy turvy with changes and land grab strategies so we have taken a view to wait for the dust to settle before venturing further into this space. More pressingly, we are set for our LLU rollout in Q4 and hope to bring some exciting new propositions to market in 2020." ■

## Just a minute with Tony Ford...

**What do you fear the most?** Not remembering who my family are

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know?**

I played guitar in a few touring musicals when I was in my teens and published poetry

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Sir John Harvey Jones for his approach to life and business; John Lennon, I have many questions for him; and Terry Pratchett because I love his books

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Making wooden furniture or guitars

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** My ability to focus hard on tasks is both a strength and a weakness: Although I get the job done, I have on occasion caused issues for people in the way or who get ignored in the execution

**How do you relax?** Play the guitar and make lots of noise

**What's the biggest risk you have taken?** Remortgaging my house to invest in the Internet when spam meant tinned meat just because someone I admired said it was a good idea

**Top tip:** The future is not minutes nor channels, but connectivity that allows you to do anything and everything

**Give one example of something you have overcome:** Illness: I hit a rough patch a few years ago but am better for it

**What could you not do without in your job?** The Marston's people – I am nothing without the guys



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# Firing up partnerships

Cisco's channel engagement strategy has moved on to a new chapter as it forges closer partner relationships underpinned by consultation and solutions versus transactional product selling, according to Angela Whitty, Cisco Managing Director, UK&I Partner Organisation.

**W**hitty is acutely focused on developing what she terms 'Cisco's next generation of partner' from its select and premier base, which is where the company has seen its biggest growth over the last financial period, up almost 30 per cent year-on-year. "We have reignited our partner relationships," stated Whitty. "We absolutely see our partners as key to our success and an extension of our sales team. We are training and enabling partners in the same way that we do our sales teams.

"However, we are moving from being a product sales team to one that focuses on a consultative sell. One that understands our customers' business requirements and is able to propose solutions that meet those requirements and create commercial propositions that allow customers to acquire them in a more of a recurring way rather than a traditional capex model. While maintaining our overall partner focus we will continue to look at how we grow our next generation partners to

meet the demands of our customers who are in the midst of their own digital transformation. With our evolution as a company from a traditional hardware vendor to a software and solutions vendor we can be instrumental in the digital transformation of our customers."

Whitty's own transformation into a Cisco stalwart occurred after she completed a university course and set about finding temporary work while living in Brussels, during this time 'falling into life at Cisco'. Twenty six years later the Cisco bond is just as strong as she seeks to develop its UK&I channel, a role she assumed three and a half years ago. "My objective is to run the best channel team in the business," she stated. "I have built many high performing teams, one of which was responsible for the implementation of the network that ran the 2012 Olympic Games. Partners have choices and I want them to choose Cisco."

Whitty displays a number of strong leadership traits that have served her well and lend support to her



Angela Whitty

## I was brought up to speak my mind, that's what I try and do

mantra that 'it's easier to ask for forgiveness rather than permission' – and being a 'lastminute.com' person also keeps her on her toes.

### Strong views

"Taking calculated risks is good for you and the business," she said. "I also admire people who are passionate and vocal about their beliefs. I struggle with people who have a point of view but just won't say anything. I was brought up to speak my mind and that's what I try and do. I also try and speak for those around me who don't feel like they have a voice. I hate injustice."

Whitty, who is no shrinking violet and nigh on indomitable, is also fuelled by determination and single mindedness. "If someone says or implies I can't do something, that makes me more focused on achieving what they say is out of my reach," she emphasised. "This is true in my business and private life. But having young children and a demanding career has not been easy. I always wanted to be a hands on mother but never felt like I was in the right place at the right time. It's much easier being the mother of older children. I love hanging out with my two sons. They keep me grounded and tell me the truth, even if I don't want to hear it."

With her feet firmly on the ground Whitty says she has been able to bring a new perspective on putting partners first. "Rather

than thinking about what partners can do for Cisco we now view partners with a mindset focused on what we can do for them," she explained. "We now have the best portfolio we have ever had and the strongest route to market via our partner ecosystem."

The ethos of partner inclusivity advanced by Cisco runs counter to the wider IT industry's poor reputation for not being 'inclusive', but, says Whitty, Cisco's embracing approach is happily becoming more typical of the sector. "In the main, the IT industry is changing on many levels and offers great opportunities for everyone – young and old, male and female, all sexual orientations and religious denominations," she said. "It would be great to change the perception of the IT industry to attract and retain the best talent and see people develop the best careers." ■

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# Strategising now key Exertis pulls in AV gurus



Ian Kilpatrick

NUVIAS CEO Paul Eccleston will be more strategically informed on the future direction of the security market following the appointment of Ian Kilpatrick to the newly created position of Strategic Advisor for Cybersecurity.

Kilpatrick, who was previously EVP Cybersecurity for Nuvias, retains responsibility for the overall cybersecurity strategy including security vendor selection. "This consultative and advisory role draws more on the areas where my strength and experience in security lie," he

stated. "I will be looking at the big picture in terms of winning strategies for Nuvias across an international market. Security is an exciting and dynamic area, with huge potential for expansion." Eccleston added: "Nuvias will benefit greatly from Ian's foresight and business intelligence in his new strategic role."

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Exertis has pulled in two former Tech Data AV specialists to bolster its Pro AV division. David Scott joins from Tech Data's Maverick arm where he was a Business Manager for interactive



David Scott

flat panel vendors. His prior experience also includes two spells at Steljes as Product Manager.

Carl Swatheridge spent over six years as a Category Manager for peripherals and monitors at Tech Data and joins Exertis with responsibility for the projection category.

Ian Neale, Exertis Pro AV solutions, General Manager, said: "With our increasing number of brands we have a great opportunity to grow our business with our AV specialists and IT resellers. David and Carl have experience in the AV market and will be able to make an immediate impact with our vendors and customers."

## Also on the move...



Czarina Sheikh Mathew

**MAINTEL** intends to review and improve the customer experience at every touchpoint following the appointment of Czarina Sheikh Mathew as Customer Experience Director. She brings over 25 years experience in customer-focused

roles including a spell as Head of Customer Experience at Intrinsic which was acquired by Maintel in 2017. "I've already immersed myself into the role to gain a better understanding of how we can go above and beyond for customers," she stated.

**FORMER** Mitel Channel Manager Dawn Lill has joined Voiceflex as Dealer Account Manager in the next step of a solid career which includes a four year stint selling Mitel's MiVoice office and MiVoice business and UC solutions. Prior to joining Voiceflex Lill was a freelance



Dawn Lill

**Business Development Manager. In total she brings over 25 years experience in UC, telecoms, account management and business development. Voiceflex Sales & Marketing Director**

Paul Taylor said: "2019 will be exciting following the launch of Unify's Circuit and Openscape cloud products. Dawn's industry experience will allow us to develop existing and new relationships and support our partners with growth opportunities."

## Watson hired by Sennheiser



Neil Watson

**CHANNEL** marketer Neil Watson has been pulled in by Sennheiser as Regional Marketing Manager for the UK and Ireland.

Watson moved from Plantronics where he

managed channel marketing communications for UK and Ireland and developed relationships with industry partners such as Microsoft.

Jane Craven, Sales Director for UK Enterprise Solutions at Sennheiser, said: "Neil's track record speaks for itself and we are certain that, with his experience allied to our new introductions in 2019, we are going to have a fantastic year ahead marketing with our partners."

Watson added: "I am relishing the opportunity to bring my experience from within the industry and beyond to the challenge of growing Sennheiser's market share within the business communications space. This was an opportunity that I couldn't miss."

**As we went to press billing specialist Union Street Technologies named Jonny Rae as Business Development Manager, reporting to Head of Sales and Marketing Vincent Disneur. Rae said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for me to work with a creative team and extend Union Street's proposition into new revenue streams."**

## Fresh start for new AIR IT CTO



James Healey and Lee Johnson

**LEE** Johnson has joined AIR IT as Chief Technology Officer and head of the Air Sec cybersecurity division. He brings over 13 years IT industry experience and has provided infrastructure support across various sectors in diverse locations such as China, Hong Kong and New York. "Lee brings invaluable skills across the IT industry and has proven experience in the MSP sector, so he is a perfect addition to the company," said Air IT MD James Healey. Johnson added: "With cybersecurity concerns regularly threatening businesses large and small, I'm looking forward to supporting and strengthening our offering to clients and advising how to ultimately safeguard their business."

# Business Mobility: What's next?

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

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Margin in Mobile will help you understand:

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- **What solutions are customers looking for?**
- **How your team can sell mobile and IoT more effectively?**

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

- Where are we now? A state of the mobile market review (analysis, trends etc - scene setter and provide context for what follows)
- 5G and mobile network innovation: What next for business mobility?
- Managing mobile: Harnessing the power of portals
- Mobile UC/Mobile Office/Mobile Conferencing: Staying connected anywhere, anytime.
- Realising the potential of mobile Apps and APIs
- Intelligent mobile: The rise of wireless and Wi-Fi analytics
- Mobile Security: The cyber threats and how to protect against them
- Mobile planning: How to develop an end-to-end employee mobility strategy for customers
- Working with suppliers to identify the most profitable mobile solution opportunities.
- How will the supply of M2M/IoT solutions fit into new 'as a service' business models?
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KEVIN BOYLE – CLOUDCELL



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

MIKE VAN BUNNENS – COMMS 365

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

LAUREN MCMANUS – DAISY WHOLESAL



Gold sponsor

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

MARK CURTIS-WOOD – NIMANS NETWORK SERVICES

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

BERNIE MCPHILLIPS – PANGEA



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

DAVID NELSON – TECHDATA

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

ANTON LE SAUX – ZEST4



Silver sponsor

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

STEVEN LOWE – GAMMA

"At Margin in Mobile, we will explain how Abzorb is removing the obstacles preventing channel partners from adding mobile solutions to their portfolios. These include giving resellers more autonomy and control of their customer relationships and having the flexibility and support to do business more easily."

MARK RIDDELL – ABZORB



Mobile Zone sponsor

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

WAIL SABBAGH – STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

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