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# Comms Dealer March 2019 Click to open FluidOne snared by Livingbridge

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### SPECIAL REPORT

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The financials of the deal were not disclosed but according to Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabyte.com, Livingbridge

would have likely paid a low-to-mid double-digit EBITDA multiple, suggesting £35-40m based on the £3.2m guided for the year to March 2019.

"With its broad mix of fixed and mobile connectivity offerings and its service provider platform, FluidOne is a relatively attractive asset in today's market driven by the migration of IT to off-premise and into the cloud," commented Carse.

According to FluidOne CEO Russell Horton (pictured) the transaction is an endorsement

of his plans to scale up the company as the market for network connectivity across IoT, cloud and mobile continues to expand.

"As companies across all sectors recognise the need for digital transformation, FluidOne sees multiple opportunities to gain market share, not least as the fibre optic broadband network continues to roll out across the UK," said Horton.

"Livingbridge's support will help us to exploit these opportunities and develop a strong M&A pipeline."

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## Livingbridge

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE rise of technological diversity and the move away from legacy go hand-in-hand. Indeed, such a diverse market as ours requires an equally diverse approach to the many opportunities that exist today and are promised for tomorrow.

To some extent, the term

'diversity' is tantamount to the notion of a free-for-all in developing markets. This can be seen in the full fibre arena which has opened up many opportunities for both national and niche-cum local fibre providers.

Their outbreak across the nation makes them all architects of Digital Britain, which is a great responsibility shared by a growing number of network builders who are laying the foundations for tomorrow's promised land of imagined and as yet unthought of revenue streams.

The end game is liberation from legacy, which is a theme that underlies much of the ICT sector today. Take the ISDN switch-off and Openreach's fibre first approach; consider CityFibre's transformational £2.5 billion investment in fibre-ing up the country; spare a thought for the rise of smart cities and high-tech rurality. Then we have 5G.

Will there be a patch of the UK untouched by the march of next generation connectivity and the revolution this will catalyse? The answer is likely to be no, which means there will ultimately be no place for legacy kit and obsolescence to hide, unless a reservation is set up as a place of rest for the diehards and the outdated.

The thought of such a reservation reveals the depth of the divide between progressive channel players and their less active counterparts. Already, diversity must be reflected in product and service portfolios, and in having an open mind about how to pursue growth in Digital Britain as it unfolds over the coming years. More so when we consider the impact of 5G which is yet to be fully realised but already anticipated by many end user organisations (see pages 44 and 50).

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Wildix starts partner hunt

CLOUD communications pioneer Wildix is on the hunt for 50 more UK partners to add to the 30 it has already recruited in just 15 months.

Channel Manager Ian Rowan believes that the range of flexible new offerings and added value solutions, unveiled at the company's inaugural UCC Summit in Barcelona last month, will convince more resellers to sign up and transition to an MSP model.

And he is confident the company's new offer to rent rather than buy telephony end points and offer customers Wildix PBXs either via cloud or traditional deployments will ease the impact of the change process.

"Although we are transitioning people to the MSP model, we are offering hardware as well," he stated.

"It means partners can still buy our solution as a traditional PBX and maybe buy the hardware and use a subscription model on the licences. We can even do lifetime licences where you buy the PBX in the traditional way and it doesn't have to be cloud deployed."

Ultimately however, Rowan and his Coventry-based UK team are keen for 'recognised'



Ian Rowan

telecoms resellers to move from capex to opex supply models aided by the Wildix support team which has a dedicated training operation to help partners transform into MSPs.

"It's about showing potential partners the value we are offering as opposed to just being an extension on a desk with a bundle of minutes," added Rowan.

"The UK channel is in for a shake-up. It can't keep operating the way it has and if partners don't realise soon it will be too late for them. They need to wake up and smell the coffee."

UCC Summit report – p28

# SysGroup seizes on Certus IT

MSP SysGroup's £8m acquisition of Newport-based Certus IT gives it a stronger presence in Wales, the south west and M4 corridor and extends its reach into professional services and manufacturing, adding to its existing specialities in financial services, retail, insurance, charity, education and healthcare.

SysGroup raised £10m through an issue of new shares to fund the deal, its eighth acquisition which also brings Dell EMC Gold Partner status to the enlarged group.

SysGroup CEO Adam Binks said: "The addition of Certus IT represents a step-change in the scale of the business and our capacity to better penetrate target markets and drive growth."

Certus IT began life in 2000 and was crowned Dell EMC Cloud Partner of the Year in 2015. Its customers include big names such as Admiral, Confused.com and Hugh James.

SysGroup has offices in London, Liverpool, Coventry and Telford and is a WatchGuard Platinum Partner, Microsoft Gold Datacentre Partner and Kaspersky Gold Partner.

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COMMENT: AUTOMATION MATTERS



Paul Burn

AUTOMATION is often perceived as something only big companies do. But whether you are automating a warehouse or a purchasing order process, the tools to automate are available at all levels. It's where our focus continues to be and as we work with SMB resellers and big global suppliers we're well positioned to see the benefits across the whole of the supply chain.

From a purchasing point of view, automation and the ability to see and process orders quicker and get them through the system is the ultimate objective. But there are those that view automation in a negative light as they fear it inevitably means job losses, in that one person can do the job that two people used to perform. But that's not how I see it. When we look at automation it's about how we can make our staff more productive and free up more of their time so that they can do more and different things.

I'm not naïve – in some cases automation can mean that things change. But that usually means you invest in other parts of the business. For us it means having the ability to be able to order online and have a seamless transition of invoices. If you are still doing all that manually then the market is passing you by.

There are many companies still guilty of not embracing automation. Interestingly, it tends to be the smaller companies that are more enthusiastic than the larger organisations which often perceive there to be a bigger and more complex impact. But automation is something we should all be focusing on because business is too fast moving and levels of expectation continue to rise.

**Paul Burn, Chief Purchasing Officer, Nimans**

• Perhaps no part of the ICT channel is so concentrated on deploying innovation as the billing sector which continues to diversify and invest in underpinning reseller businesses (p36).

# Telesis snapped up by Firstcom Europe

FIRSTCOM Europe has acquired Bolton-based comms provider Telesis as it seeks to become the number one pan-European provider of cloud comms. The deal is Firstcom Europe's eighth acquisition in five years and adds circa £9m revenues, spiking annual turnover to 35m euros.

CEO Jean-Pierre Vandromme revealed plans for at least one other major acquisition and a number of smaller transactions in 2019 which he says will further aggrandise revenues to over 60m euros. "Our goal is to become the prime pan-European cloud provider with a presence across most of Europe and revenues of over 75m euros by 2020," he stated.

The acquisition increases Firstcom Europe's staff numbers by 42 to 200 and gives it a presence in the north of England. The financial details of the deal were not disclosed.

Telesis began its commercial life in 2009 and was significantly boosted by its transformational acquisition of Digital Telecom Airtime last year.

Telesis Director Christian Bleakley remains within the business as MD of Firstcom Europe's UK branches.



Jean-Pierre Vandromme

Firstcom Europe's group firms, Voip.co.uk and Firstcom Denmark, have developed a proprietary cloud platform.

Bleakley said: "The market is moving more towards subscription-based cloud services such as hosted PABX and SIP channels and our combined expertise allows us to expand and enhance the overall service proposition for our customers."

Vandromme stated: "The acquisition adds revenues, a customer base and expertise in the north of England. It fits our strategy of converting customers with traditional services to new cloud-based products."

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**Editor: Stuart Gilroy**  
sgilroy@bpl-business.com 07712 781 102

**Publisher: Nigel Sergent**  
nsergent@bpl-business.com 07712 781 106

**Managing Director: Michael O'Brien**  
mobrien@bpl-business.com 01895 454 444

**Sales Director: Simon Turton**  
sturton@bpl-business.com 01895 454 603

**Production: Frank Voeten**  
fvoeten@bpl-business.com

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# Resiliency on tap says ICUK



Paul Barnett

A NEW quoting tool for resilient and failover leased lines has been introduced into version 19 of ICUK's control panel.

"The tool enables users to see in seconds the resiliency options while taking into account fibre availability and the POP locations," commented Director Paul Barnett.

The company utilises multiple fibre providers to the client while achieving physical resilience within ICUK's network and redundant hardware on site.

"ICUK works with seven fibre and two broadband carriers which combined with a growing number of ICUK POP locations enables us to offer true resilience," added Barnett.

He also noted that ICUK has witnessed a growing trend with businesses not just taking up Ethernet but pursuing resilient designs because downtime is too costly for them.

"Regardless of whether a budget can extend to a resilient Ethernet connection, or simply making use of available broadband technologies for failover, our quoting tool now presents all options," he stated.

Neil Barnett, Head of Business Development, commented: "Resellers can be confident that true resilience will be delivered with the quotes displayed. If a combination doesn't deliver diversity and resilience it doesn't appear."

## Jola in billing move

THE confluence of two revenue-shrinking trends experienced by mobile dealers has prompted Jola to launch a fully managed white label billing solution for JolaMobile packages based on Union Street's aBILLity platform.

"Mobile dealers are witnessing a surge in demand but those operating on a commission basis with the networks are seeing financial rewards diminish as more customers move to SIM-only and legislation mitigates overage charges," stated Jola MD Andrew Dickinson. "Dealers also risk losing control

of the relationship with their end users. Many want to switch to a resale model but are put off by the complexity and cost of billing systems.

"JolaBilling addresses these prohibitive issues."

Dickinson explained that the billing platform can be programmed to invoice products and data can be pre-loaded. The system also provides real-time analysis and fraud prevention with a data export facility to common accounts software.

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

A EUROPEAN patent has been awarded to Ultracomms for its AMD+ answer machine detection technology. "AMD+ helps call centres boost outbound agent productivity while reducing nuisance calls, enabling businesses to meet Ofcom's requirements around the management of call abandonment," commented Tom Davies, Technical Director at Ultracomms. "The technology also permits the analysis of historical campaign data."

NIMANS has been assigned as a TP-Link full distribution partner and according to Solutions Business Manager (Networking) Judith Addison its WLAN technology will be especially popular among resellers. "They can take advantage of free centralised controller software, licence-free access points and built-in customisable captive portals," she said.

A £46M INVESTMENT boost from Aviva Investors has enabled Essex-based ISP County Broadband to kick off the roll out of a full fibre network across villages in the east of England. County Broadband has already deployed an all-fibre Gigabit network in Broughton, Cambridgeshire, and supports over 3,000 homes and businesses with its wireless-based broadband services in the region.

LONDON has maintained its position as the top destination in Europe for technology investment according to a report by Pitchbook and London & Partners. London attracted almost double the amount of investment than its closest rival Berlin. In 2018 London tech firms pulled in £1.8bn of venture capital funding, 72% of the total £2.5bn raised by UK tech businesses. UK investment in AI rose 47% to £736m while £1.2bn went into the fintech sector.

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COMMENT: ENVIRONMENT MATTERS



Nick Powell

WE BELIEVE innovation and upholding real business values are based on two key factors – great people who continually want to deliver better, and a customer-focused ethos that means we listen and act on their feedback. But that's not all: Believing in better doesn't just mean focusing on the services we offer to businesses. We've always

been conscious about the huge role we can play in catalysing positive social and environmental change.

Sky recently celebrated its 30th anniversary and we've hit some major environmental milestones over the past three decades, including being the first carbon neutral media company – and we've remained carbon neutral ever since. We have also introduced some ambitious initiatives including Sky Ocean Rescue which is dedicated to raising awareness and finding solutions to the issue of single-use plastic pollution in our oceans. Every minute, the equivalent of a rubbish truck load of plastic goes into our oceans. It never decomposes and will remain there forever. If nothing changes, it is calculated that by 2050 the discarded plastic could weigh more than all the fish.

Our oceans' health affects us all, so we need to come together to take protective action. We want to shine a spotlight on these issues and inspire people to make a change in their everyday lives. As part of this we are partnering with WWF to safeguard over 400,000km<sup>2</sup> of Marine Protected Areas across Europe's oceans.

Because of increasing transparency and expectations, companies are being forced to respond to issues like this outside of the normal realm of business. This means being mindful of the social and environmental impact of your business. So look outside your organisation and create a culture everyone wants to be involved in – from your employees to your partners and customers.

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

# Rising security risks addressed by DaaS

THE extent to which an organisation is protected against the rising tide of security threats will depend in large part on whether they have implemented a Device-as-a-Service (DaaS) solution, claims Lenovo General Manager UK Preben Fjeld.

He says the growth of mobility, BYOD, remote working and the gig economy have redefined the security challenges faced by businesses at a time when incidents of human error are also on the increase.

He noted that humans are often considered to be the weakest link in security. According to Freedom of Information figures on the causes of data breaches in 2016, 62% of incidents were a result of human error.

"Employees who ignore or don't understand security protocols can expose enterprises to considerable security threats, financial loss and reputational damage," stated Fjeld.

"By 2025, 75% of the workforce will be millennials and Gen Z. They are already taking their behaviours into the workspace without an understanding of the associated security risks.

"But people of all ages can be guilty of prioritising convenience over compliance."



Preben Fjeld

According to Fjeld, companies need to understand their multi-generational workforce to better manage and protect devices and to develop strong security protocols and practices.

"There are four spaces where companies and end users need to focus to protect themselves – data, identity, online and device – and it's critically important to develop a holistic plan against threats in each of these areas," commented Fjeld.

He says DaaS will be key to addressing security issues, particularly as they become more complex and frequent due to expanding mobile workforces.

"The DaaS model is finding a receptive audience among companies looking for a new

way to manage device allocation and support," he stated.

"It combines state-of-the-art devices such as mobile, PC and powerful workstations with value added expertise in an all-inclusive managed solution under a single contract."

Fjeld also pointed out that DaaS protects organisations by monitoring a company's entire fleet of devices to ensure users' adherence to security policies at all times regarding passwords, approved apps, lifecycle management and access to data.

"Insights from these devices can easily be tapped into, including fleet inventory, location and the condition of the devices themselves," he said.

Fjeld cited research by Gartner undertaken last year that found almost 30% of CIOs are considering DaaS as part of their device strategy during the next five years.

Meanwhile, IDC calculates that the market for DaaS will triple in value by 2020.

"As technology advances and moves out of the traditional work environment, organisations and employees will need to ensure security is front of mind," added Fjeld. "DaaS may offer the necessary solution."

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COMMENT: THE 5G REVOLUTION



Helen Freestone

AS 5G EVOLVES it will be more than just an incremental improvement on current mobile services, it will be a major leap forward in what connectivity can enable people and businesses to do. With its ultra-fast speeds, ultra-low latency and incredible capacity, 5G will act as a platform for emerging technologies such as AI, IoT, robotics and connected cities – and will, in time, revolutionise our day-to-day lives.

As a result of 5G we will see a growing

expectation for immediacy and reliability in both our professional and personal lives. Businesses will be looking to channel partners to help them fully understand the potential of 5G and to advise on how they can leverage and implement it to deliver real business impact from driving efficiencies to improving customer service.

5G will give channel partners the opportunity to offer their customers new and broad reaching solutions that will enable businesses to work more quickly and more efficiently, that can increase productivity and reduce costs. In time, this may extend to other exciting applications such as holographic conference calling which would transform remote working.

So, with the promise of transformative and innovative applications, it's clear 5G represents a tremendous opportunity for channel partners. It will allow them to provide greater bandwidth to customers and offer a platform from which other services will thrive.

However, 5G is in its infancy and we recommend that channel partners look at the options available now to give their customers the perks of a stronger network sooner.

**Helen Freestone, Director of UK Partnerships & Alliances, Vodafone**

# French titan Orange snares SecureData

SEEKING to establish a dominant presence in the European cybersecurity market French telecoms giant Orange has snapped up 100% of Maidstone-based SecureData and its consulting subsidiary SensePost.

According to Orange the acquisition is a double coup having bagged the largest independent cybersecurity service provider in the UK which operates in the largest market in Europe. SecureData will continue to operate with commercial and operational autonomy.

The financials of the deal were not disclosed but what is clear is that the intrinsic value – the potential value of future cashflows – is significant considering SecureData's consistent growth rates of circa 20% since 2016. The deal also signals that the UK remains an attractive target for overseas buyers despite Brexit concerns.

Orange generates sales of around 41bn euros, has a circa 150,000 headcount and operates across 28 countries. Its Cyberdefense operation brings in annual sales approaching 300m euros and employs over 1,300 security experts.

With this acquisition Orange has, in a stroke, added annual



Ian Brown

revenues of 50m euros, bolted on 200 employees in the UK and South Africa, and brought in an additional cybersecurity operation that builds on Orange's existing network of nine such centres designed to monitor and respond to security breaches targeted at customers.

Working alongside Orange Cyberdefense's existing operations in France and Belgium, SecureData will leverage access to Orange Business Services' existing sales force and its customer base of over 3,000 multinationals, and will benefit from the carrier-grade CERT and threat intelligence team.

According to Hugues Foulon, Executive Director of Stra-

tegy and Cybersecurity activities at Orange, the SecureData deal is a 'milestone' and reflective of how both companies have made the transition towards Managed Security Services.

"We will progressively co-build the operational and commercial synergies," he commented. "Cyber security has become a critical element for both large and small companies as they evolve in an increasing digital reliant world."

SecureData will also partner with other parts of the Orange Group including Orange Business Services to deliver cybersecurity services.

SecureData has a 25-year track record of providing integrated cyber solutions. Its sale is the third major exit of a UK ICT business led by Executive Chairman Ian Brown.

He said: "Both organisations share the same vision and aspiration for the cybersecurity market, and have many complementary services and skills.

"By being part of Orange we will be able to better serve the international needs of many of our existing customers as well as providing enhanced cyber services to Orange customers within the UK."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

NIMANS has hooked up with TotalComms Training to offer a City & Guilds training programme from its Trafford Park Trade Counter facility. The initial courses focus on copper and fibre optic cabling and electrical installations. "The courses enable a reseller to demonstrate levels of competency that are needed to gain on-site access in certain circumstances," stated Trade Counter Manager Geoff Wilde.

RED Box has linked up with information archiving and compliance firm Global Relay. The partnership enables customers to use Global Relay's search, surveillance and analytics tools. "Reliable and secure voice capture and retrieval is crucial for financial services organisations endeavouring to comply with and prepare for regulations," said Peter Ellis, Red Box Chief Product Officer.

KYOCERA Document Solutions UK's business plan to double hardware revenue via the channel over the next three years has been advanced by the appointment of Exertis which joins existing distribution partners Midwich and Ingram Micro. The agreement will see Exertis distribute Kyocera's hardware, software and apps.

# Walters hire for Firstcom

THE former Channel Director of Hunter MacDonald – which was named the fastest growing IT services company in the UK by the Sunday Times Fast Track 100 in 2017 – has joined Firstcom Europe as Channel Sales Director.

Chris Walters brings almost 20 years industry experience which includes stints in leadership roles at Cable&Wireless, GTS Ebone and Verizon.

"We are at a critical point in our journey and need renewed leadership to successfully implement our channel strategy," stated Adam Crisp, Firstcom UK co-founder and Group CTO for Firstcom Europe. "We are fortunate to have someone of Chris's calibre on board."



Chris Walters

Walters commented: "We are about to launch new products and services, but to do this effectively we need to focus clearly on our partners, both new and existing, to accelerate their ability to bring innovative products to their customers."

# Hare's fresh fibre push

FULL fibre whizz Matthew Hare, who founded rural fibre network provider Gigaclear in 2010, is aiming to repeat his trick with the launch of another fibre network operator, called Zzoomm and this time focused on towns and suburbs served only by copper infrastructure.

"The full fibre revolution is here but many are currently left

behind," stated Hare, Zzoomm CEO. "Numerous small towns and suburbs still do not have any plans for full fibre from the network into properties.

"We will develop the network across the country through regional operations which will work with local communities to build the full fibre network they need for a brighter future."

# Clark gets extended sales role

PLANTRONICS stalwart Paul Clark is to oversee both Plantronics and Polycom sales teams as SVP for EMEA with responsibility for voice, video, content and cloud solutions.

Clark has been with Plantronics for almost 25 years holding the position of EMEA Marketing Director for the first 10 years, and then overseeing European Product Management before moving into various sales leadership roles. In 2016 he was promoted to MD of Europe and Africa.

"Paul will bring standardisation to sales," commented Jeff Loebbaka, EVP for Global Sales. "The industry is constantly evolving and our portfolio needs the right structure in place."

Clark commented: "With the growth of new workspaces and dispersed collaboration showing no signs of abating there are huge opportunities for us, our partners and end users."



Paul Clark

NEWS ROUNDUP

THE latest phase of Exponential-e's Software Defined Digital Platform (SD-DP) is comprised of core and edge computing, bonded with SD-WAN and SD-Data Centre. And, says the firm, with various tools and services these components form an 'intelligent digital transformation stack'.

GALA Technology, maker of the cloud-based PCI DSS compliant payment solution called SOTpay, has scooped a PCI: 2019 Award For Excellence in recognition of its work in payment security and PCI DSS compliance. The Yorkshire-based business also bagged the Best use of Technology within a Contact Centre gong at the national UKCCF awards last November.

SCANSOURCE is to host what it calls a 'major partner-focused hospitality programme' around the 2019 Indianapolis 500 on May 26th following a sponsorship deal with McLaren Racing. The distributor's annual conference will be staged in the area at the same time. CEO Mike Baur commented: "McLaren's reputation for providing leading edge technology, while keeping a keen eye on the future, makes it an ideal partner for ScanSource."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

WIRELESS charging firm **Chargifi** has pulled in a number of executives from various industries including President and founder of **Aruba Networks**, **Keerti Melkote**, who joins the Board. **James McNiven** joins as COO and **Ciaran Bradley** as CTO. "These appointments come during a fundamental shift in the development of the wireless power market," stated Melkote.

SUNDERLAND-based **Nice Network's** presence in the manufacturing sector has expanded following the award of a two-year contract to supply worktop and high pressure laminate producer **Formica Group** with mobile devices from **Vodafone**. Previous wins in the manufacturing vertical include **Nike**, **Husqvarna** and **Dräger UK**.

BACK-to-back record breaking sales months notched up by **Telford-based Network Telecom** have been ascribed to the firm's launch of a new video phone, **NT Multimedia**, last September. **Research & Development Executive Sam Myatt** said: "Operating on **Android**, **NT Multimedia** can do anything that a tablet or smartphone can do, for little or no extra cost compared to traditional phone systems."

# Tool ticks up fibre roll out



Kevin Murphy

OPENREACH claims that a data analytics tool has halved the time it takes to connect fibre broadband customers.

The **Qlik Sense** solution works by collating data from Openreach's multiple systems, giving managers a clearer view of the nature of customer orders including how long each job has been waiting for completion, enabling them to react faster on deciding a course of action.

Openreach began working with the tool's provider, **Qlik**, in 2017 on a pilot to improve the performance of its **Fibre and Network Delivery (FND)** team, which is responsible for the roll out of fibre across the UK, with a focus on **Ethernet** customers.

The **Qlik** platform has now been officially adopted and used

by 1,000 field based managers across the **FND** team.

Openreach plans to roll out **Qlik** more widely later this year to include its service delivery arm and ultimately make it available to field engineers.

**Kevin Murphy**, who is MD for **Fibre and Network Delivery** at Openreach, stated: "We set out to transform the service we offer to our business customers 18 months ago and the latest analytics solutions have given our people the ability to make their own decisions on how best to complete orders and tackle problems in their local area.

"Working with **Qlik** has improved both operational efficiency and customer service and encouraged our teams to embrace data analytics."

# FluidOne connects to G.FAST

NETWORK aggregator **FluidOne** has added **G.FAST** to its portfolio – now available to partners via its **Dash** customer portal or **API**.

The **FTTC** enhancement comes in two speed options and uses existing copper infrastructure which is why **Openreach** claims it is a quick and less disruptive way to access next generation ultrafast connectivity.

**FluidOne's** ultrafast **G.FAST** launch follows the introduction of **Ethernet on Demand** in November last year.

**CEO Russell Horton** said: "G.FAST delivers the fastest possible speeds over readily available and affordable copper infrastructure. The roll out of **G.FAST** is taking place in existing fibre street cabinets, boosting download speeds for those located within a short distance of the cabinets."



Russell Horton

NEWS ROUNDUP

**SUREVOIP** has witnessed over 40% growth in its customer base following a partnership with fibre network provider **Grain Connect**. It took just five weeks to migrate more than 500 of **Grain Connect's** business customers to the **SureVoIP** network. **SureVoIP MD Gavin Henry** said: "We migrated them seamlessly, including number porting and provisioning, which was a big win for the team."

**8X8'S X SERIES** cloud comms and **CC** solution, launched in March last year, has received a capability boost following the introduction of a third party integration framework, enhanced speech analytics and real-time dashboards. The latest integrations include **Microsoft Dynamics 365**, **Bullhorn** and **Slack**.

FOLLOWING the launch of the Government's 'fire it up' apprenticeship campaign, **The Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP)** is calling on the telecoms industry to employ more apprentices. "This campaign is designed to promote apprenticeships to businesses, parents and young people," said **ITP CEO Crissi Williams**. "We have seen first hand the impact apprenticeships can have on telecoms organisations."



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COMMENT: TIME FOR A FAST START



Richard Thompson

AS WE RACE towards the close of the financial year it's the perfect time to look back and celebrate success, and to look forward and plan how to deliver an even better FY20. The ever-present challenge for our industry is how to continue to generate customer value and optimise P&L in an increasingly commoditised market. It's something that we are facing

into here at TalkTalk and I know it's a challenge that many partners share. So, here are my top three tips to ensure your sales strategy delivers a 'Fast Start' for your business.

**Optimise insight to upsell your existing customer base:**

There is an increasing trend towards higher bandwidth services, so identifying the right customers to upsell from broadband to fibre at the right time can help prevent churn, improve customer satisfaction and lower the cost to serve. At the other end of the bandwidth spectrum, identify Ethernet circuits that are running at capacity and transition these to higher bandwidth options. We continue to see huge growth in 1Gb circuits, a trend that is set to continue.

**Do not underestimate the importance of service:** While cost is obviously important, how you deliver your services is critical, not only in reducing your cost to serve but also in delivering a great customer experience. Here at TalkTalk Business we'll be launching improvements in this area with the introduction of our One Service Desk, enabling a quicker query resolution by reducing handoff points.

**The importance of having one plan:** A single, joined up strategy with objectives that your entire organisation can get behind – whether commercial, sales or operational teams – ensures everyone is pulling in the same direction. To help our partners deliver their own 'fast start' into the new financial year we're holding a roadshow to share further details on our operational and product roadmaps, and how to leverage customer insights, equipping partners with the tools they need to win.

Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

## Olive proves mettle

OLIVE Communications has rolled out a multi-million-pound cloud-based contact centre and UC platform for business process outsourcer (BPO) Innovation Group.

The Mitel platform supports over 1,300 agents and 1,000 back office workers across the UK, North America and Australia, with South Africa planned to go live during 2019. The system is located over mul-

tiple global data centres and delivered via a private cloud.

Olive Communications CEO Martin Flick stated: "Olive is continuing to outperform the market with our cloud and UC revenues growing organically by more than 25% year-on-year.

"As customer demands change in an increasingly fast paced and digitally enabled world the Olive team has proved it can meet those demands."

# PE biz Thoma Bravo bags ConnectWise

IN A MOVE designed to ratchet up organic and acquisitive growth ConnectWise has been acquired by PE firm Thoma Bravo for an undisclosed sum.

ConnectWise founder and CEO Arnie Bellini takes an advisory role following the transaction while President and COO Jason Magee becomes the company's CEO.

Magee has more than 20 years industry experience working with MSPs and VARs and has pledged continued investment in partners.

According to Bellini the seeds of a sale were sown five years ago when ConnectWise considered its options including an IPO and the advances of seven other PE companies.

The deal clincher, pointed out Bellini, was Thoma Bravo's experience in Software-as-a-Service technology.

"ConnectWise and Thoma Bravo have co-created a multi-year strategy that is aligned with our mission, vision, culture and partners," commented Bellini. "With this new relationship we



Arnie Bellini

plan to accelerate our partners' success worldwide."

Magee joined ConnectWise in 2011 and became COO in 2016 since when the company has experienced a cumulative annual growth rate of 21% with over 81% growth in EBITDA.

Magee stated: "Our growth has been founded on deep interactions with partners through our IT Nation events and peer

groups. We will continue to invest in our partner community.

"Partners can expect to see innovative cybersecurity solutions, advanced education and go-to-market tools for the 'as a service' world, and a connected ecosystem to drive greater productivity and simplicity."

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## Conventional mindset stymies potential for cloud-based WFM

THE business advantages of cloud-based workforce management (WFM) software will only be fully realised if IT and business leaders 'break free from their heavily on-premise mindset', according to Colin Whelan, Principle Solutions Consultant at Aspect.

"Given the crucial role that WFM plays in ensuring the smooth running of an organisation it's paramount that it can function in an agile manner," he said. "The prevalence of mobile devices and the growing popularity of remote working has made WFM solutions a necessity



Colin Whelan

to successfully manage staff working across different sites."

The most effective solutions, noted Whelan, incorporate features such as employee scheduling, analytics, reporting and enquiry resolution metrics in a way that caters to the needs of the flexible modern worker.

"Cloud has this flexibility but making it more widespread is about better extolling its virtues and making the financial benefits clear," he said.

"Making the most of cloud from a WFM perspective is about being open to change and embracing new ways of working from the top.

"If leaders are willing and able to do this, the added flexibility and agility that cloud can offer will filter down throughout the organisation, leading to greater employee engagement and, ultimately, improved customer satisfaction."





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# Partners hail 200 bill runs



Armstrong Bell and 9 celebrate 200th bill run

WORCESTERSHIRE-based Armstrong Bell's 200th bill run with 9 Group was marked by a surprise office visit from 9's Partner Business Manager Debbie Wealthall and Digital Marketing Executive Stephanie Miles who delivered champagne and cake.

Armstrong Bell MD William Copley said: "We've partnered with 9 for over 16 years and our 200th bill run is our biggest yet. We've continued to adapt and seen impressive growth along the way, but there wouldn't have been an Armstrong Bell without the relationship with 9."

# New voice platform launched

A SERIES of interrelated tech partnerships have enabled Connectus to launch a new mobile-first voice platform.

The proposition is based on an exclusive UK relationship with Swedish technology company Advoco, and through an integration with Dubber and AWS the platform provides features such as GDPR compliant online call recording and data retrieval, along with AI for training and marketing.

Multiple site resilience and failover is achieved through a collaboration with data centre provider UK Fast.

SBC capacity has been significantly increased to boost security and enable AI and recording features.

Connectus CTO Duncan Shaw said: "It's no secret that many businesses are choosing to host their communication services using cloud technology and making them accessible to a number of devices, whether fixed or mobile, irrespective of time or location.

"We have designed this platform around those modern business needs."

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# Ribbon cable speeds fibre

A DEPLOYMENT timesaver is being trialled by Openreach as it seeks to speed up the roll out of fibre across the country.

The use of a new ribbonised fibre cable is five times faster than conventional cabling, according to Openreach, as this method bonds individual ultra-fast fibres together in a web-like pattern that allows increased packing density in a cable.

Engineers 'blow' these cables long distances through ducting on a current of compressed air without having to joint.

The ribbon format also allows engineers to splice together 12 fibres simultaneously which means joints can be completed five times faster.

Openreach collaborated with technology business Fujikura and cable installation company CBS Products to develop the technology which is currently under trial in Leeds.

Openreach plans to scale up the trial with future deployments in other areas before running an invitation to tender later this year.



Andy Whale

Openreach Chief Engineer Andy Whale said: "As we build bigger fibre networks to support the roll out of FTTP, especially in cities, we need to install higher fibre count spine cables to our exchanges.

"With these new air blown cables it means we no longer need to pull in a few hundred metres at a time."

CBS Products MD Robert Davidson added: "The pilot in Leeds showcases a significant leap as the 432 fibre cable installation machine can blow and install up to 60 metres of fibre per minute."

# Beeby talks growth plans

THE founder of Brighthouse-based Abzorb Steve Beeby has outlined plans for a technology scale up and headcount boost that he says will build on a three year period of overall 49% revenue growth.

"2018 was another strong period and we have exciting announcements to make this year," he said. "Our technology roadmap will be part of a scale up over the next 12 months, as will some senior hires."

Beeby, who set up Abzorb in 1992, also plans to enhance the



Steve Beeby

company's wholesale propositions and portal.

Last year Abzorb became an approved supplier on the telecoms framework for Jisc and The Scottish Government

Framework. It also launched CapZ which enables businesses to monitor and control their telecoms spend and prevent bill shock, in line with Ofcom's bill cap legislation.

# ISP Spitfire brings out SIP Gateway solution

TO OFFSET the impact on customers of BT's ISDN switch-off planned for 2025 Spitfire has introduced a SIP Gateway solution that enables traditional PBX systems to interface with SIP trunks for VoIP telephony.

"Having made a significant investment in ISDN phone systems many of our customers are concerned about the planned withdrawal of ISDN services by Openreach," commented Sales Director Dominic Norton.

"The SIP Gateway offers a neat solution which protects the customer's investment while providing the benefits of VoIP telephony using SIP trunks."



Dominic Norton

Norton also claimed that SIP Gateway could deliver significant cost savings. "SIP Gateway is offered on a monthly rental basis and the cost savings possible from using SIP trunks, as opposed to ISDN circuits, should more than cover the rental for most businesses," he said.



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# Midpoint raised by 'unforeseen' event

MILTON Keynes-based Midpoint Communications, established in 2016 by MD Chris King, is planning to boost staff numbers by 50% this year to 24 as he seeks to leverage new business opportunities unlocked by an 'unforeseen' service provider relationship with 9 Group.

Midpoint had already been rated a success having picked up the Newcomer of the Year award from its previous service provider, which was acquired by 9 Group last summer.

At first sight the idea of building a stronger business on the back of an enforced change of supplier was not obvious, according to King, who admits he was concerned about events that were beyond his control.

But if the experience taught him anything, said King, it is that a change of circumstances and a different approach can work far better and be transformative for resellers.

“As a larger operation the scale of support that 9 can provide is bigger than our prior relationship,” he stated. “That is



Adam Cathcart (left) with Chris King

not just beneficial, it is unequivocally pivotal.”

The continuity of relationships with people who transferred across as part of the acquisition was also important, noted King, who now has a chance to seize new business growth opportunities in areas of the market he had not until recently fully considered, such as hosted comms, mobile telephony and IT products including Microsoft Office 365.

“I can see the value that a larger product portfolio can bring in terms of customer retention and business success,” pointed out King. “Access to 9’s

Virtual Office and engineering team will be crucial in this.

“Marketing support and help with incentivising our staff could also make a difference to how we position and promote products and services.”

Adam Cathcart, MD for Partners at 9, commented: “Last year’s acquisition introduced a number of established reseller relationships to 9 who, like Midpoint, have an appetite to exploit an expanded product portfolio and fully managed billing services.”

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## Wenso nets £500k funding



The Wenso team

A £500K GROWTH funding boost from the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF) puts Manchester located IT services business Wenso on the path to boost its headcount and more quickly con-

vert a strong sales pipeline. The company has partnerships with Microsoft, Oracle, SAP and Salesforce. It operates across Europe, north America, Australia and Asia and the Middle East and currently

employs 60 staff. Founder and MD Mushtaq Mohammed said: “This funding enables us to further study, understand and analyse our clients’ complex businesses. We then deploy next generation solutions.”

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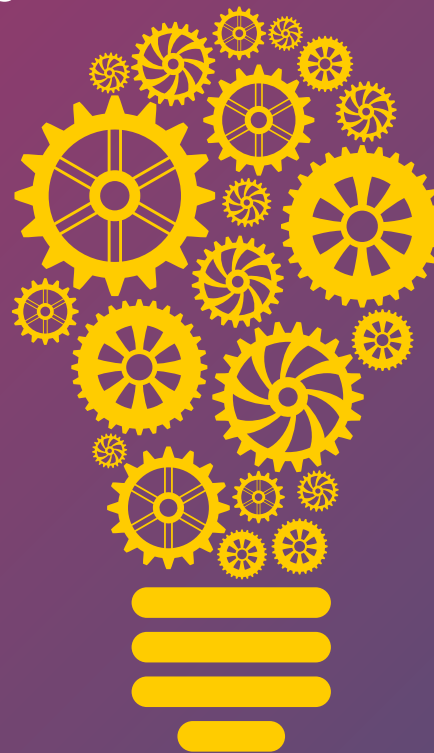
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Child & Co., 3 Fleet Street, **5 April**  
 London EC4Y 1AU



### Evolution Capital 'Celebrity' Golf Day

The Kennels, Goodwood Estate, **8 May**  
 Chichester PO18 0PN



### The Five Secrets to Realising Intrinsic Value

Honourable Artillery Company, **6 June**  
 London EC1 2BQ



### Le Mans Grand Tour

Portsmouth - Cherbourg **13 -18 June**  
 Le Mans - Rennes - Caen



### Festival of Speed Preview

Goodwood House, Goodwood, **4 July**  
 Chichester PO18 0PX



### Cowes Week Regatta

HMS Medusa, Gosport PO12 1NU **16 Aug**



### England Rugby International

Twickenham Stadium, London TW2 7BA **24 Aug**



### Maximising Value for your Business Sale

Rosewood Hotel, London WC1V 7EN **5 Sept**



### Rapidly Changing TMT Landscape & Valuations

Evolution Capital, Chichester PO20 7FD **3 Oct**



### One to One Business Reviews

The Gleneagles Hotel, Auchterarder Perthshire PH3 1NF **6 Nov**



### Preparing your Business for 2020

Mosimann's Club, Belgravia London SW1X 8JL **5 Dec**



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# VC sector turns up big diversity issues

A REPORT by The UK VC & Female Founders for the Treasury underlines the extent and cost to firms of a 'staggering' imbalance between females and males in key roles, which is as much an issue for the comms sector as venture capitalists.

Research shows that for every £1 of venture capital investment in the UK female-led start-ups get less than 1p.

"The bottom line is that ignoring women is costing venture capitalists money," stated AnyGood? founder Juliet Eccleston. "We all know gender inequality is a huge issue but these figures are staggering.

"Equality and diversity drive productivity and profit. There is much evidence to suggest this, with McKinsey research showing that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity at executive level were 22% more likely to outperform their national industry average."

The UK VC & Female Founders report also discovered that all-male founder teams are given 89p and mixed gender



**Juliet Eccleston**

teams collect the remaining 10p. Only one in 10 decision makers were woman and two-thirds of VC firms have no female partners.

"A large body of work shows that having a female presence at senior level boosts profitability," added Eccleston. "A report published by Credit Suisse stated that companies where women made up at least 15% of senior management were 50% more profitable than those where fewer than 10% of senior managers were female."

Eccleston also cited research in the USA which says that male-only businesses may be a

worse investment than mixed teams. "For every dollar of funding, start-ups with women on the board generate 78 cents, but those founded only by men generate 31 cents," she said.

"People tend to invest in what they are familiar with, and the lack of female representation across VC boards is clearly playing a part in this imbalance.

"Only by overhauling the way we hire and coming to terms with the ingrained bias within hiring processes will we be able to build diverse teams."

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## NFON snaps up rival in bid to take top spot in cloud comms

NFON's 17m euro acquisition of Deutsche Telefon Standard based in Mainz, Germany, adds circa 50,000 seats, boosting the total customer base to more than 355,000 seats.

The deal also expands NFON's partner network to over 2,000 in Europe and increases company headcount by 65 to 280 employees.

The addition of DSL and SIP trunk solutions along with Deutsche Telefon Standard's CentrexX SIP PBX system is expected to significantly bolster NFON's current product portfolio and augment its cloud



**Hans Szymanski**

telephony proposition in the mid-market segment.

"We want to become the number one for cloud telephony in Europe," commented Hans Szymanski, CEO and CFO of

NFON. "Through the acquisition we will complement our product portfolio, broaden our customer base and open up additional sales channels by expanding our partner network."

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# IoT network for Scotland



Boston Networks CEO Scott McEwan & Falk Bleyl

GLASGOW-based Boston Networks is to build a £6m Internet of Things network – called IoT Scotland – based on 500 LoRa wireless gateways located throughout the country.

Glasgow will be over 99% covered via 22 gateways making it the most LoRa covered city in the UK with the potential to become the smartest, claims Boston Networks.

The project is part funded by £2.7m from the Scottish Government with support from Scottish Enterprise, Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and investment from Boston Networks. A full roll out is planned by March 2021 with Boston Networks installing and managing all devices.

CTO Falk Bleyl said: “There will be a forecasted 25 billion IoT devices connected by 2025 and only a small number will be

connected to the Internet using 3G, 4G or Wi-Fi.

“LoRa networks like IoT Scotland are going to become increasingly important with the potential to be as disruptive to businesses as the Internet has been to our daily lives.

“IoT Scotland can revolutionise the use of smart technologies and will be rolled out in cities, towns and rural areas across the country.”

Bleyl also noted that a range of users – from public sector organisations to small IoT start-ups and multinationals – will be able to focus on the deployment of sensors and applications rather than network build.

“There is already interest from other parts of the UK in what we’re doing, and there is potential for us to roll out similar infrastructure elsewhere,” he added.

# Unify sets up reseller back-stop

UNIFY has appointed Telecom Resource as a DX Support Specialist for its legacy HiPath DX and Realitis systems.

“The appointment gives our legacy customers and partners a route to access software upgrades, licenses and Unify’s DX Technical Design Team,” stated Robert Wiles, Unify’s VP Channel Sales for UK&I.

“The aim is to give customers the maximum amount of flexibility to either remain on their platform or to transition in a more effective way to new Unify environments.”

Telecom Resource began its commercial life in 2003 as a supplier of comms systems and later established Channel Solutions Resource through which it provides services to the channel, operating to the MOD Quality Assurance System (JSP480) and ISO 27001.

Telecom Resource MD Don Moore commented on the link up: “I have worked with Unify and its predecessors for over 30 years. This appointment marks a new chapter where we can deliver enhanced value to Unify’s partners.”

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# A centre for experiences

PANASONIC Business’s just-opened Customer Experience Centre expresses its latest technology as live and immersive experiences, for which there is a strong appetite, and which underpins the vendor’s new B2B brand proposition ‘Freedom through innovation’.

Located at Panasonic’s new UK HQ in Bracknell the Customer Experience Centre is split into two zones: An immersive 270 degree interactive presentation space built around eight separate virtual vertical environments; and a demonstration area that allows customers to get hands-on with the latest Panasonic technology.

The Centre features over 100 items of technology and the presentation space houses nine laser projectors to heighten the fully immersive experience.

“Our technology frees businesses to perform to their maximum,” stated Simon Grantham, MD of Panasonic UK.

“The new Customer Experience Centre provides a platform for us to work with cus-



Simon Grantham

tomers to solve their daily business challenges.”

The centre is categorised five ways – retail technology, rugged computing, AV solutions, comms solutions and next gen’ surveillance technology.

“We are bringing the latest technology for retail, transport, logistics and entertainment in one place,” stated Grantham.

“We hope to immerse visitors into our Panasonic world, inspire their creativity and prove our solutions can strengthen their business in an increasingly competitive landscape.”

# Splicecom adds UC client

SPLICECOM’S SelectVoice platform has received an integration boost following the addition of Navigate Pro, a free of charge UC client which partners can deliver via cloud, on-premises or a mix of the two.

“The client gives Windows 10 users phone management and control from their desktop and two-way integration with Microsoft Skype for Business and Outlook,” stated Splicecom’s Director of Marketing and Product Management Robin Hayman.



Robin Hayman

He also noted that Skype for Business integration is proving to be a big draw among Splicecom partners as more end

users seek to leverage the combination of Skype for Business with Microsoft’s Office 365 suite, a blend that dovetails with how modern businesses want to work, says the firm.

Stuart Bell, Head of Splicecom Sales UK&I, added: “The integration of Navigate Pro with Microsoft’s Skype for Business promotes closer working relationships between internal staff, external suppliers and customers, using cross-federation to deliver a Unified Communications experience.”



UNIFY’S Distributor of the Year gong went to Nimans at the vendor’s UK Partner Awards (staged at Atos’ HQ in London). The distributor’s efforts to drive sales of Unify’s Circuit collaboration and OpenScape Cloud platforms, which were up circa 20%, helped to secure the award along with associated investments in support. Head of Solutions Sales John McKindland said: “Unify is our largest PBX partner, specialising in mid-market and enterprise level markets, and it recognised how hard we work to elevate and drive solution sales.” Rob Wiles, Unify’s VP Channel Sales (UK&I), added: “2018 was a year of change and Nimans has been with us for the entire journey, increasing investments in sales and pre-sales resources, adopting our cloud technologies and ramping up our partner landscapes.” Pictured: Nimans’ Paul Crossley, John McKindland, Scott Baron and Ross Collin.



# Investment in fintech surges



Jonathan Simnett

RECORD investment in fintech start-ups last year hit a transaction value of \$30.8bn, almost double 2017 figures according to international tech M&A advisor Hambleton Partners.

Director Jonathan Simnett said: "In H2 2018 the UK continued to lead the way in fintech in Europe, breeding a new generation of innovators with record levels of investment following the lead of new unicorns like Monzo and Revolut."

The research also highlighted the rising adoption of biometric technologies among consumers with smartphone fingerprint authentication and facial recognition for payments featuring prominently.

While AI continues to show promise as firms adopt algo-

rithms and advanced modelling techniques for investment decisions, change is more likely to be a gradual process than a leap into new data sources and methods, observed Simnett.

"Winners in fintech are primarily emerging at a regional rather than global level in similar fashion to traditional retail banking, reflecting differing business and regulatory conditions," he added.

"Meanwhile, most start-ups that have grown large enough to gain traction, attract a strong customer base and produce a profitable balance sheet, will remain small enough to be acquired by fintech and traditional incumbents leading to an ongoing process of consolidation and M&A."

## NDG's top billing

WHOLESALE comms supplier NDG Supernet's One-Touch partner portal has received a boost following its integration with Union Street's aBILLity billing platform.

One-Touch is a central hub for NDG Supernet's partners to manage their customer base, review billing and provision new products and services.

"Using Union Street's API we have been able to harness much of its functionality to power One-Touch's billing capabilities," commented NDG

Supernet CEO Alex Bentley. "Because customer data is held in One-Touch there's no need for partners to re-enter this data into a separate billing system.

"All billing is white labelled with our partners' branding as they have complete ownership of the customer relationship."

Union Street's Head of Sales and Marketing Vincent Disneur added: "Union Street has channelled considerable resource into developing our API along with supporting documentation and support services."

## Distie to boost UK presence

SCANSOURCE has increased its UK presence striding out with additional footprints in Hampshire and Berkshire.

The firm has opened a distribution centre in Southampton and a new office in Winnersh Triangle near Reading – both set to open in March.

The move expands ScanSource's logistical operations and enables it to extend order cut-off times for all UK customers for next-day delivery.

ScanSource has also enhanced its capabilities in professional services.

The new office brings members of ScanSource's UK-focused AV, UC and cloud services teams together under one roof. The distributor also has offices in Bury and Hull.

"With our enhanced UK presence we are able to provide a deeper level of support," stated Paul Constantine, President for International Business.

## MSP hires new CCO

MANAGED services provider Memset, which was founded in 2002, has named Chris Burden as Chief Commercial Officer.

He was previously the company's Sales and Marketing Director and before that MD of Civica's cloud and managed services division.

"When Memset formed 17 years ago cloud storage was in its infancy," stated Burden.

"Today, we see a maturing understanding among business leaders in their use of balanced, multi-cloud strategies.

"Our focus over the coming period is to make sure that we are well adjusted to this changing landscape."

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# Weller's on track for new

Nextgenaccess MD Mark Weller has brought the company to the most significant inflection point in its history – a major expansion of its channel strategy and full fibre network ambitions.

**W**eller has set himself a single task – to deal with the UK's digital deficit through the application of an ambitious strategy shaped by past working experiences – most notably his time in rail fibre and as an architect of business growth who can see how the comms landscape lies. Formerly a property surveyor Weller moved into telecoms in the early 1990s following a dip in the commercial property market which coincided with the rise of the first generation of analogue mobile networks. Having read all the signals Weller set up Cellular Design Services in 1995 which tested and acquired mobile sites. The company became a market leader in the UK and Benelux, growing to £12.5 million at the time of its sale to a merchant bank in 2002.

Weller remained active in the telecoms and mobile sector and in 2012 sourced the funding to acquire Alan Dick Communications which managed the UK's rail fibre and rail GSM networks. Its turnover increased from circa £4 million to £22 million prior to its acquisition by Panasonic in 2016. "My expertise is in trackside rail fibre and surveying, these are essential when it comes to evaluating the potential of our existing and planned fibre network infrastructure routes and sites," stated Weller. "By tapping into the thousands of miles of UK rail fibre infrastructure we can quickly and cost-



Mark Weller

effectively bring full fibre within reach of underserved businesses in strategic areas of the country network, and support increased network capacity for mobile operators as 5G comes into play."

#### Connections

Nextgenaccess was set up in 2013 with a mission to 'connect the unconnected'. Gaining Code powers and Physical Infrastructure Access (PIA) in 2016 changed the competitive landscape in the firm's favour, enabling it to get involved in an increasing number of high value projects based in large part on having access to Openreach's duct and pole infrastructure. "The PIA regulations transformed the business case for us and minimised disruption and lead times in providing alternative services," added Weller. "We were an early

## My expertise is in trackside rail fibre and surveying, these are essential when it comes to evaluating the potential of our existing and planned fibre network infrastructure routes and sites

adopter of PIA and have the technical expertise and knowledge of Openreach's infrastructure to deploy new fibre where it's really needed, or where a carrier actually wants it."

Rather than resell the legacy networks of incumbent suppliers Nextgenaccess is extending its existing 10Gb fibre core network by a further 1,000km over the

next three years. A new route will typically have at least one anchor tenant. "We will open the route up for businesses through carriers and channel partners in the vicinity using PIA to provide access," noted Weller. "We can then offer layer 2 access services to the Internet or appropriate meet-me point."

Weller emphasised that the channel is essential to his

business model as resellers will populate the fibre network in high numbers. "The opportunity for partners is to monetise our routes by delivering ultrafast and custom broadband services to businesses in their area, using our expertise in PIA to provide access," he explained. "We are focused on building a network of volume selling channel partners with the right level of expertise, ideally already used to selling to SMEs, large businesses and public sector organisations, and with a reasonable degree of technical and engineering capability. Many resellers providing voice and data services already tick some or all of these boxes."

Nextgenaccess is also targeting infrastructure based carriers looking to expand their reach, and asset-light operators seeking alternative access routes. Traditional and edge data centres requiring greater diversity, security and resilience are also relevant markets. "But the arrival of 5G is a game changer, putting mobile operators centre stage to meet the increased performance demands of both business customers and consumers, and they are under pressure to deliver widespread roll out as quickly as possible, at the lowest possible cost," said Weller.

"Operators have to upgrade their core mobile and RAN networks. Our fibre routes will form part of the essential plumbing that underpins



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# How fibre routes

high speed 5G networks for the delivery of AI, the IoT, Big Data analytics, Machine Learning, connected cars and Virtual Reality etc. With this comes an unprecedented opportunity for resellers to use and monetise our fibre for enabling 5G applications. Our infrastructure model is fully optimised and future-proofed for 5G."

## Leadership

To turn its strategic vision into positive and assured action Nextgenaccess has assembled a high calibre and experienced senior management team including Chairman Steven Marshall, formerly Group Exec VP of American Tower Corporation, the \$60 billion Fortune 500 and NYSE listed telecom, broadcast and energy infrastructure group. Also on board is former Gamma CEO Bob Falconer as a Non Exec Director and Sales Director Don McAuley who was most recently VP Global Sales for Interoute (now GTT). "We are a slim organisation and plan to keep it that way," noted Weller. "Currently we have 12 people and plan to be around 20 by Q4 this year."

Weller himself became involved with the company last year following an introduction by Nextgenaccess investor Amber Infrastructure, a multi-billion pound asset management group focused on infrastructure investment including the telecoms, transportation and energy sectors. He subsequently joined as Managing Director and worked to secure Nextgenaccess's initial £22 million funding from the National Digital Infrastructure Fund, which is a part-Government, part-private investment

fund for supporting the delivery of the UK's full fibre digital infrastructure.

"We are selectively identifying key routes where there isn't any fibre or where there are few or no alternative providers to BT," said Weller. "Our priorities are to leverage our PIA and rail trackside expertise in delivering on several key strategic full fibre deployments. Our main challenge is ensuring the appropriate levels of future funding to maximise on accelerating market demand."

Weller intends to work closely from the ground up with resellers who can demonstrate a viable business case for a new route. One such reseller is currently working on the delivery of ultrafast broadband to 4,000 underserved businesses in south west England and south Wales. Nextgenaccess is providing an 80km full fibre link to enable broadband network expansion between Newport and Bristol. It's a scenario that is as much about future proofing the reseller's business as providing top notch connectivity to needy organisations.

"The drive towards cloud and SaaS models limits the potential for SIs to build a business based on integration alone," explained Weller. "Resellers and SIs will need to develop their trusted adviser role and be less project-led, going for more continuous engagement. Owning infrastructure will have the joint benefit of tying customers in more closely while also offering the flexibility and differentiated offerings that carriers will struggle to provide." ■

## Just a minute with Mark Weller...

**Role model:** My friend, Fraser Hardie, an entrepreneur with a heart and brain the size of a planet

**What talent do you wish you had?** I wish I could paint

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Fishing and sailing, preferably at the same time

**Best piece of advice you have been given?** Count to 10...

**What do you fear the most?** Bad knees

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** Explaining ideas and getting people excited about them is a key strength, but I need to work on my patience

**Biggest career achievement?** Giving my house to the bank to set up Cellular Design Services and then getting it back a year later

**Name three ideal dinner guests and why you would invite them:** Christopher Hitchens to challenge everyone; Bill Hicks to balance Hitchens; and Kenneth Williams for his acid tongue and wit

**What possession could you not live without?** My father's watch

**Lessons learnt:** I wish I had not micromanaged people early in my career. Trust people and let them fail – it's how we all learn

**How would you like to be remembered?** A good husband, father and boss

**Top tip for resellers?** Keep innovating to stay ahead

**One thing you could not do without in your job?** My smartphone

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# Cathcart: Architect of tru

Getting hands on with resellers brings service providers closer to their business partners, which is a big asset to both parties. But to realise the full potential of partnerships requires comprehensive reseller support mechanisms and a strong sense of strategic symbiosis – in this 9 Group has taken a clear lead, claims Managing Director for Partners Adam Cathcart.

**T**he real message of Cathcart's Comms Dealer interview is that only one relationship matters in the reseller channel. It is not between a reseller and their kit bag of multiple suppliers – the key relationship is between the partner and a single-source specialist provider of all products and services. "Differentiation is now about value, not price nor commoditised products, so we help partners to position multiple products and services correctly and provide support across provisioning, selling, installing, billing and in-life management," said Cathcart. "We are a partner, not a supplier, and work hard to articulate our story and keep it visible."



Adam Cathcart

Cathcart, who talks with a convincing passion, embodies the high touch approach 9 Group as a whole has achieved. He says partners need far more than a purely transactional set-up with a faceless provider which cops out of doing the road miles. In contrast, Cathcart champions 9's hands-on bias towards partnering which is reflective of a specialist boutique-style operation rather than coming from one of the channel's biggest ICT providers.

By speaking to partners individually and face-to-face

## I welcome the extent to which partners are transparent with us in terms of their challenges and pain points

Cathcart says he is able to meet the challenges they may be up against with coherent long-term planning. To him, the answer is a simple case of communication. "Our willingness to engage on a one-to-one level and not prescribe preconceived solutions enables 9 Group to develop relationships that are founded on true partnership," he stated. "I welcome the extent to which partners are

transparent with us in terms of their pain points.

### Marketing matters

"For example, partners frequently struggle with marketing but we have a multi-skilled in-house team, including designers and digital marketers who tailor individual marketing support for partners who, often for the first time, witness the true power of effective marketing and

how they can deploy it in their own business."

Cathcart is also seeking to build on 9 Group's impressive sales growth figures, not through a simple quest to hit higher numbers but – as he points out – as a staunch business partner first and foremost, and not a supplier. "We do not pursue scale for its own sake nor adopt a scattergun approach to partner recruitment," he

said. "Yet we still saw a 60 per cent increase in partner numbers last year and could have recruited a lot more had we not been selective in looking for partners with the ambition and resources to grow. Enabling partners to make positive changes to their business is not just about sharing knowledge, expertise and tools, it requires tangible activity to make a difference. Our proposition is all about hands-on support."



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# ue partnerships

It's a strategy that pays off handsomely. "2018 was a year of big numbers that outstripped the market," enthused Cathcart. "Compared to 2017 our new partners are 154 per cent more profitable. We have seen a 74 per cent increase in data circuit sales and a 35 per cent rise in mobile sales. Hosted voice showed a phenomenal 129 per cent climb in sales. Our metrics and parameters are all on track or exceeding forecast and our most ambitious aim this year is to grow the hosted IPT business by over 150 per cent. We are already ahead of the curve."

Cathcart rates 9's (and its partners') biggest opportunity as its hosted voice and SIP proposition, called eve. "We have serviced tens of thousands of SIP end points and are reaping the rewards of a multi-million pound investment in the eve platform and our partner-led roadmap for new features and capabilities," added Cathcart.

Through investments in its portfolio, partner support and numerous initiatives, 9 Group has shown that it is not your average channel supplier, and able to help resellers to reform outdated and limited customer offerings and raise new revenue streams without them incurring the burden of a high cost. "Being a sophisticated service provider 9 is well placed to help our partners navigate the increasing convergence between comms and IT," said Cathcart. "There is an opportunity for SIs and VARs to translate digital transformation language into simpler, meaningful messages for their customers – and 9 can help them with that.

Adoption of new services such as collaboration needs to be straightforward and attractive not just to the decision makers but to the actual users. End user dismissal will hinder any potential sales growth."

Like many other service providers 9 recognised the need to offer a bureau billing option, but an investment in capability and integration has transformed the proposition

## We are reaping the rewards of a multi-million pound investment in the eve platform and our partner-led roadmap for new features and capabilities

into a fully managed service. "We provide online reporting that gives immediate commercial and operational insight, which combined with management information enables course correction and deeper strategy adjustments," noted Cathcart. "While many established partners are billing six figure monthly sums we also support smaller partners focused on growing but who need some help. We are especially effective where emerging businesses have the drive and commitment to succeed. They quickly

benefit from our insight and proactive support."

Cathcart explained that 9 Group's partner management structure is split into two units – the Partner Sales team headed up by Anna Roper and the Partner Solutions division led by Rob Downes. Both work hand-in-hand. The sales side includes Partner Business Managers and the Solutions arm offers product insight, pre sales and sales support, accreditations and educational webinars. "We reflect the wider industry challenge of locating and recruiting strong people for our teams, especially those with multiple product experience," noted Cathcart. "Fortunately, 9 is a great place to work and develop a career so this makes our task more straightforward. We recruit Partner Business Managers with broad product experience and then support them with the certainty of specialist expertise."

Another sure thing is the upcoming ISDN and WLR switch off. But not so clear is the true nature of the threats and opportunities that partners will face, so 9 Group has created a comfort blanket. "A fog of views is widespread so, to provide clarity for our partners, we monitor how the switchover to SIP services will impact product revenues and overall margin and then model how the transition curves need to look to remain successful," stated Cathcart. "We share this insight with partners and measure whether they are above or below the curve before offering help and advice where needed. With services such as this we live up to our vision of being a multidimensional partner, not a one sided supplier." ■

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# Disruptive Wildix on MS

Channel leaders have been preaching about digital transformation for years, but few have been as ardent in their condemnation of industry laggards than the Osler brothers, the Italian co-founders of cloud communications innovator Wildix.

The slide behind Steve Osler declared 'Think Big' as he kicked off the company's inaugural UCC Summit staged at the World Trade Centre in Barcelona, and the CEO certainly pulled no punches in front of 400-plus Wildix channel converts from across Europe. "Traditional PBX vendors are 'the Walking Dead, sucking fresh blood from the channel'," he claimed, and described carriers as 'dinosaurs who are not UC specialists and don't make any profit'. "Operators copy each other, launching 'me too' products with no advantages to customers," he said. "They are Dodos and it is a matter of time before they go out of business."

Osler said the Internet and 'Amazon Effect' has also led to the almost total loss of 'the man in middle' between supply and demand. "It is no longer sustainable to be a pure reseller of other peoples' products who acts as a simple intermediary and fights a price war that does not bring margins," he said.

Osler called upon resellers to wake up to the new world of managed service provision and start selling disruptive cloud-based PBX solutions on a subscription model, or risk extinction. "Resellers will not exist anymore," he claimed. "Your future begins today. Evolving into a Managed Service Provider is the only way to remain competitive. If you don't differentiate and



Dimitri Osler (left) with brother Steve

## System integrators must evolve into MSPs and sell their skills as an integral part of the solution

adapt your business model now you will continue to lose margin. You cannot survive selling commodities."

### Productivity tools

Osler firmly believes in the principle that if you want to buy a bespoke suit you wouldn't accept an off-the-peg garment in a colour and cut that doesn't meet your style and needs. "No one, nowadays, addresses a systems integrator (reseller) company because they want a new switchboard. What is

required are tools to increase business productivity," he commented, urging resellers to transform from being a simple retailer and installer into a professional MSP, specialised in solving the business challenges of the customer. "System integrators must evolve into Managed Service Providers and sell their skills as an integral part of the solution. This is done by proposing the right technologies together with a business model fit for purpose," he added.

Cristiano Bellumat, Head of Channel Sales Strategy and founder of Wildix's training division Unicomm, said: "Creating value is a pillar of the sales model for companies in the Managed Services sector. In fact, it is not about selling a product, it is about interviewing clients to understand what problems you have to solve to improve their performance."

Wildix is pledging to give channel companies the support and training

they need to transition to MSPs and address market opportunities in the 50-1,000 seat market, although its web-based platform can extend to 250,000 users and beyond. Osler said Wildix was creating an 'amazing amount' of qualified leads via social media and marketing campaigns. These are all being delivered to partners and those acting on them is completely transparent via the company's Facebook page. To reinforce his message





# P growth path

Osler invited 10 partners from Italy, France and Germany to describe how their businesses had been transformed by adopting the MSP model following Unicomm training and all reported a rise in profits. Wildix co-founder CTO Dimitri Osler, alongside Vasily Ganchev, Team Leader of VoIP development, then announced a raft of new Wildix hardware and innovations designed to add value and margin for partners.

These included Wzyconf, a 'hacker proof' video conference solution based on WebRTC and operating on Chrome OS; a suite of iOS and Android mobile integration solutions and apps; a new DECT phone that can be sanitised for use in medical environments; and the 'Ultimate Executive Tool', a new SuperVision eight inch display phone console for managers with two factor identification and stereo playback.

The Wildix back story is an interesting one and has indeed been turned into a book entitled The Blue PBX, one of many tomes and manuals produced and

published by the company. "Nowadays any company is a media company," stated Steve Osler. "We produce a lot of books, a magazine and videos. The quality of products you take to market are vital, but communications are equally important."

### Fast growth

Wildix – a name which is derived from a desire to be disruptive combined with IX for Internet Exchange – originated in Italy and, funded by banks, originally started by importing VoIP phones from China. "We sold them on the web and went from zero to four million euros in two and half years," commented Osler.

"Dimitri is skilled in finding new products and he was able to determine which were winners and which were losers. We have been profitable since 2013 and now we are investing our own money in sales and marketing. We have two million euros put aside to grow our US market and £400k in the UK."

The Osler brothers have now personally relocated to Estonia – said to be the

world's most digital country – to escape Italy's suffocating tax and bureaucracy and their technical and R&D teams are based in Odessa in Ukraine. There the company's hardware solutions, all Chinese manufactured, are quality tested and developed for specific market needs. So, what is Wildix's channel sweet spot in the UK? "Our main target in the UK is telephony integrators because they know the industry, they are very professional, and they have a mature customer base and the trust of the customer," explained Osler.

"Our future is not in telephony, it's in the organisation of communications. Our qualification criterium is straight forward. Telephony partners will need to have one guy in technical sales and least 100 existing customers. IT companies might not want to enter the telephony market but want to make integrations, so we team them up with telephony partners. We use the biggest partners to manage the smaller ones and they work better together because the telephony guy needs the IT knowledge and vice-versa." ■



Taurus receives Gold Partner recognition from Wildix

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# Dealmakers and funders for business growth

Nothing in business beats the thrill of driving fast growth and exiting with a flourish, and last month's inaugural ICT Investment Forum provided a valuable lesson in both.

Investment, M&A and building businesses have become core functions of the ICT channel, and the inaugural ICT Investment Forum, launched by Comms Dealer, aimed to spur the business growth agenda with a stand-out conference line up that reflected the extraordinary levels of dealmaking witnessed last year. The event, held on February 28th at BAFTA in London and facilitated by TV and radio business journalist and presenter Simon Jack, proved to be a classic of business growth exploration, providing a springboard for delegates to elevate their strategic thinking as they seek to take their businesses to the next level.

M&A is now built into the way Britain's ICT sector functions, and the greatest stimuli to growth is technological innovation and the catalysts of industry consolidation which went into overdrive last year when ICT channel M&A activity hit a new record. Among the 800-plus ICT and software companies tracked by Megabyte the number of deals last year escalated to 420, up 19 per cent on 2017 figures – and the dealmaking bonanza is forecast to continue into the foreseeable future with PE a prime cause of consolidation.

The greatest curb on deal success is the unpreparedness of ICT supplier companies in terms of seeking an investment or sale. In this, the sector would have some trouble dissociating the success of its M&A record from the role of advisors (such as ICT Investment Forum sponsor Knight Corporate Finance) who facilitate the process and ensure their clients 'look good on the night'. Knight Corporate Finance co-founders and Directors Adam Zoldan and Paul Billingham provided insights into how delegates can make critical evaluations of their own business and think more strategically about their planning as ever more investors' and buyers' eyes fasten onto prime targets in the ICT arena.

"If a preferred investor or buyer knocked on your door today would your business be ready for sale or investment?" asked Zoldan. "We like meeting



Simon Jack

people years before they are aiming to sell. During this preparation phase we help set the target and ensure the business is ready for that transaction. It's about building the right perception to create interest and stimulate competition, which is the true driver of price. The perception-building process creates the story, but you need to deliver on expectations once you have the perfect investor or buyer waiting for you. So there is a strong focus on due diligence and execution, because the biggest issue towards the end of the process is not having the right answers to questions. Consistency is key."

#### Strategic planning

Of all business growth matters, planning is perhaps the most critical, which was clearly evident in the perspectives offered by Chris Russell, CEO of Arrow Communications, who during his on stage interview shared insights into M&A value creation and how to identify potential acquisitions while shining a light on the factors that define a trademark takeover target and successful transaction. Arrow has completed seven acquisitions since February

**Among the greatest aids to making an acquisition is funding, but choosing the right financing option throws up a number of challenges**

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# s provide a springboard

2017 and is now a £50 million business with more than 220 employees. "In 2010 we saw the market was maturing and knew we needed to grow, so we borrowed some money for transactions that took us to £3.5 million EBITDA in 2016," explained Russell. "But we reached a crossroads: How do we materialise that value? PE gave us the hybrid option to crystallise value, keep a stake in the business and have the funds to grow. PE also gives you access to better bank financing because if the banks know a PE firm is sitting behind you the doors open slightly easier."

Arrow has spent £33 million in the last 22 months buying bigger and more established companies, and in each of these transactions a strategic and developed way of going about things has been key. "You do need a process," stated Russell. "You can't just go out there and do a £10 million deal first off, you'll probably make a mistake. You have to feel your way, get experience, find what works best for you and how that fits with the culture of your business. We approach a potential deal in two ways – technical and emotional. Technically, you need to be independent. There are five people on our acquisition team and we have a balanced scorecard system which determines the value range we pay. We score independently and anonymously."

## Integration matters

"But the complexity of an acquisition is directly correlated to the number of people joining your organisation. So 'emotionally', if there is alignment and commonality of cultures that will work. But if it's a completely different organisation the integration will be three times as complicated and take three times as long. This ultimately reduces the number of deals you can do. So you've got to make sure you understand the cultural and emotional piece."

Among the greatest aids to making an acquisition is funding, but choosing the right financing option throws up a number of challenges which the Forum helped to unravel. A panel session delved into the different financing options and showed how they affect the running of a business, and highlighted the key aspects of investment criteria, reasons for funding, and how best to meet investors' pre-deal conditions. Insights into how funding methods differ and create business value were also offered, along with tips on how to go about securing funding. "Approach a bank as if you are pitching a client," said Martyn Drake, Director of Growth Capital at Santander. "Selling yourself is key in the first meeting. It's about getting close to the management team and building relationships."

In his session, Philip Carse, Chief Analyst at Megabyte, explored the key drivers of the ICT market and gave the inside track on where to find growth, profits and

cashflow in comms and IT services – and offered tips on how to guard against business value slipping away.

For those embarking on a growth journey or seeking an exit the importance of realising the holy grail of a predicted outcome cannot be underestimated – nor thought about too narrowly. And according to Xentum Managing Director Adam Carolan, who advanced his 'Grab Life' mindset to conferees, the all-encompassing alignment of business and personal assets must be a key consideration when building a business for exit or income.

Optimising M&A strategies has seized the agenda, and the ICT sector's M&A and investment economy is structurally geared to generate wealth across the entrepreneurial landscape. It's a dynamic that could ultimately create a two tier sector as fast growth and

**AGAINST a backdrop of record comms sector M&A deals the ICT Investment Forum enabled technology entrepreneurs and business leaders to better understand their business expansion and exit options, providing a further stimulus to growth in the ICT channel.**  
[ictinvestmentforum.com](http://ictinvestmentforum.com)



Adam Zoldan and Paul Billingham

upward mobility will be derived mainly through valuable transactions – with immobility rooted in intransigence. Immobility will be particularly pronounced where resellers adhere to traditional business models and remain oblivious to the fast evolving market that surrounds them.

To say that Daisy Chairman Matthew Riley is upwardly mobile would be to greatly understate the rate of ascent achieved by this comms channel tour de force. Riley's business success is as visionary as it is jaw dropping. In his exclusive interview with Simon Jack the self-made entrepreneur behind the comms channel's greatest reseller growth story opened up on his golden rules of building a business, the watershed moments, the challenges and what makes him tick. And as one of the most inspirational and recognisable comms sector business leaders Riley's growth plans for the future show no signs of slowing down (see page 32 for the full story). ■

**The ICT sector's M&A and investment economy is structurally geared to generate wealth**

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# Riley talks doing deals

Daisy Group Chairman Matthew Riley is responsible for 52 acquisitions, 12 disposals and circa 4,000 staff. For him, there is no such thing as business-lite.



Matthew Riley and Simon Jack

**R**iley's first real test was to last the course at school, which he left at 16, two years later than he wished. "From the age of 14 all I wanted to do was earn money," he stated. "I did Saturday jobs including selling horseshoes before joining a Youth Training Scheme which paid £29.50 a week. I still love working – that hasn't changed."

Riley set up Daisy Group as one of the first companies to offer wholesale line rental targeting what he says was the incumbent's Achilles heel, its large size and inability to provide customers with an agile and personal service. He wasted no time in forging a path to fast growth but Daisy's first four years of operation were acquisition free. All that changed when Riley displayed a sharp eye for structuring a great deal when the opportunity arose. "The company we bought was good at sales but not so good at looking after customers," stated Riley. "I put two and two together, removed the operational costs and relocated the business from London to Nelson – all paid for over two years although the deal paid for itself in six months. I had taken on no debt, but when the banks saw our spike in revenues they picked up the phone and were ready to lend."

Riley was at first reticent to take on debt, but with the benefit of hindsight things may have been different. "It's something I sometimes regret," he commented. "Daisy may have got bigger quicker had I put more debt into the business sooner, but at the time it terrified me. If I got it wrong we didn't eat."

But as a private company in 2009 fast growth had become a priority, evidenced by a list of 10 acquisition targets that got Riley thinking hard about how to raise the money to buy certain competitors that had got themselves into trouble.

## Going public

"I had been to private equity but all I could see was them putting debt into my business and it wouldn't give me the pot of money I needed to do these acquisitions," he added. "So we decided to go the other way and became a public company. I don't regret that, it was the right thing to do at

## Daisy may have got bigger quicker had I put more debt into the business sooner

the time and helped us to get to where we wanted to be. The upside was £100m-plus to spend and we were taken seriously, able to circumnavigate quite a few processes. And it worked from a public market perspective in the press and media. Customers felt more assured. But I just found it boring and frustrating. When you do 40 meetings and they're all pretty much the same it's soul destroying if you're not that type of person."

Riley was in a unique position where four shareholders owned 92 per cent of the company – making it a private-public business with no

stakeholders wanting to sell until a large corporate cosied up with an offer that piqued the interest of most shareholders. "I didn't want to accept it," said Riley. "But the shareholders said it was a good price and that if a similar offer was made we should talk seriously. In that same meeting I offered to buy them out if they were happy with that price and they agreed. I very quickly had to work out how to get the money."

With his fear of taking on debt well and truly overcome, Riley pushed ahead with going private again. "To do something like that you've got to have confidence in your business," he said. "With recurring stable revenues you can have a good view of what's going to happen over the next five years, and that's what gave me the confidence to increase the levels of debt we took on, allowing ourselves headroom to make more acquisitions."

Daisy Group's acquisition process is practical and openly honest with all parties, as you would expect, and often involves no holds barred conversations-cum head-to-head clashes during high level Group meetings on the viability of potential targets. "We have an investment committee where we bring ideas to the table and for people working on acquisition projects that's their baby," noted Riley. "If someone calls a baby ugly that's good as you need to have that open debate, scream at each other, bang tables and wake up the next day as friends."

To say there is much at stake does not fully express the import of what's really on the line in some circumstances. "I can be placing my own equity at risk," considered Riley. "In the case of Alternative Networks, I sat with a cold towel on my head and thought about how much equity I have in the business and whether I'm prepared to risk it on this acquisition at that price."

A current preoccupation is finding an appropriate target in the high level security consultancy space, which is top of mind for Riley. Another priority is to continue challenging his divisional leaders to think differently about ways to go faster and improve the business. "I'm constantly looking at different areas including new companies and how they might mix things up in our industry, and asking whether we are missing anything," stated Riley. "The key is not to get complacent." ■

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Arrow CEO Chris Russell discusses acquisitions



Panel discussion spotlights financing options



Xentum MD Adam Carolan on grabbing life



Megabyte's Philip Carse talks finding growth



Daisy Chairman Matthew Riley on how he did it



Delegates with business growth on their minds



TV and radio business journalist Simon Jack



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# Billing's bigger purpose

Converging trends are turning billing providers into linchpins of the comms and IT channel, according to Inform Billing Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth.

**T**hree trends of great significance are currently impacting the billing sector – a big increase in demand for mobile and IoT billing, continuing entry into the resale space by traditional non-voice specialists and rising expectations around systems integration. “Mobile and IoT is a growth area attracting new entrants, but existing dealers are also seeking to gain increased flexibility in their offering and greater autonomy by equipping themselves with billing,” stated Bodsworth. “Having the right billing capability to offer flexible tariff packages and flexible options for pricing and bundling is critical to transforming the mobile and IoT space.”

Bodsworth continues to see increasing numbers of IT resellers moving into voice for the first time and greater numbers of resellers have a requirement to bill more complex recurring revenues such as connectivity and cloud-based services – including Office 365, data back-ups and other IT related subscriptions. “While relatively straightforward, these have traditionally either been billed as a one-off or annual fee or at an enterprise level rather than on a reseller model,” added Bodsworth.

Expectations are also rising around integration, noted

Bodsworth. “When resellers are looking to integrate two or more complex systems, such as billing and CRM, the complexity of any meaningful integration should not be underestimated,” he commented. “Rather than having integration for the sake of it, this is where an experienced billing provider should be able to offer advice, support and recommendations.”

All of these trends require billing providers to ensure their wrap-around support, advice and expertise matches up to their physical product offering, emphasised Bodsworth. “Billing has become much more of a service package than solely a software requirement and we are seeing a huge increase in the value to resellers of Inform Billing’s experience and expertise,” he explained. “Demand for our managed services has increased 400 per cent over the past three years.”

Inform Billing’s cloud-based Eclipse Next Generation billing platform was launched to the channel in September 2017 and continues to roll out to its 250 strong customer base. The platform was built from the ground up and incorporates tried and tested functionality alongside 40 new features as well as a new interface, simple navigation and improved security. “We invested over



Shaun Bodsworth

## Demand for our managed services has increased 400 per cent over the past three years

£1 million into this version and continue to plough 45 per cent of revenues back into ongoing development of the software, prioritising enhancements that lead to a smoother customer experience,” said Bodsworth.

### Joined up solutions

“We are also developing a range of partnerships and integrations with other complementary applications in order to offer joined up solutions. Our roadmap will see us continue to develop solutions that enable automation to ease and simplify the billing process through the use of advanced technologies.”

Resellers without billing capabilities may be restricted by their limited commercial offerings. “This could mean missing out on additional margin opportunities and

other benefits that billing provides,” added Bodsworth. “In contrast, resellers who are nimble and creative with propositions are able to react and drive changes in the marketplace from a solution provider’s perspective.”

With customers spanning traditional telecoms, IT, mobile and the IoT as well as utilities, waste management, banking and even hospitality all using Inform Billing’s software, it is clear that the firm is developing partnerships in diverse markets relevant to the subscription economy, opening up opportunities for the channel – especially around customer ownership.

“Alongside increasing channel activity around mergers and acquisitions comes greater emphasis on the definition of true

customer ownership,” noted Bodsworth. “Who owns the customer can be a contentious issue and is not always clear cut. It often comes down to who manages the customer relationship and who has the legal contract with them. Billing is critical to ownership. For example, if a reseller is buying network services from a supplier who is also responsible for billing and possibly even for cash collection, then it’s debatable if the reseller has true ownership of that customer.”

Because having a billing capability brings complete customer ownership, the lack of such a capability means exit routes and business values are likely to come under pressure. “Resellers with billing and total customer ownership will see enhanced multipliers and greater value in their recurring revenues,” stated Bodsworth.

It’s a fact underscored by Paul Billingham, Director at Knight Corporate Finance, who said: “It’s been proven on many occasions that resellers with true control over their customer base – with their billing independent from their network service provider – will see a positive and significant impact on the value of their business.”

A billing systems’ greater purpose therefore is to empower resellers to provide a total solution, create additional value through their business and gain complete ownership of their customers. “Customer ownership is at the heart of being a reseller,” added Bodsworth. “Rather than being a necessary evil, billing is fundamental to being a reseller.” ■





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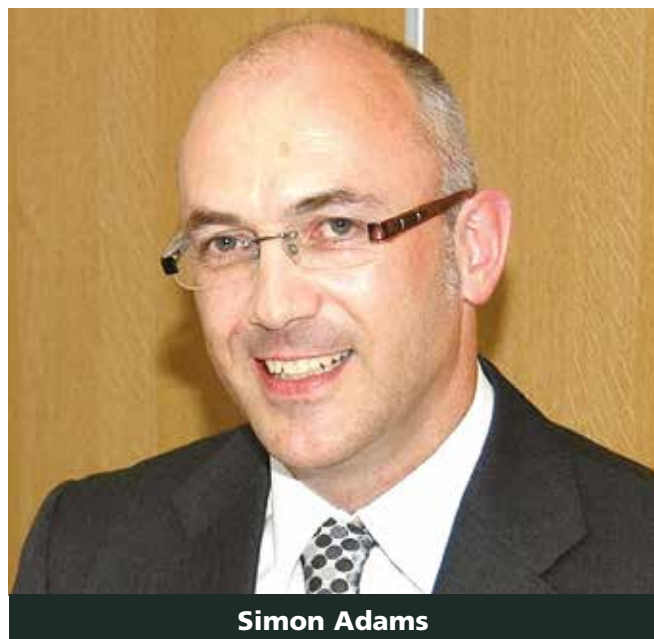
# Platforms for growth

Perhaps no part of the ICT channel is so concentrated on deploying innovation as the billing sector which continues to diversify and invest in underpinning reseller businesses.

**T**he channel's leading billing providers continue to deftly straddle the most turbulent period of comms technology history, remaining fit for purpose as demand for their services springs from unconventional angles. According to Simon Adams, Director at PRD Technologies, during the past 12 months his company has witnessed a growing number of non-traditional telephony billing inquiries. "There are more opportunities to create new revenue streams, especially relating to mobile data,"

he stated. "Consumers are demanding higher data limits and more flexible data plans, and 5G will create new revenue options for telecoms. Our job is to help maximise these opportunities to ensure that data can be processed and billed. With increasing complexity comes a slow shift towards value orientated billing. As a billing partner we are becoming more consultative and advisory with our customer dealings."

Adams has also noted a shift away from traditional CDR processing towards



**Simon Adams**

**As a billing partner we are becoming more consultative and advisory with our customer dealings.**



**Helen Booker**

**Deploying a billing platform model should be a top priority for any partner in an industry requiring automation, diverse product sets and digital transformation.**

more consumption-based billing services. "Telecoms is evolving to become more data consumption driven which needs new billing capabilities," he added. "For example, we have just gone live with a large and complex implementation for an Azure Cloud Solution provider requiring integration into Microsoft Partner Centre API."

Requests to demonstrate flexibility through proof of concept is also on the increase. This illustrates the shift in sector requirements for billing with a greater purpose, and the need for billing to be flexible while constantly pushing new boundaries, observed Adams. "Demand for automated processes is also a growing requirement," he commented. "Most customers are now using business support systems and services to improve operational efficiencies and profitability. They may

also want to maximise their customer intelligence through data analytics and unlocking billing related data gives customers what they want."

Optimising the billing function means integration into third party systems. "Even our entry level QuickStart billing platform includes as standard integrations into most third party systems such as banking collections and accounting," noted Adams. "However, for the more complex resellers this means integration into virtually any system of choice. More resellers are looking at ways to simplify such processes."

#### Security matters

In light of constant regulatory changes Adams has responded fully to increasing concerns about privacy and the safety of data and IT infrastructure. "We are doing everything within our control to eliminate or reduce the risk of cyber attacks,

investing many hundreds of thousands into a new IT hybrid infrastructure, and employing specialist IT security teams to ensure every measure is taken," he stated. "This includes new and constantly updating DR and back-up processes. For some customers back-ups will be on a near constant basis. This has come at a significant cost, but one that PRD is covering with no or minimal cost transfer to our customers."

In reassessing the role of billing providers we quickly realise that they deserve much credit for the investment-driven expansion of functionality that delivers a means to reseller growth. In fact, billing platforms change a partner's business model, says Chess Partner Operations Director Helen Booker who joined the business when it acquired TMS in September last year. "Billing platforms enable partners to have

**Continued on page 39**





# Knowledge is power

And through **Eclipse Next Generation**, we harness a decade of experience and expertise to deliver truly powerful billing solutions.

# Why billing is pivotal

Billing is to resellers what ramparts are to castles – their defence against an advancing wave of technology challenges and threats to customer ownership, according to Union Street Technologies Head of Sales & Marketing Vincent Disneur.

Union Street was quick to take action on industry moves to the cloud, SaaS and integration and continues to step up its response to the emerging requirements of a disruptive market. “The importance of a robust and accurate billing engine cannot be overstated, but it would be a mistake for anyone to believe that generating invoices is all that a billing platform has to offer,” said Disneur. “Taking control of billing is pivotal to capitalising on emerging opportunities, scaling up operations and staying agile.”

Union Street is another reminder of the extent to which billing providers push their R&D centres. Disneur noted that Union Street plans to plough over £2 million into research and development for its aBILLity platform this year, much of it allocated to areas defined by customer feedback. “Based on these consultations aBILLity has become progressively more sophisticated,” added Disneur. “It increasingly acts as a profit centre and end-to-end solution for comms provisioning, billing and customer management. It delivers real-time revenue analysis, fraud detection, supplier reconciliation and

has been used as a central hub of integration with countless other operational support systems.”

That billing platforms such as aBILLity perform a great service by doubling up as gateways to new revenue streams is surely beyond argument. Just as clear is the shift towards bundles and subscription-based contracts spurred by the looming shutdown of PSTN and ongoing shift to SIP-based telephony. “This change, coupled with the increased pressure on margins that SIP telephony brings, will make it even more important for billing platforms to provide comprehensive reporting to identify unprofitable customers and services,” added Disneur.

## Customer ownership

According to Disneur this degree of capability is unparalleled and the growing imbalance between resellers who leverage billing platforms and the rest is now being matched by a business value imbalance between those who bill and own the customer relationship and those who don't. “CPs that rely on suppliers to manage billing on their behalf are likely to become less competitive and less able



Vincent Disneur

## Taking control of billing is pivotal to capitalising on emerging opportunities

to define a unique selling proposition,” noted Disneur.

He clearly has strong views on why resellers need to get the measure of billing especially as a rising tide of end users want to work with one supplier for all communications and IT related services. “Meeting this demand with a truly competitive package is likely to require a CP to work with multiple suppliers,” added Disneur.

“At the same time, end users are looking for one consolidated bill for all services complete with executive summaries and management reports that provide a clear and concise picture of how their services are performing. Reconciling these two expectations will become increasingly problematic for

CPs that are not managing their own billing through a single platform.”

Over the past decade billing providers have moved from monthly CDRs to daily and hourly ones; and as technology matures the provision of real-time or near real-time CDRs is increasingly in vogue. “There is a big need for real-time data to be made available – consider the recent introduction of mobile bill limits,” said Disneur. “We’ve introduced functionality for recording limits and for alerting CPs if a bill cap is about to be exceeded. We’re also working with some of the leading mobile suppliers to the channel with the aim of integrating with their systems to expedite the alert process and perhaps even automate line barring if a customer has overspent.”

As the market moves away from WLR3 towards converged next-gen network services the product portfolios of CPs will inevitably broaden out. While offering more choice can be a point of differentiation a raft of options makes it more challenging for CPs to prepare packages that are both competitive and profitable, believes Disneur. “Often a CP will have to visit multiple portals and contact numerous suppliers when building a quote for data connectivity services like broadband, fibre, Ethernet, lease lines etc,” he stated. “Much of our focus over the past few years has been on easing this challenge for CPs and in creating greater synergy with the provisioning process.”

Disneur says the process is swift and easy, and he also champions the rising role of integration solutions, for which there is a strong appetite. “Virtually every new partner we deal with requires some level of integration between aBILLity and other operational support systems,” he commented. “In response we have put a high priority on the development of APIs and complementary resources.

“Improving the processing power and performance of the aBILLity platform is another key requirement and we’ve found some innovative ways to increase throughput and build on our current performance of importing and rating up to 20,000,000 CDRs per hour. We’re also working to boost processing speeds for generating and dispatching invoices. These performance boosts will be introduced in coming updates of aBILLity.” ■



**Continued from page 36**

multiple suppliers, various products, create bundles and packages all on one invoice with minimum input," she stated. "Deploying a billing platform model should be a top priority for any partner in an industry requiring automation, diverse product sets and digital transformation."

Billing is especially important because automation and resource optimisation are crucial in the competitive telephony sector which is increasingly experiencing decreased revenues, observed Booker. "A billing system that is capable of automating processes such as loading CDR and SDR from multiple suppliers, producing one invoice to the customer while capturing all products and services is key," she added. "Automation enables resellers to be operationally leaner and more efficient in providing customers with value for money services and keeping their operational cost low."

**Diversification**

Following its TMS acquisition Chess Partner's billing proposition includes cloud and on-site solutions offered under the brands CLick and Enterprise. These solutions reflect the ever diversifying product portfolios that should be adopted by resellers. "The telecoms industry now encompasses a far broader portfolio including connectivity, hosted solutions and software-based applications," noted Booker. "The lines between the telecoms and IT sectors are becoming increasingly blurred. Comms companies need to diversify and provide data and voice services."

The acquisition of Dataflow Communications by 9 Group in 2011 provided a significant capability boost to its Billie billing platform, which was acquired by 9 when it bought Club Communications two years earlier. According to Head of Billing Nick Jarrett



**Nick Jarrett**

**I am excited about the possibilities that Machine Learning could bring to the billing industry.**

9's managed billing service continues to evolve and staff training is key to matching end user and regulatory billing requirements with new technology.

"We invest time every month training our managed billing service team to develop a broader understanding of regulatory changes, commercials, best practices and new product technologies," he stated. "This enables us to provide partners with a range of solutions to complex problems. For example, we're seeing more demand for subscription-based models, IT services and complex hosted and mobile bundling, while balancing the need to make things more secure and effortless."

Regulations relating to NGCS, GDPR, mobile capping, domestic reverse charge VAT and auto compensation (to name a few) are disruptive, noted Jarrett, and just one reason why high levels of flexibility in billing is key. The critical importance of flexibility is also reflected in

the squeeze on margins as competition focuses more on value over price. "It's important for partners to compete based on each customer's needs, whether that be tailoring what the invoice looks like and how it's presented or integrating with CRM or marketing platforms," he explained. "Furthermore, as the telecoms and IT markets continue to merge scalable subscription-based services will grow in popularity, creating a requirement for communication and billing providers to offer API access into provisioning portals to ensure that billing integration is maximised."

9 has offered a hosted billing service for over 10 years and to boost its capabilities the company now leverages Microsoft Azure's capacity for on-demand scaling. "Ease of onward billing now forms part our development roadmap for all new technologies at 9, and I am excited about the possibilities that Machine Learning could bring to the billing industry," added Jarrett.

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# Preparing for exit is key

ICT businesses looking to exit must invest in a comprehensive preparation process to secure the best value on transaction day, writes Duncan Gregory, Transaction Director of mid-market M&A advisory firm Evolution Capital.

**P**reparation for exit is clearly key to success, but how many company owners genuinely practice this when embarking on selling their business? We see so many companies in the TMT sector make the decision to sell only to be disappointed after a long and arduous sale process in which the final price has been chipped again and again by savvy buyers. Selling your company is arguably the most important event of your business career. It would be foolish not to prepare fully for it.

#### Where to start?

The sales process is a multi-event sequence and requires learning a multitude of technical skills and abilities. While most entrepreneurs have plenty of passion and commitment it is unlikely that they will become an expert in the different aspects of selling a business, or even assemble a team that can deliver such a multi-skilled process. A first step would be to find the right M&A advisory firm with an in-depth knowledge of the sector to take you through the entire process.

#### When to sell and who to?

When to sell is a personal decision. Some entrepreneurs have a target value in mind,

others might have to sell for personal reasons. There is no right or wrong time, as long as your business is ready for sale it will attract buyers. The TMT sector continues to expand and there are plenty of mid-market players looking to merge with like-minded businesses. Knowledge of the sector and the personalities behind it is paramount as due diligence advisers are known to be canny.

#### Get fit for sale

This can take time. Learning new skills is always hard, and only with total commitment to trial and error do we acquire new abilities to a reasonable standard. All the events or phases in a sales process are crucial. A platform of quality information and reporting needs to be designed and populated so the business will score the highest points through each event, and most importantly arm business owners with the right tools to defend buyer investigations in the transaction phase. Business owners who are determined to achieve maximum value must understand a buyer's perspective of their individual propositions, strengths and weaknesses, before embarking on value improvement.



Duncan Gregory

## We see so many companies in the TMT sector make the decision to sell only to be disappointed after a long and arduous sale process

#### Strategic review

A full strategic review of your business is crucial. Most companies will want to raise KPI performance before populating an information memorandum template. It is critical for business owners to improve these metrics and remove any obstacles to a sale. Sale processes that do not commence with a strategic review, that have no robust due diligence platform to support the process through to completion, nor commit to a value improvement program from the beginning, are unlikely to achieve maximum value at transaction.

Simply squeezing your business into a template to attract offers without any bespoke analysis and metric training is not an

option. In fact, research by Evolution Capital has found the biggest challenge facing a business ill-prepared for the sales process is not the lack of reasonable offers, it is achieving a value at transaction that has any semblance to the value agreed when entering exclusivity with a buyer.

#### Start early

Most processes lose more value than they gain in price maximisation through marketing and negotiation than they do in the period between signing heads and entering exclusivity to completion. Why not enter that phase in full knowledge that your business is fighting fit? It is not uncommon to see reductions of over 20 per cent achieved by competent buyers

with specialist advisors. During due diligence, difficulties often arise with defending claims made in the company information memorandum document and this generally points to a lack of preparation in the beginning and due provision for specialist guidance in the final phase.

#### Professional advice

While brokers claim expertise with transactions, many lack the experience or fail to commit these expensive resources in the final phase of the project. Business models heavily contingent on success require high levels of transactions, which in turn necessitates resources being spread too thinly to deliver outstanding outcomes for shareholders. In many cases, the need for experienced transaction support is critically delivered over a demanding four week period, when business owners are most challenged to defend value. Our experience is that a successful mid-market business sale absorbs many hours of professional advice much earlier in the process, typically between 500 to 1,000 hours of professional advice. Of this at least 30 per cent is set aside for preparation.

#### Transaction day

It can all still fall apart if you don't have the right team around you. While training and preparation are of equal importance to achieving ultimate success in a sales process, all can still be lost at the final crucial moment. A good M&A advisory organisation will manage the arduous transaction process, field questions and deliver the right information to buyers, ensuring the right price is achieved. ■



**FINAL ENTRY DEADLINE 5pm, March 11th**

# Don't miss the chance to reward your 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)

Sponsors ready to reward teams



**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."



**NEIL WILSON - VIRTUAL 1**  
 "The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards are a standout diary in the diary. It is a great opportunity for Sales and Marketing teams to reflect on the last 12 months, and for the Channel to celebrate those who have truly excelled. I jumped at the chance to sponsor the Reseller Sales Team (£7.5m+) award. It's a hotly contested segment and one we work closely with, so being part of paying tribute to those teams was very important for us."



**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 **Sarah Baker** on **01895 454476**; email **sbaker@bpl-business.com**

**Enter now at [www.cdsalesawards.com](http://www.cdsalesawards.com)**

# Lekerman's next steps

In this era of cloud growth and consolidation entrepreneurs and innovation are rampant. Enter TIG CEO Des Lekerman...

**W**atford-based TIG began its commercial life as The Internet Group in 2001 – a small start-up with two staff. It soon built a reputation for providing top notch IT support to companies across Europe and has since expanded its expertise into a much wider arena. Lekerman joined TIG in 2013 when he acquired a majority stake in the business and took control of its strategic direction, introducing data analytics and cybersecurity as core go-to-market services, and forging a partnership with Microsoft for the Azure platform which TIG customises using its own IP to build industry specific solutions. Late last year the company entered the Global Top 100 of Public Cloud Service Providers.

TIG's transformational acquisition of netConsult in January strengthens its presence and capabilities in the financial services sector, particularly in security and monitoring. "The acquisition is another step towards our goal of becoming the UK's primary cloud services provider for medium sized UK businesses," stated Lekerman. "We intend to extend netConsult's expertise to other customers who are now looking at security as a major area of investment, especially with the new rules and regulations that came into force last year.

Most organisations feel exposed by having little or no security and this is an area where TIG can step in to provide support."

The acquisition of netConsult is not Lekerman's first big foray into the financial services industry. Early in his career he spent two years in Chicago learning how to trade commodities. But in the late 1980s the market crashed so he returned to the UK. Unable to find a similar position in financial services Lekerman went into computer sales for a local firm in Manchester. A year later he decided to strike out on his own and with a colleague started up Eurodata which grew to £30 million revenue with over 400 customers on its books. In 2011 the company was sold to a competitor, which was later sold on to Capita.

In preparation for TIG's next phase of growth Lekerman has formalised the Board with the appointments of Non-Exec Chairman Mark Howling (who was formerly Pulsant's CEO) and Non-Exec Corporate Finance Director Ronnie Smith (ex-Six Degrees Group). The company has also put in more controls, compliancy and processes, all of which helped to attract a £6 million funding boost from BGF.

The business generates circa £12.1 million revenue, has 90



Des Lekerman

staff and is seeking EBITDA growth of 15 per cent organically and has plans to execute further acquisitions to broaden its capabilities in cloud provision and professional services. Target customers are forward thinking mid-market companies that will consume large amounts of data and understand how technology can drive efficiencies, enable faster decisions and create new revenue streams.

## Innovation

"The projects we have delivered are on the cutting edge of innovation, including machine learning, automation and identity and access management," said Lekerman. "We have a great team who are able to appreciate the distinct requirements of each client and adapt the technology to work for their specific needs. I am passionate about technology and how it can help people work smarter, communicate better and improve lives."

## Cloud adoption is still in its infancy but we anticipate the market to scale significantly over the next 12 months

In 2016 TIG really got to work on Microsoft cloud and built solutions for full cloud and hybrid, and went on to achieve Microsoft Gold Partner status for Cloud Platform and Cloud Productivity. "We have built a data analytics practice and developed easy-to-consume solutions that, through our microservices layer, provide intelligence and dashboards which enable customers to interpret trends quickly,"

commented Lekerman. "One of the biggest challenges in business is the ongoing growth of data, and having the ability to present this data with intelligence enables our customers to make faster decisions. There are many companies out there that are able to offer managed IT services, but our strategy is to stand out from the crowd by providing technical solutions designed to improve overall business performance. The market has grown substantially over the last year and we have seen 1,000 per cent growth in our cloud services.

"Cloud adoption is still in its infancy but we anticipate the market to scale significantly over the next 12 months as companies look to refresh their on-premise services. We see more and more demand for Platform as a Service and less infrastructure, although there will always be connectivity requirements as well as security, identity and access management." ■







Partner  
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Thursday 28 March

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Book your place today at  
[talktalkbusiness.co.uk/roadshow2019](http://talktalkbusiness.co.uk/roadshow2019)

# Time to gear up for 5G

In taking local 5G trial sites and setting them on a national stage we appreciate more fully the powerful narrative of a pending mobile-first world and why it would be a great miscalculation to underestimate the imminent impact of 4G's transformational reincarnation and not keep customers up to speed right now, according to Onecom CEO Ben Dowd.

**B**y keeping customers fully informed on the progress and implications of 5G roll outs ICT providers will be among the first to unleash this technology on a customer base primed for an upgrade. Many of Onecom's customers already see themselves participating to some degree in a 5G experience, asking questions that require firm answers. "Our customers want to understand how 5G will impact their business," stated Dowd. "They are especially keen to know when 5G devices will become available and at what cost.

"They are also asking whether it's best to wait a while before they upgrade, recognising it will take time to roll out and for the big manufacturers to launch their mass market offerings. Customers ask if they will have to swap out existing 4G devices and whether interoperability issues will

occur. From a productivity perspective they want to know what more 5G can do over 4G and how it can make them more efficient. We don't have all the answers right now but managing expectations and keeping an open dialogue is a key area of focus for us."

5G is already in trial with the UK networks and expected to start rolling out this year, so Onecom has wasted no time in making 5G plans with key partners, particularly the networks and device manufacturers, to understand timescales and roll out schedules. "We learnt a great deal from the upgrades from 2G to 3G and 3G to 4G, and we'll use that experience to help us plan and prepare for 5G," added Dowd. "In this, the Government must ensure that regulation enables the networks to access dark fibre to deliver 5G backhaul. This will greatly increase the likelihood of achieving densification in cities."



Ben Dowd

## Our customers are keen to understand what 5G will offer them and how it will impact their business

In their move from 4G to 5G many businesses will have for the first time an opportunity to become 'mobile-first'. "5G will have a huge impact, driving convergence in communications and IT and much greater collaboration," noted Dowd. "5G, like other previous technology upgrades, will be more about the outcomes and use cases it delivers rather than the technology. Solutions sold in this way, with clear commercial and end user benefits, will help drive

acceleration. Continued investment in the UK tech sector will also be necessary to drive adoption at pace."

### Readiness

The UK is recognised as one of the top 10 countries in terms of readiness to roll out 5G, along with China, South Korea, the US, Japan, Germany, France, Canada, Russia and Singapore. That said, there are challenges to overcome such as the current lack of viable fibre backhaul for small cells which enable

densification in large towns and cities, noted Dowd. "There have been great lessons from the roll out of 4G which will be replicated with 5G," he said. "There are likely to be additional requirements for the provision of a broader range of products and services."

5G is also a big opportunity for wireless operators to broaden their portfolio of services and grow data usage. "We expect to see IoT opportunities proliferate with a further explosion of connected things and more immersive experiences, whether that's in entertainment through VR or in the medical profession where 5G enables information and data to be transmitted with no latency," said Dowd. "The key for operators is to make sure increased demand for data and new digital services are monetised and customer expectations on the value these services bring is clearly managed. There is a big reliance on the networks to articulate the 'art of the possible' and enable the channel to work with end customers to help them understand the opportunities.

"The advent of 5G feels like the convergence of strands that have been coming for some years – IoT and smart cities, truly converged comms and a mobile-first approach. As 5G is deployed Onecom will need to work closely with the networks to understand roll out plans so expectations can be set for customers who will have their estates split possibly between 3G, 4G and 5G. Clearly, the benefits of 5G will determine the pace at which those businesses upgrade from older technologies." ■





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IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE  
BUSINESS AND PROPERTY COURTS OF ENGLAND AND WALES  
INSOLVENCY AND COMPANIES LIST (ChD)

No. CR-2018-009151

IN THE MATTER OF  
ROYAL & SUN ALLIANCE INSURANCE PLC

- and -

IN THE MATTER OF  
THE MARINE INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED

- and -

IN THE MATTER OF  
MERCANTILE INDEMNITY COMPANY LIMITED

- and -

IN THE MATTER OF  
THE FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS ACT 2000

Notice is hereby given that on 17 January 2019 an Application was made under section 107 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (the "Act") in the High Court of Justice of England and Wales by the above-named Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance plc ("RSAI") and The Marine Insurance Company Limited ("MIC") (together the "Transferors") and Mercantile Indemnity Company Limited (the "Transferee") for Orders:

- (1) Under section 111 of the Act sanctioning a scheme (the "Scheme") for:
  - (a) the transfer to the Transferee of certain direct and reinsurance business of the Transferors, namely certain UK-based commercial general insurance business; and
  - (b) the making of ancillary provisions under section 112 of the Act for implementing the Scheme.

The following documents are available and may be obtained by any person free of charge by downloading them from the website ([www.rsagroup.com/RSATransfers](http://www.rsagroup.com/RSATransfers)) or by making a request by email to [RSATransfers@equiniti.com](mailto:RSATransfers@equiniti.com), or in writing at RSA Insurance Group, 20 Fenchurch Street, London EC3M 3AU (Attention: Jonathan Colson) or by calling the Scheme helpline on +44 121 415 0966 at any time until the making of an order sanctioning the Scheme:

- a copy of the Scheme document;
- a copy of the report on the terms of the Scheme prepared by an independent expert in accordance with Section 109 of the Act;
- a communications pack, which includes a statement setting out the terms of the Scheme and a summary of the independent expert's report.

Anyone who has any questions regarding the proposed Scheme or would like further information should contact us using the above details.

The specific nature of the transferred business differs between RSAI and MIC, but in both cases constitutes part of their respective commercial general insurance businesses.

It is intended that the Scheme will transfer from RSAI to the Transferee certain commercial general insurance policies that include liability cover and that were either: (i) written by or on behalf of RSAI prior to 2006, or (ii) written by or on behalf of another insurer prior to 2006 and transferred to RSAI prior to 7 February 2017. Policies that relate exclusively to marine or motor liabilities, or were

underwritten by a branch or agency incorporated or domiciled outside the UK are excluded from the Scheme, as are certain other specifically excluded policies.

It is intended that the Scheme will transfer from MIC to the Transferee the following categories of commercial general insurance policies that were either written: (i) by or on behalf of MIC, or (ii) written by or on behalf of another insurer and transferred to MIC prior to 7 February 2017:

- (A) all marine energy policies written prior to 2004;
- (B) all other marine policies written prior to 1997; and
- (C) all aviation policies written prior to 2009.

The Scheme will also transfer various business contracts from each of RSAI and MIC to the Transferee, including all or part of certain outwards reinsurance contracts. The business of the Transferors, comprising policies and business contracts, and associated assets and liabilities, that is to be transferred to the Transferee by the Scheme forms the "Transferred Business".

The Scheme will transfer the Transferors' rights and obligations under the commercial general insurance policies forming part of the Transferred Business (referred to as the "Transferred Policies") without alteration to Mercantile. The holders of the Transferred Policies (and any persons entitled to beneficial rights under such Transferred Policies) will, with effect from 00.01 BST on 1 July 2019 (or at such other later time and/or such other date as the Transferors and Transferee may agree) (the "Effective Date"), become entitled, to the exclusion of any rights which they may have had against the Transferors under a Transferred Policy, to the same rights against the Transferee. Similarly, the holders of the Transferred Policies shall be liable to account to the Transferee for any further or additional premiums or other sums attributable or referable thereto, as and when they become due and payable. Responsibility for handling all claims under the Transferred Policies, which are currently being handled by, or on behalf of, the Transferors will transfer to the Transferee. The Transferee shall be entitled to any and all defences, claims, counterclaims and rights of set-off under the Transferred Policies, which would have been available to the Transferors prior to the Effective Date.

Subject to certain exclusions, at and with effect from the Effective Date, all assets and liabilities that are comprised in, arising from or in connection with the Transferred Business shall transfer to the Transferee. Various business contracts will also transfer so that they will become agreements between the Transferee and the relevant third party. The Scheme will be valid and binding on counterparties to such contracts notwithstanding any restriction on transfer or assignment contained in any such contract.

The Application is due to be heard at the High Court of Justice of England and Wales (High Court), 7 Rolls Buildings, Fetter Lane, London, EC4A 1NL on 13 June 2019. Any person who considers that he or she may be adversely affected by the Scheme has the right to make representations and/or to appear at the Court hearing. It is requested that any person intending to make representations (either in writing or by telephone) and/or appear at the hearing (either in person or using legal representation), please contact RSA on +44 121 415 0966 or in writing at the email address below as soon as possible and before 13 June 2019 to set out the nature of their representations. This will enable the Transferors and the Transferee to provide notification of any changes to the hearing and, where possible, to address any concerns raised in advance of the hearing. If the requested notice is not given, attendance at the Court hearing, either in person or using legal representation, will still be permitted.

Jonathan Colson  
RSA Insurance Group  
20 Fenchurch Street, London EC3M 3AU  
[RSATransfers@equiniti.com](mailto:RSATransfers@equiniti.com)

# A motion for the cloud

Three hosted comms providers put down a joint motion to place traditional voice and data resellers safely on the road to a cloud-based future.

Cloud comms proponents such as Xelion see little future in the traditional on-premise PBX market. Xelion observes that a number of major manufacturers have vacated the space in recent times, and argues that on-premise PBX systems will only be required in the large corporate enterprise sector. "SMEs are rapidly moving over to hosted solutions," stated Xelion UK Managing Director Dave Reynolds.

He observed that the pressure on customers to migrate to SIP or hosted voice is mounting as BT Wholesale will no longer accept orders for ISDN from 2020. "Many organisations will discover that their legacy on-premise PBX is not compatible with SIP and be unfit for purpose," added Reynolds. "This is a great sales opportunity for our partners."

Xelion's UK customer base has grown to 10,000 seats with a total base of over 140,000 users. Monthly growth is running at 2,500 to 3,000 users, and 90 per cent of Xelion users use the desktop app every business day. "Our principal focus is to achieve one million subscribers by the end of 2022 via channel partners," added Reynolds.

To speed things along Xelion provides its hosted telephony service free to channel partners, enabling them to familiarise themselves with the features and functions of the service so they can better communicate these to customers. Another key to help comms and IT resellers unlock hosted comms revenues is integration with other back office solutions. "This is why Xelion 7 has RESTful APIs allowing third party apps such as MS Exchange and Office 365 to be integrated seamlessly with the service," explained Reynolds. "This gives our partners the freedom to design bespoke solutions with best-of-breed apps instead of a one-size-fits-all service. By adding value our partners generate profit."

Reynolds also noted that there is still some hesitancy among IT support companies regarding their adoption of hosted telephony, but he observed that voice resellers have fully embraced the technology to the extent that many no longer sell on-premise PBX hardware. "Those IT support companies that are nervous about voice communications will find that deploying hosted telephony is much simpler than conventional PBX systems and requires far less after sales support, because configuring hosted



Paul Taylor

inception in 2005, is seeing growth across the board from SoHo to enterprise and Taylor expects high demand to accelerate as he ramps up the introduction of a range of applications from messaging to full UC, WebRTC and APIs from a growing range of companies. Late last year the company became Unify's only UK Cloud Service Provider and one of only three worldwide.

"Our main priorities are to get the product into our existing channel and Unify partners and to educate them on the differentiation between Circuit with OpenScape provided by a CSP," stated Paul Taylor, Sales & Marketing Director. "We will be launching Circuit as a standalone application which can be used as a UC add on to any on-premise telephone application."

## One reason why the majority of resellers are not moving to hosted models is a lack of mainstream providers

solutions can be done by the customer," added Reynolds.

### Simplification

TelcoSwitch Sales Director Paul Gibbs agrees that the key to helping comms and IT resellers unlock hosted comms revenues is to make it easy to adopt, understand, deploy and support. "This process creates and underpins partnerships rather than one dimensional transactional buy-sell relationships," he said. "Having a hosted proposition that keeps the traditional functions that the end user expects but can also morph into a collaborative tool is also important."

In Gibbs' experience most end users expect to see a hosted quote from a reseller and want to adopt an opex strategy. "The main point of hesitation for comms resellers is the effect of the opex model on their cashflow," he stated. "IT resellers have been more aligned to recurring revenues for a longer period of time and tend to be less hesitant about adopting these type of technologies. If resellers don't adopt they will be left with a base that is worth x1 if anything. Confidence is key."

Voiceflex, which has been a cloud voice carrier since its

Resellers seeking to establish a cloud partnership would be wise to take the long-term view, advises Taylor, who advocates 'mainstream' players as being key. "Not all hosted providers will survive in the long-term, so you need to ask yourself where your business will be if a provider stops trading," he said. "When the point arrives for a reseller to sell their business, will the potential purchaser be interested in an unknown or niche provider?"

"There seems to be a new hosted supplier launching each week. One reason why the majority of resellers are not moving to hosted models is a lack of mainstream providers. Most new hosted systems are license only and the reseller adds SIP trunking from their preferred supplier. This is all well and good until there's a problem." ■



# Revolution in EdTech

Now that the Department for Education has placed teacher training and support at the heart of its approach to EdTech, what specific requirements do tech providers need to address and solve? We asked Caroline Wright, Director General at the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA).



Caroline Wright

so that both schools and suppliers can learn from each other and improve education outcomes and commercial development successes in the future."

Recommendations on a peer-to-peer level are highly effective in the education market, so forums such as those advanced by BESA and the DfE could help to increase the number of workforce advocates, and through word of mouth spread news about new tech products across all levels of the education sector. "We are seeing a hugely innovative range of time-saving EdTech solutions and digital curriculum resources coming onto the market to address skills shortages in schools," added Wright.

"It is important that all stakeholders are aware of these. Looking ahead, using AI effectively to help individual pupil outcomes is an exciting development area, although it will be important to have a public discussion about the ethics and governance of AI use in education sooner rather than later to ensure that the data and information provided by AI is always used for the good of individual learners.

"Resolving issues like the implications of AI on education is just one aspect of my job that I love. There are different challenges and opportunities every day. One week I could be leading a trade mission of British companies at an international education conference; the next week I could be working with member companies on a white paper outlining opportunities and concerns on a particular piece of Government policy. Every day holds something new." ■

Last summer Education Secretary Damian Hinds set out the main drivers of EdTech and challenged the tech industry to launch an education revolution in schools, colleges and universities. He called on the UK's tech sector to help tackle the five biggest issues facing schools and classroom teachers today and create a step-change in education, improving teaching and reducing workload. The five key areas of investment that will drive the EdTech 'revolution' are improvements to teaching practices, assessment processes, teacher training and development, administration processes and solutions that enable lifelong learning.

For its part, BESA is the industry body for the UK's education resources providers. It offers research, business support and advice to British companies selling educational supplies to schools in the UK and internationally. "My role covers all types of educational resources used in schools, as well as EdTech," explained Wright. "My

previous work as a journalist and communications specialist within Westminster in both the trade and education departments means I have experience of the education field and the commercial market."

Wright noted that there is an unprecedented shortage of teachers in the UK and many other countries. "When you consider the pressures of workload and administration on teacher time you can see the potential of technology to help them make the best use of their limited time resource, and also help bring expertise to areas where there may be a skills shortage in subjects such as science and mathematics," stated Wright.

#### Get hands-on

Given the education sector's spending power, how best can ICT providers catch the attention of stakeholders in this vertical? According to Wright, it is important for tech providers to be part of the CPD solution, offering training and hands-on support to help teachers understand how to get the best use out of their products

and solutions. "Training and support isn't a 'one-off at the time of purchase' issue, it's ongoing and there are lots of great providers in the market who work alongside schools and colleges to provide that support," she said.

BESA's core aims are two-fold – to help support the commercial success of British education suppliers and raise the quality of education outcomes. To advance its mission BESA is partnering with the DfE to stage a roadshow, called LearnED, to provide CPD training and showcase technology for schools. "We are also offering a new service called LendED which provides best practice case studies of innovative tech solutions and the opportunity for schools to try tech before they buy," added Wright.

She hopes that BESA's partnership with the DfE will help overcome one of the big challenges facing ICT providers to the education sector, which is the task of reaching the right person to talk to. "Teachers have huge pressures on their

**When you consider the pressures of workload on teacher time you can see the potential of technology to help them and bring expertise to areas where there may be a skills shortage**

time," reiterated Wright. "Effective use of the right kinds of technology can help save them time, but getting through to teachers when they are so busy can be a problem. The LearnED and LendED initiatives will help connect school leaders and teachers with industry

# Brexit: Whatever happens

**A**t the time of writing, politicians and civil servants on both sides of the English Channel were still to agree on the terms of Britain's exit from the EU. A deal could still be reached at the 11th hour, there could be a chaotic 'no deal' scenario, or the UK's departure could be delayed until later this year. There could even be another referendum for heaven's sake!

It is unlikely that the democratic result of the 2016 referendum will be overturned, so Brexit will happen in some shape or form. The question is: how will this tumultuous decision affect the ICT industry? Are we impervious to any future economic slowdown as a result?

Not many in the tech sector supported the UK's decision to leave the European Union with concerns focusing on a draining of talent and investment and an increase in friction around the flow of data and services. The remainers also believe that if the UK pulls out of the EU single market, we will no longer be party to agreements on freedom of movement, making it more difficult to hire tech specialists. There's also a fear that it will be harder to share data with EU countries.

Over 80 UK technology leaders have signed up as supporters of 'Tech For UK' to call on the Government to back a meaningful vote by Parliament, or the people, on the actual terms of Brexit which, again at the time of writing, now has the support of the Labour party. The group has written to Prime Minister Teresa May <https://techforuk.com/news/uk-tech-industry-letter-to-the-prime-minister/> saying EU withdrawal "will vastly increase friction in trade with the EU and impose significant and costly changes for the tech industry."

On the flip side, while demand for hardware products is declining, software and data services are being recognised as the main drivers of growth, together with cloud computing. Indeed the continued development of mobile apps and new technology are anticipated to drive the sector forward in coming years. And at the inaugural ICT Investment Forum last month we reported that the UK tech sector continues to outperform the rest of Europe and in 2018 attracted £6.3 billion in venture capital investment.

Moreover in London, the capital has once again maintained its position as the top destination in Europe for technology investment, gaining double the amount of investment than its closest rival, Berlin. In 2018, technology companies in London attracted £1.8 billion in venture capital funding, 72% of the total £2.5 billion pounds raised by UK tech businesses.

An overall economic slowdown post Brexit could prove most damaging, but as many commentators have observed, the ICT industry has survived recessions in the past and is well placed to do so again.



MARK SAUNDERS  
9 GROUP

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO GET A DEAL?

Essential. The uncertainty and anxiety induced by a no deal outcome will have a negative impact on business confidence and individual prosperity.

#### WILL A BREAKDOWN OF TRADE DEALS AFFECT YOU?

Maybe not directly in the immediate term, but a proportion of our customer base will certainly be impacted, while a reduction in seamless trade agreements makes no sense to me.

#### WILL YOUR MARGINS DECLINE POST BREXIT?

Whatever the outcome of the next few weeks, Brexit uncertainty is damaging for business. Decision making needs to become informed and liberated, or margins will eventually suffer if choking of the business landscape continues.

#### WILL BREXIT AFFECT STAFF RECRUITMENT?

Access to the widest possible pool of talent is a tremendous asset for a fast-growing business like 9, so any restrictions in that area are unwelcome.



BEN SUGDEN  
ABZORB

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO GET A DEAL?

We need to be pragmatic and plan for the UK Government being unable to finalise a deal. It is vital that UK businesses prepare for a possible "no-deal" - we can and will pick up the pieces.

#### WILL A BREAKDOWN OF TRADE DEALS AFFECT YOU?

Telecommunications is a robust sector with strong international ties both within and without the EU. We do not see a threat to our existing European partnerships.

#### WILL YOUR MARGINS DECLINE POST BREXIT?

The most difficult part of Brexit, for UK businesses, is the sense of uncertainty carried with it. Whilst we do not foresee our margins eroding, we will be keeping a close eye on our management information and will react accordingly.

#### WILL BREXIT AFFECT STAFF RECRUITMENT?

By working closely with our universities, we are able to nurture the skilled workforce of tomorrow. Brexit will not change that. There are skilled staff available in the UK right now.



NIGEL DUNN  
JABRA

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO GET A DEAL?

I think it's very important - UK businesses require stability, so they can accurately plan and make investments, to continue to expand and be profitable.

#### WILL A BREAKDOWN OF TRADE DEALS AFFECT YOU?

Potentially. We obviously hope that won't happen but as we do not know the full effects yet, due to the large amount of uncertainty about Brexit generally, it's hard to tell how this will affect us in the future.

#### WILL YOUR MARGINS DECLINE POST BREXIT?

So far, even from what little we know about the final Brexit deal, from our own opportunity pipeline and forecasts for the coming year we do not foresee any erosion of margins.

#### WILL BREXIT AFFECT STAFF RECRUITMENT?

Generally, we think that there's a strong talent pool of UK-based staff. However, if we want to increase our multi-lingual skilled staff, then we might see an impact if less EU-nationals come to the UK to work after Brexit.



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# ICT growth will continue



PAUL BURN  
NIMANS

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO GET A DEAL?

From a business perspective it would definitely be favourable – although the EU needs to be willing for a deal as well as the UK.

#### WILL A BREAKDOWN OF TRADE DEALS AFFECT YOU?

If there is a breakdown in trade deals, it could make a difference. But it's swings and roundabouts really. I think the time it will take to strike any deal leaves us in no man's land for now.

#### WILL YOUR MARGINS DECLINE POST BREXIT?

Profiteering could be a problem if prices go up which means we then have to pass those increases on. If prices go up and everyone in the chain passes those increases on then there is no margin erosion – although higher prices risk losing the sale altogether.

#### WILL BREXIT AFFECT STAFF RECRUITMENT?

I don't think it will have any impact on staff recruitment, certainly not in the foreseeable future.



AXEL KLOESSNER  
FONTEVO

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO GET A DEAL?

It is very important for a deal to be done to create stability. The UK is not going anywhere, and it means a lot in terms of commerce for the whole of Europe.

#### WILL A BREAKDOWN OF TRADE DEALS AFFECT YOU?

Some trade taxes may be applied but our SME focused solutions are at the right pricing for the UK and the rest of the world, so I don't see this as a major issue.

#### WILL YOUR MARGINS DECLINE POST BREXIT?

At this stage we don't know what the trade deal or no deal looks like so it will be a long time before we really know the true impact of Brexit across the world.

#### WILL BREXIT AFFECT STAFF RECRUITMENT?

We are a multi-cultural business and always have been and we recruit people from all over the world from Mexico to France, Germany and the UK.



BARRY EDWARDS  
SPLICECOM

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO GET A DEAL?

Even no deal is a deal. Tariffs on imports contribute to the public purse and take the pressure off the taxpayers. If we know the rules, we can work successfully within them. Indecision and uncertainty are the bigger challenges.

#### WILL A BREAKDOWN OF TRADE DEALS AFFECT YOU?

Most of our products are developed in England so our UK Channel and end-users are protected. Our Brexit immunity and exploitation plan, instigated in 2017, positioned us for faster UK and international growth, no matter what happens.

#### WILL YOUR MARGINS DECLINE POST BREXIT?

Just the opposite. Tariff arrangements affect less than 20% of our gross margins. So, any tariffs on imports would have an insignificant effect on SpliceCom.

#### WILL BREXIT AFFECT STAFF RECRUITMENT?

I don't think so. SpliceCom doesn't look for big brand certified applicants, but prioritises candidates' attitude, aptitude and skills. We employ great team players, developing their specialist skills and increasing their market value.



JUSTIN BLAINE  
NTA

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO GET A DEAL?

I think it is vitally important as this enables politicians and business leaders alike to start to plan for the future. A no deal Brexit would deliver uncertainty and that is not good for the economy.

#### WILL A BREAKDOWN OF TRADE DEALS AFFECT YOU?

I think every business in every vertical sector will be affected, however we have the advantage in the ICT world to deliver cost savings and drive efficiencies with technology, therefore I would envisage this only to be short term.

#### WILL YOUR MARGINS DECLINE POST BREXIT?

No not at all, we have the ISDN turn off in 2025 and the majority of the market still need to adopt a VoIP solution, therefore if we focus on this then great margins and growth can still be achieved.

#### WILL BREXIT AFFECT STAFF RECRUITMENT?

Potentially, however this is not a major concern of ours, finding the right people with the right skills in all areas of our businesses is always a challenge, therefore I do not think Brexit will detrimentally alter this.



VINCENT DISNEUR  
UNION STREET

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO GET A DEAL?

I don't really accept the media hysteria surrounding no deal, but a deal with a period of transition might be best for business. I'm positive about the whole thing either way.

#### WILL A BREAKDOWN OF TRADE DEALS AFFECT YOU?

We work with CPs in the UK, Europe and as far off as Australia, but this shouldn't affect how we supply them. Depending on the value of the pound, this could actually work in our favour!

#### WILL YOUR MARGINS DECLINE POST BREXIT?

If trading conditions worsen for comms providers this could impact profitability. However, the comms industry weathered the financial crash admirably. I'm confident that we and our partners can handle whatever Brexit has in store.

#### WILL BREXIT AFFECT STAFF RECRUITMENT?

Some of our most talented people are EU citizens. Staff churn is extremely low and coupled with the success of our apprenticeship and graduate recruitment programmes, we will continue to attract the best people.



ADRIAN BARNARD  
ALPHABETA

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO GET A DEAL?

It's fully urgent, however we must manage the media demands and be prepared for, quite literally, a last-minute completion.

#### WILL A BREAKDOWN OF TRADE DEALS AFFECT YOU?

No, the future is bright in any scenario for myself and I think any well managed solutions provider in our industry.

#### WILL YOUR MARGINS DECLINE POST BREXIT?

Sadly, I see a loss of confidence in the political establishment causing delays in investment. I am used to margin erosion and price declines in our highly competitive industry.

#### WILL BREXIT AFFECT STAFF RECRUITMENT?

No, hiring and retaining good staff and team building have always and will always be fun.

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# Pathfinding 5G roll outs

One technology alone stands to really transform the UK's comms landscape, the roll out of 5G, according to Gavin Jones, Managing Director for Mobile, Media & Broadcast at BT.

**T**he overwhelming weight of opinion on 5G is clear. It is that Britain's digital economy will be greatly enabled by 5G and that connectivity services to businesses and how they are delivered will be transformed. What is not yet so clear is the full nature of the potential challenges faced by operators when implementing this revolutionary technology.

A pathfinding project has been undertaken by BT's mobile arm, EE, which has switched on live 5G trial networks in Canary Wharf and across east London and is targeting speeds in excess of 1Gbps. EE has also named the first six UK cities where 5G services will be rolled out. "Our live 5G trials are helping us to better understand some of the main obstacles and challenges which will be faced by all operators when deploying 5G networks," said Jones.

One challenge is the need for rooftop sites to be significantly strengthened to carry the new 50kg 5G antennas, with some sites supporting up to three such antennas at a time. "The level of upgrade work required on rooftop sites can often cause delays

in obtaining planning permission and require repeat visits, meaning multiple access requests to landlords and building owners," added Jones. "The location of 5G antennas also needs to stay within the guidelines for public exposure to power output, meaning added complications around the positioning and location of antennas to ensure these limits are not exceeded."

The move to 5G, says Jones, will spark a big shift in the number of planning and consent applications needed in urban areas, which is already constrained by red tape at a local level. "The current concessions model around the use of street furniture in urban areas when deploying small cells for 5G networks also acts as a barrier to investment, so we're keen to work with local authorities and other mobile operators to agree an alternative model," added Jones. "Here we welcome the Government's focus on removing barriers to 5G and fibre deployment through the DCMS Barrier Busting taskforce."

This all means that mobile operators will need to continue to sweat their 4G investments while also



Gavin Jones

## As the roll out of 5G progresses we'll begin to see increasingly widespread deployment of wireless and fixed wireless networks

preparing for the introduction of and gradual roll out of 5G services across the UK. "5G will not replace 4G, but will add to the network, allowing customers to be connected to both at the same time," noted Jones.

### City roll outs

As well as its six nominated cities – London, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Belfast, Manchester and Birmingham – EE plans to roll out 5G services to a further 10 cities once the initial six are up and running. These implementations will no doubt benefit from the trial

runs currently on the go. "Our 5G trials are helping us to better understand how the technology performs over a live network as well as informing the shape of our 5G propositions," stated Jones.

BT's 5G services for businesses will focus initially on providing faster mobile data speeds and more capacity, explained Jones. "This will allow us to deliver more connections and richer services to businesses than we do today," he added. "We see the future being about how multiple access

technologies across fixed, mobile and wireless can be bound together by an intelligent software-driven common infrastructure to deliver a seamless customer experience. It's here that we see the biggest opportunity for BT, its customers and the channel – in building a truly integrated smart network combining fixed, mobile and Wi-Fi."

The benefits of 5G to businesses in terms of latency, speed, reliability and volume will be a step change from where we are with 4G, although the two networks will be complementary. "But it's fair to say that as the roll out of 5G progresses we'll begin to see increasingly widespread deployment of wireless and fixed wireless networks, with business customers taking advantage of faster speeds, lower latency and greater capacity and reliability," noted Jones.

"We may also see 5G shake up the market in terms of the tariffs and pricing on offer. For instance, business customers may well ask their provider to supply 5G wireless Ethernet solutions instead of fixed Ethernet for rapid time to market or combined 5G/fixed services with compute or security as part of the base service. This, combined with wider technology convergence such as OTT, cloud and the IoT will enable us to provide our customers with technology which is bespoke to their business and their customers. How the industry can offer these services in a flexible and cost-efficient way that allows customers to provide innovative solutions will need new thinking, a big effort and investment. This is a challenge we will take on." ■



# 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.

The advent of 5G super-fast connectivity will fuel more exponential growth and create huge opportunities for resellers to provide an increased range of mobile, IoT and UC solutions to their customers.

Now is the time to ensure your mobile communications and IoT offerings are fit for purpose and your business is poised for growth.

Margin in Mobile is the new channel event that will provide resellers with the knowledge and understanding of the new margin opportunities that now exists in the mobile solutions landscape.

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During one day of education and networking, you will meet a range of mobile and IoT operators, service providers, vendors and distributors all expert at helping you launch into or grow existing mobile revenues.

## The agenda for the day is as follows:

- 09.30: Anton Le Saux, Strategic Telecoms Leader – Zest 4**  
Subject/themes: IoT; advantages of Secure Sim and Data management platforms/multi network propositions; maximising and monetising end-user relationships.
  - 10.00: Roan Pratt, Head of Sales Product and/or Matt Worboys, Head of Channel — Gamma**  
Subject/themes: How to be disruptive with mobile networks; service differentiation (how to be different); fixed mobile convergence; SMS.
  - 10.30: Mark Curtis-Wood, Head of Networks Division, Nimans followed by EE channel spokesperson (TBC).**  
Subject/themes: The potential of 5G; the 'mobile' PBX.
  - 11.00: Coffee break**
  - 11.15: Mike Van Bunnens – Managing Director, Comms 365**  
Subject/themes: Mobile Data security and the opportunities for higher margins this offers; Software Defined Mobile data; how businesses can incorporate Mobile Data into their core networks; bonded technology; QoS over Mobile Data; adding value to fixed line services.
  - 11.45: Daisy Mobile (speaker TBC)**  
Subject/themes: Differentiation in market for end users; mobile bill limits; Daisy's package of added-value offers including billing.
  - 12.15: David Nelson, Services Director – TechData and Graeme Good, Head of Indirect Channel B2B– Samsung**  
Subject/themes: The next mobile economy; how subscription models can offer lifetime device management and profitable growth for resellers.
  - 12.45: Dan Cunliffe, Managing Director - Pangea**  
Subject/themes: Mobile World Congress report on trends in market; revenue opportunities in IoT with real-world examples; 'Intelligent Connectivity' solutions.
  - 13.15: Lunch**
  - 14.00: Managed 1-2-1 meetings sessions**
  - 18.00: Delegate Express check in**
  - 19.30: Pre-dinner drinks**
  - 20.00: Networking dinner & entertainment**
- All the above is provided FREE to qualified delegates.**

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## MiM sponsors line up to meet new partners

 Gold sponsor	<p>"We want to understand the challenges facing the reseller community. By supporting Margin in Mobile, we aim to inform the channel about the opportunity to drive incremental annuity revenue afforded by Cloudcell Connect."</p> <p><b>KEVIN BOYLE – CLOUDCELL</b></p>	 Gold sponsor
 Gold sponsor	<p>"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."</p> <p><b>MIKE VAN BUNNENS – COMMS 365</b></p>	 Gold sponsor
 Gold sponsor	<p>"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."</p> <p><b>LAUREN MCMANUS – DAISY WHOLESale</b></p>	 Gold sponsor
 Gold sponsor	<p>"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."</p> <p><b>MARK CURTIS-WOOD – NIMANS NETWORK SERVICES</b></p>	 Gold sponsor
 Silver sponsor	<p>"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."</p> <p><b>BERNIE MCPHILLIPS – PANGEA</b></p>	 Silver sponsor
 Mobile Zone sponsor	<p>"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."</p> <p><b>DAVID NELSON – TECHDATA</b></p>	 Silver sponsor
	<p>"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."</p> <p><b>ANTON LE SAUX – ZEST4</b></p>	
	<p>"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."</p> <p><b>STEVEN LOWE – GAMMA</b></p>	
	<p>"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."</p> <p><b>MARK RIDDELL – ABZORB</b></p>	
	<p>"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."</p> <p><b>WAIL SABBAGH – STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES</b></p>	
	<p>"With significant experience through some very large mobile and IoT clients, we will be on hand to provide advice and guidance on the intricacies of billing for these growth opportunities."</p> <p><b>SHAUN BODSWORTH – INFORM BILLING</b></p>	

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# Unlocking the cloud

Boom Comms Managing Director Nick Birtwistle makes a strong point – that many larger organisations display unease over whether to adopt the cloud model. Meanwhile, the tiger’s half out of the cage in the smaller business sector.

**E**ven with aggressive growth in cloud communications, IaaS and UCaaS, some larger businesses are still reluctant to adopt hosted technology, observes Birtwistle. “There is a lack of knowledge about how a cloud PBX works,” he stated. “Yet we see huge uptake among Soho and smaller companies. As businesses begin to transition to other areas of the cloud such as SaaS their confidence in wider cloud strategies, including cloud PBX, will grow.”

In stark contrast to their smaller counterparts larger organisations are clearly suffering inner demons of hesitancy, believes Birtwistle, who proposes to unclog the conduits of understanding and knowledge through the application of insight, which Boom is formerly advancing to the channel as Insight as a Service to help drive demand for hosted comms across all levels of the market. “A primary factor lies in providing clear information, insight and control over the resellers’ client environment,” he stated. “It is key for resellers to have control and feel secure about the services they sell, and know that the

platform they use is delivering quality and capability from day one – all delivered with disruptive pricing.”

To prevent a continuation of the aforementioned ‘default mode’ within a significant section of the reseller channel Boom has ramped up the volume on its proposition as a fully inter-operable UC solution supported by its Insight as a Service category and a focus on MiFID II and PCI compliance. “All these are key factors in our portfolio that provide the reseller with total control of their services on the platform,” stated Birtwistle.

### Clear insights

Basingstoke-based Boom prides itself on its pragmatism in achieving profitable hosted revenues based on strategies linked to insight and communication. And, according to Birtwistle, the power of taking something complex and making it simple for the channel remains a long underrated quality in what can be a confusing marketplace with new avenues to follow. “Introducing the concept of Insight as a Service enables our resellers to earn more via tapping into adjacent ICT markets,” he added.



Nick Birtwistle

## Still we come across resellers who have tried hosted but are uncomfortable about switching their client base over to fully hosted PBXs

“There also has to be clear communication, a way to take the pain away from resellers and help them with end user educational and promotional support. This could take the form of pre-sales support, regular communication and education, Dealer Days and creating customer focused examples on the benefits of cloud technology. Make it real and they’ll understand it.”

Birtwistle’s modus operandi shows us that we need tools and fresh concepts

to rebut cloud migration intransigence – gifts of insight towards all those who lack a cloud vision. “Still we come across resellers who have tried hosted but are uncomfortable about switching their client base over to fully hosted PBXs,” he explained. “Some of this is due to a lack of capacity among resellers to impart information and exert control over their environment. As more and more businesses adopt the cloud hosted model and the move to a more multi-collaborative unified approach accelerates,

resellers who don’t have additional cloud services in their proposition will surely suffer revenue declines.”

Just as certain is that in leveraging a strong and supportive wholesale proposition resellers could more readily permeate the cloud market and become a shop window for current and future ICT buyers. “Our real growth will come from having a disruptive proposition that is driven by our platform partners,” noted Birtwistle. “What drives demand is always quality, capability, insight, listening to partners, market forecasting, driving innovation, maintaining the agility to adapt and delivering on your promises.

“Forward looking resellers tell us they want a wholesale proposition with rich features such as advanced call recording and analytics, self-service usability to minimise support overheads and a single portal to manage everything. We have demonstrated how additional margin can be achieved by resellers when moving customers to the cloud and cross-selling other services that cloud-based technology unlocks.”

The requirement for forward planning is plain to see along with the writing on the wall, but it is a fact that a number of traditional resellers will continue to pay a pittance of attention to the spread of the hosted market evolving under their noses. “If traditional PBX resellers are not thinking that cloud is truly a commercial proposition then I would suggest they may want to rethink their value proposition for the next five years,” stated Birtwistle. ■







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# Boardroom reshuffle



Anthony Quinn (left) and Michael McMillan

IN PREPARATION for the next phase of its growth plan Glasgow located Silver Cloud has restructured its senior management team and hired Michael McMillan as Managing Director. McMillan takes over from company founder Anthony Quinn who's assumed the CEO role. Investor Steve Smith has been appointed Chairman. "We now have the right structure in

place to scale locally and expand within the UK," stated Smith. "The next phase of our development will involve acquisitions as we increase our geographical reach and the range of services we offer to clients." Quinn added: "Michael will be a key part of everything we do. His experience in IT support will be particularly important as we intend to expand significantly in that area."

# Area boost for Synergi

GATESHEAD-based Synergi's presence in the London and south east area will be more strongly felt following the appointment of Declan Doran as Technology Solutions



Declan Doran

Consultant for the region. He brings 15 years technology experience to the role especially in the Microsoft SharePoint collaboration and process automation space.

Synergi Managing Director Peter Joynson said: "We will continue to invest in a skilled team as we look to bolster national operations, notably in the south east region. Declan has a great understanding of our industry and, importantly, business process and collaboration tools. It's an exciting time for us. We performed well in 2018 and have ambitious plans for a further 30 per cent growth in 2019."

Synergi was established in 2013 and is set to hit £2.5 million revenues within the next 12 months.

## Also on the move...



William Scully

CLOUD telephony provider Xelion's UK channel approach has been boosted by the hire of former TFM Networks R&D chief William Scully as Operations Director. Scully is responsible for all support and operations including the on-boarding

of new partners. He brings over 10 years ICT industry experience in a career that includes stints at Interoute, Easynet and Griffin. Xelion UK Managing Director Dave Reynolds stated: "Will plays a crucial role in how we enhance the on-boarding process for new partners and support them through the initial learning curve. He will also be key in identifying strategic partnerships to enhance the Xelion product offering."

UNION Street Technologies has appointed Jonny Rae as BD Manager reporting to Head of Sales and Marketing



Jonny Rae

Vincent Disneur. Rae's previous experience includes a four year stint as an Account Manager for a wholesaler of comms and utility services. Disneur said: "With a great reputation, product knowledge and contacts

across the ICT channel Jonny will be an asset to our sales team." Rae added: "This is a fantastic opportunity for me to work with a creative and innovative team, with a view to extending Union Street's proposition into new revenue streams."

# Reid starts a new chapter



James Reid

WESTCON'S designation as Mitel's only UK distributor with Authorised Training Partner status has been supported by the hire of a pre-sales specialist, James Reid, who brings 13 years telecoms

engineering experience with a particular focus on Mitel, especially the MiVoice Office product.

"These are fast moving times in the world of UCC and, with Mitel back in the channel, partners can fast-track their ambitions through our end-to-end Mitel capabilities," stated Reid.

Westcon's Mitel Business Manager Barry Langmaid added: "James is a real boost to our Mitel pre-sales and solution building team through his in-depth understanding of the technology and Mitel's organisation." The Westcon Academy is Mitel's exclusive training provider for EMEA and APAC delivering Mitel certified technical training.

COLT has ramped up its strategy to help MNOs get more out of its IQ Network following the appointment of Mark Gilmour as Head of Mobile Connectivity Solutions. He brings 20-plus years industry experience to the role and joins from Ciena where he was the Senior Advisor for Product Line Management Cellular and Wireless. Prior roles include stints at Three, Ericsson and Hutchison.

# Vapour pulls in account leader



Alec Stephens

AS PART of its preparations for a 50-plus per cent revenue hike this year Vapour Cloud has appointed Alec Stephens as Account Director. He brings more than 15 years experience in the tech sector and began his career as an inbound contact centre agent, progressing through telemarketing and account executive roles. It was during a stint at Virgin Media that Stephens first worked for Tim Mercer, CEO of Vapour Cloud. Stephens joined the Yorkshire-based company from Exponential-e where he was an Account Director. Mercer said: "I have first-hand experience of Alec's knowledge, tenacity and approach to customer service, and it is exactly this level of acumen that I look for in our colleagues."



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## COMMS PAGES

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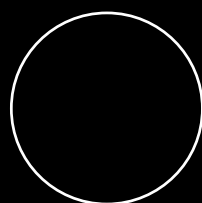


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New



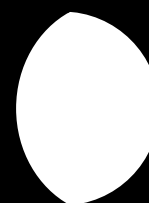
Young



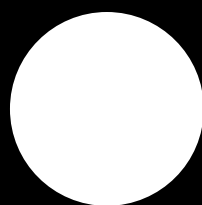
Waxing Crescent



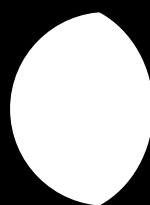
Waxing Quarter



Waxing Gibbous



Full



Waning Gibbous



Waning Quarter



Waning Crescent



Old