

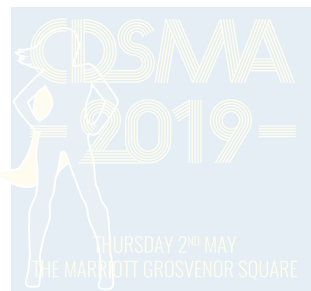


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Why it's time to
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Click to open Industry lacking strategic clarity

CONNECTIVITY should underpin Britain as a cradle of digitalisation but confusion continues to challenge the Government's Digital Britain agenda.

SPECIAL REPORT

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"There are many unanswered questions and we've got to have guidance," she urged. "We provide our own infrastructure and our vision is heavily dependent on us knowing the UK connectivity roadmap."

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Ben Knights, Head of Product Commercial at 9 Group, commented: "We are formulating a strategy to educate resellers on what this journey will look like because it is extremely complicated. There isn't one answer. We're suddenly going to have different products in different areas and there will be more competition.

"You need to make sure you've got the journey mapped out because what happens today will have relevance for the next 10 years." See page 34

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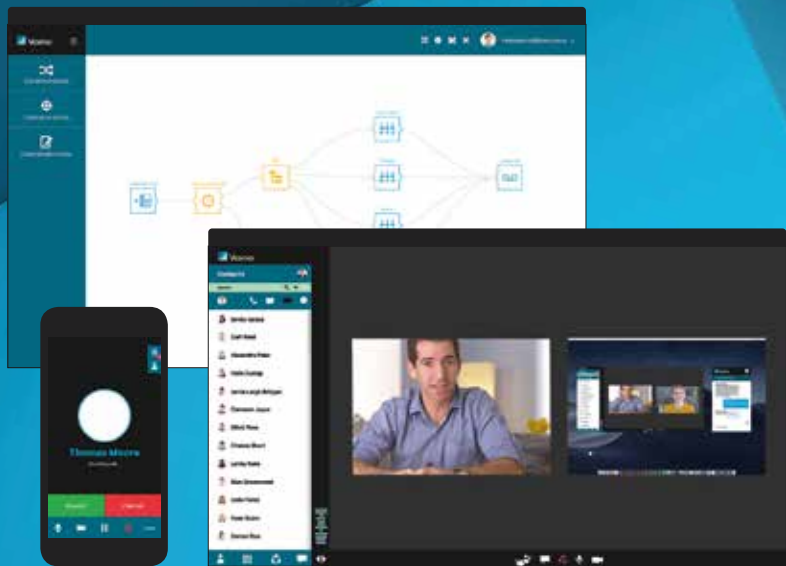


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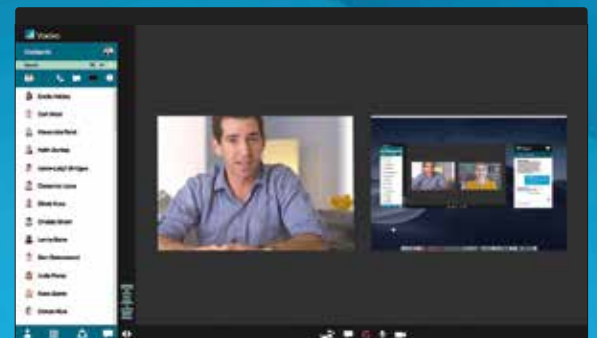
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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE ICT sector is no place for those with even a minor tendency to sit on their hands. It never has been and never will be. The difference now is that there has probably not been such a great need to sit up, take note of the fast spinning market and make a decision

to jump off or roll with it. The incentives to grab the bull by the horns are many and varied and achieving growth in new markets may be far less of a challenge than perceived, especially when you take into account the help that is on hand from suppliers ready and willing to fast-start resellers in the mobile arena, for example.

Last month's Margin in Mobile symposium, our first dedicated channel event for all things mobile, provided a platform for delegates to witness and assess a whole range of business opportunities, many of which sit under their noses already. But the opportunity has to be recognised. In this, the event was an eye opener and prompted delegates to take action and secure their future share of the ever growing mobile marketplace (see page 30).

A Round Table discussion last month focused on another area of connectivity – the UK's infrastructure upgrade – and the primary theme that emerged from the debate was that now is the time for resellers to take action and educate clients about ISDN's demise, not only to avoid a more difficult discussion further down the line but also as a protective measure against rivals ready to swarm over traditional customer bases (see page 34).

The key messages to take away from these two events is that the market requires open eyes and ears at all times, and don't hesitate to take action in response to important market stimuli. It really is a case of first mover advantage.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• From the moment 4Sight Communications Managing Director Simon Turner established the business six years ago as a disrupter to the status quo rapid success was bound to come (p44).

FONtevo set for SME push



Alex Kloessner and CEO Christian Auerswald

GERMAN phone system maker Auerswald's UK channel building campaign – advancing under the international FONtevo brand and underpinned by its link-up with distributor SOS – stepped up a gear last month when the vendor's COO and International Business Director, Axel Kloessner, set out plans to snatch a big slice of the SME market from under the noses of established vendors.

FONtevo works with circa 16,000 resellers in Europe and despite its size and influence has retained what Kloessner says are 'family values', which he hopes will have the same positive impact on partner recruitment in the UK.

Speaking at the company's UK 'Accelerate your SME business' FONtevo partner day held at Mercedes Benz World in Surrey, Kloessner said: "We

are established, successful, and have a passion to succeed in the UK by working with partners who share our vision."

Kloessner says that FONtevo's blend of service and support in tandem with added value provided by SoS will enable resellers to give customers alternative VoIP solutions with a seamless upgrade to the cloud.

SOS MD Colin Hepher said: "Having visited FONtevo's manufacturing base, met its people and witnessed its processes, I am convinced resellers will benefit from a relationship."

"There are two million SMEs that need to transition from ISDN to VoIP before it's switched off, and FONtevo has the pedigree, solutions and back-up service they need."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE Plantronics and Polycom brands have been shelved in a revamp that follows the merger of the two companies (completed in July last year). The business will now be known as Poly, reflecting the definition 'many' and intended to denote the various audio and video solutions provided by Plantronics and Polycom. Amy Barzdukas, EVP and CMO, said: "Our new brand represents the many elements of our history that we bring together."

TWENTY of Pragma's top performing iPECS reseller partners were rewarded with a beachfront trip to Cape Town. Pragma's Sales & Marketing Director Will Morey enthused: "Cape Town was the perfect destination to recognise the outstanding growth of our best performing reseller partners."



In other Pragma news, a game of heads-and-tails held during its Partner Awards event (see p36) raised over £2,300 for Cancer Research and St Peter & St James Hospice, which cared for co-founder David George in his final days.

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COMMENT: HOW NICHE ARE YOU?



John Mckindland

VERTICAL markets are changing and resellers need to adapt and upskill to stay one step ahead of the competition. Take the retail sector for example which has been decimated due to various factors. Those operating in this arena need to be more dynamic and flexible to maximise revenue. The solutions for retail are evolving because the cost model is changing and

opportunities are shrinking. But all is not lost. With the advent of GDPR and PCI compliance resellers are having to become even more specialised in certain verticals. The key to success is upskilling and understanding what they can deliver in a particular marketplace. It's not an out-of-the-box solution but one they can put together and tailor for a customer. It could be a simple walkie-talkie for security, an IP phone or even a SIP phone or a tablet with all the collaboration tools available, instant communication and CRM integration, everything they need – from the very bottom end to the top end.

Recently I visited a company involved in DIY equipment where they have taken a fairly standard wallboard and had to bespoke it to deliver specialist call centre information. Together with us and the reseller we engaged with the software manufacturer to deliver exactly what they needed. We've deepened our reach to find more bespoke solutions for certain types of vertical.

The question I'm posing to resellers is, are they future fit to work in certain types of verticals? How consultative are they being with their supply chain to see what's available? Be more consultative with your supply chain. Understand the marketplace you want to be in and the parameters you can work within and what you might need to expand outside of those to grow your business. Be more niche and become more successful.

John Mckindland, Head of Solutions Sales, Nimans

Aerial Direct grabs developer IPCortex

FAREHAM comms provider Aerial Direct has snapped up software developer IPCortex, adding a ready-made channel and bolting on tech expertise that Aerial founder and CEO David Kilby says will boost his firm's capabilities in DX and UC&C. The financials of the deal were not disclosed.

"The acquisition is a major growth opportunity for both businesses, allowing us to expand our service offerings," he commented. "It also means that we are in a stronger position to support organisations through their digital transformation journey as they look to implement unified communication and collaboration solutions and drive efficiencies."

Kilby also pointed out that IPCortex will continue its channel-only route to market and that aside from the instatement of Aerial Direct's Glyn Thomas as MD of IPCortex there will be no other immediate operational changes to the business.

"Aerial Direct has the ability to execute on IPCortex's growth plans by offering greater commercial resource, scale and an increased focus on expediting the development of features that are important to resellers,



David Kilby

especially as they support customers shifting to cloud-based environments," said Glyn. "The acquisition assures a long-term future for the IPCortex platform which currently has more than 80,000 business users."

IPCortex founder and CEO Rob Pickering said: "This offers an opportunity for IPCortex to accelerate the next stage of our growth, and supports our strategy to invest in IPCortex's commercial infrastructure."

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NTA gives partners margin protection

THE uniqueness of reseller branded desktop phones introduced by hosted comms provider NTA during its Partner Karting Day last month prevents customers from seeking cheaper alternatives, claims MD Paul White, who says resellers can more easily move the sales conversation away from price towards features and functionality, thereby protecting margins and locking in client ownership.

The company is offering four models of Fanvil-made IP handsets which can be exclusively branded by partners, meaning that customers cannot seek like-for-like cheaper deals online.

"If a partner is selling a well known handset they are always up against a customer Googling the make and model and finding cheaper ones," he stated. "Now, resellers can go into a customer with their own product. It's no longer a pricing issue."

NTA is offering partners a demo kit with four handsets at 50% of the normal cost.

"A lot of work has gone into creating this portfolio which



NTA's Justin Blaine and Paul White

suits all needs and budgets," enthused Graham Richards, Business Services Director at NTA partner Smart Numbers.

"This will allow us to quickly deploy updates and changes to Busy Lamp Fields and access a major new feature, the company directory integration."

NTA also announced a new disaster recovery feature that routes allocated numbers to Amazon Web Services in the event of network failure; a new video conferencing facility with screenshare; and a UC client with an improved GUI, screen popping and click-to-dial that links to all major CRM apps.

The firm also lifted the curtain on a WebRTC mobile extension that can be white labelled; a range of analytic reports which can be programmed on NTA's portal; and portal upgrades that enable rapid provisioning of multiple handsets.

White is confident his company's upgraded platform and focus on partner branding will help partners compete successfully against the established telephony players.

"It's not all about price, but at least our partners won't feel like they're up against somebody else selling the same product," he added.

£4bn annual revenue barrier demolished by Computacenter

A SALES hike of 14.7% pushed Computacenter's annual revenues to a record £4.35bn in its year to 31st December 2018.

Adjusted pre-tax profit was up 11.3% to £118m, reflecting the US FusionStorm acquisition in September 2018 which contributed £3m of adjusted operating profit to the group in the last three months of 2018.

Overall services revenues hit £1.175bn, a 1.5% rise, while lower margin supply chain sales jumped 20.5% to £3.177bn.

The Germany operation delivered another record performance, said the firm, with

revenue growth of 8.3% leading to a 14.5% increase in adjusted operating profits. The UK saw sales growth of 9.7%, leading to an increase in adjusted operating profits of 12%.

Adjusted operating profits in France rose 27% on a constant currency basis due to strong technology sourcing margins. But in France, revenues were down 4.1% due to the loss of a low margin managed services contract, said the company.

CEO Mike Norris said: "2018 was a record year in revenue, adjusted operating profits and adjusted diluted earnings

per share for the group. We have also laid foundations for further growth in the years ahead.

"We have invested in the physical infrastructure that enables our technology sourcing, increased our services capability and expanded our geographical footprint.

"While the technology sourcing success of last year creates a difficult comparison in 2019, particularly in the first half, lower services margins in 2018 give us an opportunity to improve. We also expect a profit contribution from our acquired business in the US."

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COMMENT: CONSIDERING SD WAN



Nick Powell

SD WAN is being hailed as the facilitator of a networking revolution. Increased visibility, simplified scalability and new income streams for resellers are among the potential benefits under discussion. SD WAN can intelligently direct and route traffic based on pre-defined policies and promises to dynamically enable the growing bandwidth needs

of businesses, which delivers benefits such as better end user experiences and improved employee engagement.

One of the ways SD WAN offers benefits is by enabling businesses to quickly fire up new branch offices or reconfigure policies efficiently. It enables organisations to leverage existing connectivity types, eliminating the need to manually reprogramme multiple pieces of hardware. By using SD WAN, complex network configuration changes can be made via a software policy and deployed over the network to instruct various traffic engineering requirements.

Some industry insiders are now suspecting that SD WAN has been unnecessarily hyped as the big 'cost save'. However, there are multiple aspects and consequences that need to be thought through before promises can be made about improved cost efficiencies and leveraging multiple access types. One of the key network building blocks that resellers cannot get wrong is connectivity. SD WAN is just an overlay service – the underlay service is connectivity.

Without a reliable, secure and robust connectivity network, SD WAN will be pointless. Partners therefore need to think very carefully about who they choose as a connectivity supplier. They need to collaborate with the best carriers, ones with continuous network investment, offering agility to operationally enable and commercially support new network and commercial models.

Nick Powell, Sales Director, Sky Business Communications

Manx sold in £255m scoop

BASALT Investment Partners has acquired Manx Telecom in a £255m cash deal that is expected to significantly boost the Isle of Man telco's fibre and 5G infrastructure and global expansion ambitions.

Manx Telecom also posted preliminary results for the full year to 31st December 2018, reporting underlying EBITDA up to £27.2m from £27.1m on revenues of £81.5m, a £3m increase on the previous year.

Profit before tax reduced to £14.8m (2017: £15.1m) due to increased interest payments.

The company highlighted a solid performance in fixed line, mobile, broadband and data services, all supporting investments in its Vannin Ventures international growth business.

Manx Chairman Kevin Walsh noted: "Since its IPO in 2014, Manx has performed well and delivered consistent returns for shareholders through resilient earnings, strong cash generation and a growing dividend.

"Basalt's cash offer recognises the quality of the business, the management team and the employees and provides certainty to shareholders."

Manx Telecom CEO Gary Lamb added: "We remain posi-



Kevin Walsh

tive in the outlook for the Group due to the solid underlying revenue, EBITDA and cashflow performance during the year, and are continuing to explore potential growth opportunities with the aim of identifying new products and services for a global audience."

Steven Lowry, Partner of Basalt Infrastructure Partners, commented: "We are keen to support Manx Telecom through its next phase of capital investment, which includes funding fibre to the premises, its commitment to Vannin Ventures and the future requirement of a 5G network roll out."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

COMPUTACENTER'S Non-Exec Chairman Greg Lock is to step down in May following ten-plus years in the role. He will be replaced by HPE veteran Peter Ryan who joined the board in February 2018. Ryan has a 37 year international career in tech under his belt and during the past 11 years his roles included Chief Sales Officer at HPE, Chief Client Officer at Logica and EVP for Global Sales and Services at Sun Microsystems.

USERS of IPCortex's Hosted Suite have access to a new call recording service called CallStash. CEO Rob Pickering commented: "CallStash helps organisations to more easily align with data retention, security, privacy policies and compliance by recording critical information such as proving verbal orders were placed or that legal terms were relayed during a call."

A STRONG business performance in north west England prompted SCC to strengthen its presence in the region with a new Leeds office that will initially house ten staff and in time accommodate 30 more. The company was also attracted to Leeds' legal, finance and professional services markets, said to be the largest outside of London.

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COMMENT: EXPERIENCE MATTERS



Tony Martino

BY 2020, customer experience (CX) will overtake price and product as the key differentiator for businesses (source: Walker Information). To maintain or improve customer experience, businesses must understand that every employee can influence CX, whether they are in a traditional

customer-facing role or not. Most business roles liaise with customers in some way, but not everyone has access to feedback that informs their work. At the same time, this challenge is exacerbated because customers are engaging with businesses in more varied ways than ever before through social media, web chat and email etc.

To improve CX, organisations will need to analyse customer interactions across the entire business (not just in the contact centre) using analytics tools that are accessible to SMEs. This is reflected in a study by Econsultancy and Adobe, where 65 per cent of respondents said improving data analysis capabilities to better understand customer experience requirements was the most important internal factor in delivering a great future customer experience.

Analytics products must therefore continually evolve in order to understand and review customer interactions. However, tools need to develop in such a way that they match the profile of customer communications. There is no point in adopting analytics tools that analyse ten methods of communication when only two are used by customers. This presents a big opportunity for the channel. By maximising their use of analytics, resellers and service providers can differentiate themselves in a crowded market, improve how their customers work with them, and in turn deliver services that help customers to improve CX down the line.

CX is effectively a launchpad for growth, feeding into marketing, product or service development, sales strategy and more. But it needs analytical insight if it is to thrive.

Tony Martino, CEO, Tollring

Majesti-fi on partner hunt



Mark Baxter



James Tyner

MAJESTI-FI is seeking to recruit channel partners to sell its fixed rate pocket Wi-Fi solutions to UK business travellers wanting to avoid hefty roaming charges and operate safely when working abroad.

COO Mark Baxter and former Modern Communications tech chief James Tyner have co-founded Majesti-fi and, after four years in development, claim their mobile size Wi-Fi devices will allow users to roam freely in over 140 countries.

Baxter said: "We have developed a package and a product that provides a fixed data cost, so whether in Timbuktu Johannesburg, New York, London or Tokyo, there will be an average saving of 67%."

He noted a growing trend for mobile workers to use freely available public Wi-Fi in hotels,

cafes, bars etc, a trend driven by the adoption of flexible working styles and remote working.

"These networks are often unprotected and can expose the user to malicious attacks," stated Baxter. "The risk to businesses is immense, especially when corporate email and sensitive data are being accessed by people working remotely."

Baxter has first-hand experience of security issues having previously been Head of Operations for a former UK Prime Minister.

"Our encryption technology 'jumps' between the strongest and fastest available 4G networks, meaning the risk of attacks, hacks and malware are significantly reduced," he said.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

NIMANS is to distribute Cisco products for the first time as a Value Added Technology Partner. The distributor will supply Cisco's MPP telephony portfolio (the 6800, 7800 and 8800 series of multi-platform models including an IP DECT device) and headsets. Richard Carter, Nimans' Director of Channel Sales, said: "Voice communication is becoming more unified, flexible and integrated. Cisco's multi-platform phones can be powered by Cisco BroadCloud or with supported third party cloud-calling platforms."

OPENREACH has claimed Salisbury as its first entire full fibre city and outlined plans to complete the roll out to more than 20,000 premises within a year. John Glen, MP for Salisbury and South Wiltshire, stated: "Full fibre will significantly improve the attractiveness of Salisbury for companies looking for a location with cutting edge connectivity, boosting the number of high quality job opportunities for constituents." Openreach Chief Executive Officer Clive Selley commented: "As a medieval city, Salisbury's narrow streets won't be the easiest for our engineers to access and work in, but we're confident that it's achievable."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

REGULATION of digital services is too fragmented and out of step with their widespread adoption and influence according to The House of Lords Communications Committee which last month called for a new overarching regulatory framework and the enforcement of a set of shared principles. "Our proposals will ensure that rights are protected online as they are offline while keeping the Internet open to innovation and creativity, with a new culture of ethical behaviour embedded in the design of service," commented Committee Chairman Lord Gilbert of Panteg.

GAMMA'S link up with Tango Networks gives wholesale interconnect and platform partners access to new private mobile network services based on Tango Networks's Kinetic Cloud Mobile-X platform, which enables a private mobile network to be created and controlled by an enterprise. "The partnership will enable us to deliver a set of converged mobility services that leverage our wholesale radio access offering," said Mike Mills, Head of Sales for the Cloud & Infrastructure Channel at Gamma.

Awards win for life saver



Life saving solution scoops Vertical App gong

A LIFE saving solution deployed by cloud comms provider Content Guru won the Vertical Application Solution of the Year gong at the 2019 European IT & Software Excellence Awards staged on 14th March at the Royal Garden Hotel in Kensington, London.

The award recognised the positive impact of Content Guru's cloud contact centre platform, storm, which underpins the UK National Health Service's (NHS) 111 non-emergency phone service.

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

"Following storm's deployment most callers seeking assistance are now five times more likely to have their problem solved within NHS 111 rather than placing additional pressure on other services," said Martin Taylor, Head of Healthcare at Content Guru.

"NHS 111 has seen up to a 50%-plus reduction in the number of ambulances needing to be dispatched. Prior to storm, patients were routed to any available advisor with no ability to track repeat callers or prioritise a patient with a developing illness. The NHS's use of storm is literally saving lives."

Fibre firm connects to NetVu

YORKSHIRE-based fibre network provider Connectus is to offer multi-sensory data, alarms and video services following a link up with Cheshire-located NetVu, a security and surveillance market player.

"The partnership demonstrates how traditional services are becoming increasingly Internet-based, highlighting the growth of the IoT and shift towards Video-Surveillance-as-a-Service," commented Connectus MD Roy Shelton.

"The Internet and connectivity are at the heart of the Connectus business model, and many businesses have a requirement for surveillance services.

"The prospect of utilising connectivity and the Internet to deliver CCTV technology and integrating NetVu's cyber secure Closed IP solution into our portfolio was an opportunity we embraced."



Roy Shelton

NEWS ROUNDUP

NODE4 has gained accreditation from CREST, which provides internationally recognised certification for firms offering penetration testing, cyber incident response and threat intelligence services. Node4 is also being Cyber Essentials and ISO27001 certified. Steve Nice, Chief Security Technologist, said: "Penetration testing is the most critical component for any comprehensive IT security practice."

TRUST Distribution has joined forces with Nordic UCaaS provider SolunoBC to provide a 'mobile-first' wholesale offering based on Trust's Mitel infrastructure and the distie's billing platform. SolunoBC has over 150,000 cloud users in the Nordic market and its UK move follows expansion into the Netherlands and Germany.

A DOUBLE deal win of importance has provided a boost to Glasgow located Exchange Communications which is undertaking expansion projects for travel firm If Only and textiles business Don & Low, both significant players in their fields. Tom Sime, MD, said: "Projects like this allow us to demonstrate the power of effective telecommunications on a business enterprise."

Cloudcell's rural connections

CLOUDCELL Technologies has underscored its credentials as a provider of cost-effective high speed broadband to rural areas with the roll out of an alternative connectivity solution for Brigantia when it relocated to rural Kinross in Scotland.

"The business anticipated being able to have fibre but following a site survey by Openreach it was quoted an Excess Construction Charge of £73k," stated Cloudcell MD Kevin Boyle. "The high cost of fibre installation was prohibitive."



Kevin Boyle

Seeking an alternative to fibre and following a recommendation Brigantia contacted Cloudcell for a more cost-effective approach.

"We proposed our SD WAN solution using both fixed and cellular connections," explained Boyle.

"The SD WAN solution comprises two FTTC DSLs and one cellular connection bonded together to achieve the high bandwidth, resilient connection required by Brigantia, without the excessive costs of installing a fibre line and delivered on time for the move.

"We provided a robust and swift resolution at a fraction of the cost of installing FTTP."



DERBYSHIRE comms provider One Connectivity has acquired Elite Telecoms (Midlands) for an undisclosed sum. The two companies are no strangers having collaborated on projects prior to the transaction. Elite Telecoms Director Chris Cowling joins One Connectivity as part of the deal. One Connectivity MD Paul Stevenson said: "The acquisition was an obvious move for us to support our growth and feels completely natural." Last month One Connectivity collected the Fastest Growing Reseller 2019 award from distributor Pragma. Pictured: Paul Stevenson (left) with Chris Cowling.



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** www.comms-dealer.com Online property (1st January 2018 to 31st December 2018), (Monthly average unique browsers 21,100/month)

*** Distribution of weekly email newsletter (1st January 2018 to 31st December 2018, Average Distribution 15,576)

£25m boost for UKCloud



Simon Hansford

A £25M INVESTMENT boost from Cisco-linked Digital Alpha Advisors will go a long way in scaling up UKCloud's operations across the public sector while giving Cisco a new route to market through joint sales and marketing activities.

Cisco already underpins much of UKCloud's data centre technology, enabling the multi-cloud platform provider to bring together its particular blend of hyperscale cloud technologies and traditional enterprise tech on a single platform.

Digital Alpha Managing Partner Rick Shrotri commented: "UKCloud has established itself in a market ripe for rapid growth due to the low levels of cloud penetration across the UK public sector.

"Its multi-cloud platform is engineered to achieve Government grade assurance and native connectivity which cre-

ates significant opportunities for digital transformation in defence, national intelligence and other new sectors.

"Our additional capital will help UKCloud scale its team and shape new product lines that are pre-packaged with Cisco's multi-cloud offering."

Cisco UK&I Chief Executive Scot Gardner noted: "In collaborating with UKCloud we have the ability to help enable real transformation of essential Government services."

UKCloud CEO Simon Hansford added: "The investment gives us potential to scale and accelerate growth in the public sector, saving taxpayer money and driving better insights.

"Our alignment with Cisco is a force multiplier, enabling us to accelerate our investment in product development, sales, marketing, customer experience and new markets."

3CX ranks Gradwell as Solutions Partner

THE ability to provide an end-to-end solution that wraps around 3CX's IP PBX has earned Gradwell a UK first with its designation as a 3CX Solutions Provider.

"Delivering successful VoIP solutions is about more than providing the required number of IP PBX licences, that's where Gradwell's value add services come into play," said Gradwell's founder and CTO Peter Gradwell.

Wrap around solutions include secure hosting, server provisioning, SIP trunks, SBC installation, CRM integration and handsets.

Gradwell claims to be the only provider to have developed solutions, specifically designed for the channel, which complement the features and functionality of the 3CX IP PBX.

"For example, with a Gradwell solution the end user is able to push call recordings to cloud storage devices, freeing up considerable server space," added Gradwell.

Other value add offerings include a team of 3CX accredited engineers dedicated to hosting and supporting 3CX, onboarding resources working exclusively on 3CX and a 20



Peter Gradwell

strong frontline support team to answer and manage any issues.

"Having established ourselves as one of the first 3CX

SIP certified trunk providers, this value add agreement takes our relationship with 3CX to the next level," said Gradwell.

ISP boxes clever

WAVENET has unwrapped ISP in a Box, a package that enables partners to run their own network without the cost of infrastructure investment.

Wavenet expects a strong response from resellers of managed broadband who are seeking to migrate their base to a new service that gives them greater control over their estate.

"What's interesting to partners is that the ISP in a Box asset remains theirs, so they never have to feel locked in again," commented Director of

Wholesale Antony Black, who also noted that ISP in a Box is a good fit for businesses looking to decommission their network.

"It enables businesses to consolidate their base, calculate tariffs and margins through one price point, manage their network via one portal and benefit from access to multiple vendors," added Black.

"It makes financial and operational sense and Wavenet offers managed migrations to all customers making the entire process simple to deploy."

9 Group teams with London Irish

9 GROUP'S alignment with sporting figures and teams has been underscored by a new partnership with London Irish that sees the comms and IT provider deliver services and support to the organisation including its move to the new Brentford Community Stadium in 2020.

9 Group's logo will feature on London Irish's home and away kit as well as branding in the stadium and on the coaching staff's IT equipment.

9 Group appointed four brand ambassadors last year



9's Adam Cathcart & Mark Saunders flank Brian Facer

from across the world of British sport to reflect its 'Free to Perform' ethos.

CEO James Palmer said: "I have been a long-term advocate of the links between business and sporting achievement so this is a natural partnership."

London Irish CEO Brian Facer added: "London Irish is expanding both on and off the field and with the stadium move on the horizon it is pivotal that we have IT and telecommunications support from a company we know and trust."

NEWS ROUNDUP

IN A TRADING update for the year ended 31st December AV distributor Midwich reported revenues up by 21.6% to £573.7m. In February the firm took a major stake in Italy-based Prase Engineering and marched into Swiss territory with the acquisition of MobilePro AG just weeks earlier. MD Stephen Fenby said: "We continue to pursue acquisitions that fit within our focus of adding new product ranges, capabilities or geographies to our existing portfolio."

Why Inbound is key to UC

Businesses may not get the hosted and UC solution they need unless Inbound is a fully considered component of the proposition, explains Windsor Telecom Channel Development Manager Darren Brown.



Darren Brown

While hosted VoIP uptake rises and UC accelerates, too many resellers pay little attention to the business benefits of Inbound solutions. “The overwhelming number of Inbound benefits to support a full UC solution are clear to see,” said Brown. “It is clear from the greater levels of resilience and DR, from the additional and improved features, from the bespoke nature of Inbound solutions, from being able to manage all comms under one roof, and from Inbound’s ability to enhance remote working, to name just a few of the upsides.”

Brown argues that there is an obligation on resellers to embrace Inbound as part of a customer’s digital transformation journey. “There are multiple drivers for UC, but don’t forget about inbound,” he added. “Inbound brings resilience to VoIP and offers DR benefits. If the VoIP goes down, for example, having a separate inbound means you can divert calls with no problems and have no down time. Furthermore, spreading your solution across two platforms means you have an added level of disaster recovery.”

No reseller should deny their customers an opportunity to enjoy more and better features, believes Brown, who cited a feature called Whisper Accept which is not available on VoIP. This is an ideal solution if customers need to know the type of call they are about to receive. “The message played can

be tailored to convey any relevant information to the person answering, so each call is greeted appropriately,” explained Brown. “You can have multiple numbers pointing to one destination and the ‘whisper’ can tell you, for example, which number the call is from. Whisper Accept gives users the option to decline the call if they’re unable to take it. By declining they do not lose the call, instead it is passed down the set call plan.”

Statistical reports with VoIP fall short of the mark for many customers, but through Inbound Windsor can offer far more granular reporting. For example, users are unable to have 0800 numbers on VoIP but they can on Inbound which means they don’t miss out on any reporting. The difference between Inbound reporting and VoIP reporting is that Inbound is much easier to use, pointed out Brown.

“Our Timetable feature is easier to use than VoIP,” he added. “On VoIP you can generally only send Call Record Recipient to one person, but with our Inbound you can send to up to three people. With VoIP you get charged for storage of recordings, by sending to up to three people you can store it somewhere else and remove it from VoIP, thereby taking away the storage cost. VoIP is generally off-the-shelf, but our inbound is bespoke to suit customers’ needs.”

Another feature that is available on Inbound but not VoIP is Windsor’s

“The overwhelming number of Inbound benefits to support a full UC solution are clear to see”

Zone Plane Route. Incoming calls (based on caller location) are automatically and instantly directed

to their nearest branch or office based on the local area (STD) code they are calling from. “Any number that cannot be identified by location (for example, a mobile, a withheld or an international number) will route to a default location or a fallback menu, which lets the caller choose which office they wish to route to,” said Brown.

“Country Geographic Plan Calls are routed depending on the originating telephone area. For example, calls from England may be routed to one destination while calls originating in Scotland terminate at another. There is also a default routing plan for all calls

that cannot be recognised (such as a mobile call).”

It is because of important benefits such as these that Brown believes Inbound should become second nature when resellers are proposing hosted VoIP and UC solutions to clients. Nor is that all. “Working with a hosted solution gives the scope to have a desk phone, soft phone on the laptop etc,” commented Brown. “Inbound offers the added feature of including the mobile in a call group – so you can dial out from your mobile using your inbound number.”

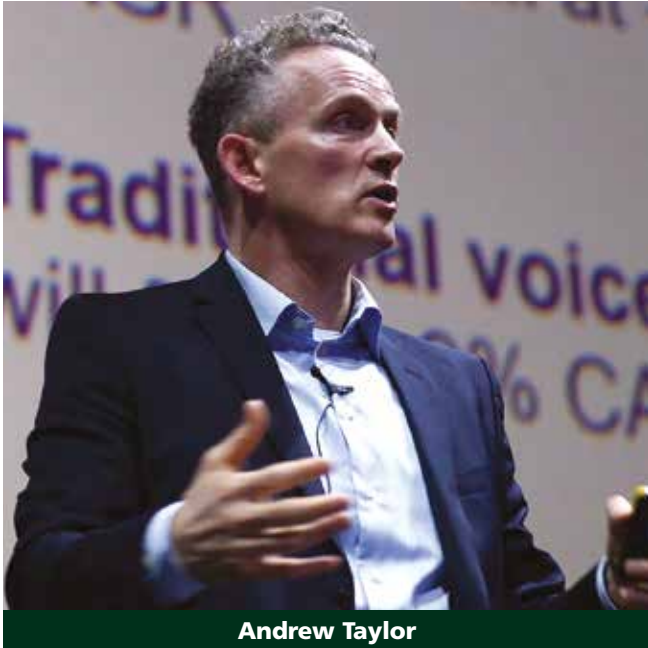
According to Brown, Inbound makes UC solutions more realistic, bringing unique levels of support that are managed from under one roof. Another example of Inbound supporting UC is having Inbound numbers as direct dials, or main numbers that can be programmed to not only call the office handsets but also mobile phones, giving a ‘one number’ option.

Call recording is available on all Inbound calls including those routed to mobiles, and voicemail-to-email allows messages to be retrieved from any device. “With remote working being so important to business these days, you can make a call from your mobile while displaying the inbound number, giving a true ‘one number’ solution,” concluded Brown. ■

Key benefits of Zone Plan

- Advertise only one number in advertising or marketing campaigns
- Save money on telemarketing numbers for each office or branch
- Callers can receive a local service from their local office or branch
- Routing calls to appropriately skilled agents or contact centres
- Increase productivity & provide seamless & efficient call handling
- Analyse real-time call statistics
- Scalable to meet business demands, both up and down

Gamma sees bigger picture



Andrew Taylor

OVER 650 channel partners descended on Gamma's 2019 roadshows staged at top cinemas across the country where CEO Andrew Taylor presented the big picture on his strategic roadmap under the overarching theme 'The Sound of Gamma'.

The roadshows also turned up the volume on the launch of Horizon Collaborate which, says Gamma, will make a big noise in the channel based on the straightforward collaborative experience it offers across multiple devices and sites.

International keynote speaker Nancy Rademaker also made a lasting impression by sharing insights that underpin winning customer-centric strategies.

Gamma MD Daryl Pile stated: "2019 promises to be a big year for Gamma with the launch of Horizon Collaborate just the start of a number of exciting new product developments.

"This year's roadshow was all about helping our channel partners navigate their business as the market changes and the end customer evolves."

Mitel drives cloud

WITHIN a year of smashing the one million cloud user barrier in Europe via its MiCloud Telepo for Service Providers proposition Mitel has added 300,000 more users.

Mitel partners with 20-plus mobile operators worldwide and the increase in UCaaS uptake is reflective of how operators are seeking new revenue streams and how businesses want more flexible ways to communicate and collaborate, according to Rami Houbby, Vice President International Cloud Sales.

"As an early entrant into the European UCaaS market Mitel has enabled fast-moving service providers to capitalise on cloud communications," he stated.

"We're seeing more of them leverage cloud to gain market share in the micro and SME segments, and even scale to large enterprises. While cloud migration rates vary by country, it's clear they are advancing and it is anticipated that the demand will further rise as digital transformation becomes even more of an imperative."

New group forged to square the circle

A NEW business group set up by Westcon-Comstor aims to solve the ever-challenging problem of defeating unauthorised broker channels while at the same time unlocking a market estimated by Accenture Strategy to be worth \$4.5tr by 2030 (across all sectors).

The just-launched Circular Technology Solutions division is designed to build on Cisco's certified remanufactured equipment business, called Cisco Refresh, where Alastair Borissow headed up global sales, marketing and strategy.

Borissow has now moved to Westcon-Comstor to lead the new Circular Technology Solutions group and is responsible for developing a portfolio of circular technology solutions that extends Westcon-Comstor's current Cisco Refresh offering.

"End users will benefit from 100% certified remanufactured OEM-quality equipment at lower cost than equivalent new products," stated Borissow.

"This improves sustainability, benefits the environment and



Alastair Borissow

reduces the impact and risk of unauthorised equipment on the secondary market.

"Our mission is to improve the overall customer experience around OEM-certified equipment consumption. The opportunities created are good for partners, good for profits and good for the planet."

Borissow also noted that Westcon-Comstor's Global Deployment Solutions business had worked with Cisco to develop a blended equipment programme and a solution for global customers.

"Comstor has led the way with Cisco Refresh," he added. "The Circular Technology Sol-

utions group will help partners to compete with unauthorised broker channels and give customers enhanced protection from the risks associated with non-certified grey, counterfeit or unlicensed products."

According to Borissow, ordering certified equipment will be no different from acquiring newly manufactured products as the previous complexities involved in blending re-manufactured IT equipment have been ironed out.

"Future enhancements will extend to other areas of the Westcon-Comstor vendor portfolio, as well as new service areas," added Borissow.

ICUK deploys ML to automate outage alert notification tool

AN AUTOMATED tool that reads, interprets, understands and alerts relevant parties to known or planned broadband and leased line outages has been introduced by ICUK.

"The tool goes beyond simply reading and providing a feed of data," stated ICUK Director Paul Barnett.

"It applies machine learning to categorise accuracy levels, aid relevance and importance, identify affected parties regardless of how vague the incident notification may be, and each party receives a relevant feed free from data clutter."



Paul Barnett

Barnett claims that ICUK's automated notification solution plugs a data gap as the main carriers tend not to supply API feeds for known faults or planned engineering works. He also said that the machine

learning techniques leveraged by ICUK shift the automated intelligence within its systems to the next level.

"Prior to and during fault journeys visibility of known issues are shared in our portal, ensuring that no time is wasted in providing relevant explanations," commented Barnett.

"We have also created an accompanying API feed that delivers the resource that carriers do not share.

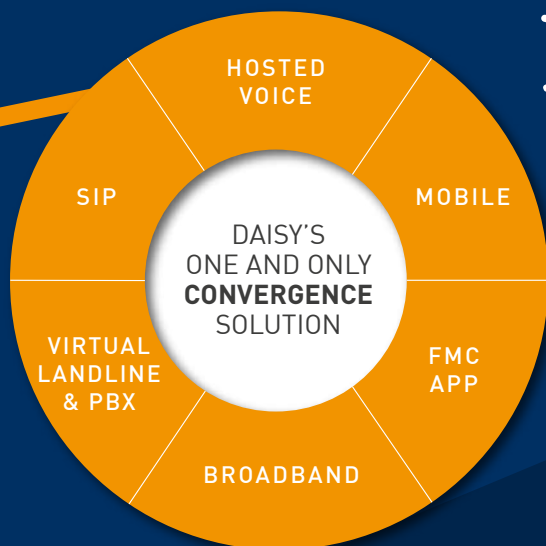
"We know the way data is fed to us from carriers is less than ideal, so we're making the most of what is presented."



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Experiences at the centre



Ioan MacRae

AVAYA'S just-opened Customer Experience Centre (CEC) in Guildford shines a light on its contact centre, communication and collaboration technologies and acts as 'a blank canvas for innovation', said the vendor.

The CEC, which was built with the help of channel partners, augments Avaya's existing R&D and innovation centres located in Dublin, Galway and Leeds Beckett University, which are all reflective of the company's sharpening focus on innovation, according to UK MD Ioan MacRae.

"The CEC has been designed to spark conversations with partners and customers around how we can help them create intelligent immersive experi-

ences and solve their customer journey and employee productivity challenges," he said. "The CEC can help create bespoke, vertical-specific solutions for customers of any kind."

Avaya's contact centre and team engagement solutions are the stars of the show with a particular emphasis on AI, cloud and comms technologies, as well as sentiment analysis, voice-enabled virtual assistants, real-time language translation, real-time speech analytics and back office integration.

"The Guildford CEC is a point of reference for all UK organisations to learn how they can take their customer and employee experiences to the next level," added MacRae.

Vodafone 5G rollout ramps up

VODAFONE'S 5G roll out has gone into overdrive with 12 more cities set to go live later this year.

As well as the seven cities already live or activating Vodafone plans to launch 5G in Birkenhead, Blackpool, Bournemouth, Guildford, Newbury, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Reading, Stoke-on-Trent, Warrington, Southampton and Wolverhampton. The operator first carried 5G traffic over a commercial mobile network in October 2018 from a location in Salford, Greater Manchester.

Since then 5G antennas have been installed in Birmingham, Glasgow and London ahead of going live over Vodafone RedStream, the nationwide optical fibre network which enables speeds of up to 10 gigabits per second.

"5G promises device speeds around 10 times faster than 4G," commented Vodafone UK Chief Technology Officer Executive Scott Petty.

"Data transfer of less than 20 milliseconds will be standard in a new era where everyone and everything is better connected, whether you are running a hotel in Portsmouth or broadcasting live at MediaCity in Salford."

Gamma hails Collaborate



Mark Senior

GAMMA partners are set to more readily boost per user margins with the launch of Horizon Collaborate, which is positioned as an upsell option for existing Horizon customers and a carrot for new business, according to Gamma's Product Manager for UC&C Mark Senior.

As part of the Horizon hosted PBX, the new Collaborate service offers instant messaging and presence, voice, video, document sharing, desktop and app sharing, and is delivered through Gamma's portal.

"Users collaborate via applications for Windows, MAC,

Android and iOS on devices of their choice wherever they are," said Senior. "Partners can provide technology that effectively connects people, applications, clouds and networks, while enabling them to quickly and efficiently share information."

Patrick Lincoln, Director at Solution IP (which partook in the early release phase), added: "This is an opportunity to upsell into our Horizon base and go after new business in different verticals and market sizes."

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Olive branches into Aussie

OLIVE Communications has extended its reach to the other side of the planet with the opening of an Australian support capability operating as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Group.

Olive will collaborate with fellow Mitel partner Azentro, the Canadian vendor's primary partner in Australia.

Working with Mitel, Olive has delivered global telephony and contact centre solutions to a number of customers across North America, Australia and the UK; and the



Martin Flick

High Wycombe-based comms provider's Brisbane foothold is intended to enhance the existing 24x7x365 support it gives to global customers.

Olive plans to launch a similar operation in North America.

Chief Executive Martin Flick said: "We have evolved from an enterprise mobility supplier into a cloud-based telephony and UC MSP with an increasing number of large customers requiring global solutions."

ANS financials rise as digital focus sharpens

ANS Group capped a strong FY19 half year (April-September 2018) with Microsoft Azure Expert Managed Service Provider accreditation and H1 revenues of £25.5m with managed services now representing 58% of total revenue.

Gross profit increased to £13.6m (£13.3m in H1 FY18) with a gross margin increase of 6.2% against 2018.

"Public cloud continues to be a strong focus but we recognise that our customers need to push boundaries and innovate," said CEO Paul Shannon.

"This is why we've moved towards not only migrating and



Paul Shannon

building next generation business applications in the cloud, but also enabling customers to leverage AI-infused technologies and digital initiatives to transform the way they deliver services to their end users."

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BI platforms propel sales



Ben Abraham

THE deployment of BI and data visualisation software could catalyse a significant hike in sales, according to a new study which claims that businesses without these technologies register circa 24% less sales.

IQBlade's Tech Impact '19 report looked at the UK's fastest growing companies and the technologies behind their growth, and found that the average sales for those using business intelligence platforms in 2018 was £39m, compared to £24m for non users.

Ben Abraham, CTO at IQBlade, commented: "Businesses that are more able to identify patterns and trends within data are better positioned to take advantage of opportunities and mitigate threats, so it's not surprising to see higher sales growth over a three year period for those that use it."

Other technologies identified as significant drivers of growth, noted Abraham, include app development and productivity-related solutions.

"This research has uncovered an interesting pattern of growth behaviour," he added.

"The average sales difference for those companies deploying certain tech stacks in the past 12 months compared to those that aren't using these technologies is significant.

"What this tells us is that more investments are being made into the likes of data-driven business intelligence platforms and app development.

"They are making a big impact in a short space of time, and I expect that by the end of 2020 the three year growth gap between those investing now and those that aren't will be much wider."

Shetlands gain fibre networks

SHETLAND Islands Council has secured £1.91m of Government funding (under the Local Full Fibre Networks initiative) to expand the existing fibre network across public sector sites on the islands of Yell and Unst.

The funding, which was supported by independent IT advisor FarrPoint, is reflective of the Scottish Government's Reaching 100% programme which aims to deliver superfast broadband access to 100% of premises in Scotland by the end of 2021.

Alastair Cooper, Chair of the Council's Development Committee, commented: "This is a positive improvement for public services in Yell and Unst which lays a foundation of connectivity that can be extended to domestic and business premises in the future."

FarrPoint has advised on digital connectivity investments in the UK worth over £2bn.

Darren Kilburn, Principal Consultant at FarrPoint, said: "This project supports the long-term viability of the Yell and Unst communities by ensuring inhabitants retain their heritage and culture while having access to future proofed public services through digital connectivity."

Local talent gets a leg up

BIRMINGHAM-based IT firm Intercity Technology is working with Ahead Partnership, a social enterprise, to improve the pipeline and diversity of talent in the local tech sector.

Intercity hopes to boost the employability skills of local young people through initiatives such as volunteering and work experience schemes.

Up to six students aged between 16 and 18 will take part in a pilot of the work experience scheme, which will involve training, shadowing employees in the Intercity Technology Birmingham office and gaining hands-on experience of roles across the business.

Following the pilot Intercity plans to roll out a fully structured programme.

Intercity Technology CEO Andrew Jackson commented: "Giving young people first-hand experience of the tech sector is a great way to get them excited about the opportunities the industry has to offer."

Ahead Partnership CEO Stephanie Burras CBE added:



Andrew Jackson

"Given the region's aspiration to become a global digital hub it is crucial that we act now to develop a pipeline of talent."

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, observed: "Bridging the skills gap is an ongoing challenge for the region, but through collaboration between businesses, social enterprises and educational institutions we can make significant progress."

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

G3 Comms appoints CTO

G3 COMMS has pulled in David Blackburn as CTO with a remit to lead the global strategy and technology roadmap, working with tech partners such as Tata Communications.

The appointment builds on Blackburn's previous work as a Data Network Consultant for G3 Comms, most notably in extending the firm's global network by building a new node in Dubai data centres.

"Corporate communications is changing rapidly and with the market set to grow further in



David Blackburn

the cloud and UCaaS areas it's critical that G3 Comms supports this trend, ensuring that service levels don't dip as customers

look to introduce a hybrid of on-premise and off-site UC&C solutions," stated Blackburn.

"To do that we're expanding our reach with network technologies from partners including Tata Communications, Microsoft, Avaya, Genesys, Nectar and Ribbon."

G3 Comms' Chief Executive James Arnold-Roberts added: "David brings a wealth of experience to the role and was instrumental in G3 Comms growing its network backbone to offer global coverage."



IN A BID to boost the social media activities of city centre traders in Sunderland three organisations have united under the SR1 Connect brand to offer traders a free tablet or mobile phone for one year, a data package and access to a social media workshop. The initiative, launched by Sunderland Business Improvement District (BID), Esh Group and Nice Network, offered 10 packages on a first come first served basis. Sharon Appleby, Head of Business Operations at Sunderland BID, said: "This is a great opportunity for city centre businesses to tap into free support and ensure they're benefiting from the opportunities presented by the worlds of social media and e-commerce." Pictured above (l-r): Sharon Appleby; Ross Markwell, BDM at Esh Construction; and Terri Hamilton, Sales Administration & Provisioning Coordinator at Nice Network.



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The Entrepreneurs' Event Calendar

2019



Life after Brexit?

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**
Le Mans - Rennes - Caen **June**



Festival of Speed Preview

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



Cowes Week Regatta

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Unfit programmes stunt channel sales

THE channel's capacity to generate sales could in many cases be stymied by the very partner programmes designed to drive revenues and build value, according to a new study published by Investec.

"While IT companies have forecasted an average annual growth of 8% over the next three years, too many are missing their potential to achieve scale-up growth of 20% or more with poor channel performance a major contributing factor," claims Investec Associate Director Junya Iwamoto.

"Having a dedicated R&D team hardwired into the channel programme is essential."

He believes that too many tech firms only view the channel as a means of distribution, and that this is damaging opportunities for revenue growth.

"We know from working with technology leaders that they spend time and energy building a vision, developing intellectual property and getting viable products to market," added Iwamoto.



Junya Iwamoto

"Once they have that laser-like focus on strategy it can be hard to shift their mindset and accept feedback from third parties. That doesn't just hamper scale-up opportunities it can hurt existing business.

"There needs to be a cultural shift towards listening and taking action on the advice that channel companies provide."

Investec commissioned independent market research company Vanson Bourne to survey 250 IT leaders across the UK. Companies ranged from SME to enterprise scale businesses with an average of £106m in annualised revenue.

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

G3 abuzz as Apiary moves in

PRIVATE equity firm Apiary Capital has acquired a majority stake in G3 Comms with follow-on growth funding.

In the lead up to the transaction G3 Comms invested in its technical capabilities, particularly in unified communications, collaboration and contact centre solutions.

The company also invested in its global network infrastructure to support multi-national clients and appointed David Blackburn as CTO (see p18).

G3 Comms Chief Executive James Arnold-Roberts stated: "We have seen our revenues and profit grow year-on-year and are now positioned to move forward with our long-term strategy. Apiary's experience and investment will be instrumental in fulfilling that plan."

Nicki Boyd, Partner at Apiary Capital, commented: "G3 Comms has built a platform that exploits increasing corporate demand for service providers that can manage the complexity of diverse communications systems."

NEWS ROUNDUP

IN A BUSINESS update Node4 signalled that it is targeting revenues approaching £50m this financial year following an investment in its technology service portfolio. The company added 50 new customers during the period and boosted headcount by 20% to over 250 employees across its UK sites including Derby, Nottingham and London. Circa £1m went into systems to boost customer support. Node4 CEO Andy Gilbert commented: "We expect this momentum to accelerate further in the year ahead."

8X8'S CLOUD communications platform has received a significant collaboration boost following the addition of video communication with voice, chat and one-touch conferencing. The launch of 8x8's Meetings solution last month follows the company's acquisition of video collaboration capabilities from Jitsi in October last year. 8x8 Meetings will include more than 25 additional features for the desktop and mobile application, and is expected to roll out in Q3 this year.

Ambitious UC player swoops on industry veteran Kenneally

XUPER'S ambition to elevate its UC platform into a global market leadership position has received a big boost following the appointment of channel veteran Enda Kenneally as VP of Global Sales and Marketing.

The move came just weeks after the merger of Xuper with sister company Questmark in January which catalysed the development of its own UC&C platform, Visconn, due to roll out in Q2 2019.

The launch is backed up by a new innovation centre at Xuper's Head Office in Derby which combined with Kenneally's



Peter Grogan and Enda Kenneally

knowhow is expected to significantly strengthen the firm's play on the global stage.

Kenneally's previous experience includes a near nine year spell as Mitel UK MD, a four year stint at Avaya where she was Senior Director BT Global and UK&I Channels, and most

recently VP Sales UCaaS EMEA at West.

"Xuper is growing at a fast pace and Enda's enthusiasm and experience will help us increase our global presence within the IT services and unified communications markets," commented MD Peter Grogan.



HAMPSHIRE-based ElemenTel's partnership with Wildix hit new heights as the hosted comms provider named it UK Reseller of the Year. ElemenTel collected the award during Wildix's UCC Summit staged at the World Trade Centre in Barcelona. Wildix UK Channel Manager Rob Loakes said: "Our Ecosystem of partners in the UK is growing. What excited us about ElemenTel most was that it selected Wildix to replace its existing lead product from a vendor that no longer offered features and services customers need." Pictured: ElemenTel MD Martin Jupp (centre) and Technical Director Paul Farr (right) receiving their award from Wildix UK Channel Manager Ian Rowan.

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Primed with fire power Horton

FluidOne CEO Russell Horton champs at the bit as he outlines plans to triple revenues over the coming five years after the company's acquisition by Livingbridge in February. Here, he gives us the inside story on a deal that puts rapid organic expansion, channel growth and acquisitions front and centre.



Russell Horton

I realised there was a great platform for a buy-and-build in a fast growth market driven by digital transformation, fragmentation and convergence

Livingbridge's acquisition of FluidOne from parent company Rigby Group closed the first chapter of a growth plan that took shape over a year ago (Horton and eight members of the management team also invested in the business as part of the transaction). "I was approached by a headhunter acting for the Rigby Group in January 2018," stated Horton. "Their objective was for me to join the business and build its value towards an exit within 18 months. As

part of the interview process I had to present my strategy for how I would create the exit. Having researched and referenced FluidOne in detail and met with some of the key directors, including COO Chris Rogers and CFO Hemant Patel, I realised there was a great platform for a buy-and-build in a fast growth marketplace driven by digital transformation, supplier fragmentation and convergence."

Horton also observed that FluidOne had a strong

network aggregator product set and an equally strong customer base with diverse routes to market, but it was under represented in the channel and had a limited number of lines of business. "These gaps presented a fantastic opportunity and underpinned my strategy to build on the connectivity platform and acquire quality businesses with specialisms in OTT connectivity related services including UC, IT cloud managed services, security and the IoT – and to activate sales and

marketing for organic growth especially in the channel," he explained.

All systems go

Rigby Group backed Horton's strategy and he joined the business in April 2018, initially refining the plan and learning about the organisation, its staff and customers. "We then built out the senior management team to support the five year vision, blending a mix of the existing management and external hires to give a strong balance of heritage, organic

growth and acquisition experience," added Horton. "An early step change was to introduce Net Promoter Scoring (NPS) and use this for detailed customer feedback to drive a programme of improvements led by our Service and Billing Director James Storey. This has risen from an industry average of 35 in July 2018 to 70 in February 2019."

Horton worked with Rogers and Patel to develop a more detailed five year plan with a view to going



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Horton takes aim

to market. Rigby Group engaged Deloitte to act as corporate finance advisors and supported Horton and the management team to hone the plan into a pitch deck suitable for PE investment. "In going to market there were a large number of private equity firms interested in discussing the opportunity, and Rigby Group with the help of Deloitte met an initial round to produce a shortlist of the best fit," explained Horton.

Living the dream

Livingbridge got the thumbs up. It has experience in the comms sector, its current portfolio includes connectivity infrastructure provider M247 and Southern Communications. And Horton said the PE firm's readiness for open and frank conversations was also appealing, which he says established trust as all three parties sought a win win deal, while keeping a strong relationship with the Rigby Group.

"Livingbridge's team supports investments to exceed growth plans, both organically and via acquisitions," added Horton. "We have already begun engagement on an improved strategy for digital marketing, increased support for finding acquisition targets, and have greater funding fire power to acquire larger businesses than I had originally planned."

Livingbridge also believed that Platform One – FluidOne's SDN that integrates cloud, IoT, broadband, Ethernet and mobile communications services – is a key differentiator in the market and another reason to invest. "Therefore Livingbridge was

focused on due diligence in ascertaining the quality of the network, customer feedback on our services, and verifying that it was a true USP in the market," added Horton. "I am pleased to say that we came through the detailed and technical due diligence with flying colours."

For the year end to March 2019 Horton forecasts £29 million revenue (11 per cent organic growth on the prior year) and £3.2 million EBITDA. The company has a circa 100

The biggest opportunity for FluidOne and resellers is to deliver a differentiated service for connectivity and OTT offerings

headcount including a small dedicated outsourced team, approximately 700 direct clients and around 200 active channel partners. "We aim to grow to three times the current turnover, bringing a wider range of products and services to our customers while maintaining service levels and a strong staff culture," he stated.

"For the next 12 months one of our major priorities is to grow in the channel by onboarding new partners and bringing a wider range of services to existing partners. To complement our existing services we have a product roadmap to bring

a wider choice of UC, SIP, IoT, SD-WAN and DASH portal improvements to our channel partners, along with improved strategic relationship engagement and service management being led by Channel Sales Director Henry West."

Horton says he has the fire power to more than double the size of the business in the first two years through M&A. "We are looking for quality reseller businesses with reputations for high client service who would benefit from leveraging FluidOne's network aggregation platform," he stated. "Our strategy is to bring the acquired skills and experience in sales, pre-sales, product and service to the benefit of our existing customers, and to offer Platform One services to the acquired customers. We are looking for companies that are strong in at least one of UC, SIP, IoT, security and IT cloud managed services."

These preferred business and technology profiles are reflective of a market undergoing digital transformation, the convergence of IT and telecoms and the fragmentation of connectivity carriers – all major trends driving demand for quality connectivity with increasing bandwidth, believes Horton. "The biggest opportunity for FluidOne and resellers is to deliver a differentiated service for connectivity and OTT offerings, and simplifying the supply and complexity of these," stated Horton. "To give end customers a choice of carrier, bandwidth and price at each location is a key enabler for our channel partners to make the most of this opportunity." ■



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Walker strides out as Aura

In driving an ever deeper divide between off-the-shelf products and future proofed bespoke solutions, Aura Technology Managing Director Tim Walker continues to play his strategic hand with a trump card.

Fascinated by technology since 'the year dot' Walker has always had a penchant for recognising the usefulness of technologies and how they can be applied to improve human environments. He brought forward the business development aspect of his mission when he co-founded London-based MSP Iconnyx early in his career. Walker went on to lead one of the largest IT support providers in Hampshire before setting up Aura Technology in late 2017 with co-founder and Technical Director Peter Hughes.

"I make it my business to keep informed not just about the latest technology but about how that technology is being used to the best effect," said Walker.

"With Aura Technology I wanted to put all those lessons to good use, to really work strategically in partnership with businesses, to understand what they need and come up with solutions that help achieve their goals."

Walker gained an early converged IT and telecoms experience which put him on the road to services. His first sales role was in the comms sector during the mid 1990s, and with foresight he predicted the ever closing gap between voice and data which led him down the path towards managed services provision. "I also learned a lot from my first



Tim Walker

Most IT companies engage in offering any SME business their standard IT support offering, but we start with the end in mind

company, Iconnyx, about the way I wanted to do things, and later in different roles I saw how it shouldn't be done," stated Walker.

At the time of Aura Technology's inception its founders were not deterred by the high number of MSPs in the market. In fact, Walker and Hughes were encouraged by their near universal habit to roll out the same model to customers willy nilly. "There was a better way, and that was to work with businesses at senior level to identify their

priorities, and then develop bespoke services that play to those goals," stated Walker.

Expansion mode

Aura Technology's rapid growth is testament to the effectiveness of its approach. The company has boosted staff numbers by 16 in 12 months, prompting a move to larger premises at the Ocean Village business hub in Southampton. Walker plans to extend Aura Technology's geographic reach by opening more regional offices to serve clients beyond London and

the south. The company currently services a customer base of several thousand users and expects that number to grow significantly over the next three years, continuing a trend that has come to define the company. "Growth has been the main driver of change at Aura," added Walker. "Word is getting around about how we are different."

So much so that fresh prospects follow hard on the heels of customer deployments, as word of

mouth continues to not only generate more business but also consolidate thinking and strategy on particular markets not before considered specific targets. "There are business areas that especially seem to value our approach – legal and professional services, for example, where we have established a reputation for delivering IT systems that work within the compliance and confidentiality constraints they are subject to," explained Walker. "A focus on those verticals where we have strength and depth will contribute to our ongoing expansion. But opportunities can come from anywhere, and happy clients are our best marketing tool. We are ready and able to serve any sector, anytime. Our approach is to remain agile."

Another aspect of Aura Technology's approach that holds great appeal, says Walker, is that the company is largely platform agnostic. "Although we have good partnerships with vendors and valuable relationships with partners such as Datto, we don't adopt a one-size-fits-all approach," he commented. "We genuinely work with businesses to identify the hardware, software and platforms that will work best for them. I anticipate that we will grow relationships with key partners as we continue to establish Aura Technology, but I never want to lose that flexibility which is so valuable to our clients."



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Aura ups the pace

Customers will not get the future proofed solutions that's right for them until ICT providers have meaningful conversations with clients and work backwards from an organisation's desired outcomes, according to Walker. Nobody can argue with his logic yet he claims Aura research has identified the opposite approach as endemic in the industry today. "Most IT companies engage in offering any SME

We have a policy of not working with the wrong colleagues and we don't believe in taking on the wrong customers

business their standard IT support offering, but we start with the end in mind," he said. "Not the end goal for our services, but the end goal for the client over the next three to five years. Only once that is fully understood can you even start to think about the right solution fit. Based on our market research during 2017, we don't see any other IT services business delivering anything like this in a comprehensive way."

Walker's line is that he tries to be ahead of the curve in all matters, and his other clear intention is to closely follow the trajectory of growth markets such as platform integration. "One example is Microsoft Teams which is proving to be a

popular platform with many clients, and is developing almost by the week in terms of functionality and integration with other software," added Walker. "We also expect to see more growth in agile working in the coming years. It makes sense to a lot of businesses to work this way, with lower overheads and more flexibility for employees. The advent of 5G technology will drive this trend. Not in a big way initially, but it will come to offer huge gains in terms of connectivity and data speed."

Another sure thing is the rapid growth in multiple device usage and the rise of agile and remote working. "These trends have been here for some time but now most businesses are dispersing their workforce," noted Walker. "However, all this is dwarfed by the requirement to secure businesses' IT environments. Poor security set-ups by another IT company or by an in-house IT team are one of the main reasons why businesses come and talk to Aura."

An iron law of Aura says that its biggest opportunity is to have 'great fun' on the journey it has embarked on, enthused Walker. "We have a policy of not working with the wrong colleagues and we don't believe in taking on the wrong customers," he stated. "Due to having a great fit with our team and also our customers, I believe we're all working hard but achieving some great results on the way. I wanted to create a business where there was no 'Sunday night dread' about coming in on Monday morning. I think the team would agree that we have achieved that. It's important to love what you do." ■

Just a minute with Tim Walker...

Role model: My father: An exceptional relationship builder and manager of people

What talent do you wish you had? To ski and play golf better

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? I'd be an actor

Best piece of advice you have been given? If you want to get to the moon, aim for the stars

What do you fear the most? Letting our customers down, and running out of time to do it all

Your main strength and what could you work on? I consider authenticity a strength. I am 'myself' whether at work or at home; but I could work on doing more meditation

Name three ideal dinner guests: Napoleon Hill, he learnt from the masters of success and would add enormous value to anyone; James Kerr, I want to know more about what he took out of the All Blacks set-up on the will to win; and Oprah Winfrey to hear her story

Industry bugbear: Working with the distribution sector. Someone in that market needs to take the bull by the horns and transform the offering to make it much simpler and easier to procure

Top tip: Have a good business plan, manage cash well, don't sell your services too cheaply, be different and build more value into your proposition

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Jumping off buildings and out of aeroplanes for the thrill, but anything could go wrong

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Tipping the balance

Despite fierce competition from cloud hyperscalers there has never been a better time for MSPs to show their spurs, according to Memset CEO Nick Craig-Wood who says the bombast of tech giants should merely serve to embolden smaller ICT service providers.

Surprisingly, the gift of a sense of direction tops Craig-Wood's wish list. He confesses that he is likely to get lost in supermarkets and hails GPS as a godsend. Yet he is hardly in a spin behind Memset's wheel, and knows exactly where the market is heading. Craig-Wood's compass for the ICT sector is a pointer to his passion for IT, which took root as a 13 year old when he was dead set on learning how to programme his father's Sinclair ZX80 home computer. Craig-Wood's compulsion to perceive how things work, even the universe, led him to study physics at university. Now, he applies a scientific approach to understanding how the ICT market ticks. "I always knew that I wanted to work with computers," stated Craig-Wood.

Cloud hyperscalers are eating into traditional markets, but for MSPs to shut their eyes to these giants just because of their size is wrong, believes Craig-Wood. While the big boys swill champagne, it is the smaller, more visible and agile providers that can really call the shots from under the carapace of a more personal and valuable proposition, he believes. "Organisations

become attracted to our transparent pricing and business ethics once they realise the hidden expensive charges and lock-ins that the cloud hyperscalers charge," stated Craig-Wood.

"We are competing against the leading cloud giants – Microsoft, Amazon and Google. As a result, there are a number of areas we continue to develop. Our main priority is to improve our managed service wrapper and focus on a new suite of security products. And our partner programme is essential in evolving our market approach and reputation, along with investments in our sales and account management team, and our reinvigorated go-to-market through many channels including social media and traditional media."

As industry players continue to be overwhelmed by their obsession with hyperscalers they must reflect on whether they are fuelling their own demise, believes Craig-Wood, who argues that nothing should detract from the opportunity yawning before tactically sound MSPs. "As more and more of our traditional competitors in



Nick Craig-Wood

Cloud hyperscalers are eating into our traditional market which challenges us to evolve

this market move to support the cloud hyperscalers, and away from offering their own cloud hosting, the market opens up for Memset to offer secure cloud services as a trusted supplier that also provides personal support," said Craig-Wood. "Therefore, our biggest opportunity lies in becoming an end-to-end integrator and leveraging our partner programme to provide customers with a one-stop-shop."

Opportunity gap

Memset set up shop in 2002, founded by Craig-Wood and his sister Kate who then operated out of their father's garage. "Kate did the website and sales and I looked after the technology," said Craig-Wood. "We founded the business to exploit the virtual

machine market. We saw an opportunity gap between the £5 per month web hosting account and the £100 per month dedicated server. As we expanded we created more products, running our own data centres and networking. Today, we provide mid-top end infrastructure and work with organisations of all sizes from all sectors, particularly those that wish to protect their data in a highly secure environment. We see a maturing understanding among business leaders in their use of balanced, multi-cloud strategies. Our focus is to be well adjusted to this changing landscape."

In the age of the Internet, demarcations between the old and new blur, meaning that staying ahead of

the curve is an ongoing and challenging process. "Customers increasingly need help in exploiting new and emerging technologies, so we look for fresh ways to take them further forward with a competitive advantage," said Craig-Wood. "We are also keen to integrate new security products into our portfolio and continue outpacing the fraudsters, offering customers rock solid protection."

"Trust sits at the centre of our commercial proposition, which is built on security and relationships. How? By providing a full data security wrap. Whether this is protecting against malicious activity, accidental loss or misuse, or ensuring up-time of service provision, we provide customers with the peace of mind they need to grow their businesses. Secondly, we make sure we maintain regular personal contact with clients. This human contact and commitment to long-term relationships is where companies like us come into our own and sets us apart from the hyperscalers."

For many businesses, rapid growth within the traditional definition of scaling up is the ultimate goal. "In hindsight, I would have taken external investment in the early years," commented Craig-Wood. "We could have grown a lot faster that way. But through building recognition in the market of our brand, service and product offering, I see Memset being a known, trusted entity within three years. We will gain this high profile by doubling our business while maintaining our ethics, innovation and customer centricity." ■

Energy is perfect fit for Keesource

HERTFORDSHIRE based Keesource provides a completely managed service for business communications and prides itself on taking the complexity out of providing joined up services.

"Our technical expertise is critical to our services, but perhaps more important is the knowledge and experience we can offer. Our clients value our trusted and personal service and our proactive approach to their business requirements," said Managing Director Karen Lumley.

The close relationship the company has developed with its customers has now directly led to an extension in its portfolio with the introduction of energy supply in partnership with Fidelity Energy.

"Fidelity Energy came highly recommended from one of our clients. This was great for two reasons. Firstly, it was proof of demand within my client base. Secondly, I was able to get valuable feedback and opinion from a real client," explained Lumley.

"We specialise in tailored solutions across multiple carriers and services and identifying cost reduction opportunities and improving business efficiency and profitability. It was clear that energy fitted within our business portfolio and became a simple extension of our sales proposition. Reducing costs and simplifying service is as relevant to energy as it is to our comms managed service."

Lumley was impressed with how fast Fidelity had her energy supply service up and running and believes it has rapidly added value to her business.

"The Fidelity proposition speaks for itself and the set up and administration is all very straightforward. With additional training on the portal we were ready to go.



"We felt it was important to sell the new energy service under our existing brand as it has the confidence and trust of existing customers. We may look at creating a separate energy division in the future, but for now it fits very well under Keesource Managed Services."

The sales team are targeting current customers and Lumley is confident of ongoing success based on the managed services skills they have developed.

"No business services are easy to sell, but if you have the in-house skill sets to deliver professional managed services to your clients then energy is an easy fit. Clients need to understand the simplicity of changing supplier. Once the transition process has been explained and any fears of disruption have been dispelled, then the response becomes very positive," said Lumley.

"The account management from Fidelity is excellent. Ryan Gilmour is very reactive to our in-house requirements and support and Zac Wotton is always on hand should we need field-based support with larger clients.

"The beauty of this proposition is that it resonates horizontally across all markets. The product is great, and the market is vast. Businesses are looking to streamline services, reduce costs, and have one point of contact for all their utility services. The opportunities are excellent.

So, what would Lumley say to any ICT companies that see this as a diversion from their core business?

"Telecoms and electricity supply are both business-critical services where customers place a lot of trust in the supplier. With this common ground, electricity is an extension of the sales proposition and not a diversion," she said.

“The beauty of this proposition is that it resonates horizontally across all markets. The product is great, and the market is vast.”

Karen Lumley

Haw has energy for more channel deals



John Haw

FOUR years after launching energy services into the ICT channel, Fidelity Energy now has £130m under management and 400 partners selling gas and electricity.

This phenomenal success has been spearheaded by managing director John Haw, who we caught up with en route to his latest partner conference alongside mobile giant Carphone Warehouse.

"A lot of our recent growth has been down to the deal we signed with Carphone, but we also have to take into account channel acceptance of the company's web portal and our dyed in the wool partnership philosophy," he said.

"After the partnership was announced in October last year, we are steadily adding around 10 partners a month. Our holistic portal proposition allows sales to be technology led, which is something ICT channel people are very comfortable with. We had two significant partner wins in December and January which have accelerated the number under management."

Haw believes the simplicity of the Fidelity Energy offering is fundamental. "All resellers have to do is get hold of a customer's energy bill," he said.

"Once we have a copy of a bill we have a 39% closure rate by value with an average deal making circa £2,000. The average customer is generating around £4,000, so if you have 500 customers and 20% send a bill over in the first year that means 100 bills. If we do close 39%, that's a margin of £78,000 to the bottom line, which is a tidy sum.

"We are also seeing renewals account for a third of our monthly sales and we have a 93% renewal rate by value, so you are building annuity value."

Haw says the Fidelity Energy portal prevents any mistakes ending up on a contract.

"We have APIs to Companies House to verify registered addresses, SIC codes and incorporation date and an API to Credit Safe to provide the credit scores - the portal then matches these against what suppliers we'll accept - and all supplier contract pads are built into DocuSign.

"Partners love the technology, its simplicity and the fact that they don't have to increase any overheads in order to realise the potential of the new revenue stream."

Haw is pleased his partners buy into the Fidelity ethos that the customer experience is king and has not been surprised by the demise of competitor Utilitywise.

"Our main differentiator is that our partners look after their customers and they are not out to exploit them. Utilitywise lacked any governance in the sales processes and customers often fell foul of that. Our partners don't behave like that, they understand if you rip people off you don't win the business next time round. Our 93% renewal rate is testament to how well our partners are thought of. UW sales people were over booking the value of contracts whereas we verify every usage with the previous supplier before we lock deals in. We are currently number one among the British Gas Partners on Actual versus Booked."

Chess raises the bar with

Following the acquisitions of IT business Lanway and telecoms billing specialist TMS, Chess has had something of a hiatus with partner events of late but was back on form with an above par show at The Belfry.



The Chess team mixed a potent cocktail of partner propositions at last month's high powered channel event

Partners have different ways of dealing with us and a broad mix of products and services to select. It's about partners picking the right cocktail for them

Chess Partner's 'Channel Mix' event was intended to give resellers an insight into new technology on the horizon and early in the proceedings guest 'futurists' delivered a heady mixture of imminent opportunities laced with some controversy for delegates to contemplate. Former BT CTO Peter Cochrane, now a 'scientist, engineer and pragmatist', spelt out a future where the IoT will monitor our health by telling us what's going in and what's coming out of

our bodies via sims in our coffee maker and down our loos, not to mention telling us we're running out of milk via our connected fridge!

But is there money for resellers in facilitating this joined up world? It's debatable because, as Cochrane pointed out, 'the vast majority of things on the IoT will not be connected on the Internet, they will be connected to each other over a short range'. The view of Ant Morse, Futurist and Head of Digital Solutions at

O2, was slightly different. "Ultimately IoT will tell us when to do more of something and when to do less," he said. "It will turn on our kettle and advise us how well we are cleaning our teeth. By 2020, 50 to 100 billion things will be connected and it's worth trillions. IoT-as-a-service is the way forward."

Disruption

Morse warned of the disruption joined up Big Data will bring, facilitated by 5G, which he described

as 'phenomenal network of service' and advised partners to start talking to customers now about the huge leaps in technology ahead and, importantly, get up to pace with cybersecurity. "Big Data will be disruptive and not everybody will take the moral decisions O2 takes not to drown people in adverts," said Morse. "We will, however, know if you're in a traffic jam and we'll be able to direct you to the nearest Starbucks. Our team is focused on helping people do more with less and be

more efficient. My advice is to become a navigator for customers. Guide them through new technology, get them secure and get them collaborating more effectively. Do 30-minute webinars or whatever it takes and offer advice on phishing, Internet security and so on."

All this 'blue sky' thinking was followed by highly engaging and motivational talks from entrepreneur and business sales expert Adrian Webster and Chess Culture Director Kate Wood, who has



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channel cocktail

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helped catapult the business to the top of the Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For list. Olympic Gold Medallist Ben Hunt-Davis, founder of the 'Will It Make The Boat Go Faster' performance consultancy, wrapped up the conference. He said that every single thing the winning Olympic 2000 rowing eight did was taking them in the direction they wanted to go. In other words, his simple message to delegates was 'set your goals and don't do things that don't make a difference'.

In between the speaker presentations 'Deep Dive' sessions with product specialists from Chess, O2, TalkTalk Business and EE gave resellers insight into new margin opportunities from Cybersecurity, Cloud PBX, IoT Vehicle Management, Workspace Collaboration and Tech-as-a-Service.

So, did Chess' return to the event business make a difference to channel partners? "I hope so," said Managing Director Stephen Dracup afterwards. "The idea of the Channel Mix theme was to make

the event like a bar with cocktails. The story we're trying to get across is that partners have got quite a lot of different ways of dealing with us and a lot of different products and services to choose from. Effectively it's all about partners picking the right cocktail they want. Also, this kind of event gives us the opportunity to hear back from partners about what they want. It's not all about just telling people things, it's about listening to them as well. I've always really enjoyed blue sky topics because they get you thinking, and sometimes it's the most simple thing that adds the most value. Nonetheless, it's always a good process.

Interesting times

"We're in a very interesting period at the moment, as an industry, as a country and perhaps even as a world. I think that we have to be able to take time out of our busy lives to think about what our place in that world is going to be. Because if we don't, then perhaps it will happen to us rather than us happening to it. In adversity or in change situations there







are always huge amounts of opportunity for people to take advantage of."

So, everyone's happy in the Chess 'cocktail bar' and with its new mix of digital products and services Chess is running at £125m in revenues which is a nice place to be, as Dracup confirmed. "We have transitioned from the old world to the new world and I think to have done that and maintained profitability has been a real achievement. Our task now is, having built a platform for growth, step on from there."

Currently, the foundations of that platform are built around the modern work place via Chess Partner. Focusing on connectivity, cloud-based and -as-a-Service solutions. "Chess Partner is a huge opportunity for transitioning partners and we're working closely with suppliers to deliver a new world proposition," added Dracup. "We're eating our own lunch as well, so what we learn we can sell. And, if you don't have that expertise in house, we can provide it and work with you to get that story out to customers." ■

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Panel discussion engages with the hot topics of the day

Panellists: Chess Managing Director Stephen Dracup; Futurist and former BT CTO Peter Cochrane; Ant Morse, O2; Howard Jones, EE; and Peter Rodriguez, Vodafone.

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Golden opportunities in

Last month's Margin in Mobile symposium exposed the ever expanding mobile market as a cornucopia of revenue generating opportunities for all channel resellers.

Speakers at the inaugural Margin in Mobile event, staged at the Northampton Marriott Hotel on March 21st, were united by their assessments of the mobile market as a hotbed of channel opportunity, and for Garry Growns, Sales Director at Daisy Wholesale, what matters most is actually recognising the opportunity and taking timely action to generate additional and significant margin. "We are in the middle of an amazing opportunity," he stated. "Yet I'm still surprised by the number of resellers not selling mobile, which is a standard business tool.

"In this second generation of mobile we're seeing a step change in opportunity as the market evolves, and the channel is well placed to capitalise on this trend by partnering with the right supplier. The key is knowing how to adapt and change your business, which may need technical and fast-start sales support. Mobile, if not already, could become one of a reseller's most profitable products, with 30 per cent to 32 per cent margin available for partners."

Daisy Wholesale registers circa 12,000 new connections every month with significant growth in applications and data. This is not an opportunity that should pass through the mesh of day-to-day distractions, especially considering the influence of a growing market such as the IoT. But to make the most of real-time data and



Delegates get to grips with the fast growing mobile market

Speakers at Margin in Mobile were united by their assessments of the mobile market as a hotbed of channel opportunity

multi-network propositions a data management platform is critical, explained Anton Le Saux, Strategic Telecoms Leader at Zest4, who noted that getting all of the data in one place is a matter of hefty investment or astute partnering. "Mobile networks are protective of their core network and data visibility," he said. "And few of them have a managed data platform for partners."

To plug the gap Le Saux noted that Zest4 has invested in a platform which connects into the network and gives visibility of data consumption, enabling partners to see what's happening in their own estate via various account

management functionalities, analytics and reporting. "The platform can be personalised, enabling partners to position themselves as offering managed connectivity," he added. "IoT opportunities exist in all sectors. We are moving into a smarter connected world."

Smart thinking

Pangea Managing Director Dan Cunliffe also emphasised that the IoT is at the core, and expressed his passion to develop ways for mobile to be used in smarter ways. Key to this is Pangea's partnership with Kingston University which seeks to overcome the challenges faced by 5G networks in maximising data transfer. "The project's

aim is to develop enriched video compression and data transfer techniques over 4G+ and 5G networks, unlocking groundbreaking speed and quality capabilities with huge implications, paving the way for data transferal over powerful 5G networks," he said.

Is mobile data and 4G a real business tool? Asked Mike Van Bunnens, Managing Director at Comms365. "Yes, if it's properly understood," he stated. "Not all SIMs are the same, and the key question is how 4G can become business grade. Speed frustrates us but it's not about that, rather the impact on latency which increases when

a data SIM is put under pressure, leading to a bad customer experience."

He cited pre-Ethernet as a common use case suitable for a small office, but with no control over the bandwidth bigger firms will suffer from latency issues. The opportunity for resellers, he said, is a solution that delivers manageable pre-Ethernet which is quick to deploy and simple to use. Enter SD-One, a clever box that takes lines and 4G from a combination of providers to give a fully integrated solution with less configuration and a better user experience. "If you manage speed, latency is constant," stated Van Bunnens. "SD-One takes any connectivity from any provider and acts as a SD WAN device, enabling bandwidth optimisation control, turning 4G into an exciting business tool."

Mark Curtis-Wood, Head of the Networks Division at Nimans, noted that an important consideration for the distributor is the decline of voice and the move to mobile, a trend underscored by its relationships with O2, Vodafone, and particularly BT/EE which he described as a 'perfect storm'. "We are seeing a shift in the market towards IP which is critical in the mobile space," stated Curtis-Wood. "There couldn't be a better time to embrace new revenue streams as data is used as a means to communicate."

The important role of the channel in delivering mobile

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mobile

services to SMEs was a point strongly made by Roan Pratt, Head of Product Sales at Gamma. "The big boys can't look after SMEs," he stated, adding with a note of caution that resellers could be at risk of being 'boxed in' by the mobile networks. "Don't be hemmed in by the operators – build stickiness and barriers to entry," he urged. "Mobile is about ownership and recognising revenue and margin from your base, and you only get this via the wholesale model. The networks are historically about ARPU, but you can have a conversation about how best to tailor the experience for the end user, and also enable customers to manage their own mobile."

Adding value

But it's not just about selling, it's about tweaking, advised Derek Watson, Managing Director at Aurora (which was acquired by Daisy), who gave delegates an example of how billing systems can be leveraged to bring added value and increase margin by reducing the workload and the manageability of an estate. "Data is key to optimising margin," he commented. "You can generate more margin by picking the right package. Ask whether the customer has the right size data bundle according to their usage. Resellers could, for example, save 50 per cent on line rental if clients are not using the data. A shared data bundle option could be key to even more revenue and margin. Billing systems help you to get the customer on the right bundle every month."

How customers should procure and pay for products and services,

including mobile, should be revolutionised, according to David Nelson, Services Director at Tech Data. He took the audience through the distributor's innovative subscription portal which he champions as the way forward, showing delegates how the subscription model can offer lifetime device management and deliver profit for resellers.

"People like to spread payments," he stated. "Resellers can take the portal to the end user, offer a subscription, and add services, costs and products from other distributors and operators. A residual value calculator is pulled through the subscription and the portal credit checks automatically, currently exhibiting an 85 per cent pass rate. Resellers can also create their own white label quotes, offer an API or use it out-of-the-box."

The portal, which has received £4 million investment so far, is integrated into Tech Data's InTouch sales platform, and according to Nelson people are starting to accept this new way of selling that gets technology into peoples' hands quickly, knows when the customer is due for a refresh and receptive to promotions, and also offers corporate mobile recycling. Just as Tech Data is seeking to disrupt conventional procurement methods, Graeme Good, Head of B2B Sales at Samsung, followed Nelson's presentation by concentrating the audience's thoughts on the extent to which mobile is a market disruptor. "Resellers should focus on driving new revenue streams with mobility at the centre," he stated. ■



Anton Le Saux, Zest4



Roan Pratt, Gamma



Mark Curtis-Wood, Nimans



Mike Van Bunnens, Comms365



Garry Grows, Daisy Wholesale



Derek Watson, Aurora



David Nelson, Tech Data



Graeme Good, Samsung



Dan Cunliffe, Pangea



Delegates get down to business in mobile

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Turn your customers into evangelists

What sets successful companies apart and a notch above competitors is their ability to strategically overcome sales challenges, but how exactly can you do so in today's ever-changing ICT sales landscape?

Even the most high-performing sales teams face obstacles in developing buyer relationships and communicating effectively with customers, whether they be channel partners or end users. The big question sales people often ask is: "How do we differentiate ourselves enough that customers want to talk to us without getting the same story they hear from every other company?"

The answer is simple and is forever being extolled in the columns of Comms Dealer: It's all about getting under the skin of your customers and building meaningful relationships, so they would not dream of going anywhere else to buy their ICT products and services. The most successful technology businesses are those that turn customers into brand evangelists. And, crucially, every customer touchpoint represents your brand.

As an example, a friend has been a disciple of a well-known, very expensive, top-end TV brand for decades and was keen to upgrade his set. Three new sets later he still complained of the same fault – a severe lag between the remote control and the TV. One helpline caller was less than helpful and blamed him for the issue. Big mistake. My friend went elsewhere and over 30 years of praising the company's products and after care service went down the drain.

On the flip side, I had an issue with a very alluring karaoke system which I wanted to buy for some fun with the family last Christmas. The microphone would not work for longer than five minutes before cutting out. A very helpful customer service representative tried to help but to no avail. I questioned him whether he thought the software might not be quite bug free and he said, honestly, that an upgrade was due. Without quibbling, he then offered me an immediate refund and suggested I re-purchase the upgraded version next year. No doubt I will.

The message here, as any business consultant will tell you, is that you're only as strong as your weakest link and honesty builds trust. Showing you always have your customer's best interests at heart is one of the best ways to stand apart from your competitors.



ED WINFIELD
CONTENT GURU

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

Content Guru's 'storm' platform offers customers huge scalability and feature-rich capability, enabling complex system integrations to deliver an intelligent customer experience. With over 13 years of cloud delivery knowledge, we are one of the leaders in this space.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

At Content Guru we deliver value with our customers, with a focus on innovation and the customer experience. We jointly develop use cases, supporting a customer to meet their business objectives and provide enhanced customer experiences.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

We always demonstrate our technology to our customers with live examples of how 'storm' can be used to enhance the customer experience. We train the teams continually on new product developments and communicate our product roadmap regularly with our customers.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

We focus on six areas with customers: we deliver at speed, we go the extra mile, we are goal-driven, we work flexibly, we communicate frequently, and we are friendly to deal with. These build that long term trust and delight.



PAUL NORTH
ENTANET

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

We're offering the channel innovative and highly differentiated connectivity products run over our own advanced and intelligent full fibre infrastructure that we lay in the ground. This is rapidly developing the scale opportunity for our channel partners.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

We develop strong working relationships with partners from day one, including advice on sales and marketing strategies. We don't just sell connectivity but a level of service and support that allows partners to set themselves apart from the competition.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

The open communication culture we've cultivated and the quality of the in-house training we provide enables our sales team to share their wealth of sector knowledge with each other which feeds into the quality of service to our partners.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

Partners tell us they like the quality of our account management, with queries answered knowledgeably and quickly. A big factor in this success is the length of service within our sales team and the experience and continuity this brings.



ANNA ROPER
9 GROUP

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

Our value-added services. Partners can take advantage of our managed billing offer, including direct debit collection with their own originator code. Bespoke marketing support will target business growth and our Virtual Office solution enables Partners to focus on sales.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

We employ Partner Business Managers, not salespeople. At a first meeting, they are there to learn about the partner and, by offering impartial advice on issues ranging from SIP migrations to regulatory compliance, can demonstrate how 9 offers far more than an average supplier.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

In addition to a range of product and technical training, our PBMs use the products they sell, so they are well placed to provide informed demonstrations and insight, whether it be a tour of our portals, or how to use eve's collaboration features.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

Trust is a personal issue, so we have invested heavily in personable, articulate PBMs, who nurture business relationships. Attitude can be a key differentiator here, so can do, will fix, won't stop until it is done, are PBM traits.



ENZO VISCITO
INCLARITY

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

The resilience and reliability of our network means that our partners and their customers are never let down. We can truly say that we don't experience any downtime. Our customer service is second to none; all our team have a can-do attitude.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

We believe that one box doesn't fill all. Our partners are treated as individuals with differing needs. Our account managers and marketing resources are experienced industry experts who can assist and adapt training, marketing, technical and pre-sales support as required.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

The primary role of our sales team is to assist our partners in growing their businesses and retaining their existing base. We take a consultative approach to selling that is backed up by superior product knowledge and business acumen.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

Each of our account managers work as a team with their partners and honour commitments made. A key focus is to create business efficiencies which ultimately enable the partners and their customers to save money whilst empowering their respective businesses.



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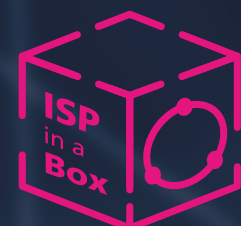
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evangelists for your brand



ELLIE ALLSEYBROOK
INFORM BILLING

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

Inform Billing's USP is in our sheer wealth of billing knowledge, harnessed in our software and services. The entire senior management team, bar me, have previously worked as billing managers in resale businesses, with first-hand experience of the challenges.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

We aim to build long-term partnerships and therefore use a consultative approach, appropriate to the customer. Those starting out need more advice and guidance, whilst with established businesses, we'll demonstrate how we can deliver their more defined requirements.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

Everyone in our business is fully trained to use and understand the complexities of our software. Our team is actively involved, keeping a handle on changes in the wider industry and supplier offerings, which adds significant value to conversations.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

We welcome comparisons and aim to demonstrate superior value from the outset, which can often increase loyalty. However, some customers don't want to shop around because they have come via channel referrals and the weight of the recommendation is enough.



TOM MAXWELL
NIMANS

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

We are a trusted partner and always do right by our customers, in line with the mission statement our founder introduced when he started the business to 'serve the customer'. Our portfolio and strength to move with the market are also key.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

It's about understanding their needs and providing and delivering what they need when they need it.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

Nimans has its own in-house training academy and we always encourage our staff with their career progression. We have regular supplier vendor days and help staff to self-learn too.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

The rapport, friendships and relationships we build with our customers is based on wanting to be their trusted partners for the long term. We have a near 40-year trading pedigree and are not just here for the 'here and now'.



JUSTIN BLAINE
NTA

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

NTA has a disruptive model that stands out on its own in a fairly indistinguishable market place, however it is our people that make all the difference, they are passionate and this shines through when dealing with our partners.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

I believe we have the most feature rich and margin driven Hosted Solution that any vendor has to offer to the channel. I do not know any MD that is not driven by a value added service and gross profit.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

NTA has monthly staff meetings so everyone is aware what is going on within every department, we also have product and feature refreshers and regular meetings with the development team to understand the upcoming releases and future roadmap.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

NTA encourages total transparency in the sales process and we empower our team to deliver this at the point of sale. We build relationships with our partners, so they are part of the NTA family not just a customer.



VINCENT DISNEUR
UNION STREET

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

Ambitious development of our software coupled with an unbeatable service wrap. We consult with CPs to guide innovation and ensure our solutions stay ahead of the curve. Comprehensive technical support, consultancy and training, ensure partners can use our solutions to maximum effect.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

They ask the right questions. There's no 'one size fits all approach'. Unless you truly understand the customer's business and requirements, you won't succeed in demonstrating your worth as a value-added partner.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

Our salespeople have previously worked in the channel, many specifically in billing. This ensures implicit understanding of customers' objectives and the versatility of our software. Union Street's in-house product training is unmatched, and our salespeople are backed by expert presales consultants.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

There's no trick or shortcut to building trust and loyalty. Take the time to understand the challenge the customer's facing and tailor your solution accordingly. Act with integrity, be proactive in supporting your partners and always aim to exceed expectations.



PAUL TAYLOR
VOICEFLEX

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

Honesty. We endeavour to be as transparent as possible from partner channel pricing to engineering and support issues. There needs to be trust between supplier and customer and this is very important to us.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

Relationship building. I advise all new staff that channel partners take approximately 12 months before they will fully respect an account manager; you need to build trust. Our account managers have a consultative approach providing support, education, training, and imparting industry news.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

It's a treadmill you never get off. Our training is intense. We are pushing products now which won't be mainstream for 12 months; knowledge and the ability to impart that knowledge, is key.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

I sent a text inviting a potential customer to a roadshow who said: "We are not changing." I replied: "I'm not asking you to change I am asking you to have a look." From time to time everyone looks; we always need to be on the top of our game.



ED HOUSE
NUVIAS UC

WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY TRULY STAND OUT?

Our two-tier automation and provisioning tools, deployment and device management and a two-tier online ordering platform. Also, our Partner Enablement Portal (PEP) for end-user demand generation gives partners the ability to market all these services and more at a click of a button.

HOW DO YOUR SALES PEOPLE DIFFERENTIATE?

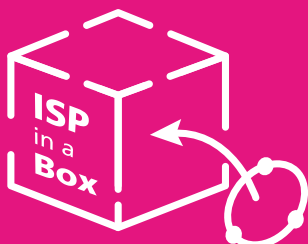
By providing end-to-end solutions and helping customers grow their business through unique partner enablement programs. They are all tailor-made to suit the partners and are designed to cover all departments to truly maximise business growth.

HOW DO YOUR SALES STAFF STAY KNOWLEDGABLE?

We run a sales academy where each sales person has a tailored training plan to ensure they are fully capable of helping all our partners. These cover all UC technologies as well as industry and sales knowledge.

HOW DO YOUR SALES TEAMS BUILD TRUST?

Via strong working relationships with customers, taking a consultative approach to enabling both their technical and sales teams. We position ourselves as an extension to our customers' teams, often attending joint end-user meetings to gain a deeper understanding of their requirements and issues.



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Connectivity upgrade cal



Those witnessing the slow pace of the UK's connectivity upgrade could be forgiven for assuming that it is really an effort to save our legacy from its inevitable demise in 2025. Attempts are now being made to make amends but with no clear national upgrade strategy there were plenty of issues to thrash out during last month's 9 Group sponsored round table debate, which sent a stark message to the channel – don't dilly dally, it's time to take action.

Censuring the state of the UK's comms infrastructure has become an industry pastime and source of frustration. It is undermining our reputation as a burgeoning digital nation, flouting the requirements of British businesses, and some say rendering us a laughing stock. According to the round table delegates, ISDN has long been out of date and the process to wind it down out of control and lurching. "Everything is driven by connectivity but the UK is massively behind the curve compared to other countries," said Paddy Coppinger, founder and Director, White Horse Telecom. "Let's not kid ourselves – we can talk about ISDN replacements, SIP trunks, hosted, on-premise etc – but it's all driven by connectivity and we're not even close. We haven't even got FTTC sorted out."

High-speed and capacious fibre connectivity is the primary alternative to the creaking national comms infrastructure lambasted by Coppinger, but upgrading the UK's connectivity infrastructure should not be the unstructured land grab that has emerged. Clear information is needed about which areas are planned for development to avoid service providers being drawn ever more into a speculative play, and everyone must know where they stand, emphasised 9 Group's Sales Director Anna Roper. "From a carrier service provider perspective, what the likes of Openreach are doing is unclear," she said. "There are many unanswered questions and we've got to have guidance on the interconnect environment. We provide our own infrastructure and our vision is heavily dependent on us knowing the UK connectivity roadmap."

FREE TO PERFORM



Is for reseller action now

ISDN today fails every long term viability test, as does the current piecemeal approach to implementing its replacement. This fiasco does nothing to lift the spirits of those crying out for connectivity that comes as standard in other nations. "Nordic countries laugh at us," said Andrew Doe, Managing Director and founder, doetaylor. "A Danish group purchasing leased lines from us was astonished by the cost. They run 100 stores for the price of five in the UK. They view connectivity as a utility. And I was in France recently where restaurants have 400 MB synchronous fibre connections for under 100 euros per month."

Served with a death warrant ISDN will hit the wall in 2025, but Coppinger forecasts a potential surprise far sooner than the cliff edge date. "We've been given six years notice," he said. "Do you think BT is going to wait six years? No, we've got to move now. There's no minimum time given to us legislatively. There is however a false sense of security, and the reseller community could be squeezed by the timeframe being brought forward significantly, perhaps in the next 18 months to two years. And they will be ramping up their sales activity. We can't sit here and be too comfortable."

Better to educate end users now than leave them to the mercy of aggressive rival telcos, or risk a backlash from bolshie customers who may feel they are being pushed into a corner if not approached soon enough. "Deutsche Telecom switched off ISDN on December 31st last year," stated Derek Owen, founder and CEO,

Totem Consulting Group. "Two big issues emerged. A large number of businesses displayed animosity at being told they must change without fully understanding why. But it worked well when resellers offered customers early education, and set out the options to move gradually. If communication is poor and left to the last minute clients will be forced to do something when they don't see the benefit. So get your options right and communicate now."

Leadership matters

The litmus test of any business leader is their alacrity to rise to a challenge and take positive action, which was a defining theme of the round table discussion as positive actions were brought to the fore. "We are formulating a strategy to educate resellers on what this journey will look like because it is extremely complicated," said Ben Knights, Head of Product Commercial, 9 Group. "There isn't one answer. We're suddenly going to have different products in different areas and there will be more competition from altnets etc. Connectivity will also become



Our strategic vision is heavily dependent on us knowing the UK infrastructure roadmap

a fragmented market, so it's about working out what's right for your business in your area. You need to make sure you've got the journey mapped out because what happens today has relevance for the next 10 years."

In an ideal world the UK's infrastructure upgrade would move away from one of a fragmented localised affair to being a coherent cross-industry effort as we embark on a transitional period that

leaves legacy behind. Yet, to an extent companies are regional players in the FTTP lottery. "It's about whether or not you can get FTTP," commented John Corney, Managing Director, Portal Comms. "In our area there's a lot of FTTP coming through. It's an evolution and as part of this we have built a data network ourselves."

That connectivity should underpin Britain as a cradle of digitalisation is not

disputed, what is in doubt is the safety of legacy client bases, noted Lawrence McCaughey, Director, Russell Telecom. "We sell CPE and everything has a flavour of SIP," he stated. "But we have a legacy customer base with thousands of customers who are technically PSTN and ISDN. With new providers selling hosted, how we get around our customers before anyone else is a challenge. We need to do something now."

Just as pressing is a victory of common sense in bringing a collaborative approach to creating Digital Britain, but the modalities of a workable arrangement are yet to be envisaged, so the nation has been left virtually to get on with it, which from a competition perspective has opened up this market as a free for all that threatens 'the establishment'. "Openreach will be overtaken by other players before it rolls out FTTP," commented Adam Sankey, Sales Consultant, Opus Tech. "5G and the likes of CityFibre will have solved the issue for sites that haven't got FTTP before Openreach puts the
Continued on page 36



ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS WITH 9



Continued from page 35
fibre in the ground, because it is dragging its heels to sweat existing assets."

Hardly the makings of a connectivity 'revolution', according to Doe. "We should be ashamed of the connectivity we have in place, and FTTP should be an expectation and a right," he added. "Small businesses recognise they now operate in a global market and that the UK is behind. I love it when someone's got an ISDN 30 or ISDN 2 or something traditional because it's not necessarily price driving change, it's flexibility and you have to embrace that."

For Equity Networks co-owner and Director



We have six years notice, but we've got to move now

Marcos Reid connectivity is 'just the plumbing, a commodity'. "The rest is gravy," he said. "That's a simplistic view but it works for us. We offer a wide range of services for a small company, and are going north at a rate of knots as a result. The IT side is proliferating. We offer hosted VoIP, call recording, Azure, AWS, Office 365 and the managed service etc. The whole piece is where we're heading. Connectivity is the bottom end."

Reid's assessment shows a confidence in connectivity that is 'out of sight and out of mind' because it does what it is supposed to do. A point picked up and advanced by Coppinger. "None of this works without good connectivity, and 5G will bring huge bandwidth to mobiles which will be the way forward," he said. "Everything will shift further into the cloud. There will be small margins with 5G but massive numbers. We have already got the ball rolling on things that are mind bending in the IoT world."

Coppinger's upbeat assessment of 5G shows how easily business growth can be lifted beyond a normal sense of proportion, elevated by new possibilities in the IoT, although 5G does

clearly pose a challenge to the industry. "Coverage is key," stated Doe. "5G penetrates buildings less because it is high bandwidth. So it might cause an issue in the roll out of IoT as 3G and 4G penetrate buildings better. The packets of data are tiny, it's about coverage not bandwidth."

Business only

The big problem will be saturated 5G networks, according to Sankey. "5G should be reserved exclusively for IoT, devices and business, for people that need available bandwidth with low latency because that is what will affect real-time products," he added. "Use cases for 5G and IoT are enormous, and the IoT will enable businesses to thrive."

In contemplating legacy technologies that have had their day, the discussion concluded with an awareness and celebration of what's possible in the future – a collage of opportunities. "We have a target rich environment, access to products to deliver on a best fit, best case basis, we are not regulated out of the market and we have access to everything on a level playing field," stated Coppinger. "We all need to take stock of the wonderful time we are living in."

Celebrating top players

Rewarding and celebrating success with channel partners is in the DNA of UC distributor Pragma and the company raised the bar for 2019 with a lavish awards dinner staged at St Ermin's Hotel in the heart of London's Westminster. St Ermin's was Winston Churchill's launch pad for his 'Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare' – The Special Operations Executive – which was Britain's secret espionage organisation during World War Two. There was of course nothing but gentlemanly engagement and friendly rivalry among the dinner suited guests who gathered to celebrate their market triumphs over the last year.



The traditions and history of the venue chimed with the mission of Ericsson LG's exclusive UK distributor to arm resellers with intelligent, state-of-the-art UC solutions and success was acknowledged in style with 15 partner awards presented by Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergeant.



Leader of the pack was Salisbury-based Berry Telecom which picked up the Overall Reseller of the Year and Phonelink Reseller of the Year awards, closely followed by

5G Communications which collected Reseller of the Year and Cloud Reseller of the Year accolades.

The full list of winners were as follows: iCall Reseller of the Year 2019 – Lily; Phonelink Reseller of the Year 2019 – Berry Telecom; New Reseller of the Year 2019 – Peach Technologies; New Reseller of the Year 2019 – Chrome Telecom; Fastest Growing Reseller of the Year 2019 – One Connectivity; Fastest Growing Reseller of the Year 2019 – Rydal Communications; Cloud Reseller of the Year 2019 – Sirius; Cloud Reseller of the Year 2019 – BDR; Cloud Reseller of the Year 2019 – Citytalk; Cloud Reseller of the Year 2019 – 5G Communications; Overall Cloud Reseller of the Year 2019 – Datakom; Reseller of the Year 2019 – Focus Group; Reseller of the Year 2019 – Lily; Reseller of the Year 2019 – 5G Communications; Overall Reseller of the Year 2019 – Berry Telecom.

Commenting on the awards Pragma Managing Director and co-founder Tim Brooks said: "This was a fabulous evening to thank our resellers for their hard work and commitment over the last year, as well as recognise some phenomenal performances from our channel, enabling Pragma to continue rapid growth."



FROM THE TABLE

KCOM has invested heavily in fibre, and 85 per cent of Hull has FTTP. You have to do something sales wise by 2025 so why not do it now.

Ben Chetham, Managing Director, Open VoIP

IT professionals are not as geared up in the sales arena as we are. But the opportunity they face is ten times the volume.

Alex Hall, co-owner, Equity Networks

If you go back to the old days of WLR and LLU, BT came in at the last minute and kept the margins.

Claire Maddox, Commercial Director, Eurolink

How many SMEs know what ISDN is? Are they aware of what is happening?

Matthew Daly, owner, Dalycom

Unless customers see comms as an application, such as a call centre, it's a utility like gas and electricity.

Lawrence McCaughey, Director, Russell Telecom



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Why it's time to socialise



As long as workgroups run as separate entities they will continue to limit an organisation's horizons, according to Voiceflex and Unify (an Atos company), which claim to offer channel partners a blend of cloud-based UC and social networking technology that promises a panacea for the many challenges faced by today's businesses.

Fragmented organisations will never work – not now nor in the future. What's needed is an imaginative and innovative blend of unified communications and social media-style collaboration technology, according to speakers at last month's Voiceflex-Unify roadshow in London (the first in a series of four such educational partner events). They say the essence of future business growth is to gain a deep understanding of a customer's ideal workspace and fashion their 'workUtopia', a catchy term coined by Unify to denote the revolution it seeks to

advance in how organisations work, communicate and test ideas using various media. Collaboration technology features prominently in this, particularly social networking, which Unify says is the answer to many of today's business communication challenges.

Circuit was launched in 2014 as Unify's flagship platform for social team and collaboration. Its design was greatly influenced by the rise of social media at the time. "In 2010 we saw that social networking was very important," said Andrew Cheel, UCC

Digital Mindset & Customer Success Director for Atos. "Organisations have diverse working groups – baby boomers and Generation X for example. This workforce demographic, which will evolve as Millennials come to proliferate, influences business processes and culture, so we need social technology and mechanisms to bring all of these elements together."

Strategic path

Unless resellers are divorced from reality, they must know that the strategic path being carved by Unify and like-minded counterparts

now makes most sense. Consider the following – real-time communication and collaboration, social networking, diversifying work groups, the rise of hosted, Millennials, Industry 4.0, the Gig Economy, digital transformation, WebRTC, AI, chatbots, analytics, multi-platform integration, new business models, dispersing workforces, superfast connectivity, smart mobile devices, ubiquitous connected things and ever accelerating change. These are just a small pick from the multifarious market drivers, trends and determining factors that are shaping the modern

day business environment where, argues Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director at Voiceflex, the offer of an on-premise PBX is likely to fall overwhelmingly short of the mark. "It's time to reach out to the cloud," he said.

The pace of change has indeed glaringly outstripped traditional communications and behaviours. Gartner reckons that by next year chatbots will power 85 per cent of all customer service interactions; 30 per cent of web browsing sessions will be conducted screen-free as voice-first browsing takes hold; 100 million users will

the digital conversation

shop in augmented reality; and the average bod will interact more with a bot than their spouse. Against this backdrop, remote and home working is on the up and up. The use of handy social tools such as WhatsApp are also on the rise among co-workers. This short, sharp and convenient contact method accelerates communications and is already making email seem clunky and old hat.

"Communications is more than voice, email and web meetings," stated Nathan Ronchetti, Head of Operations at Voiceflex. "Organisations must adopt enhanced conversational technologies as trends such as Instant Messaging come to prominence with apps like WhatsApp. We all know about BYOD, but with Circuit there won't be a Bring Your Own Platform era. The integration capabilities consolidate thousands of apps and a myriad of platforms. This is effective communications, but a consultative sell is crucial. Partners need to dig deeper into the customer's business processes to match their long-term growth strategies with digital technology and enlightened user mindsets."

With the on-premise PBX likely to be put on hold in light of all this, there's only one option, noted Taylor, but with circa 100-plus hosted telephony suppliers to choose from, exercising that option is not straightforward. "Not all providers will survive," he stated. "So 'mainstream' became a priority for us when identifying a partner, along with channel centricity and solid foundations, which do not come much deeper than Atos, an £18 billion

turnover business, £1 billion of which is attributable to Unify which deploys circa 20,000 seats per week."

The appointment of Voiceflex as Unify's first UK Cloud Service Provider in November last year coincided with the launch of Unify's workUtopia project. The link-up enables Voiceflex to deploy Circuit and the OpenScape Cloud application to channel partners. Taylor noted that Voiceflex will soon have the capacity to deploy Circuit on any telephony platform in the world using its SIP trunks. "The hosted space is crowded," he said. "By launching UC and collaboration applications our partners will continue to avoid the me-too environment."

Unify's technology will be hosted on Google infrastructure and Voiceflex partners will be backed up by Unify's weighty support mechanisms and collateral including certain compliance requirements like GDPR. Atos's capacious and impressive London offices at Midcity Place in High Holborn can also be leveraged by Voiceflex partners



Andrew Cheel

Wisdom is propagated across the network and the knowledge worker is far more productive. Beneficial outcomes like this drive adoption.



Paul Taylor

By launching UC and collaboration applications our partners will continue to avoid the me-too environment.

wanting to demonstrate the communication and collaboration capabilities of the Circuit platform to prospects.

User mindsets

It would be foolish to deny the veracity of Unify's world vision and only committing to a process of social collaboration will pass muster, according to Cheel. If resellers are not already considering such action they must change tack, he believes, adding that technology now is all about the user mindset. For example, take the role

of knowledge workers – strip out their unnecessary workload and we clearly see the benefits of socialising the digital conversation, pointed out Cheel.

These go-to people are hounded time and again every day with the same questions. Staff who ask similar questions, in Circuit's world, become an inner circle of like-minded people. "Using social media techniques Circuit creates conversation groups where answers can be found, quite often embellished with useful adjunct information based on

the experiences of others in the group," explained Cheel. "Wisdom is propagated across the network and the knowledge worker is far more productive. Beneficial outcomes like this drive adoption, people feel empowered and knowledge workers are released. It is calculated that they will be 11 days more productive a year. Add to this an index linked search engine and the organisation begins to hunt for information independently. All driven by simple inter-company social networking."

There's more. Collaboration with non-like-minded people can open up new possibilities not thought of before, as fresh perspectives often cast a new light on existing and unresolved issues. In the Circuit pipeline, and building on these benefits, is an analytics capability which Cheel says will be 'gold dust' for resellers as they will be able to show, with analytical insight, how users are deploying Circuit and how business processes are operating. "With capabilities to chart change and produce reports the reseller will become the client's best friend," added Cheel.

The assertion that resellers need to adapt or die is now a cliché but their need to become enmeshed in the hosted and social-defined collaboration world is a fresh responsibility they cannot ignore, according to Taylor. That more organisations are revolving on a hosted axis is reflected by the latest barometer of on-premises SIP trunk sales which shows a slight slow down, but Taylor reports a significant upturn in demand for SIP
Continued on page 40

Continued from page 39

connections in data centres. "Carrier hosted services have grown since 2015 which is a sign of where the market is going," he stated.

Voiceflex began its commercial life in April 2005 as a forward looking SIP trunk provider. In 2011 the company added a fraud protection product and launched a low end hosted offering called Nebula which now has 6,500 sold licences. Four years later Voiceflex introduced ABBA, an Advanced Behaviour Based Analysis application, and in 2017 debuted SIP trunk bundles with WebRTC. The link up with Unify marks the next step in Voiceflex's somewhat pioneering endeavour to be at the vanguard of change where emerging technology becomes market reality.

Which is not too dissimilar from Unify's modus operandi. When Circuit launched five years ago its inherent connectors were prescient of today's far greater demand for integrated platforms. Office apps and suites can be connected in, such as Outlook and OneDrive from the Microsoft ecosystem. This ability to create an office environment and then hook into it will also be available for Google, noted Cheel. "We have the means to combine ecosystems and migrate people away from handsets," he stated.

Ever closer union between channel partners and their customers falls squarely into Unify's definition of a supportive loyalty model.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The UK hosted market is only 20 per cent penetrated.
- Just 35 per cent of employees prefer email to communicate with colleagues, and 53 per cent already use IM with co-workers.



Nathan Ronchetti

Partners need to dig deeper into the customer's business processes to match their long-term growth strategies with digital technology and enlightened user mindsets.

A big question for resellers will be: Can they thrive with a customer base that cannot fully collaborate nor find a route to long-term growth? According to Unify's VP for Channel Sales UK&I Rob Wiles, the channel has reached a critical juncture where the future of reseller businesses cannot be separated from the long-term prospects of their customers. This, he says, is the starting gun for a deeper conversation with the customer that must forge a self-sustaining loyalty model.

Customer experience

"A better customer experience translates into profitability, and partners can help their customers drive loyalty in their customer base," stated Wiles. "If businesses don't adapt they will become dinosaurs, slow moving and easy targets. Nobody wants to sell to customers like that. They won't have budget and will seek the cheapest products, in doing so becoming less valuable to partners. So resellers would be wise to have the workUtopia conversation. Ultimately, our businesses depend on clients being successful over the long-term."

How we work should no longer be constrained by mindsets and technology,

making leadership, strategy and culture fundamental to the success of future proofed digital transformation projects. The clear indication being that comms is evolving away from traditional methods, as set out by Wiles, who said the vendor's role now is to educate partners on the best approaches, with a particular focus on Millennials who will be the next greatest rising influence and disrupter. They are forecast to make up approximately 75 per cent of the workforce by 2025, said Wiles, with 20 per cent of them gunning for managerial positions.

"They communicate differently and some would sacrifice a portion of their salary to be better connected," stated Wiles. "Businesses need to adapt to this new demographic of employee if they want to recruit talent and survive. But the subject of enhanced communications and social collaboration may be out of a partners' area of expertise. WorkUtopia's are all different, there is no one size fits all option, and social networking solutions need to be flexible and fit for any scenario today and tomorrow. Even so, partners must reimagine the role of communications and collaboration and have that conversation with clients." ■

Ways to pep up your sales performance

Are you ready to make FY20 your most successful yet? Writes **Richard Thompson, Director of Partners at TalkTalk Business.**

A highly motivated sales team can accelerate your business unlike any other area. Yet, as every Manager and Director knows, building and activating a 'dream team' isn't an easy task. Here are my five key tips to building a high-performance team:

Activate and energise

Energise your team and outline their focus for the new financial year with a sales kick-off meeting. While individuals will have their own personal goals, you must ensure that everyone is working towards the same core strategy. Having one clear goal will keep your team motivated and make it easier to track their progress.

Inject fresh talent

Let's be honest, the channel could use some fresh faces. A graduate scheme is a great way to inject new talent into your business. Graduates are driven to learn and succeed and often stay loyal to the business they've joined. Many leaders in the channel began their careers as graduates. I joined TalkTalk Business over 16 years ago as a graduate before working my way up to Director level.

Invest for the future

Your people are your most important asset. Invest in them with training and development and provide clear progression pathways to



Richard Thompson

help them succeed from day one. Promoting internally into senior and leadership roles will encourage your team to keep giving 110 per cent.

Provide the right tools and behaviours to succeed

Invest in training to support the sales process and provide your team with the right tools to succeed, such as software. Help your team drive the right behaviours to support your customers by setting a good example and ensuring senior members of the team do the same.

Recognise and reward

Reward your team beyond their commission plan and cultivate a great team culture with social events and once in a lifetime activities. For example, our team grows stronger through social events such as Thirsty Thursdays, Disco Yoga and Chocolate Olympics. I believe that a team that plays together wins together. ■

BOOK YOUR TABLE NOW: CALL 01895 454476

Channel heroes ready for a celebration of success!

Following another bumper entry, the finalists have been announced for this year's Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards, the leading awards process which recognises sales and marketing expertise in the ICT channel.

Team heroes from reseller, distributor, service provider and vendor companies across the UK will now prepare to assemble at the Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards finalists luncheon which will take place at the lavish Grosvenor Marriot in Mayfair, London on May 2nd

Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent commented: "Sales and marketing teams often do not get recognition for the hard work they carry out for their companies, day in day out. We are therefore delighted to once again acknowledge their efforts and look forward to our spectacular final's day on May 2nd, which is acknowledged as one of the channel's favourite events of the year and shouldn't be missed."

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



Iain Shearman, Managing Director of National Network Services, Kcom
 "It's a real joy to be part of this event"

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."

Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards 2019 shortlist

Distributor Channel Sales Team of the Year Ingram Micro Nimans ProVu	Inty Pragma Westcon	Vendor Channel Marketing Campaign of The Year Entanet Inform Billing Union Street	Fluidone Unify Virtual 1	Best Partner or Customer Event Daisy Inty Midwich Pragma Wildix	Gamma Kcom Mobliciti Union Street
Distributor Channel Marketing Team of the Year Inty ProVu	Pragma Westcon	Reseller Sales Team of the Year up to £2.5m Boxx White Horse Telecom	Sirus	Best Apprentice Scheme Agilitas Citytalk Fitzrovia IT SW Comms Windsor Telecom	BT Wholesale Entanet IP Netix
Distributor Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year Midwich ProVu	Pragma Westcon	Reseller Sales Team of the Year £2.5 to £10m Citytalk Pure Windsor Telecom		Best Sales Support Team Boxx Onecom Sirus	Daisy ProVu Virtual 1
Service Provider Channel Sales Team of The Year Agilitas Daisy Glide Pangea Vaioni	Chess Fitzrovia IT IP Netix Salt DNA	Reseller Sales Team of the Year Above £10m Berry Telecom Net Connection Network Telecom	Focus	Charity & Fundraising Award Berry Telecom Diva Telecom Entanet Focus Gamma Windsor Telecom	
Service Provider Channel Marketing Team of The Year 9 Group Pangea	Daisy Vaioni	Reseller Marketing Team of the Year Below £10m Mobliciti Pure	MPS Sirus	Best Company to Work for under £10m Boxx Citytalk Nice Network Invosys Salt DNA Windsor Telecom	
Service Provider Channel Marketing Campaign of The Year Agilitas Pangea	Fluidone	Reseller Marketing Team of the Year Above £10m Berry Telecom SW Comms	Focus MPS SW Comms	Best Company to Work for over £10m Agilitas Berry Telecom CAE Technology Services Chess Cisilion Entanet Nimans Virtual 1	
Vendor Channel Sales Team of The Year 3cx Gamma Union Street	Entanet TalkTalk Virtual 1	Best Social Media Campaign G3 Comms Pragma	Gamma This is Fuel		
Vendor Channel Marketing Team of The Year Entanet Inform Billing Virtual 1	Gamma Union Street	Best PR Campaign F6 Agency SW Comms	Mash PR Union Street		

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**

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Banking on acquisitions

Need growth funding for an acquisition? Martyn Drake, Director of Growth Capital at Santander, highlights the key points and actions to consider in meeting an investor's pre-deal conditions.

There are a number of factors to take into consideration before approaching a bank for growth or acquisition funding. The first is whether you wish the management team or a corporate finance firm to arrange the financing. Both have their advantages and disadvantages. The key ones are time versus cost. A corporate finance firm will run a competitive process and gather together all the required level of information for a bank to make a reasonably quick decision. They would project manage the whole process, enabling management to continue to focus on running the business. However, building rapport with a bank through direct dialogue can be lost and the relationship factor sidelined if the only selection criteria is financial.

If you decide to run the acquisition process yourself there are three key things to prepare in advance. Firstly, a presentation of both companies with a clear strategy and business plan for the combined businesses. Secondly, a financial model with integrated profit and loss, balance sheet and cashflow figures for both historic and comparable forecasts. And thirdly, a

data room of all supporting information. This information would include the acquisition heads of terms, the proposed financing structure and management career profiles.

Self-arranging is time consuming for a management team that lacks senior financial resource and experience. In the absence of a FD with structured acquisition finance expertise, a bank may struggle to get comfortable with the financial information, the level of debt proposed and the ongoing financial monitoring and reporting required. This level of resource is particularly relevant in setting and measuring bank financial covenants and monitoring areas such as cost synergies, working capital and cash.

Full time interim Finance Directors can be engaged for the acquisition event itself and on a part-time basis to oversee monthly bank reporting. Other considerations include the amount of equity contribution, your experience in successfully making acquisitions and whether you have any tangible security to offer a bank.

For a bank to lend against a company's future cashflow



Martyn Drake

The Managing Director and Finance Director should make a strong first impression so that a bank will want to stay in touch

rather than against a percentage of tangible security value, they will need to carry out a significant amount of financial, business and commercial analysis to demonstrate they are satisfied with the material risks faced by the enlarged business. Gathering information in advance on areas such as the senior management team, customer concentration, the market dynamics and competitor analysis can significantly help with the timescale.

When asking a bank to leverage the earnings of the combined businesses and assess repayment from a set of forecasts, third party financial due diligence on the acquiring company, the

target company and an assessment of the forecasts is often required, typically adding a minimum of three to four weeks to the process. A bank would expect the Finance Director to have prepared the forecasts and to liaise with the accountancy firm appointed to produce the due diligence report.

Analysis

Financial analysis by the bank would include an assessment of historical performance and budgeting accuracy, the working capital requirement of the enlarged business, the cash generation and debt serviceability and the reasonableness of the forecast assumptions against which the bank is lending. The absence of a

Finance Director does make this difficult to achieve, particularly if the vendor is pressing for completion in a tight timescale.

A key consideration for owners of a lifestyle business is succession planning. Sometimes this is combined with a desire to grow the business and increase value prior to exit. To accomplish this with bank debt does involve professionalising the business by empowering and incentivising a wider senior management team. A bank would also expect the priority of cash distribution to be on debt service.

Companies often underestimate the amount of information they will need to supply to the bank and the time it will take for a bank to obtain approval to lend. The timeline might be shortened for an existing customer, but much depends on how well the bank really knows a business and whether you have borrowed this type of financing from them before. A previous positive experience by the bank will give comfort to lend again.

In anticipation of making an acquisition a company might consider meeting a number of potential bank lenders to assess their different lending criteria. Even with these casual fireside discussions it does make a difference if a company can present a comprehensive view of the business with good financial information. Ideally, the Managing Director and Finance Director should make a strong first impression so that a bank will want to stay in touch and potentially help shape an acquisition financing proposal when the time is right. ■



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4Sight's founding vision

From the moment 4Sight Communications Managing Director Simon Turner established the business six years ago as a disrupter to the status quo rapid success was bound to come.

London-based 4Sight Communications – last month crowned Mitel's UK Top Services Partner – shows clearly the power of a founding strategy that gives customers what they really want. Of equal importance and building on solid strategic footings, Turner is a long-standing apostle of knowledge as the route to sales success. "My early sales roles were all based mainly on commissions," he commented. "So every opportunity was golden and I needed to find ways to be better than my competition. I made sure I knew everything about my products and the customer. Knowledge reigns supreme in any sales scenario."

4Sight's sweet spot has always been the mid to large enterprise client, and the link between Turner's objective to always grow at a sensible pace and not compromise on core service values remains strong. "We have seen year-on-year improvements in turnover, profit and cash reserves, and been successful in markets previously considered a closed shop due to frameworks," said Turner. "However, there are no insurmountable barriers when it comes to clients wanting great service. And we recently submitted our response to RM3808, aiming

to be successful so we can accelerate our potential."

On any showing, this has been a stand-out period of success for 4Sight Communications. "We have grown from a starting position of three staff to the 30 headcount we have today," said Turner. "The bias in our staff is towards solution design and technical skills. This side of the business drives our performance in retention and growth."

When Turner kicked off his own comms career 30 years ago at Essential Communications his tools of the trade were a telephone and the Yellow Pages. His products and targets – the PKS2 and DXE phone systems for SMBs. A local office closure prompted Turner to move to Echo Communications working on a commission-only basis where he rose through the ranks to become Sales and Marketing Director and a shareholder. In 2007 Echo was bagged by Alternative Networks landing Turner a new role as Systems Director, his remit later encompassing large enterprise sales and retention across solutions, fixed and mobile networks.

"It was five years to the day when I left Alternative Networks in 2012 to establish



Simon Turner

We could see our industry was becoming increasingly coin operated and driving the wrong behaviour

4Sight Communications," said Turner. "The founding members were all ex-Echo personnel. 4Sight was born out of frustration. We could see our industry was becoming increasingly coin operated and driving the wrong behaviour with decisions based on spreadsheets and protracted processes that rendered clients indifferent or resigned to the status quo. We found that customers were willing to pay for the right services, so we formed 4Sight to challenge the status quo."

The axis of growth this past six years has been 4Sight's relationship with Mitel. "You cannot achieve a high level of expertise without focus," said Turner. "So Mitel is at the core of everything we do. We

are already working across the MIVB product suite with approximately a third of our client base operating contact centre solutions to varying degrees of complexity."

Hybrid on the rise

Turner noted that UC is 'interesting right now' as Mitel raises its game with MiCollab and Microsoft pushes Teams. But he reports little demand for UCaaS, primarily because many of his customers own and operate private clouds. "This means we have vast experience in the consolidation of Mitel technologies, virtual environments and connectivity," commented Turner. "Hybrid is emerging and this will drive a mix of public and private cloud solutions."

New UCaaS business, however, is where Turner sees a big opportunity. "There is no better time to drive this technology," he commented. "The products are comprehensive and proven and our skills are 100 per cent transferable. I would love to say that every one of my existing customers is going to adopt UCaaS as that would probably double my turnover without having to do very much. However, my gain in turnover means bigger bills for clients, and I believe that most will opt to leverage their existing investments until we find a compelling reason further down the line."

MSPs have a duty to their customers to match new products and services to their evolving requirements, and 'box shifters' are anathema to these building blocks of long-term trading relationships, believes Turner. "If I could, I would restrict the box shifter from selling products where they have no official technical or services accreditation on offer in house," he said. "It is bad for the brand and rebounds on service providers like ourselves."

The polarisation between true MSPs and masqueraders has never been so glaring, according to Turner, who says staying relevant to customers is a topmost priority that will drive the wedge deeper – albeit a vital balancing act. "If you fall behind or get too far ahead then you will become disconnected and at risk," added Turner. "Furthermore, when your main trade is the supply of licences and software there isn't much to break, so you need to justify the services clients pay for. They need to stand up to scrutiny." ■

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Voiceflex

Migrating broadband

FluidOne's Virtual Core solution overcomes network migration challenges, encourages independence and builds long-term partner business value, according to Channel Sales Director Henry West and Edward Reay, Account Manager & Product Specialist.

FluidOne's Virtual Core proposition releases the constraints heaped on partners shackled to outdated infrastructure and legacy relationships, according to West. "In one area after another Virtual Core overcomes migration issues," he said. "Each Virtual Core partner is treated like a single network, and all of the infrastructure is managed and supported by us, so little technical knowledge and investment is required. Partners have their own realm, their own IPs and access to our carriers, and we can bring their hosted services on-net to support QoS or other application delivery services."

In practice, FluidOne provides customers (such as City Talk and Premier Choice which have completed realm swings) with a customisable instance of Platform One, its core network. "Typical partners will be looking for their own realm if they don't already have one and need to apply for an IP range," explained Reay. "We host the realm and IPs and manage the internal infrastructure and in-life experience, while our customer facing portal, DASH, puts control into the customers' hands."

Virtual Core has been designed for a variety of partners (with a base of 500 to circa 20,000 connections) who are either seeking to scale their connectivity estate; looking to acquire and have a need to lift and shift multiple connectivity bases to a single point; are wanting to consolidate their supplier relationships with a single provider that offers access to the latest product sets; are developing their own last mile fibre footprint and need a low entry cost to a resilient software defined core network; and partners looking to maximise their exit value with a future sale in mind.

In all of the scenarios outlined above, Virtual Core is as much a nudge towards common sense as a liberation from legacy network restraints, delivering regeneration and empowerment, says West. "Consider the legacy DSL issue faced by partners," he noted. "We have seen the impact on resellers when carriers go through change. There may be a significant decline in operational support, a lack of investment in new technology which reduces upsell opportunities to new services, while low



Henry West



Edward Reay

Virtual Core is as much a nudge towards common sense as a liberation from legacy network constraints

investment in the network creates service issues and impacts the quality of the OTT service being delivered. Without their own realms and IPs the process to move a DSL base is painful for partners. In most cases a site visit is needed, a change of username and password. The cost is too high, so resellers are forced to live with and manage the pain.

Control and flexibility

"Virtual Core overcomes these challenges. It's the reseller's realm, their IPs and they have autonomy over their customer base. This gives control and flexibility to our partners, provides independence and enables them to deliver on-net connectivity to underpin their OTT services. Furthermore, and as a sign of our confidence in the network, if partners wish to migrate their

estate away from FluidOne they can do so with the same ease as joining us."

FluidOne aggregates 30 carriers and suppliers into its Platform One software defined core network, which has 18 PoPs that are currently running at 25 per cent capacity, and underpinning propositions in Ethernet, the IoT, broadband, mobile, Internet, Wi-Fi, cloud and hosting services – all accessed via the in-house developed DASH portal.

"Running your own network is expensive," added Reay. "New DSL technologies such as G.FAST and FTTP are bandwidth hungry and resource heavy so are likely to cause additional spend to upgrade legacy hardware core network infrastructure. Again, some partners are seeking to reduce

overheads and are looking for a provider that gives the same benefit without the capex overhead and cost of managing the network."

It is not just about cost savings. Strategic paralysis also stands across the path of growth, claims West, who argues that the autonomy and flexibility offered by Virtual Core will be a boon to partners. "With their own IPs and control of the connections that sit within their customer base our partners are free to grow," said West. "And they are not beholden to a single supplier's product set."

"We enable partners to host their own OTT services and deliver our full connectivity product set on-net. Where customers choose to partner with a third party for OTT services we can PoP the data centre and again deliver our connectivity on-net. The Virtual Core proposition is primed for application delivery, and we are seeing OTT providers benefit from having an on-net presence in areas like QoS and latency." ■



The Changing Channel

Prepare for new opportunities at MiVaD 19

With the impending switch-off of ISDN, the increasing demand for customers for collaborative 'joined up' solutions, plus the increasing popularity of cloud communications, the ICT channel is truly facing a period of massive change.

The big question is: how will the changes ahead affect you and your reseller business and how will you maximise on all the opportunities they will bring?

Each year since the turn of the millennium, Margin in Voice & Data – affectionately known as 'The Industry event of the Summer' – has helped resellers addressing SME markets identify and open new doors to profit and truly understand the changing ICT environment. This is a truly inspirational event that will help you really understand the market changes and meet suppliers keen to help you unlock these amazing opportunities.

Where will it take place?

On July 4th 2019, MiVaD 18 returns to the picturesque Forest of Arden Hotel complex in the heart of the West Midlands and once again this 24-hour event promises a day of inspiration and exploration plus a 'once a year' opportunity for resellers to network with like-minded peers and business generators.

Who will qualify to attend?

if you are a director of a reseller organisation turning over up to £3m, you will be able to attend MiVaD 19 completely free of charge, including all hospitality and an overnight stay at the Forest of Arden!

This offer is only extended to 120 reseller directors operating in the ICT channel so do not delay, register now to secure your place.

**FOREST OF ARDEN, MIDLANDS
4TH JULY 2019**

What happens at MiVaD 19?

Split into three sessions, the event will comprise a morning thought leadership conference to help delegates get an understanding of the changing channel landscape; an afternoon 'managed meetings' session where resellers can meet new supplier partners; and last but by no means least, a fun evening networking dinner.

This year, the main theme of MiVaD 19 will focus on the shift to Cloud Communications and the new challenges this presents, plus completely new value-added opportunities these new business environments are creating for ICT resellers.

MEET THE SPONSORS



MATTHEW WORBOYS, HEAD OF CHANNEL, SOUTH-EAST & SCOTLAND, GAMMA

"Gamma is once again pleased to sponsor this year's Margin in Voice and Data. The day provides an excellent opportunity for us to meet with existing and new partners. As the only major UK communications company and network operator that has a clear market focus on targeting customers through the channel, we offer a variety of ways of working with us to ensure our Channel Partners are successful in their markets. To find out how we can help grow your business come and speak with us at the event."



ADAM CATHCART, MANAGING DIRECTOR, PARTNERS, 9 GROUP

"With our comprehensive portfolio, 9 has been a leading provider of IT and telecommunications products for the channel for over 10 years. At MiVaD we're looking forward to exploring how channel partners can work with their service providers, to gain advice and support to help them grow their businesses against a backdrop of change."



AXEL KLOESSNER, COO, FONTEVO

"We have over 16,000+ ICT resellers across Germany, Austria and Switzerland and we're now expanding into international markets with the UK being a key focus. FONtevo is sponsoring MiVaD in 2019, to inform the UK ICT Dealer market that we are on track with our rollout to recruit

specific UK resellers looking for a unique, trusted, quality driven and collaborative partner to help grow their SME PBX and SIP phones solutions."



MARK CURTIS-WOOD – GROUP SALES & MARKETING DIRECTOR, VAIONI WHOLESALE

"We are excited to be sponsoring one of the most important events in the ICT industry. At Margin in Voice and Data 2019, we will be showcasing our extraordinary connectivity solutions including our own V.E.N. Ethernet Network, Pre-Ethernet and 10GB services, to name but a few. These provide the channel with a genuine alternative to the main large Ethernet carriers, helping reseller partners stand out from the crowd and win and retain more business."



IAIN SINNOTT – SALES & MARKETING DIRECTOR, VANILLA IP

"We really enjoyed the first Margin in Mobile event which was delivered to the very high standard that we expect from Comms Dealer. It gave us a great opportunity to meet with a new section of this converging market and I know we will be seeing a very rapid return on our investment. We're really looking forward to Margin in Voice & Data now!"

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Fast rising Silver Cloud

Sterling Scottish ICT provider Silver Cloud has transformed its growth vision into long-term strategy following a leadership revamp and the appointment of Michael McMillan as Managing Director.

McMillan's entry into the army's Junior Leader's Regiment at 16 put him on the road to a career in comms when he undertook a City & Guilds in Radio and Telephony Engineering (later moving into management). But his army career ended after the first Gulf War when, with an injury, he was told he wouldn't walk again without the aid of a stick. "Following a lot of help from fantastic physiotherapists people today wouldn't even know I had ever used a stick," he said.

Yet at times McMillan still relies on a stick with a difference, this time kept up his sleeve – a magic wand. It's true: The war veteran can regularly be seen performing magic to paying audiences, something he's been doing for over 20 years – and now he brings a magic touch to Glasgow-based Silver Cloud where he was appointed as Managing Director in early February, taking over from company founder Anthony Quinn who's assumed the CEO role. The management restructure, which also saw investor Steve Smith instated as Chairman, prepared the business to scale locally,

expand across the UK and build on its portfolio of products and services with the help of acquisitions.

Over the last year Silver Cloud has grown from £2.5 million turnover to £4 million and increased its headcount from 20 to 35. "We expect similar growth this year," stated McMillan. "My immediate priority is to continue this growth and we are looking closely at acquisitions, not just telecom companies but IT firms too. Given the fast pace our industry we want to ensure that we are at the forefront of new technology."

High standards

Silver cloud was established by Quinn in February 2014 following a successful career selling office products and services. "Tony set high standards from the outset," added McMillan. "He was determined to build a business not just driven by sales but based on respect, empathy and trust. That's why we enjoy positive relationships with our customers which in turn helps us to grow rapidly."

From the outset Silver Cloud put the pedal to the floor



Michael McMillan

My army career shaped me in many ways, especially in leadership, communication, motivation and planning

and now counts itself as one of Scotland's top performing independent companies. Its success had not gone unnoticed by McMillan who was equally impressed by the high levels of ambition and infectious enthusiasm displayed by the company's founder who, perchance, was on the lookout for a kindred spirit like McMillan to take things to the next stage.

"With Tony's experience in sales and my background in management, operations and engineering, my appointment as MD was a yin and yang moment," stated McMillan. "I too am a passionate and enthusiastic person, relish a challenge and strive to be the best I can be. And my army career also shaped and defined me in many ways, especially in leadership,

communication, motivation and forward planning."

Silver Cloud has four powerful weapons in its armoury which combine as a single cultural vision. First, the company is proactive in seeking new opportunities and heading off potential issues; second, it maintains high levels of energy and enthusiasm when getting to grips with the latest products and commercialising them; next, professionalism is also key, along with promise-keeping and plain language; and lastly the company understands that businesses are ultimately about people so it aims to connect with everyone on a personal level.

With this cultural formula as its blueprint, McMillan says Silver Cloud has more opportunities than you can shake a stick at and rates smart cloud technology as a top prospect, fuelled by the attractiveness of putting customers in control. "We continue to invest and develop our cloud offering and we are coming up with more creative and innovative services we can host from our data centre," added McMillan.

"On a granular level we want to make sure all operational processes and procedures, ISO accreditations and industry wide compliances are in place, as well as the systems and staff to drive the business forward. When a company grows as quickly as Silver Cloud it is imperative that our processes and procedures are clear, and that we have enough staff to facilitate a professional and smooth running process from beginning to end, thereby ensuring we keep customer satisfaction levels high." ■





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Curtis-Wood signed



Mark Curtis-Wood

FORMER Nimans network services chief Mark Curtis-Wood has joined Manchester-based Vaioni Wholesale as Group Sales & Marketing Director. In this newly created role Curtis-Wood will mainly be responsible for developing the sales, product and marketing strategies, and support the company's roll out of its Software Defined Network.

Curtis-Wood joins from Nimans where he was Head of the Networks Services Division and brings over 30 years direct sales and channel management experience. Curtis-Wood said: "With Vaioni Wholesale's ambitious growth plans and strategies, these are exciting times for the company."

Managing Director Sachin Vaish added: "Mark brings a wealth of experience within the telecoms industry and his ethical values and vision align with our business. His passionate approach to the reseller industry and desire to remain disruptive and help us stand out from the crowd will be a great asset."

COO netted by CityFibre



Simon Holden

FORMER Goldman Sachs Partner Simon Holden has joined CityFibre as Group COO, reporting to CEO Greg Mesch. He spent 18 years at Goldman Sachs working in London and

New York holding senior roles in the Investment Banking division including Global Chief Operating Officer and Vice Chairman EMEA as well as a number of leadership roles in the TMT banking team including Head of EMEA, Global Co-COO and Global Head of Telecom. Prior to joining Goldman Sachs Holden worked for Baring Brothers in London and Hong Kong. Mesch said: "Simon's expertise and experience will prove invaluable at this transformative stage in CityFibre's growth."

Holden added: "As a service-based economy, the UK is reliant on the Internet and ensuring access to the finest digital infrastructure possible is critical to its ability to compete and succeed on the world stage."

Also on the move...



Mansoor Hanif

OFCOM CTO Mansoor Hanif has replaced Sir Mike Rake (who is retiring) as Patron of The Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP). Hanif's previous roles include senior positions at BT, Orange, EE and Vodafone and he is

an advisory board member for UK5G. Hanif said: "The focus is on taking the ITP's work forward and collaborating with regulators, government associations and other leading bodies on a variety of projects that are important to the future of the industry." ITP CEO Crissi Williams added: "Our vision includes supporting the industry to bridge the current UK skills gap and we welcome Mansoor's input and expertise."

DISTRIBUTOR Nuvias has appointed Simon England as CEO, adding almost three decades of distribution experience to the EMEA business. He takes over



Simon England

from Paul Eccleston and joins from Tech Data where he was SVP Next Generation Technologies. The appointment sees Eccleston become Executive Chairman of Nuvias Group, retaining responsibility for

Vendor and Corporate Strategy. England said: "Nuvias is well positioned in a market which continues to grow strongly and is transforming how IT services are securely delivered and consumed."

Edge moves into CybSafe



Mark Edge

CYBERSECURITY awareness and data analytics platform provider CybSafe has appointed Mark Edge as Chief Revenue Officer to drive channel growth. The move follows an investment

round of £3.5 million to develop CybSafe's platform ahead of a UK&I channel building campaign led by Edge. His previous experience includes sales and executive leadership roles at IBM, Citrix WatchDox and Brainloop. CEO Oz Alashe MBE said: "Considering the rising threat of cybercrime and the challenges of data and security compliance, the human element of cybersecurity is now a priority for businesses worldwide."

Edge added: "Businesses have spent so much time on cybersecurity technology but in doing so they've taken their eye off the human cyber risk. CybSafe helps businesses make better decisions about human cyber risk and resilience and takes the guesswork out of information security awareness."

M247 has pulled in Greg Hudson as Hosting and Cloud Solutions Architect ahead of a push in IaaS. He moves from Synapse360 and brings 22 years cloud computing and technology experience. "My knowledge will help M247 to introduce enterprise class cloud services to our clients," stated Hudson.

Wilkinson joins Nimans division



Graham Wilkinson

FOLLOWING the departure of Nimans' network services head honcho Mark Curtis-Wood (see top story) the distributor announced the appointment of Graham Wilkinson as Head of Sales, Network Services. Wilkinson has a 26 year comms career under his belt and is keen to build on the division's record period of growth last year, focusing on all areas of the connectivity supply chain – mobile, connectivity, hosted and broadband, services and billing. "For me it's all about driving development and growth for our customers," he stated.

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