



Why cloud strategies are falling short of the mark p26


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# Daisy builds new force in channel

**THE merger of Daisy Group's channel serving divisions into a £200m business creates the largest partner-only organisation in the channel.**

**SPECIAL REPORT**

The three separate Group entities formerly known as Daisy Wholesale, Daisy Distribution and Daisy Worldwide have combined their portfolios, platforms and teams under the just-launched Digital Wholesale Solutions name and brand.

The rebrand, which was unveiled on April 30th with a new logo and website, is the culmination of a six month integration period in which teams and portfolios were brought

together into a single hub to simplify how partners transact.

"The new Digital Wholesale Solutions business has been given complete autonomy to focus on partners while retaining the financial benefits of being part of the wider Daisy Group of companies," explained CEO Terry O'Brien (pictured right), who was formerly Daisy Wholesale MD.

"The IT and comms market is characterised by fast change and we are responding to this by evolving our business to become

more capable and valuable to our partners, whether they are comms, IT, cloud specialists or more generalist MSPs.

"With our combined skills and capability I have a vision for our new business to become the channel aggregator."

CDO Nathan Marke (pictured left) added: "Growth is coming from digital infrastructure, fibre, IP, cloud, SaaS and mobility. Therefore to capture growth resellers need to be selling the right products to the right businesses." See page 34

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

OVER time the blending of IT and comms technologies and their traditionally separate markets will pale into insignificance besides the many other convergences that are emerging right now. This will be the inevitable outcome of a direction of

travel which has become the all-pervading natural course for the industry. Various points of convergence can already be plotted across the sector as we map the comms landscape, many of which are reflected in this magazine.

Talk of convergence always invokes the ICT sector consolidation discussion, but late last month we saw the inter-company merger of Daisy's partner serving organisations into a single central point. Furthermore, how its partners will serve their customers is also converging towards an all-encompassing single source web store (see page 34).

Another example of Convergence.2 is the shrinking radius of contact centre channels and technologies onto a single point platform where AI, BI, analytics, reporting and a myriad of other techs and medias converge and reside. Not only do these platforms serve as central hubs formed by the force of gravity, they also function as focal points of innovation that will take convergence to new places. Here, creative minds focus ever harder on pushing the boundaries of convergence in ways that continue to unlock the value of intelligence and insights (see pages 26 and 38).

Whole markets themselves are converging around technologies as ICT buyers realise the value of hi-tech in meeting their challenges. This month we delve into how this trend is playing out in the healthcare and retail sectors (see pages 24, 40, 46 and 47).

What does the pull towards 'oneness' ultimately mean? After convergence comes more convergence – so it will be key for resellers themselves to become points of convergence for their customers before they gravitate, under industry forces, elsewhere.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Vinci scoops up Nouveau



**Pictured (l-r): Nouveau Solutions Non-Exec Director Mike Tuson, Andy Stevens and Rochdi Ziyat**

VINCI Energies has bolstered its ICT security, cloud and managed services business (which operates under the Axians brand) with the acquisition of Nouveau Solutions.

Vinci Energies, the Vinci subsidiary focused on energy, IT and communications, entered the UK's ICT market in 2014. Its UK&I CEO Rochdi Ziyat commented: "Nouveau Solutions marks a milestone in our ambitious plan, strengthening the Axians brand and bringing complementary capabilities."

Wokingham-based Nouveau Solutions began its commercial life 25 years ago and is best known as a provider of cloud,

infrastructure, compliance, network and security solutions. It employs 35 staff and has an annual turnover of £7m.

Andy Stevens, who is Nouveau Solutions MD, commented on what drew him to the deal: "The group's business model was attractive, giving us an ability to grow our company and use the strength of the Axians network of business units, both in the UK and across the globe.

"This is an opportunity for us to accelerate our efforts and at the same time retain our autonomy and culture." See p48

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

KCOM is to be acquired following a £504m offer from Universities Superannuation Scheme. Mike Powell, Head of the Private Markets Group, USS Investment Management, said: "With the right capital support and assistance KCOM's management will be able to enhance the quality of its offering, delivering benefits for customers and sustainable long-term returns."

A LINK-up with Genesys has extended IP Integration's cloud contact centre portfolio, enabling it to offer greater choice around private and public cloud-based solutions (hosted in the UK or internationally) as well as on-premise implementations. The deal sees IP Integration designated as an approved partner for Genesys PureCloud.

CONVERSICA, the Conversational AI specialist, has secured a London base to support partners across its European regions. Its customers include BT, Colt Technology Services and NewVoiceMedia. "Continuing to expand globally is the next step in our evolution and there's clear evidence of the growing demand for virtual assistants powered by AI," said UK GM John Pincott.



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COMMENT: COVERING ALL BASES



Paul Burn

IT USED to be said that people buy from people. But it's more than that. They actually buy from people they trust. Relationships are more important now than ever. In terms of price, well everyone can embark on a race to the bottom. But it's important to recognise that everyone has a business

to run and has to make some money along the way so the whole chain is able to survive.

Relationships are critical but they often mean different things to different people. For some it's purely mechanical based on being efficient and reliable. But others want something more, based on longevity, advice and knowing everyone is pulling in the same direction with the same goals. They want to feel cared about.

As a distributor we sit in the middle. We've got suppliers and customers and they are both equally vital because we can't work without either. Making sure our goals are aligned in both directions is important.

Furthermore, in the global world we now live in distributors such as Nimans are becoming more unique. Local markets require local knowledge from people on the ground with a deep industry understanding. You can't always shoehorn a global process in from too far away as it doesn't always deliver the best results.

Resellers make decisions on relationships based on a number of factors. It could just be logistics excellence, but if more is required of the relationship we also serve in that capacity. We are in a competitive market and in the past you could have great service or great price, but now quite rightly everyone wants both. The world continues to evolve and you have to cover both bases.

**Paul Burn, Purchasing Director, Nimans**

• The channel is yet to do justice to the interaction, analytics and reporting opportunity, but the scales are tipping says Gary Bennett, VP of Sales UK, MEA & Northern Europe, Enghouse Interactive (p44).

# Onecom bolstered by £30m war chest

A SIGNIFICANT period of growth beckons Whiteley-based Onecom following the completion of a five year £30m funding deal from HSBC UK.

Onecom CEO Ben Dowd said the fund raise will speed up preparations for enlargement with investments planned for systems and teams as he kicks off a five year expansion plan.

Dowd also hinted that acquisitions form part of the strategy.

"Initial projects include upgrades to IT systems to scale them for future growth, greater use of AI to support customer service teams, and an increase in resource at a local and regional level," he stated.

"The funding also strengthens Onecom's ability to maximise the opportunities presented by consolidation in the mobile and fixed line marketplaces."

Anthony Reed, HSBC UK's Head of Corporate Banking for Hampshire & Dorset, added: "Onecom has created a strong platform for growth. Our local team, led by Ben Hyslop, has worked with Onecom to create a tailored finance package to best support its expansion strategy."



Ben Dowd

Onecom also operates out of ten regional offices including bases at Cardiff, Belfast, Southampton, Plymouth, Leeds,

Telford, Norwich and Brighton. The fast growing company currently manages nearly 100,000 business customers.

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# Fund raise to drive Dubber



Steve McGovern

DUBBER has raised almost £12m to support big plans for a global scale up and platform investment programme.

“This investment will go towards our ongoing expansion into new deployments with service providers across the globe, particularly in north America and Europe,” commented CEO Steve McGovern.

The company already has agreements with 92 telecoms service providers. “These existing relationships will be instrumental in driving customer uptake of our services and bring long-term value through recurring revenue,” said McGovern.

The funding will support growth opportunities through Cisco BroadCloud which incor-

porates Dubber’s recording service, pointed out McGovern.

He also noted that an agreement with IBM to market a joint technology solution will enable Dubber to take advantage of IBM’s client base.

Dubber’s platform – which enables the integration of third party applications through its open API – is another key area of investment. “We will invest in expanding our ecosystem of connected applications that will ultimately deliver solutions for all users,” said McGovern.

“The investment will help to propel our global user base by expanding our core functionality to include advanced AI services that are available for every phone.”

## Wi-Fi on the move

A WI-FI solution launched to the channel by Wilmslow-based Zest4 enables transport companies operating minibuses, taxi cabs, vans, buses and coaches to offer Internet connectivity to their passengers.

The solution uses a 4G data SIM with managed connectivity and requires no external antenna, meaning straightforward installation and portability between vehicles. Data bundles of all sizes are available.

“Free Wi-Fi is a prerequisite of modern day life,” commented Anton Le Saux, Head of M2M & IoT at Zest4.

“There are many benefits for operators. These include improved services, returning customers, data collection to track usage, and the system opens up coach travel for business clients.

“Alongside passenger Wi-Fi connectivity, the Wi-Fi system features a secure Wi-Fi Accessory Channel.

“On-board systems such as next stop announcements, CCTV and ticketing systems can connect wirelessly to the Accessory Channel, providing a full-featured and secure connected Wi-Fi system.”

## NEWS ROUNDUP

THE contract to provide comms to the UK’s first nuclear plant to be built in 25 years has been awarded by EDF Energy to Telent Technology Services. “This reflects our track record in providing critical comms solutions in a range of diverse and sensitive environments,” said Mark Plato, CEO at Telent. “At Hinkley Point C we will utilise our experience and expertise from right across the company and channel it into this national project.”

LIFESIZE continues to register a strengthening presence in the video comms and collaboration market, surpassing \$100m in bookings with an 80% CAGR for annual recurring revenue over the last four years. The firm boasts more than 3,500 global partners, distributors and resellers (with more than 400 new partners added since January 2018); and reports enterprise customers up 62% year-over-year.

XELION has signed its second UK wholesale partnership with HighNet in Scotland. HighNet will act as a tier one wholesaler to the channel for the Xelion hosted telephony service. In an initial move, HighNet is migrating 500 hosted extensions from a legacy platform to the Xelion service. From its head office in Inverness, HighNet manages over 22,000 business lines, billing over 100 million minutes a year.

THE latest release of Akixi’s mobile app delivers the most significant changes since it was launched in January 2018, said the firm. “The app continues to display real-time statistics on Akixi’s customisable wallboards, however this most recent release also has an option for Akixi 2000 users to gain enhanced functionality with ACD agent reporting and control,” said MD Bart Delgado.

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COMMENT: MEETING DEMAND



Nick Powell

WE ARE seeing content and digital media experiencing 36 per cent compounded growth year-over-year. This is having a big impact on bandwidth scalability with organisations requiring the capability to deliver content to their end users without effecting their experience.

5G, smart cities, augmented VR and IoT are emerging technologies that

will ultimately drive another revolution requiring significant increases in bandwidth. So connectivity providers must develop network investment programmes that will focus on core infrastructure and backhaul capabilities. This will ensure networks are future proofed and ready to meet the new evolution of technology and content demands. Providers that build their networks from the ground up and continue to invest organically with in-house engineers designing and operating their platforms will be better placed to service the increase in demand.

Connectivity providers must constantly invest in their networks to ensure users can view and download content at speed. Business requirements have quickly jumped from 100Mbps as standard to 1Gbps. With most networks struggling to keep up with this, how are they going to handle the next jump to 10Gbps? Which will be sooner than we think. What does this mean for the channel and how long can they afford to put up with operators oversubscribing their exchange backhaul? Ethernet must be available at 100 per cent of the bandwidth that the customer has paid for.

Capacity and scalability are two of the most important elements when it comes to the channel and being able to deliver to their customers. Wholesale partners, now more than ever, need to be partnering with network providers that make the investment to maintain their business growth.

Nick Powell, Sales Director, Sky Business Communications

# Gradwell set for SME push



Jamie Ward and CEO Simon Curry

GRADWELL Communications has doubled down on plans to secure a greater share of the SME cloud comms market and is rallying the reseller community to join its rolling campaign convoy spearheaded by incoming CEO Simon Curry and former Gamma sales chief Jamie Ward, who's now Gradwell's Sales and Marketing Director.

Gradwell aims to build on strong advances made in the cloud comms SoHo and micro business marketplace where many of its entrepreneurial clients have outgrown their basic comms services and need greater ICT capabilities.

At the same time Gradwell hopes to scale up its wider SME sector ambitions emboldened by its designation as the first 3CX UK Solutions Provider, a status it was awarded in March.

"Our cloud communications solutions have helped SoHo and micro business clients to grow into successful larger organisations," said Ward. "They are today's SMEs and they want to keep working with us."

The expansion of Gradwell's strategy to address the SME market has prompted a greater emphasis on delivering cloud solutions through a growing posse of channel partners.

"3CX gives us the opportunity to offer partners out-of-the box end-to-end cloud communications for SMEs," stated Curry.

"By continuing to look after our existing customers while also focusing on our SME sweetspot, Gradwell aims to quickly establish itself as a go-to partner for the channel serving SMEs."

Peter Gradwell interview – p22

NEWS ROUNDUP

IOT distributor Alliot is to supply LoRa sensors from Netvox in an exclusive distie deal with the Taiwanese business. Alliot MD Darren Garland said: "Netvox will open up plenty of opportunities for people looking to create and implement IoT solutions on the LoRa network."

Kent Shen, Vice President of Netvox, added: "Alliot is a company with a huge ambition to give LoRa network input into all possible contexts." Alliot is the sister company of ProVu. See page 12

CITYFIBRE lost a judicial review last month against the Advertising Standards Authority on the use of the term 'fibre' in broadband advertising. CEO Greg Mesch is considering an appeal against the decision. "We continue to believe it is not right for consumers to be misled into thinking copper-reliant connections are fibre broadband," commented Mesch. "The decision is particularly disappointing in light of the recent progress made in other countries which have restricted misleading advertising and established clear rules to distinguish full fibre from inferior copper-based services."

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COMMENT: TIME FOR LEARNING



Iain Sinnott

AFTER 15 years of multi-tenant cloud voice services, and at least eight years of UC, the UK business market is still predominantly owned by the traditional PBX design concept of the 1960s, refined a bit over time but essentially only a short step away from being a museum piece.

So why is technology so far ahead of the customer? Why is the market not flipping at the speed the mobile world moved from traditional phones

to smartphones when Apple launched its iPhone? Complacency would be my first suggestion. To those of us involved in the cloud sector, the advantages look so obvious that we have developed an expectation, even an arrogance, that new business will simply deliver itself.

For traditional PBX resellers the expectation might have originally been the same, but the case was never made to UK businesses who remain largely unaware of the technology dividend they are passing up and, while they remain unmotivated, our PBX friends gain most from letting sleeping dogs lie.

Cloud sales people need to evangelise, inspire and stimulate a goal within their clients to achieve optimal productivity in each individual member of their team. They need to demonstrate the obvious enhancement to their client's own customer experience and highlight the changes in staff employment structures which, if not copied, will affect their ability to recruit the best of the modern workforce. They need to learn their product, learn how to control the sales conversations, learn how to design and deliver a solution that takes full advantage of the technology at their disposal.

Then they will see high sales at high margin. This is a market for professionals, and professionals selling well.

**Iain Sinnott, Sales & Marketing Director, VanillaP**

# Oak leaders in succession



Phil Reynolds



James Emm

OAK Innovation's veteran head honchos Phillip Reynolds and James Emm have handed leadership responsibilities to their sons CTO David Reynolds and Chief Growth Officer William Emm as Canada located sister company OakSI merges with Poole-based Oak Innovation. Adam Bardsley remains MD.

Reynolds and Emm senior, who continue to play key roles as Board Directors, said the move will bolster support for channel partners and end users.

William Emm said: "This is a natural move that will enable us to grow by leveraging sales, marketing and support strengths across the combined business. I am especially excited about the opportunity ahead for us in North America.

"Organisations are looking to use both qualitative and

quantitative metrics to understand customer experience and drive better leadership and decision making."

He confirmed that Oak Innovation will build on existing strengths in recording, analytics and integration.

Last year Oak Innovation introduced nLighten, a cloud recording platform, and PaymentAssist, a cloud-based service that helps organisations to securely manage card payments over the phone.

David Reynolds commented: "Over the last few years we have invested in new platforms designed for ease of use and freedom of deployment. This is a great foundation from which to move forward and develop our portfolio."

Oak Innovation was founded in 1987.

NEWS ROUNDUP

AN EXPANSION of Mitel's partnership with Google Cloud gives the Canadian vendor access to more advanced AI, machine learning, security and reporting capabilities. The Google Cloud Platform will initially support new MiCloud Connect and MiCloud Flex customers. New MiVoice Business customers will also have the option of deploying on the platform.

MANX Telecom has acquired Synapse 360 for an undisclosed sum, bolting on capabilities in managed services, virtual IT infrastructure solutions and cloud services. The Synapse 360 Directors including MD Colin Sheard continue to lead the business. Manx Telecom CEO Gary Lamb stated: "We have long viewed managed services as a potential growth area."

WI-FI and wireless networking distributor Purdicom has achieved Gold in the Investors in People standard, which is reflective of the company's five-star rating from its employees on the review platform Glassdoor. Sales & Marketing Director Steve Kent commented: "Investing in our people translates into exceptional value for our customers."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

INCLARITY'S cloud telephony bundles now come with Redbox call recording as a standard feature with free storage for a year. MD Enzo Viscito said: "Call recording has become a must-have service required by businesses of all sizes. We appreciate the efficiencies that call recording can offer our partners' customers which has prompted us to provide it within all of our bundled services."

INTEGRATION between Xelion's platform and the Zapappi SMS gateway enables the cloud telephony provider to offer SMS integration out-of-the-box with no feature charges. Users can send and receive SMS text messages via a REST API interface with the Xelion cloud telephony solution. Xelion UK MD Dave Reynolds (pictured) commented:



"The key to winning long-term contracts over the next ten years will be

comms providers' ability to deliver smart hosted services that integrate with complex third party software packages and CRMs."

# TTG adds £1.5m in comms firm scoop



Mark Mills, David Marsden, former LTS Director Sarah Mills and TTG CEO Jonathan Marsden

THE acquisition of comms firm Hertfordshire-based Exchange Local Telecom Service (LTS) by The Technology Group (TTG) adds £1.5m turnover, 400-plus customers and six staff to the Leeds-based ICT provider, which has targeted £15m annual revenues by 2022.

The financial details of the deal remain under wraps.

LTS is a family run business in York where it will continue to operate under its own brand. The company is a Panasonic Solutions Partner.

The deal is TTG's second acquisition in 18 months, following the purchase of

Hertfordshire-based Exchange Comms in October 2017.

According to TTG Acquisitions Director David Marsden another deal is planned for later this year.

"LTS will have access to a wider product portfolio, the latest technological innovations and the broader technical knowledge and resources that comes from being part of a wider group," said Marsden.

Former LTS Director Mark Mills added: "There is a synergy between the two businesses."

TTG currently generates £6.5m turnover and also has

offices in London and Welwyn Garden City.

The company has 39 staff, over 900 customers and telephony solutions in 22 countries.

"Acquisitions form one of the key pillars of our growth strategy, which is to reach £15m turnover by 2022, double staff numbers to 65 and customer numbers to 2,000.

"This latest acquisition, coupled with continued organic growth, means we are on course to achieve our target."

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## Astro CTO rallies for charity IT

ASTRO Communications founder and CTO Steve Smith has urged channel firms to help charities maximise the benefits of IT by putting their weight and skills behind CITA, the Charity IT Association.

As a CITA trustee Smith is seeking volunteers in the industry to give up their time to help charities that need IT support.

"All we ask is that interested ICT professionals and charities register on our website and we connect them," he said.

Smith originally became involved with CITA as a Liveryman in The Worshipful Company of Information Technologists (WCIT).

"In 2015 the WCIT was involved in a joint survey of the charity sector which uncovered some key issues around the use of IT within the charities polled, in particular a lack of IT skills and not knowing where to start or who to trust for IT advice," said Smith. "This led to the WCIT collaborating on a solution and CITA was born."

Three years on and CITA has helped over 600 charities across the UK deliver IT services to a conservative value of over £1m.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

PAN-European cloud comms provider NFON is targeting the 'cloud friendly' Italian market with a new office in Milan and the appointment of a regional head. Italy is the 14th country where Munich-based NFON operates. Hans Szymanski, CEO and CFO, said: "Italy, with around 22 million employees, is one of Europe's key markets for transformation and digitisation, alongside the UK, Spain, France and Germany. We will use this potential for our cloud telephony solutions." Marco Pasculli, newly appointed MD of NFON Italy, said: "Italy is positioning itself as a cloud-friendly country that wants to be at the forefront of the digitisation process."

MITEL has launched MiVoice Office Mobile Application, a cloud-based UC and collaboration solution for small businesses, available in EMEA on MiVoice Office 400 and delivered through the Mitel CloudLink platform. "MiVoice Office Mobile Application was designed from the ground up to address the simplicity and mobility needs of small businesses," commented Martin Bitzinger, Vice President, Unified Communications Products and Solutions, Mitel.

# ProVu starts IoT business



Darren Garland

HUDDERSFIELD located VoIP distributor ProVu aims to replicate its long running provisioning model, this time in the IoT space with the launch of sister company Alliot Technologies.

The move follows ProVu's entry into the IoT market last year when it added the Lorix One LoRaWAN gateway to its line card. A new range of LoRa products were introduced last month by Alliot.

According to ProVu and Alliot's MD Darren Garland the new business will represent the world's primary IoT device manufacturers as they seek to bring their IoT technologies to the UK market.

"In the early days of VoIP ProVu fostered relationships with techies with a keen interest

in developing their technology into commercial applications," he said. "Using the technical and commercial skills that ProVu has built up over the last 20 years Alliot will replicate these traits in the supply of IoT devices, making the deployment and management of IoT devices as simple as possible."

Key to this, noted Garland, will be value added services such as a UK stock holding, provisioning, next day delivery and ongoing device management. "Alliot's strategy is to work with IoT projects to deliver cost savings on the deployment and ongoing management of hardware," he added.

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# Gamma's leg up for emergers

ASPECTS of Gamma's Gold and Platinum partner designations have been extended to resellers not yet selling at the volumes required of Gold or Platinum status, but are deserving of top tier benefits through their commitment.

To acknowledge these emerging partners, who may be fresh to Gamma, the company has introduced the new Technical Alliance tier.

"These partners should be rewarded for their commitment and provided with extra support to grow their businesses," said Gamma MD Daryl Pile.

"Technical Alliance Partners gain annual marketing funding, an accreditation logo to use on their website and marketing collateral, full access to Gamma Accelerate premium features and support from the Gamma marketing team."

Bristol-based Blackstar Solutions is the first partner to join the programme.

Its Head of Marketing Dylan Pepler stated: "The marketplace is crowded and this is an opportunity to differentiate ourselves while demonstrating to customers that we have a skilled team and the technical knowledge to support their business."

# Breaches decline in gvt study

THE Government's 2019 Cyber Security Breaches Survey reports that 32% of businesses identified a cybersecurity attack in the last 12 months, down from 43% the previous year.

The reduction is partly due to new data laws under the Data Protection Act and the GDPR.

The report says 30% of businesses and 36% of charities have made changes to their cybersecurity policies and processes as a result of GDPR coming into force in May 2018.

But the typical median number of breaches among those businesses hit by attacks rose from four in 2018 to six in 2019.

The most common breaches or attacks were phishing emails, followed by instances of others impersonating their organisation online, viruses or other malware including ransomware.

Digital Minister Margot James said: "Business and charity leaders are taking cybersecurity more seriously. However, with less than three in ten of those companies having trained staff to deal with cyber threats there's still a long way to go."

"With the rising cost of attacks, it's not something organisations can choose to ignore any longer."



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Richard Thompson

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Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

# Security skills gap calls for education

THE extent of the cybersecurity skills gap is well documented but how the ICT industry should go about bridging the chasm is a far less chronicled issue.

According to David Ellis, VP Security and Mobility Solutions for Europe at Tech Data, a drive for all-level education is key, from distributor support through to forging links with education establishments.

"The collective channel should align with universities for example, and work more closely on programmes in terms of graduate recruitment and apprenticeships," he commented. "The lack of skills in the channel needs addressing.

"Another big question is how resellers can gain a low cost of entry with reduced risk levels. This is a common challenge for partners who are juggling core business but want to do new things. How do they keep the plates spinning?"

Ellis said Tech Data is busy providing academy services and training to educate the channel and customers, giving partners a



David Ellis

leg up to the high growth security market where the SMB space has become a focal point.

"The security channel has traditionally focused on the enterprise, but there's a growing appetite and need to address the SMB market," he said. "Whether a two or 2,000 person company, hackers are looking for weaknesses, and if there's a weakness there's a risk. It's

important for SMBs to secure their infrastructure."

Ellis noted key opportunities for managed UC providers to offer security, and equally important opportunities for providers of managed security to overlay existing infrastructure.

"It's key for customers to buy a service and a business outcome rather than a technology," added Ellis.

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# Smart move by PE player



Scott McEwan

PRIVATE equity firm Aliter Capital has merged Glasgow's Boston Networks and north Wales based Pinacl Solutions to create a circa £50m revenue business with a 300 headcount.

The enlarged organisation will focus on network infrastructure, smart buildings, the IoT, physical security and life safety systems.

Aliter snared a majority stake in Boston Networks in January 2018. The company also acquired PEL Services in April last year and 2020 Vision Systems in December.

Boston Networks is behind a £6m IoT network in Scotland, a project part-funded by the Scottish Government.

Pinacl has also made its presence felt in the IoT space having built and delivered an

intelligent street lighting solution for Aberdeen City Council.

Boston Networks Chairman and Aliter Partner Greig Brown said: "Since our investment into Boston Networks we have been focused on creating a national provider that has major credibility across the networking and systems integration market."

Pinacl CEO Rob Bardwell added: "Pinacl has an appetite to accelerate its growth. The prospects for the combined group through its range of capabilities are exciting."

Boston Networks CEO Scott McEwan said Pinacl offers 'complementary technologies, customers and geographical coverage'. "It will be business as usual for the two companies," he added. "The synergies are obvious."

# ICUK plan dangles a big carrot

A NEW incentive scheme introduced by wholesaler ICUK gives partners cashback for customers adding new FTTC 80/20 tails to their base via a migration or a new installation.

Called the 'ICUK £1,000 carrot' the scheme is expected to help smaller resellers grow on its platform.

The move builds on the current offer of free PSTN and broadband installation as standard; which has been extended during May and June with the promise of £250 cashback for 10 new connections, £500 for 15 new connections and £1,000 for 25 new connections.

"Further incentives are available for larger bases," stated Neil Barnett, Head of Business Development. "Following the popularity of our free PSTN and broadband activation offer over the past three years we're now offering a cashback incentive for new and existing resellers, whether small and large, to help grow their bases."



Neil Barnett

# Apprentices break mould



Apprentices overturn convention

THE first tranche of employees have completed South West Communications Group's inaugural apprenticeship scheme, which began life in 2017 and reflects a £200k commitment to the Apprenticeship Levy Scheme with bespoke NVQ Level 3 IT, communications and administration qualifications provided by Exeter College, offering a choice of 27 modules.

The scheme was open to all non-technical staff and created 16 apprenticeships. "We have turned apprenticeships on their head," said Commercial Director Jon Whiley. "Not only do we look for young talent through traditional apprentice-

ships, we have upskilled existing staff by giving them time to study for a formal qualification.

"South West Communications has embraced change following an industry transformation that has seen a shift towards cloud-based products.

"We are no longer just selling solutions but also services, which means staff need a greater understanding of our services and how to develop their customer service skills."

Exeter College has presented the swcomms model to other UK and overseas employers.

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## Energy makes sense in Pescado progress

NORTH WALES based Pescado prides itself on presenting telecoms and IT solutions to its customers that make sense, so adding energy services to the company's portfolio alongside Fidelity Energy was a 'no brainer' according to managing director Fraser Watson

"We don't bamboozle our customers with jargon and keep the explanations simple and concise, even when the technology is anything but. It's our people and commitment to great service that we believe sets us apart," he said.

"Every email we send to a customer, prospect or supplier asks them to 'let the Big Fish know how we are doing'. We really want them to do just that. The response we get is invaluable, we love great feedback but appreciate we can always improve.

"Every business uses electricity and we believe that our valued customers continue to want to purchase products from trusted suppliers, and they know they can rely on Pescado to give them first class service and support."

The partnership with Fidelity was serendipitous as Group Finance Director Jonathan Weeks explained.

"We had a new member of staff join us who had worked with Fidelity Energy in previous employment and had realised it was a positive addition to the product portfolio. He arranged for Jason Fernyhough from Fidelity Energy to meet with Fraser and we progressed from there.

Pescado partners with some of the biggest names in the telecoms and IT industry such as Vodafone, EE, Vanilla IP, Plan.com, Microsoft and TalkTalk Business, so Fidelity's pedigree and record of success in the ICT market was crucial to the decision.

"Fidelity's approach has been

supportive and very professional and what really impressed us was their portal. It's really user friendly and it's made adding energy to our portfolio much easier than we ever imagined," said Watson.

Utilising its reputation for service and understanding in ICT, Pescado is now providing energy under its existing brand, addressing the company's entire base of 2,500 existing clients across the UK.

"The sales process itself is straight forward enough and customers are generally receptive. We have faced the usual objections, such as an existing broker in play already, but this is where we can leverage our existing relationships," said Weeks.

"We have enjoyed some early success but with perhaps the wrong focus. We are now addressing this with the support of Jason Fernyhough and armed with a revised strategy we are ramping up opportunities by organising some incentives and marketing that Fidelity have been happy to assist us with."

So, what would Watson and Weeks say to telecoms companies that see energy supply as a diversion from their core business?

"It's not a distraction: Fidelity help Pescado's growing client base find extra value by delivering a simple way of procuring gas and power using their technology and open book approach. It gives us confidence in the product and we know our customers are getting a great solution," said Watson. "Fidelity also go out of their way to help us land and manage deals. We have a field-based account manager and desk-based support meaning someone is always on hand to support and advise. They do a lot of the heavy lifting in gathering information and producing the quotes for us, we just close the deals."



Pescado directors left to right, Directors Jonathan (Jonny) Weeks and Fraser Watson.

## Kakapo app rates tweets

KAKAPO Systems, the software development business focused on end user applications for the Cisco BroadSoft platform, has launched Twitter Queues for BroadSoft.

The service is an extension of the Unity Contact Center framework that provides web chat and call back queues as an overlay on the BroadSoft BroadWorks system.

Marketing Director Steve Tutt said: "End users are moving their customer support requests not just to digital channels but to public and social ones.

"Twitter is the best example, where individuals can massively amplify their frustrations on a public feed. The implication is clear – any company with customers has to raise their game if they are serious about offering Twitter as a front line customer service channel."

Tutt said the launch reflects growing demand for omnichannel requirements in the SMB sector. "Incoming tweets are picked up by the Unity Contact Center and routed to agents



Steve Tutt

based on the longest idle or simultaneous profiles," he said. "The agent manages the tweet response as well as web chats and BroadSoft ACD calls via the Unity Agent interface. Agents can also send DM requests to take public chats private."

Tutt also noted that the launch is the latest example of how Kakapo Systems is layering different types of digital media into Unity.

"Crucially, the Agent interface will blend the omnichannel experience so the agent is only handling the next incoming media, of whatever type," commented Tutt. "And there is shared logic about integrating BroadSoft voice ACD with Unity Contact Center."

### NEWS ROUNDUP

SCC has merged of M2, the Managed Print & Document Services (MPDS) business it acquired in 2014, into its main organisation, creating SCC Managed Print & Document Services. SCC CEO James Rigby said: "Now is the right time to formally merge M2 into the SCC business as we continue to grow and evolve our combined Managed Print & Document Services. The MPDS market has been converging with IT for many years. Together as one, the business is well placed to seize the opportunity these trends present."

LEEDS-based Lily has been awarded Platinum Partner status from Gamma and is ranked in the top 1% of the comms provider's growth partners. Lily partnered with Gamma in 2012 and secured Gold partner status in 2016. Two years later Lily added Gamma's hosted telephony solutions which it branded as Lily Cloud. The company expects that Gamma's recently launched Unified Communications solution called Collaborate will become a core product in its portfolio.



NIMANS staff raised almost £700 during a purple themed day held to remember founder Julian Niman who died in January 2018. "Julian was renowned as a colourful character and nearly £700 was generated in his memory to support Epilepsy Action, a charity committed to a better life for everyone affected by the condition," said PR Manager Chris Widocks. The fund raising activities included a raffle, the sale of purple fruits, cakes and sweets, and an auction for Manchester United FC tickets.

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# Extreme set to expand AI

IN A SCALE up of its investment strategy Extreme Networks is to plough 95% of its R&D budget into AI, automation and software development.

“From telemedicine to electronic shelf labelling to digital learning, Extreme aims to transform the network from a binary utility into an intelligent engine that automatically connects people to technology, freeing IT in every industry to reimagine their business and create meaningful outcomes that improve the human experience,” commented Ed Meyercord, President and CEO, Extreme Networks.

“For digitisation to be fully realised, organisations need an agile, adaptive and secure network, a software-driven approach and human intelligence underpinning the business.

“That’s why Extreme is investing 95% of its research and development dollars into software and AI this year to expand the automation capabilities across our Smart OmniEdge, Automated Campus, and Agile Data Centre solutions.”

Rohit Mehra, Vice President of Network Infrastructure, IDC, observed: “The network has traditionally been seen as an IT support function, providing



Ed Meyercord

connectivity to users, devices and IT infrastructure – seen by many as ‘plumbing’.

“That notion is antiquated and false, given the intricacies of what modern cloud and IoT applications require in an enterprise context.

“Today’s vision of the network is that of a secure, application services and connectivity platform that can help optimise the user and application experience across healthcare, education, hospitality, manufacturing and other domains.

“Extreme’s focus on automation is relevant and timely as organisations look to network transformation as a foundation to build on for their digital transformation journey.”

# Cloudcell sidesteps FTTP ECC

A COST-effective alternative to FTTP launched by Cloudcell Technologies enables partners to offer customers superfast broadband without the burden of excess construction charges.

“Many businesses believe that FTTP is the only way to achieve faster broadband speeds and lower latency,” commented Cloudcell Technologies MD Kevin Boyle. “However, with excess construction charges rising to as much as £73k and often experiencing long delays, FTTP is beyond the reach of many businesses.”

The solution leverages the SD WAN capabilities of Cloudcell EQ to deliver a fibre alternative by bonding up to four LTE connections with two fixed broadband connections.

“This provides an enterprise grade broadband service with increased speed, quality of service, and lower latency, without incurring excess construction charges,” added Boyle.

“Using our new Cloudcell EQ Fibre Alternative service, resellers are able to drive incremental annuity revenue and win new business.”

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# Integrator in key purchase

NETWORK Utilities’ acquisition of security managed services business Metropolitan Networks adds a data centre and NOC in the UK and new offices and staff in the Middle East, Caribbean and West Africa.

The combined company boasts over 400 enterprise and service provider clients.

The financial details of the transaction were not disclosed.

David Bundock, Network Utilities COO, said: “We now have the depth and breadth of people, technologies and services to expand our customer footprint without sacrificing the values that made us successful.”

Ashok Thomas, CEO and founder of Metropolitan Networks, commented. “Meeting the expectations of our clients while expanding the business proved challenging through organic growth alone.”

The new company holds top tier accreditations from key vendors including Juniper Networks, Pulse Secure and Fortinet; and has CISSP experts and Security Clearance for its



David Bundock

work with UK governmental and security agencies. Network Utilities also holds ISO 9001 and 27001 certifications.

Paul Rowe, Sales Director, added: “The deal expands our footprint into new regions such as the Middle East, the Americas and Africa where, although initially small, we have international clients that offer growth potential.

“Our enlarged size and new areas of the business such as training, private cloud and Cyber Essentials certifications also gives us a more rounded portfolio that offers additional value added services.”

# MCSA landed by Park Place

DATA centre maintenance firm Park Place Technologies has snapped up IT services provider MCSA Group in a move that significantly extends its national presence, picking up six offices in the UK including one office in Scotland.

MCSA has been a provider of multi-vendor break-fix support for 40 years.

“MCSA’s heritage of providing end-to-end IT services and solutions makes it a welcome addition to the Park Place Technologies family,” said



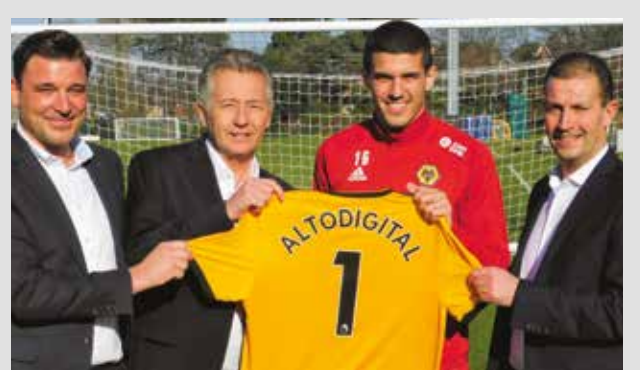
Chris Adams

Chris Adams, President and CEO, Park Place Technologies.

Roger Timms, MCSA’s founder and Chairman, added: “This is the right move for MCSA, the staff and for me

personally. We look forward to introducing our customers to the technologies and maintenance solutions Park Place Technologies offers, including its AI-enhanced remote monitoring service, ParkView.”

The deal is the first acquisition for Park Place Technologies in 2019 and follows four in 2018, including Latin America-based CMG-Nicsa, Ireland-based Origina Technology Services, Axentel Technologies in Singapore and Houston-based Solid Systems CAD Services.



OFFICE tech provider Altodigital has netted a three year print management contract with Premier League club Wolverhampton Wanderers. Kingswinford-based Altodigital, which has 12 offices around the UK, has a reputation for working with sports clubs including Arsenal, Huddersfield Town, Glamorgan County Cricket Club and Cardiff Devils ice hockey team. Tim Hubbard, Large Enterprise Director, said: “Our partnership with Wolves goes back 10 years, and a key part of the club’s requirement is to become more environmentally friendly, including reducing waste. Staff will now have to use their door key cards to release print jobs, meaning no more carte blanche printing and significantly less waste.” Altodigital was launched in 1987 and provides print, document management and office supplies for businesses across the UK.



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# SME focused Gradwell ra

Bath-based Gradwell Communications has staked a strong claim as the first to market with voice-ready broadband in 2005. Today, founder and CTO Peter Gradwell aims to get a similar head start in the race to provide SMEs with channel-ready cloud comms solutions.

**C**loud comms provider Gradwell Communications has found a new stomping ground in SME territory as it steps up from its traditional micro business heritage, eyes bigger fish and embarks on a fresh channel partner recruitment campaign that will form the next phase of its growth. Gradwell Communications currently serves 22,000 small businesses, has circa 32,000 seats and a similar number of SIP trunks under management and works with 300 partners. The ambitious hosted VoIP specialist also plans to add 10 more staff to its existing 70 headcount and double its £7.5 million revenues by 2022.

Gradwell has long-championed cloud comms as the key to growth, and he established the business at a time when new ideas about comms and networks emerged. "Gradwell Communications was born in the cloud 20 years ago so we are unencumbered by legacy services – we know this market well," he stated. "Historically, we focused on SoHo and micro businesses and have played an important role in helping many of them grow into known brands. As we continue to serve these customers we are turning our attention to the growing and evolving SME cloud communications space."

Gradwell was only 19 years old when he set the



Peter Gradwell

## Some of the giants in the room have unlimited funds and broad products but they are slow, inflexible and unable to connect with the customer's needs

business up. He was in the second year of university at Aberystwyth and had in mind a notion to become a forensic scientist. But the influence of his father, who was a self-employed database systems designer, was telling. With no obvious flair for chemistry but oodles of natural aptitude for computing, Gradwell set about studying Software Engineering. "As part of

my degree I experienced an industrial placement at Logica writing billing software for the Orange mobile service," he recalled.

### Striking out

"I spent my evenings writing websites for people at the turn of the millennium. Working in London during the dotcom boom was an exciting

time. But employment by a big corporate wasn't for me, so I quit in favour of a small ISP to finish my year. The move helped me to start and grow my hosting company. I then sold my first email and web hosting business Clicknames to Onyx Internet, now Pulsant."

Having graduated, Gradwell continued with web hosting

and found himself wanting to route calls across the Internet between two friends, one located in Leeds and the other Tunbridge Wells. "This was in 2002," stated Gradwell. "We'd just got broadband and hated paying for ISDN. So, we moved the ISDN lines into Telehouse, I built a web portal and we showed the service to our 1,000



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# MSPs up channel

web hosting customers. They loved it. The rest is history. We grew quickly by offering VoIP, broadband, fibre and web hosting."

Gradwell Communications was boosted by £1 million investment from Altitude Partners in 2012, which exited in 2017, leaving the path clear for Chiltern Capital to invest for a second phase of growth that ultimately saw the hosting business become relatively small and non-core, so it was divested to PickAWeb in 2018. Gradwell Communications also outsourced the broadband and fibre to Wavenet while rebuilding the VoIP platform into AWS.

## Leadership matters

"A change in leadership allowed us to be 100 per cent focused on becoming a next generation cloud communications provider for SMEs," commented Gradwell. "Our priorities are to continue the growth story and bring to market the next generation of our platform. We are developing our services to be easy to integrate with business applications and partner ordering systems. Another focus area is rebuilding the management tools inside Salesforce, both internally and for partners so that we have one consistent experience from order to in-life management.

"Our biggest opportunity is to out-perform the competition in niche vertical markets. Some of the giants in the room have unlimited funds and broad products but they are slow, inflexible and unable to connect with the customer's needs. Our main challenge however is recruiting and

developing enough talented colleagues in sales and software development."

In March this year Gradwell Communications scored an industry first when it was awarded Solution Provider status by 3CX in recognition of its capacity to provide an end-to-end solution including SIP trunks, hosting, service management and licensing. "Our hosted platforms are well placed to take advantage of the migration of SMEs from TDM services to hosted UC," added Gradwell. "Customers are moving off ISDN and PSTN now the switch off has been announced.

"Meanwhile, businesses that adopted VoIP three to five years ago are coming out of their first contracts and looking for something that offers more. Our new platform will bring cloud-first innovations like office 365 integration. We are heavily into AWS and using some of its auto scaling systems. The platform automatically makes itself larger which is great for our call centre customers. We are also keeping a close eye on Microsoft's Teams product. It will be interesting to see how much traction this gets and whether customers choose to consume voice services on the platform, or if they stick to more traditional methods.

"At the same time there is consolidation across the voice, IT and managed service providers space. MSPs are looking for recurring revenues and see voice as a way to achieve this. They are trusted partners of their customers and voice is a logical and relatively simple next step for them. Voice is moving inside applications."

## Just a minute with Peter Gradwell...

**Role model:** Bill Gates. He was able to scale Microsoft over a long period of time and he knew when to do something else

**Your biggest achievement?** Growing a well respected and profitable telecoms provider from scratch along with having two kids and obtaining my PhD

**Biggest risk you've taken?** Having PE investment and ceding control. It meant that I wasn't always right!

**Best piece of advice you have been given?** Go to work every day to make yourself redundant by empowering the team

**In hindsight:** I would have invested more in product. In a period of hyper growth we spent more on sales and operations which created a lot of manual workarounds. If we had hired developers we could have scaled faster

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Forensic scientist

**One example of something you have overcome?** At one time the business was growing at such a pace we required more funding. I didn't like the thought of ceding control, but ultimately it was a good thing and I can now leverage the experience of a very capable board

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** I can quickly understand a high level strategic problem and the technical nuts and bolts that need oiling to resolve it; but I am not comfortable sharing my feelings and being direct with people

**Top tip for resellers:** Your unique value is understanding the local context, so monetise that

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# Workshop: Opportunitie

A seismic shift from in-store to online purchasing has become the order of the day in the retail sector. Here, Tony Rich, Head of Vertical Solutions at Atos, explains how to match technology solutions to the many challenges faced by today's retailers.

**R**etailers today face two big challenges. Firstly, they need to find new, innovative ways to drive footfall, enhance the customer experience and ultimately drive sales and brand recognition. Secondly, from a digital perspective, they need to better understand the online path to purchase. "Retailers need to use all the data available to them to uncover how they can influence a purchase decision in order to effectively target and convert customers," said Rich. "The key to combating both challenges is increased personalisation for the customer."

Cost-reduction and customer acquisition have traditionally been primary drivers in the sector. However, the buying pattern has evolved towards driving customer engagement and improving the overall customer experience. "What we're seeing now is different types of in-store technology such as digital mirrors and virtual shop assistants to enhance the overall in-store retail environment," added Rich. "Simultaneously, retailers are continuing to invest in digital tools such as AI and chatbots to help customer conversion and engagement. Both avenues are crucial in merging the physical and virtual world, offering a consistent brand experience."

While novelty technology tends to create an initial



Tony Rich

## Any technology that improves a retailer's ability to gather, analyse and act on information to achieve a more holistic view of customers and improve the shopping experience will continue to drive investment

buzz and drive footfall in the short-term, the big challenge for retailers is finding a way to pilot these programmes and seek out how, why and when customers want to interact with them, and what place they have in their go-to-market strategy, pointed out Rich. "In addressing this challenge, communications and IT providers shouldn't concentrate on deploying

tech for tech's sake," commented Rich. "Instead, they should focus on the bigger picture by better articulating how different propositions will positively impact business performance. I often say to clients, 'I don't believe in technology, I believe in impactful business-focused solutions'. Any offering that can demonstrate a genuine business lift or provide the cutting edge

over the competition will perform well."

### Integration

In the wider comms and technology market there's an increasingly blurred line between traditional UC and collaborative tools, and this presents an opportunity for the retail sector, believes Rich. "No longer is technology deployed in cumbersome on-prem boxes, landlines

or headsets, instead the technology is weaved into software platforms which can join up in-store, online and remote contact centres to help virtualise the in-store shopping experience," he explained. "This type of technology has been used in contacts centres for a number of years now, however it's permeating its way through entire shops and organisations."



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# s in retail tech

A key factor is that retailers are under more pressure than ever to leverage the systems they currently have to deliver as much value as possible in terms of improving the customer experience. "Communication and collaboration technology is now at an evolutionary stage, it can be cost-effective while also being scalable and adaptable to change with market and customer demands," noted Rich. "The cloud forms a huge part of this. However, other tools that help integrate and improve existing systems will increasingly influence future purchasing decisions from retailers and their suppliers."

With online continuing to account for a larger portion of UK retail spend, stores will gradually move away from being a

traditional sales channel to a more experiential offering, observed Rich. "We've seen this with Tesla, Amazon and Best Buy in the

## Comms and IT providers should focus on better articulating how different propositions will positively impact business performance

States, but larger sections of the market will become more focused on building and nurturing the brand experience through store showrooms and cutting-edge technology which will take on a greater role in driving brand loyalty," he added.

With more options for customers to self-scan in-store, retailers will start gathering huge amounts of data showing how customers interact and buy. This data can then be analysed and used to change everything from store layouts, staff resourcing and promotional marketing. "When combined with other data sources, such as loyalty cards and online shopping habits, retailers will be able to build an unrivalled and holistic view of their customers, which will be beneficial for both the retailer and customer," commented Rich.

"Retailers have long known that the more you know

your customer, the more you can tailor your offering to suit their needs and provide the experience that they want. Data is the new currency. Any technology that improves a retailer's ability to gather, analyse and act on information to achieve a more holistic view of customers and improve the shopping experience will continue to drive investment. This can be in the form of IoT sensors, analytics, collaboration software, chatbots, AI or simply upgrading legacy systems which aren't able to cope with the sheer volume of information available to retailers."

According to Rich, ICT providers need to challenge themselves and start having new types of conversations with clients. "As an industry we've got to be smarter about understanding the specific pressures on businesses to solve the most critical issues in each sector," he commented. "Tech companies that embrace verticals and each specific issue that customers experience will see big opportunities opening up. No longer can you simply take a broad brush approach to technology. It's part of a much wider total transformation agenda and conversations need to reflect this.

"The key to unlocking potential will be having adaptable solutions that can collaborate and integrate across a range of pre-existing and new solutions to solve a particular business pressure, be that cost cutting, driving productivity, customer acquisition and retention, or building a sound and credible brand identity." ■

### RICH'S TOP TIPS

- Specialise in verticals to fully understand the specific challenges retailers are facing.
- Think about the end user and how the solution you are selling can solve their most common or concerning pressure points.
- The days of aspiration sales are over. The more data and metrics you can bring to show impact the better your chances of success.
- Do everything you can to integrate solutions around complex and pre-existing systems.
- It is important to understand the wider total transformation agenda and adapt key lessons and best practice from other vertical deployments to solve the problem at hand.

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# Cloud model falls short

The industry's great obsession with driving cloud adoption lacks the direction it needs to succeed, according to VanillaIP's Sales and Marketing Director Iain Sinnott who argues that cloud strategies are screaming for the critical Interaction Management and Reporting (IM&R) element that will make them truly worthwhile.

**T**o press the go button on cloud projects that lack customer focused IM&R would be to totally ignore a red light, believes Sinnott, who says much of the industry is too slow to recognise that true cloud deployment, driven by real-time insights, is where the market is heading. "If you are leading the charge you will gain customer loyalty, but if you resist the flow you will lose your base," he warned. "Just because your business is built on an old world commercial model doesn't mean the customers of the future are going to accept your terms. Suppliers have focused too much on simple bundles to make deployment and management easy, but it hides the reality of service utilisation, or to be more precise, non-utilisation."

Sinnott says the prevailing habit is to look too hard at simple connection figures rather than service utilisation and profit. "Product profit is lost as package prices are forced down, but within those packages are unused services which represent a

wasted wholesale cost," he added. "For the customer, the blunt nature of service deployment means they can't scrutinise feature adoption and demand a tailored product delivering a feature appropriate service per user."

Sinnott noted that when supplying services to business clients VanillaIP always seeks to optimise the performance of their staff and customer experience. "Therefore statistical reporting of how staff, managers and the call flows perform will lead to a better performance and the removal of waste," he added.

#### Profit matters

From a reseller perspective, profit is the most important measure, emphasised Sinnott. "If I can analyse the profit performance of my sales teams, report on secondary revenue sales, customer adoption of revenue services and churn on secondary services I can predict the value of all the business I write and target my efforts where the highest margins are made," he explained. "We can work with our resellers to design the correct



Iain Sinnott

**Just because your business is built on an old world commercial model doesn't mean the customers of the future are going to accept your terms**

products for their portfolio and Uboss will report on both the core sales figures and also adoption numbers and profit performance of all elements. This includes products the reseller adds to the portfolio at their level

as well as those services purchased from VanillaIP."

The reporting and self-management tools also become a factor in the end client's buying decision as the call flow, service adoption and staff performance reports help them to extract the full technology dividend from their purchase. "If sold as a true dynamic cloud solution, resellers give their customers the chance to constantly optimise their investment making future churn far less likely," stated Sinnott.

IM&R is especially beneficial with call and contact centre products which optimise the performance of staff and call flow management, with reporting enabling agile management of each of those tools. "This area also offers a higher revenue return for the reseller, although through the construction of 'feature

appropriate user packages', resellers should retain a consistent profit margin from simple through to complex solution deployments," noted Sinnott. "The lower revenue markets still deliver strong margins. For example, we have seen a massive uplift in education sector sales since the creation of a specific 'classroom' user."

VanillaIP's Uboss management ecosystem is developing and delivering greater levels of profit analysis to resellers. By better understanding a product's profitability, and being able to understand accurate feature adoption, resellers can construct packages that fulfil the service requirement without having to carry the wholesale costs of redundant services.

"In Uboss we have made a commitment to deliver a true cloud consumption model, which means we inform on usage, allow flexible adoption and promote a dynamic live solution model," said Sinnott. "The app store is the desired service management experience in the smart mobile world, and it will be the desired service management model in the business communications space. The concept is held back by a supply chain dominated by dinosaurs.

"If we are to be true to the potential of the on-demand cloud service principle, then a redundant application report, triggered by a fallow period threshold would also be interesting. In the short-term resellers may see it as an unnecessary loss of margin but if the customer never leaves because their costs are directly proportionate to their consumption, resellers are sure to gain loyalty." ■

# The Next Generation of Customer Communications: The Simple Changes Making All the Difference

Contact centre solutions have the potential to offer so much more than the standard call queues and call management. In business communications, the customer experience is key to developing a trustworthy brand favourite in the era of online reviews and social media.

There is a growing need for more efficient and diverse methods of customer communication, however, not all communications vendors are able to successfully fulfil the requirements that a high-functioning call centre needs. Likewise, not all vendors catering specifically to call centre solutions can provide the array of communications features that the explosion of UC has introduced. 3CX, however, has integrated all the functionality of a contact centre solution into its award-winning PBX system. This has allowed for the perfect amalgamation of call centre functionality with advanced UC, paving the way for the next-generation of customer communications. And what's more, 3CX V16 has focused more on outward communications, introducing even more features that cater to enhancing the customer experience.

## Enhancing the Basics

One of the main reasons a business may implement a contact centre solution is to improve their level of customer support. Features such as intuitive call management, effortless transferring, the ability to view the status of colleagues, and contact centre reporting all allow for efficient and productive handling of customer enquiries.

At its most basic level, contact

centre solutions enable businesses to streamline their communications processes, therefore saving agents' time that can be spent assisting more customers. 3CX makes navigating the phone system and its features simple, so in a few clicks a call can be answered and the customer can be directed to where they need to be, and with the use of agent status, this can be done quickly without leaving the customer waiting on hold.

A feature that really brings together the UC side of the call centre solution, is 3CX's ability to switch between a variety of communication methods seamlessly. So, if an agent is on a call with a customer and they need a more visual perspective to deal with their enquiry, they can easily begin a web meeting without ever losing contact.

## The Brand = Customer Experience

Take support efforts a step further and we begin to really amp up the customer experience. There are always going to be cases in which agents are unable to solve a customer's issue, but allowing them to communicate with ease and having the ability to explore all possible avenues whilst personalising the service is sure to leave them with a sweeter taste in their mouths than if the business just doesn't really bother.



The free 3CX Live Chat & Talk plugin complements the contact centre solution by allowing businesses to employ a direct line of communication straight through their website. Live chat functionality is a great method of communication that gives customers an instant solution and boosts their trust and loyalty to a brand or business. Allowing instant communication, at the customer's convenience, shows you have nothing to hide, and what's more: it's free. With 3CX's Live Chat & Talk plugin, chats can be easily elevated to voice and even video calls to better assist the customer.

With the plethora of features in conjunction with CRM integration, 3CX offers the ability to personalise the assistance that agents provide to customers. Chat can be used for more relaxed and friendly communication, an approach much preferred by the often phobic millennials. What's more, seamless synchronisation between your PBX and CRM solution doesn't only allow for more efficient call handling. It also

allows you to view previous correspondence with the customer as well as check the progress of their case, saving time for them and the agent as well as boosting overall customer satisfaction.

## Turning the Tables

The 3CX Live Chat & Talk plugin is a great way for customers to contact you, but that's not its only purpose - why not let the agents do the talking? Website live chat provides the ideal opportunity for agents to pursue leads by engaging in chat to offer assistance in whatever it is the customer is looking for, or maybe they need a little push to commit. And even if they don't follow through with a purchase, businesses will at least be alerting them to their level of customer service and how easy it is to contact them if need be.

## Report. Analyse. Improve. Repeat.

In addition to the number of communication features and intuitive call handling, 3CX also includes advanced call reports that, when used correctly, have the

potential to offer important insight into the call centre's performance and how you can effectively improve customer service. Keep track of call activity for a better understanding of the call centre's strengths and weaknesses, allowing you to customise processes and roles based on performance. What's more, this feedback is essential in training agents and driving the team forward.

Businesses are quickly coming around to the fact that their brand and reputation is built on the customer experience and communication accounts for the majority of this. Resellers should offer systems that can provide the basics that call centres need to run efficiently as well as the more advanced features that make communication with agents more of a pleasure than a torment. 3CX offers a complete call centre solution with an array of customer service enhancing features that are all accessible through one simple and flexible platform - all of the functionality, none of the hassle.

# Ambassadors give 9 the

Maddie Hinch is the undisputed Number One women's hockey goalkeeper on the planet and having her on board 9 Group's brand development team alongside four other sporting greats perfectly aligns the company with winners, according to Marketing Director Mark Saunders.

It was in 2017 that 9 Group launched its Free to Perform brand ethos, and according to Saunders it's important to continually articulate and explain the concept of brand ambassadors to partners. "At its core, the proposition means 'we do our job, so you can do yours'," he commented. "By aligning our brand with elite athletes, who generally have people around them to carry out their 'back office' tasks so they can concentrate on winning, we could bring the Free to Perform message to life.

"There is also a clear benefit in creating an association between our inherent brand values and people who are successful, inspirational and personable in equal measure. Given the long-established link between the requirements for success in sport and business, expanding our portfolio of sporting brand ambassadors seemed a logical next step for us."

9 Group now has five sports people in its armoury, Maddie Hinch, Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup Championship driver Josh Webster, wheelchair tennis gold medal winner Gordon Reid and British Olympic artistic gymnasts Becky and Ellie Downie. Saunders initially worked with a marketing agency to establish a long list of 12 potential brand ambassadors, who melded into 9's criteria.



Maddie Hinch and Mark Saunders

## Make sure that your brand ambassador will enhance your brand and profile, never detract from it

"We looked at what would work within our budget and which individuals provided the more inspirational stories that would work well with the 9 brands," he said. "We also wanted to work with sports stars who were already champions and likely to feature in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, to enhance the profile they could provide. There was an opportunity to

possibly work with a single household name and invest all our budget behind them, but the ambassadors that we finally selected held a stronger resonance with our Free to Perform message and I believe they are more relatable than some of the A list sports people.

"Gymnastics, hockey and wheelchair tennis may not

command the airtime of football, rugby and cricket, but they have incredible participation rates in the UK and in Maddie's case, a back story that gripped the entire nation at the Rio Olympics in 2016."

### Compelling story

As well as featuring regularly in 9's trade advertising, on the company's website and

in its social feeds, Hinch made her industry speaking debut at last year's Comms National Awards and received a standing ovation after her introduction keynote. "Any awards night is a boisterous environment, but Maddie was able to captivate the guests with her story of England's penalty shoot-out victory at the Rio Olympics and how our Free to Perform



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# winning touch

ethos resonates with an elite level athlete," added Sanders.

"By way of contrast, she also spoke at a small round table event, attended by around 20 of our partners, held at The Shard earlier in 2018. Maddie spoke to everyone about her background and the long slog to her eventual success, with a good many references to Free to Perform. Everyone then enjoyed a most convivial lunch and welcomed the opportunity to pose for selfies alongside Maddie and her gold medal."

Hinch has agreed to work with 9 until January 2021 and carries out two or three engagements each year, as well as supporting the business on social media and by sharing website content. Saunders is unconcerned about the length of the deal, even if she gets injured or dropped from the England or Great Britain team.

"Sporting ambassador contracts always contain 'what if' clauses, but the personal qualities which first inspired 9 to work with Maddie will remain, even if she is unfortunately injured or out of form," said Saunders. "When Maddie decided to take a break from international competition to focus on her club career in Holland, we fully supported her, while equally looking forward to her hopeful return to the international stage later this year."

The 65,000 dollar question for Saunders has to be – how does he connect an international hockey goalkeeper with selling ICT solutions? "The skill, desire and dedication required to be a gold medal Olympian are all the same qualities that you

need to succeed in sales," he explained. "Succeeding in the ICT market is a competitive business, so is being an international hockey goalkeeper. The parallels are clear to see and people like to associate themselves with winners, especially inspirational ones."

So, is it a wise idea for partners to employ a brand ambassador? "Why not? But only if it is part of a marketing strategy and reinforces the values of

## Choose an emerging sports person or athlete and back them to win in the future

your company," noted Saunders. "I would recommend avoiding any ego led decisions, or assumptions that you may just get some free tickets. Activating the relationship needs a careful plan and considerable investment, so this is not a decision to be taken lightly, but it can yield positive results.

"I would advise choosing an emerging sports person or athlete and back them to win in the future. Their progress, and even their setbacks can create engaging content for you. Alignment is the key. Make sure that your brand ambassador will enhance your brand and profile, never detract from it. Be prepared to work hard to maximise your return on investment, and make someone accountable for delivery." ■

### Just a minute with Maddie Hinch...

**Role model:** Kate Richardson-Walsh OBE – the GB and England captain for 13 years and the most capped female hockey player in the UK's history. A truly inspirational leader

**Your biggest achievement?** Winning Olympic Gold in 2016

**Did you ever imagine you'd be a world No1?** As a teenager I remember saying, 'one day I want to be the best in world', but I never believed it would happen

**Best piece of advice you have been given?** If you don't believe in yourself, who will?

**The key to your success?** Dealing with setbacks. When I was knocked back it made me more determined to achieve

**Who has inspired you most?** Serena Williams. Despite her many accolades, her journey to the top was difficult which inspires me to stay strong during hard times

**How do you perform to your best?** Train hard and often, and consistently push myself out of my comfort zone mentally and physically both on and off the pitch

**Your winning recipe?** Hard work, grit and determination

**What's the difference between a good and a great goalkeeper?** Mindset! A mistake can change the game, so it's about the ability to handle this mentally and relish rather than fear the challenge

**How would you like to be remembered?** As one of the greatest hockey goalkeepers of all time

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# Take control of mobile

A priority job of ICT providers is to create sticky new service offerings by integrating mobile comms into corporate customers' telephony and ICT systems, says Tango Networks General Manager for Cloud Services Andrew Bale.

**T**radition dictates that mobile comms management is not a matter for CIOs and business leaders. But, says Bale, it clearly should be for individual organisations to decide how to deploy and manage their mobile communications. Perhaps more importantly, this 'fundamental right' has stimulated the rise of MVNOs and opened up a significant opportunity for ICT resellers of all kinds. "There is a golden opportunity for VARs, CSPs and hosted service providers to launch a new breed of MVNO focused on business mobility, and shine a light on the last major blind spot in corporate IT," stated Bale.

In a typical enterprise CIOs have direct control over IT assets and services such as networking, Internet, applications, security, telephony etc. But mobile phones are now the primary communications devices in many enterprises, and everyone uses them to access business applications that the CIO's staff can't control in the same way they can other parts of IT.

"Mobile communications is controlled by a range of mobile operators over

a number of networks, involving various devices and many different subscriptions," added Bale. "That's the enterprise mobility 'unknown'. But resellers can solve this pressing issue with new white labelled enterprise-tailored MVNO services."

Previously, becoming a MVNO involved heavy lifting on the technology and service delivery side. "It's much easier now and turnkey types of implementations are available for basic MVNO services that are straightforward to white label and bring to market," added Bale. "That's the big opportunity for resellers. They can specialise in delivering mobile services that are tailored to customer requirements. Customised service bundles address the mobility blind spot directly and become sticky offerings."

#### In control

Today's fixed-mobile convergence touches a wide range of areas, such as integrating mobile communications with business applications and workflows and moving beyond voice convergence to include placing messaging and mobile data usage into corporate IT's control. The benefits include the capture



Andrew Bale

## Customised service bundles directly address the mobility blind spot and become sticky offerings

and recording of mobile voice and messaging (including SMS messaging) to comply with communications archiving or monitoring rules. Additional boons include enabling text messaging from business numbers, integrations with workforce optimisation, field worker management and other enterprise applications. Furthermore, desktop

replacement strategies such as going 'mobile first' and making mobile phones the primary communications device enterprise-wide can be an attractive option, observed Bale.

"Many enterprises are moving to 'mobile first' strategies and making mobile phones the primary communications devices for employees," said Bale. "Last year PwC did away with landline desk phones for its 18,000 employees in the UK, going 'mobile first' and making mobile phones the main communications device for all."

To take advantage of this mobility opportunity resellers can become a MVNO by partnering with solution providers that can deliver a platform that is easy to configure to the customer's requirements. Tango Networks (which

acquired Simetric Telecom in November last year), for example, has enabled channel partners to give large distributed enterprise customers a single, global mobile network service that is private, secure and directly in control of the enterprise CIO.

"The offering unifies the control over mobile services and puts it in the hands of the enterprise," explained Bale. "It consolidates many contracts and operator relationships into one. The enterprise IT manager has direct control over the mobile voice, messaging and data usage by employees even when they are distributed across many regions and operator networks. With an offering like that, resellers can become high value solution partners."

According to Bale, resellers who are interested in becoming a MVNO also need to leverage their deep relationships with business customers and think through how to position and deliver the service, at the same time giving some consideration to taking advantage of their team's particular skill sets and experience.

"Many of our MVNO reseller partners launch vertical-specific mobility solutions," commented Bale. "Others focus on a functional aspect such as workforce optimisation or field management. Some offer specific mobility services designed for very small firms, medium sized companies or large global enterprises. When starting out as a MVNO, resellers should focus on their existing proposition and commercial relationships, not be distracted by the background technology." ■

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# The PBX will be around for



**A**re you a remainer or a leaver? And we're not talking about Brexit here... The question is aimed at a UK comms provider community divided by those loyal to on-premise PBX solutions and those offering the increasingly popular hosted telephony alternative.

There are still strong remainers who will argue until they are blue in the face that a traditional PBX offers their customers management and control of their telephony and can be modified as needed. Integration with an existing CRM platform can be smooth too, because an in-house PBX is typically designed to work well with all the tech tools a customer depends on and gives its people access to some 'best-in-breed' functionality. What's more, an in-house PBX is the best option for businesses with a large centralised workforce that has specialised needs. Arguably, once a business exceeds a critical mass of extensions - somewhere in the range of 50 or above - an in-house PBX starts to be especially cost-effective.

On the other hand, the 'leavers' will contend that the traditional on-premises system is a dead duck and their arguments are compelling. A managed hosted solution is more flexible as a business grows, does not take a big chunk out of CAPEX funds and, over time, will offer substantial savings. Hosted PBX customers will also not incur high initial charges and setup costs, nor will they have to pay for annual maintenance and periodic upgrades.

Some would argue that the ISDN switch off in 2025 will see a massive migration to Cloud based telephony, but that's a bit of a red herring as most modern on-premise systems are IP compatible. Others will say the argument will become immaterial once 5G and ultimately 6G becomes ubiquitous as all communications will be via mobile devices.

Companies and organisations in a variety of markets and locations have different needs. As always, its horses for courses and ultimately customers will decide what's best for them.

Based on respondents to our Kaleidoscope round-robin this month, it would appear our industry is as divided about the long-term future of the on-premise PBX as our country is over Brexit. In both cases it's clear that those that offer the best of both worlds continue to thrive in the changing digital landscape.



AXEL KLOESSNER  
FONTEVO

**IS THERE STILL DEMAND FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?**

With or without the ISDN switch-off being a driver for cloud base services, I feel that there will always be a need for on-premise PBX systems as it provides choice and a lower TCO level for individual company owners who like to be fully in control.

**IS THERE ANY FUTURE FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?**

For some time, there will be a need for on-premise PBX systems as these can be VoIP enabled and therefore support business owners in utilising their current investment in telephony systems and handsets until they see the real business need to switch to cloud.

**WILL IP EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR VOICE QOS?**

In most cases across Europe, connectivity is good enough for QoS. Yes, there are for sure still issues with activating hi-speed/ good quality broadband for the areas where broadband is not possible, but this has been an issue for some time now.

**WILL 5G/6G MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TAKE OVER ANYWAY?**

Maybe in 15-20 years this could be the case, but there is still an increase in cloud and on-premise PBX systems being installed every day in the UK and Germany. So, this is probably related to the next generation and what the trend will be towards communications and meeting their expectations.



ALAN MACKIE  
GAMMA

**IS THERE STILL DEMAND FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?**

Businesses want choice to meet their requirements, whether that's integration to business applications or how users access the applications. Based on the differing customer requirements and locations, we think there will continue to be a mix of on-premise and hosted solutions servicing the market for the foreseeable future.

**IS THERE ANY FUTURE FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?**

Cloud-based solutions offer the most flexibility and scalability. However, there continues to be a market for dedicated UC solutions, taking the form of an on-premise platform (which may be the best option due to lack of IP connectivity) or a dedicated instance for the customer hosted locally or in the cloud to support specific business application integrations.

**WILL IP EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR VOICE QOS?**

Yes, quality IP connectivity is available now for most UK businesses. The roll out of new access technologies will see this increase in bandwidth and footprint over the next few years.

**WILL 5G/6G MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TAKE OVER ANYWAY?**

If we really mean ALL communications via mobile networks, the answer is NO! But we certainly see that there will be a significant increase in the use of Voice, Collaboration and Conferencing services over Mobile networks.



JOHN MCKINDLAND  
NIMANS

**IS THERE STILL DEMAND FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?**

There's still a huge demand for on-premise systems especially as cloud-based alternatives are playing catch-up in terms of contact centre functionality for example. Hosted is not a one-size fits and in lot of cases the long-term ROI is far greater for on-premise with an additional capital asset.

**IS THERE ANY FUTURE FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?**

There are several products that offer a very low cost of entry, are modular in size, low application builds and can grow to up to 100 extensions. They will be around for a long time because the long-term cost of ownership is so much less than other options.

**WILL IP EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR VOICE QOS?**

Current connectivity yes, if you have the right infrastructure in place. But if it's not deployed properly then data will override the voice 'packet' which causes problems. There are still issues.

**WILL 5G/6G MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TAKE OVER ANYWAY?**

There are some places in the country that cannot even get 3G! There will be a time when 5G and 6G become the 'de facto' standard, however it's a long way off.



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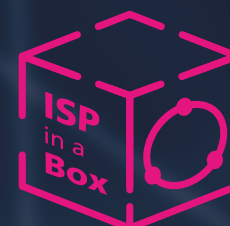
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# ... for some time yet (perhaps!)



JUSTIN BLAINE  
NTA

#### IS THERE STILL DEMAND FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

I think there is still a place for on-premise solutions and I do not foresee this changing in the immediate future, however in the longer term, say within the next 10 years, I see only cloud solutions being delivered.

#### IS THERE ANY FUTURE FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

The cost of ownership of a PBX vs Cloud Solution is a huge contributor of why PBX's are being sold, however I also believe there are many resellers still leading with this technology as it suits them cash flow wise!

#### WILL IP EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR VOICE QOS?

Connectivity is getting better all the time and costs are now more palatable for end customer. We at NTA see that QoS is good enough in most locations to provide a reliable and resilient service for voice purposes.

#### WILL 5G/6G MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TAKE OVER ANYWAY?

Maybe in generations to come however the mobile network is not good enough alone to deliver PBX functionality, this in my mind can only be achieved coupled together with a hosted platform currently although that may change in the future.



IAIN SINNOTT  
VANILLA IP

#### IS THERE STILL DEMAND FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

Optimising workforces requires flexible technology making clients fleet of foot. CPE options are technically sound, but they lack the dynamism to help a modern team. I would guess in three years PBXs stop selling, and seven to a 90% cloud base.

#### IS THERE ANY FUTURE FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

A twin-tub washing machine will still get your clothes clean and dry, but other technologies widen choice, improve results and fit more with the lifestyle of busy families. CPE telephone systems are like twin-tubs, a good idea at the time.

#### WILL IP EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR VOICE QOS?

Smart communications is about blending the best available technologies together. Where an IP connection is strong, use IP, but where GSM delivers better voice, use GSM. The internet has delivered a fantastic service to-date, so I foresee no future issues.

#### WILL 5G/6G MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TAKE OVER ANYWAY?

I foresee a time when suppliers blend mobile and localised terrestrial networks together to deliver a seamless single network solution but in-building challenges, and the need for guaranteed minimum capacities, still make open cell solutions a risk.



DARREN GARLAND  
PROVU

#### IS THERE STILL DEMAND FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

The market for on-premise systems exists for a variety of reasons not all of which are technically led. How long it survives is difficult to predict, it's in decline, and will become a more niche request based on specific requirements.

#### IS THERE ANY FUTURE FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

Despite its decline, there is some future for on-premise telephony - until the cloud wins the trust of some industries, they will continue to use it. Many also choose to utilise both cloud and on-premise for failover protection.

#### WILL IP EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR VOICE QOS?

Absolutely, the connectivity in most places is already good enough. The threat is the increased use of bandwidth by users for other applications, hence why many companies use dedicated connections for voice at present.

#### WILL 5G/6G MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TAKE OVER ANYWAY?

Not in its current form. Mobile will undoubtedly continue to evolve as will our communication methods. We believe there will be growth in multiple forms of communication through single devices which will drive a mix of licensed and unlicensed frequencies.



ROB DOWNES  
9 GROUP

#### IS THERE STILL DEMAND FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

There is still a market, for now, although the demand is shrinking and will naturally continue to diminish in the lead-up to 2025. While we're currently in an industrywide shift, we're not there yet and some demand for on-premise remains.

#### IS THERE ANY FUTURE FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

The demand is entirely customer driven but the shift to hosted needs to be Partner led. Partners need to take their customers on a journey by preparing them for 2025 and through educating them about how hosted solutions can really benefit their business.

#### WILL IP EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR VOICE QOS?

This is where carriers are really placing their focus and massive strides have been taken. Again, customer education is key. Partners should demonstrate how demands on connectivity are increasing and guide their customers to choose the best option for their business.

#### WILL 5G/6G MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TAKE OVER ANYWAY?

We're en route to a time where users will have an entirely seamless experience when switching between fixed and mobile connectivity. We'll remain connected to a single network, regardless of location. This will really open the doors for true unified communications.



ROBIN HAYMAN  
SPLICECOM

#### IS THERE STILL DEMAND FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

If, by ON-PREMISE telephone systems we're talking about voice applications running on virtual servers or industry standard Operating Systems then it's a big YES. The 'hybrid' in hybrid cloud voice is an on-premise element too.

#### IS THERE ANY FUTURE FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

Businesses with 50 plus phones, in-house management/IT policy, a preference for CAPEX over OPEX, a Financial Director who understands the true costs over 3/5/10 years; the more ticks in these boxes, the more likely the solution will include on-premise elements.

#### WILL IP EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR VOICE QOS?

Routing calls over the internet is the lowest common denominator. If you can afford to provide a voice service to customers, suppliers and employees, where quality can't be guaranteed, it's value for money. If quality is important, aim higher.

#### WILL 5G/6G MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TAKE OVER ANYWAY?

Why not. So long as there's still access to business-critical analytical data in the form of call management reports and call recordings and employees can't walk away with valuable client contact details on their mobiles when they leave.



NICK BIRTWISTLE  
BOOM

#### IS THERE STILL DEMAND FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

We are seeing a need for both cloud and on-premise solutions, but as cloud technology becomes the 'norm' at home we are seeing businesses move towards cloud for their communication needs.

#### IS THERE ANY FUTURE FOR ON-PREMISES TELEPHONY?

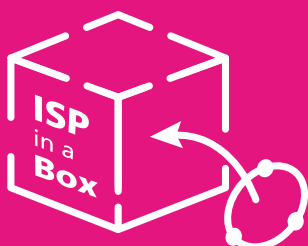
Currently, there is a need so it's best for resellers to be able to offer a solution that does both. Obviously, having both means that if or when the requests for on-premise solutions stop, resellers are well prepared for this and can offer a fully supportive cloud solution.

#### WILL IP EVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR VOICE QOS?

This has been an issue for some-time in the UK with lots of businesses still not able to get broadband let alone QoS. The question is more about connectivity in general and the advances that need to be made for all businesses to get good quality broadband and QoS. no matter where their business resides.

#### WILL 5G/6G MOBILE CONNECTIVITY TAKE OVER ANYWAY?

With the advent of 5G and future technologies beyond that, there is a definite possibility. We're now starting to see humans implanted with chips to monitor health, how long before those same chips are capable of communications!



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# Daisy creates partner-or



Terry O'Brien reveals the new company and rebrand to staff

With the merger and rebrand of Daisy Group's partner serving organisations a £200 million 'Super Aggregator' has been created at a time of unprecedented market growth, disruption and transformation, according to Digital Wholesale Solutions CEO Terry O'Brien and CDO Nathan Marke.

**D**aisy Group created a single partner-only organisation from its channel serving businesses to offer more choice and easier access to a wider portfolio of products and services, while meeting the demands of the evolving market. "The name Digital Wholesale Solutions positions us in the converging market that we serve – whether telco, IT or cloud partners etc – and the mission statement 'Power in Partnership' underscores our 100 per cent focus on channel partnerships," said O'Brien. "We are an established scaled business with great growth but feel like a start-up with a fresh brand that represents our culture, entrepreneurship and how our staff feel about our business."

The job of Digital Wholesale Solutions is to empower partners through its scale and ambition as a 'Super Aggregator'. At the root of its channel strategy and market outlook are a number of factors, among them the changing shape of the business landscape and the

challenges faced by partners. "The IT and communications market is characterised by fast change and we are responding to this by evolving our business to become more capable and valuable to our partners, whether they are comms, IT, cloud specialists or more generalist MSPs," said O'Brien.

According to the Office for National Statistics there are now 5.7 million businesses in the UK, up from 3.5 million in 2000, with the majority of these businesses employing less than 10 people. "We are becoming a nation of entrepreneurs," stated Marke. "These new companies aren't interested in old technology. If you start a business today you would use IT and communications in a very different way compared to five years ago. Modern businesses are putting all their data and business services in the cloud and enabling these services to be accessed 24x7 from anywhere.

"Growth is not coming from traditional on-premise IT. It's coming from digital

# Only 'Super Aggregator'

infrastructure, fibre, IP, cloud, SaaS and mobility, which are all growing at fast rates, well above 10 per cent as smaller businesses move rapidly to fibre, IP, cloud and XaaS. This means that to capture growth resellers need to be selling the right products to the right businesses."

This shift is reflected by analyst predictions which show that the market overall is growing at around three per cent. However, spend in large enterprises is flat – all of the growth is coming from SMBs (four to five per cent growth) suggesting that smaller businesses have a sharp appetite to spend on the technology that enables them to punch above their weight against larger competitors.

"How organisations are buying is changing too, driven by the fact that although the technology should be getting more simple it is getting more and more complex," noted Marke. "This is partly driven by a greater reliance on technology to run the business. Take Digital Wholesale Solutions – we are completely reliant on technology platforms as nearly everything is automated through our systems. Not only do we need good technology, we also need to worry more than ever about reliability, cyber security and data privacy. So all of our products are intrinsically wrapped in security."

Buying trends are also being driven by a desire to use technology to make people more productive and efficient, which is being captured more generally by the term Digital

Transformation. In response to this, businesses need to ensure their technology deployments are effective and can change quickly, and they are rationalising their ICT suppliers as part of this endeavour. "Businesses are finding that they have too many suppliers providing parts of the jigsaw and this is slowing them down," said Marke. "So they are trusting fewer suppliers to deliver more.

#### Subscription economy

"Just like the consumer market, business customers are increasingly researching and completing transactions online. Automated and subscription services are growing at eight-times the rate of traditional purchases. The channel is naturally responding to all of these changes, with partners increasingly seeking to offer a wider set of services to their customers."

Traditional communications and telco partners are broadening their offerings, stepping into providing IT

products and services. At the same time IT partners are increasingly offering networking, comms and telco services. "All partners are realising that to generate long-term value for their customers and their own businesses they need to create managed services, characterised by high levels of automation and remote management, that provide them with differentiation and long-term subscription revenue streams, the value

## Growth is not coming from traditional on-premise IT. It's coming from digital infrastructure, fibre, IP, cloud, SaaS and mobility

of which cannot be easily removed by the big cloud vendors," added O'Brien. "It is against this backdrop that Digital Wholesale Solutions provides our services, to help partners address their changing customer requirements. We

aim to be the one place that the channel can come to provide digital infrastructure for its customers."

Working with partners during the past five years Digital Wholesale Solutions has delivered 'tremendous growth' across every category of product offerings. "We do not do any direct business and work with partners of all shapes and sizes, from the earliest stage start-up that just wants to sell and

wholesale products and propositions and wrap these in their own services and support," explained Marke.

"We know that our products need to be simple, work first time, be competitive and surrounded by support. This enables our partners to confidently sell to their customers. We use our scale and breadth to offer straightforward and low risk commercial terms and often disrupt the market to enable this to happen. For example, wherever possible we reduce our partners' contractual commitments down to a minimum. Hop-on hop-off monthly contracts are always our target. We would much rather get growth from repeat business than from locking our partners into onerous long-term commitments that are hard to commit to into your customers.

"We also know that working with lots of suppliers is complex, adds to cost and means it takes longer to

**Continued on page 36**



**Nathan Marke: 'Modern businesses are putting all their data and services in the cloud'.**

**Continued from page 35** deliver to customers, so longer to get paid. Digital Wholesale Solutions offers a single point of contact and a single contract for all requirements, alongside smart tools. Most of the ordering experience will be automated, partners can badge our sales collateral as their own – and leverage our online and face-to-face training academy. The roster of smart tools also includes Insight, an intelligent engine that constantly monitors a partners' base of services with us, providing analytics and reporting that enables them to improve business, spot operational issues and sales opportunities in their customer base."

### Scale matters

Digital Wholesale Solutions also sees itself as a 'Super Aggregator', one place for all digital infrastructure requirements. "We have a broad, modern portfolio enabled by a portal and a rich set of APIs," commented O'Brien. "The backbone of this is our connectivity offering where as an ISP we own and operate our own secure and high performance aggregation network. We enable our partners to deliver broadband, Ethernet, Wi-Fi, SIP and fixed line services across the UK with access services from all of the major carriers."

Digital Wholesale Solutions also claims to be the largest independent provider of business mobile in the UK, with a fast growing base of more than half a million business mobile connections under management. "We work with all the major networks, enabling partners to connect either with a network billed dealer model or on a self-bill wholesale model, offering simple commercial models with hop-on hop-off monthly contracts and an automated end-to-end process," added O'Brien. "We also have a suite of MDM and fixed

back-up solutions, and bundled propositions with our voice and hosted voice offerings which enable partners to offer single bill and FMC solutions."

Hosted voice and UCaaS solutions are also in growth mode, with more than 70,000 business seats on Digital Wholesale Solutions' platform. "We anticipate this growth to continue as we enable integrations with cloud workplace productivity suites such as 365 and Teams, and get really smart with propositions that enable our partners to capture not just the UC and voice opportunity, but also connectivity by bundling business class QoS enabled broadband and mobility through integrating mobile and fixed using our mobile app," added Marke.

Digital Wholesale Solutions has built a stable of smart software products designed to help telcos and MSPs better serve their customers in the subscription world.

"We are disrupting the traditional cash model for hardware and software supply," said O'Brien. "The imminent launch of our One and Only Webstore will enable partners to build solutions online by searching and selecting across a range of ICT products from all the major UK distributors. We

## We use our scale and entrepreneurial spirit to challenge the status quo

have automated the process to turn this basket into a subscription that enables partners to quickly close business with their customers with competitive rates enabled by our scale and ability to incorporate residual values into the sale process."

Ultimately, said O'Brien, the reason people buy technology is to deliver an outcome, a change that could make a business more productive, more efficient, more mobile, and

facilitate a more contented workforce with a better work life balance. "We are conscious that our partners have this job to do, and so we build our products in a way that enables them to fit together to create solutions for customers that deliver outcomes fast," he commented. "And with

customers increasingly seeing the value of moving to SIP and hosting, and with the switch off of TDM due in 2025, we are making it easy for partners to migrate from ISDN to SIP by providing compelling reasons to move customer voice bases to us and to work together on taking customers on a journey to IP. With all of this we provide all of the training, pre-sales and specialist support to ensure that partners get it right for customers first time."

Digital Wholesale Solution bills itself as a 'challenger'. "We are in a market dominated by a few big telcos," said O'Brien. "However, these models of doing business are often not suited to the commercial reality and the speed in which our partners need to operate with their customers. So we use our scale and entrepreneurial spirit to challenge the status quo. Our partners tend to be smaller businesses and it is hard for their voice to be heard. By working with us, they are in effect joining a buying consortium. Our 2,000-plus partners have over 8,000 sales people and, we estimate, more than 400,000 end customers. This is a scale that matters and means that we can work with the top tier telcos and IT vendors to do deals that work for partners.

"Just as important, we are a team that loves what we do and loves working with partners. It's hard to describe a culture – it needs to be experienced first hand." ■



**United force: The Digital Wholesale Solutions Board team**



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# Building value from real-

Most channel opportunities seem modest in comparison to those of real-time Interaction Management and Reporting (IM&R), according to leading developers and proponents of such technologies. Here, we examine how best to leverage, optimise and build value from insights derived from business intelligence and reporting.

**S**peech analytics and Artificial Intelligence are transforming how companies engage with their customers, and the way businesses improve the customer experience. The advantages are such that Tollring CEO Tony Martino has witnessed consistently high IM&R attachment rates and a widening customer profile that extends far beyond the formal contact centre.

Martino also reported significant growth in analytics and call recording in the cloud. "The past year has seen over 150 per cent growth in cloud endpoints, compared to 20 per cent growth in on-premise licenses," he said. "Hybrid is also proving to be a popular deployment option and provides an easy route to the cloud, where cloud analytics are delivered to on-premises PBX users."

"The most effective use of IM&R is when users fully utilise features that help them to identify and explore the complete customer journey," said Martino. "Cradle-to-grave and interaction resolution reports give this kind of insight, ensuring that decision makers receive actionable feedback that allows them to improve their customer service processes in a targeted way."

For partners, IM&R provides ample opportunities to differentiate their proposition, but it is important to adopt a consultative approach where the right metrics can be identified and adopted for each customer profile. "Our most successful channel partners fully integrate IM&R into their overall business proposition, adding value to their product portfolio with analytics and call recording,"



Tony Martino

**Our most successful channel partners fully integrate IM&R into their overall business proposition.**

added Martino. "Integration of analytics and call recording into the overall proposition can be achieved in various ways – by providing basic level analytics with every sale, or bundling call recording with every sale. The big advantage for our partners lies in understanding how their customers use the solution," he added. "This is even more effective when combined with custom KPIs and SLAs as the ability to set your own targets makes the data more valuable and more accessible to decision makers."

Creating a consistently excellent customer experience is a priority for businesses, and omnichannel brings data together from a

wide range of sources to provide a true picture of business communications.

"APIs play a huge role in making data accessible and actionable, but with the availability of more data comes a renewed emphasis on the need to focus on the most relevant data in terms of content, context and timing – which will change depending on the business, its customers, and its long and short-term goals," stated Martino. "We have significantly enhanced our framework of APIs to allow organisations to take full control of their data with insights that match and measure business goals against analytics in a smart way."

Anything that's actionable will benefit from IM&R insights. But drawing out actionable business intelligence is the challenge. Another challenge for some in the channel is to change from an outright sales to a professional services model. "As everything moves to the cloud there is less requirement for a local footprint to support on-premise solutions, and resellers do not want to be bypassed," said Steve Tutt, Marketing Director, Kakapo Systems. "Recognising and understanding opportunities to mesh together different parts of their customers' go-to-market components is becoming more important. For example, by CX enabling the customer website with chat and incorporating Salesforce into incoming customer contact rather than using it as an after-the-event CRM."

### Battleground

The point at which IM&R meets CRM is becoming more blurred by the day and understanding the journey customers are taking before they engage is the big battleground. "We are building 'personas' which will allow customers to map visitors across disparate channels, such as web chat, calls and tweets to join up all these transactions," added Tutt. "Our strategy is to incorporate different platforms like web chat into a unified framework. With our



Steve Tutt

**For a customer interaction platform to have most value you need all of the customer contact channels together.**

# time insights



Colin Gill

**A number of businesses still see IM&R as an expense. To gauge whether something is of value, it helps to be able to measure its effectiveness.**

cloud IM&R engine we can layer other digital channels, such as LinkedIn, Salesforce and Trust Pilot to build out a central transaction management platform. Our current priorities are adding new channels, SMS and WhatsApp for example. For a customer interaction platform to have most value you need all of the customer contact channels together."

The definition of an 'interaction' is also getting wider. For most it's about customer-facing touch points like chat on the website, call centre calls, call back requests, email, Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp. "You need to be able to map this to the customer's business operations," said Tutt. "For example, it's not enough to say a business had 56 tweets, because the value lies in data that shows the support queue had 345 interactions, of those 134 were email, 86 were WhatsApp and 56 were tweets etc. That's nirvana for the customer.

We see massive uptake of omnichannel in the SMB space, and the specific requirements of these customers means you

cannot easily port down an existing enterprise play. You have smaller agent teams, therefore need the ability to dynamically add and remove contact centre channels based on agent availability. Also, you need to make the solution simple to set up and control without having to get the web team involved every time a change is needed."

### Realising value

Despite strong arguments in favour of IM&R there is still a long way to go before it becomes mainstream at the front end of business-driven decisions. "There is still a number of businesses that see IM&R as an expense," said Akixi Product Manager Colin Gill. "They only see the costs involved, not the value. To gauge whether something is of value it helps to be able to measure its effectiveness. Fortunately, at its most basic level any decent solution that provides IM&R facilities, if used effectively, is designed to aid a business in both measuring change and providing insights for decision making."

In this there are two points that need to be considered, noted Gill. Firstly, is a

company operating as efficiently as possible, specifically in cost centres such as contact centres? Secondly, are they maximising the revenue that is being generated through those cost centres? "These easily translate into key questions," added Gill "Are lost sales being minimised? Are lost sales being dealt with effectively to potentially recover missed revenue? Do you have the optimum number of staff to effectively cover customers' calls? Evaluating these questions in real-time and responding immediately makes insights more valuable and lets a business deliver efficient, good customer service while also maximising revenue by reducing potential lost sales."

The combination of many streams of data is massively greater and more valuable than the sum of its parts, pointed out Gill, who added: "One of our long-term aims is to make data integrate more easily with other streams and in real-time, to give more power to businesses when it comes to making those critical real-time and longer-term business strategy decisions." ■



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# Why traditional retailers a

From the moment online retailers delivered a plausible and convenient alternative for consumers a counter strategy became essential for traditional high street sellers, setting the stage for a technology resurgence. In this, according to Pangea Managing Director Dan Cunliffe and Sales Director Bernie McPhillips, there is much to be said for the IoT.

**T**he high street is burdened by well documented pressure from digital rivals but the options for bricks and mortar retailers are far from closing. To take back control, retailers must show themselves capable of a resurgence and trigger a counter response underpinned by technological innovation rather than convention. "The main drivers in the retail sector used to be behind the scenes solutions that ensured products were transferred from factories to shop floors without money and time wastage," commented McPhillips.

"Take logistical considerations such as route optimisation for retail supply chains, EPOS capabilities and stock tracking. These elements are still important but more of the technology needs to be upfront, visible and tangibly present on the shop floor. Today, the customer experience is fundamental in many retailers' ethos. This

is an experience that can begin even before customers arrive at the store. Rather than have them enter the shop and wait to be served, retailers are looking to engage with buyers by delighting and enticing them with interactivity."

With the support of capable ICT providers that have IoT in their kit bags, high street retailers can deliver the smooth experience buyers are looking for. At its core IoT is driven by outcomes. It informs decisions and makes businesses more effective at what they do. "The possibilities are endless, and the channel's best bet at differentiating themselves from other providers is to master IoT solutions and strategies as they emerge," added Cunliffe.

"The channel has a major part to play in providing the retail sector with intelligent connectivity options that solve several of retailers' biggest challenges. Channel players need to pinpoint



Dan Cunliffe

## The channel's best bet at differentiation is to master IoT solutions and strategies. The possibilities are endless

opportunities as they arise and maximise their offerings to retailers."

### Critical response

A viable response is now critical for traditional retailers across Britain. Physical stores are contending with potentially expensive rent, and the proliferation of on-demand services means there's less opportunity for customers to handle products, reducing emotional buying. "It's also harder to initiate flash sales and deals at the same speed as digital rivals," said Cunliffe.

Alongside these challenges, a most favoured outcome is the

customer experience which can match the product in terms of importance. "There's a big focus on the experience pre, during and post visit, whether to a physical store on online," stated Cunliffe. "Targeted advertising encourages pre-visit engagement through offers tailored to user preferences or what customers are likely to want. During the visit, IoT solutions such as beacon and NFC technology enable more targeted in-store offers. And, loyalty points systems will keep customers engaged throughout the experience."

The online shopping bubble is unlikely to burst, and

traditional retailers must accept that economic pain will remain a fact of life without a tech refresh. "Retail is a massive sector with many types of players," added McPhillips. "Furthermore, the IoT market is vast and complex. But ICT providers don't need to change their business model or focus to succeed in IoT. They should take their expertise and knowledge of requirements and pain points in a particular sector and apply these to the opportunity at hand."

These opportunities come in many shapes and sizes, and for example include end-

# are sold on IoT technology

to-end solutions that focus on smart EPOS terminals; security anti-theft tags for stock; smart vending; digital signage and warehousing technology. The common thread, says McPhillips, is for resellers to carve out a niche within retail using their specialism, then transform the offering by incorporating IoT. "Perhaps that means utilising geographic advantages if the reseller is shipping-focused and based near a port, or manufacturing-focused if based near a factory," he explained. "The key message is to do what you do best."

## Fightback

This all means that defeating the high street is no walk in the park for online sellers, believes Cunliffe. "Customers expect digital outlets to be up and active every minute of every day, which means retailers need to make sure maintenance and customer service is readily available at all times," he added. "On top of that, customers are likely to compare offerings between websites. They won't buy on Amazon what they can get cheaper on Alibaba. Review systems also come into play. A retailer or product review left by previous customers often makes or breaks a sale."

Cunliffe also noted that Amazon Go concept stores are taking the market by storm. "Completely sensor and camera driven, these transactionless outlets are a shining example of what you can achieve through IoT solutions – the ultimate in seamless shopping," he enthused. "But there are still challenges that need overcoming such as back-up connectivity should the store struggle with outages,

stock pricing updates and system failure procedures."

The chasm between traditional retailers and the digital world once seemed unbridgeable, but a path through the impasse is clear to see and it leads to a strategic balance between new and old. "Success in the future will depend on the ability of providers and retailers to hybridise bricks and mortar with the digital experience," stated Cunliffe.

"Outlets that combine the best of both worlds will provide the greatest experience for customers and the most value for retailers. In terms of connectivity, providers need to push 4G primary and backup for retailers. For example, the seamless delivery of a pop-

up environment requires seamless connectivity on the move."

## Key capabilities

A pop-up retail capability is becoming a necessity. By bringing the retail solution to the crowds directly, companies can be more proactive in their strategies. And using technology such as 4G primary and back-up, outdoor EPOS and digital signage, they can quickly deploy and deliver an experience that matches the in-store equivalent. Thus, IoT and connectivity solutions are changing forever the way retail works. Sensor-driven data will enable retailers to analyse and understand their footfall patterns, build strategies around flash sales and facilitate bespoke offers for returning shoppers.



Bernie McPhillips

**ICT providers don't need to change their focus or business model to succeed in IoT**

"So cross-selling and up-selling is key," said McPhillips. "When buying a car via a dealership's touchscreen terminal, or making an Amazon purchase, you get recommendations on accessories, additional power sources and suggestions based on what other people with similar purchasing habits enjoy. Delivering a top notch digital experience in a physical environment is the way forward for retailers.

"Customer facing systems are taking centre stage. Staff members at Apple Stores, for example, are walking-talking points of sale. All you do is hand over your Apple ID for a completely seamless transaction. The question is no longer 'are the shoes comfy?', or 'does the phone work?' It's 'how was my experience with this retailer?'. IoT is helping to deliver those great experiences."

## New conversation

Returning to the nuts and bolts of retailing, many businesses struggle to locate stock or shift stock to shelves efficiently. Others are unable to track footfall, monitor best selling items, or they need to open fully connected pop-up shops. They may also be complacent, or even reluctant to start the move into digital transformation. The way around this is to shift the conversation to the value of IoT. "Saving time, reducing costs and making employees safer are all aspects that are hard to ignore," stated McPhillips.

"But for resellers, one of the biggest challenges they face is having people with the ability to open the right conversations and ask the right questions. Take the mobile salesperson – most

businesses have mobiles, so the goal is to replace the existing supplier of the service. But in the IoT sphere there's usually no existing solution in place. The pain points are there and shared by many, but the tricky part is helping businesses to recognise them in the first place."

Partnerships, says McPhillips, are an important step in overcoming these challenges. "They're key in most industries, but critical in IoT," he added. "Both the retail and IoT markets are so colossal that nobody can conquer them alone. But through strong partnerships companies can band together to create solutions that will reshape the sector as we know it." ■

## PANGEA'S TOP TIPS

- Rather than stretch yourself thin, carve out a niche in retail based on your strengths. Then incorporate IoT into your offering.
- Don't be afraid of asking questions to open up opportunities. Many decision makers aren't aware of the pain points that you provide solutions for.
- Maintain a customer-centric approach. User experience is king, and retail needs to be as delightful as it is seamless.
- Know your sector and the challenges that exist within it, especially your clients' competitors.
- Follow your typical sales cycle. Product sets may be undergoing change through digital transformation, but the core tenets remain the same.



# Thriving in a data-driven world

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In today's society, it's difficult to find something that isn't connected online. The use of the internet for general web browsing is a thing of the past. Streaming music and TV shows is now part of everyday life. Instant messaging platforms are replacing SMS and there are apps for everything. But it's not just consumers who are becoming more reliant on the connected world, it's businesses too. Video conferencing, cloud sharing, remote working – we're all doing more online and putting more strain on the networks we use.

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# Seamless interactions

The channel is yet to do justice to the interaction, analytics and reporting opportunity, but the scales are tipping according to Gary Bennett, VP of Sales UK, MEA and Northern Europe, Enghouse Interactive.

**E**nghouse Interactive is seeking to bridge the chasm between partners and the vibrant market for interaction, analytics, reporting and associated technologies. "Resellers often see these as awkward to handle, difficult to understand and hard to overlay onto their existing business model," said Bennett. "Moreover, the complexity of the market environment, with ongoing migration to the cloud and the emergence of AI, has made it difficult for resellers to give each area the right level of focus. But the situation is changing."

In giving partners access to a pool of expertise Enghouse is enabling resellers to enter a market that would otherwise be beyond their reach. The company has a range of specialist partners in areas such as Microsoft Skype for Business, micro-verticals like housing associations and local Government, while others bring specialist technological skill sets to the table. "Channel partners work in collaboration with these technologically-focused people to bring a greater depth of specialised understanding to their customer engagements," added Bennett.

One area that resonates with partners, he pointed out, is real-time speech analytics (RTSA), which enables contact centre managers to take real-time information about a call and interrogate it, enabling them to alert agents to compliance issues or missed sales opportunities while they are on the call. "The ability to use RTSA in the contact centre to drive sales effectiveness, help with retention and maintain compliance, is easily accessible to the channel today," said Bennett. "Several of our partners now see it as a true value add that they can overlay onto the rest of their offering."

Working with partners Enghouse gets to grips with understanding each customer and the end consumer they are serving. "Typically, we look to understand what the top five customer journeys are and identify the 20 per cent of journeys overall that drive 80 per cent of the value, 80 per cent of the revenue and 80 per cent of the customer complaints," added Bennett. "From that point onwards it is about building a process and customer journey that layers in the right technologies and the right people at the right time."



Gary Bennett

## The ability of RTSA to understand what is happening en masse and make real-time decisions is a key differentiator

The contact centre offering is a key part of Enghouse's interaction management and reporting proposition, be it a limited helpdesk option or a sophisticated solution that works across a range of channels including phone, web chat and social media. "Most interactions into contact centres are still voice-based," stated Bennett. "In this context, having a platform that can work in real-time on a host of

variables is powerful. That's not to say it's the perfect solution for every customer, but for those clients where it does fit it adds enormous value. The ability of RTSA to understand what is happening en masse and make decisions in real-time is a key differentiator."

### AI innovation

Enghouse is investing in new types of AI that cannot be classified as generic technology. These bots are designed to do prescribed pieces of work that support contact centre agents. "This approach works well when handling straight-through processes but when something exceptional happens – such as a person who has missed a flight or their credit card is rejected – then you also need a seamless hand-off to the human," stated Bennett.

Not surprisingly therefore, a big driver is getting the balance right between the conversation and machines,

and between human agents, AI and bots. "It is important to understand the role of the human in the interaction moving forward, and assess how the contact centre is likely to look in five or ten years time," noted Bennett.

The consulting aspect of the Enghouse approach stands poles apart from the many players running around with 'shiny new toys', according to Bennett. "Often, they sit in the cloud, they demo well and it's easy to get them up and running quickly," he said. "But without understanding the top five journeys that might drive 80 per cent of the revenue and cost – and ultimately what really matters to their end consumers – organisations run the risk of their technology investment being misdirected. The channel partner needs to fully engage with customers and advise on how to implement technologies in a timely and strategic way to optimise the customer journey."

In all of this one of the most important areas to focus on is system integration, emphasised Bennett. "No single vendor has every piece of technology required to deliver every type of customer journey perfectly, so it is always important to effectively integrate with third party systems, from CRM to ERP to supply chain management," commented Bennett. "Do this by fully understanding what you are trying to do, ensuring that you know what you already have, and then collaborating with a competent channel partner that will allow you to integrate – through open APIs – the different technologies that are required to deliver an optimised customer experience." ■



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# Health sector perks up

The health sector has long faced many challenges but in grasping a technology lifeline the prognosis is positive. Here, Content Guru Deputy CEO Martin Taylor takes the pulse of a sector that has started to realise the transformational impact of technologies such as AI.

**P**ressure on the health sector to deliver more for less is ever mounting, and the focus on using technology enabled efficiencies to reduce waste and avoidable costs is ever sharpening. The health sector must also consider ways to maximise the potential of the large and multi-skilled workforce involved in health and care services. "Acutely aware of these issues, ICT commissioners are beginning to shift their focus from organisational, to patient to citizen centric delivery models," said Taylor. "The NHS has started to reorganise into broader sustainability and transformation partnerships, encompassing whole health and care systems to deliver the necessary reform."

The pattern of technology procurement has also shifted, and technology providers acknowledge that delivering healthcare is complex so they are seeking ways to engage with the NHS as strategic partners. The emerging Tech UK initiative to connect industry with national and regional leads is a step in the right direction, believes Taylor. "This

approach has now begun to mature," he commented. "For example, NHS Digital increasingly reaches out to industry leads through Tech UK to help shape service specifications. This methodology has the added benefit of encouraging the NHS, and other companies in the health sector, to think beyond current capabilities and consider new and emerging technologies."

Big data is key. The ability to collect unstructured data via speech-to-text, alongside the use of AI tools to better understand trends and behaviours will enable local and national care commissioners to design better services. "Cyber security will also become crucial as data is migrated into cloud technologies and information flows across multiple channels within health and care communities," added Taylor.

#### Personalisation

Technologies that support the development of personalised healthcare are growing in popularity. These technologies, pointed out Taylor, should also make it easy for people to navigate their way through a complex



Martin Taylor

## The latest NHS Plan reaffirms the importance of regional Academic Health Science Networks as a conduit between care commissioners, providers and industry

care system, while ensuring clinicians and carers have the information required to respond to planned and unplanned patient needs. "A notable trend in the health sector is the use of AI-enabled self-service solutions that support the delivery of personalised care," said Taylor. "A combination of Natural Language Processing (NLP), speech-to-text and other contact centre trends creates enormous potential for the provision of a better experience for patients who are, for example, elderly and frail."

Taylor noted that omnichannel technologies are providing service users with access on any device, anytime and anywhere. They are also being used to deliver a connected patient experience, helping them to navigate through different services and guiding them to the right care. "This technology enables callers to be recognised instantly, and their care record or crisis plan to be made available to the responding clinician," added Taylor. "It also offers options to self-triage using AI driven algorithms and

suggests alternative services to better meet their needs.

"As well as chatbots, NLP and other AI driven innovations that help drive care personalisation, reducing routine tasks and delivering better experiences and outcomes will also be key. This implicates a number of technologies as being important to suppliers, including cloud reliability, omnichannel flexibility, big data analytics and real-time data management and alerts."

Cloud technologies offer the potential to deliver change by connecting with legacy investments. "By avoiding the need to rip and replace suppliers are positioned to offer advantageous changes while maximising the benefits of prior investments," said Taylor. "Cloud can deliver incremental change, side stepping the need for risky and large-scale transformation."

Raising brand awareness in such a dynamic health system is never easy. Many small suppliers struggle to engage beyond a small pilot. "The latest NHS Plan has reaffirmed the importance of regional Academic Health Science Networks as a conduit between care commissioners, providers and industry," noted Taylor. "This route should be used for any new entrant wishing to understand how to raise awareness. It is vital that providers develop partnerships with Academic Health Science Networks, Tech UK Health Team and NHD Digital Market Engagement leads. They should also spend time listening to clinicians, patients and carers." ■

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# Transformational times

**M**atching technology to health sector challenges is now a top priority for ICT buyers and it's changing everything. "In the past there was a disconnect between technology buyers and the operational requirements of front-line staff," said Ian Bevington, Marketing Manager, Oak Innovation. "Now we're more likely to be working with transformation managers looking to automate routine tasks and improve adherence to policy, make better use of resources and improve the patient experience. They're also aware of the need to meet compliance and manage dispute resolution more effectively."

There's also a trend towards shared services, collaboration and mergers to provide a better service to patients and meet important metrics. "In primary healthcare we are seeing practices collaborating to manage extended hours, centralise call handling and merging to create larger, purpose built surgeries able to offer

a wider range of services," commented Bevington

He says most technology providers succeed by focusing on one or two healthcare sub-sectors, then building a detailed understanding of requirements, and working with specialist technology partners. "Healthcare is at the beginning of a telemedicine revolution that promises to improve patient experiences and access to specialist resources through a combination of video consultation and IoT," he added.

IoT and smart tech counteracts issues such as low resources, lack of funding and pressure on bed space, noted Pangea Sales Director Bernie McPhillips. "Through data gathering capabilities enabled by wearables and remote monitoring healthcare can take a patient-centric approach and ease some of the strain placed on large hospitals," he said. "Assisted living applications are helping older patients to keep their independence. Research shows the link between mental health and wellness



Ian Bevington

benefits and the proper use of smart tech in the home.

"Looking to the future, 5G is set to transform healthcare and pave the way for incredible new solutions. Transmission efficiency is going to be crucial in reducing desperately high healthcare costs and improving operations within the industry. Though nationwide next generation rollouts are still in the works, isolated 5G deployments are already enabling groundbreaking experiments

across industries, and healthcare is no exception."

5G holds the power to reshape how healthcare is delivered on-site and vastly improves how patients undergo treatment. "We saw a clear example of this at Mobile World Congress Barcelona 2019, where a Barcelona-based Chief of Gastrointestinal Surgery supervised, on stage, surgery live streamed from the hospital site, made possible through the ultra-low latency and high reliability that 5G connectivity is famous for," added McPhillips.

### New possibilities

"The implications of this level of technology are staggering. 5G-powered telehealth solutions could see patients in rural locations receiving treatment that they previously had no access to, or even allow for remote operations to be conducted on patients whose conditions prevent them from being transported to hospital. Beyond surgical applications, 5G is going to play a major role in bringing much needed change to the UK's triaging system."

One of the main challenges faced by ICT providers is the health sector's reluctance to embrace the cloud, believes TeleWare Sales Manager Nigel Simpson. "Medical providers access and store a wealth of sensitive personal information, from addresses and social security numbers to payment information and patients' health records," he commented. "But few healthcare providers choose to entrust all their legacy applications to a public or private cloud. Instead, many are now opting for a hybrid model."

"It will be incredibly hard for the health sector to create a single view of the patient journey if data can't be shared. This presents an opportunity for IT providers to put compliant data access at the heart of their approach. By combining data, healthcare professionals will be able to start analysing patterns and discovering insights that doctors couldn't possibly have discovered on their own. This will allow them to make better decisions to deliver the best possible care." ■





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# Nouveau enters new era

Wokingham-based Nouveau Solutions has never been in a stronger position following its acquisition by Vinci Energies early last month, according to Managing Director Andy Stevens.

**D**eciding on the concept of an acquisition as a course of strategic action was by no means a done deal. It was with open minds that Stevens and his fellow directors approached the idea of a sale. "The initial discussions on a possible sale began about a year ago," recalled Stevens. "It was a case of understanding what we did, whether there was a fit and if there was a personal ambition for this to happen. There was no rush nor pressure. But as we continued to grow organically we felt that we could accelerate our growth through the right acquisition. And after our best year of trading we still recognised the expansion we wanted would not come simply through organic growth alone. We didn't want to sell our business to a private equity firm. We wanted to ensure that our existing team were on board and continue to support our growth moving forwards."

Nouveau Solutions had received several approaches over the years but none of them felt right. "We were not looking at the time we were approached by Vinci," added Stevens. "However, after considerable due diligence and many

conversations it became apparent that this could be a viable option which would give us what we personally wanted as well as meeting the needs and ambitions of our staff. Around 20 per cent of our team have been with us for 10-plus years, we have a low staff turnover, practically no sickness and have built a great positive workplace."

Vinci Energies has 1,600 autonomous business units within its group that Nouveau Solutions can now collaborate with and identify mutual opportunities to develop the business. "This in effect gives us a whole new channel opportunity," noted Stevens. "Furthermore, the support of Vinci will make Nouveau a more commercial proposition for new clients with sizeable deals. Our main priorities now are to transition the business and maximise the opportunities available to us through building relationships with other business units, while not taking our eye off the ball."

Nouveau Solutions began its commercial life in 1992 after Stevens met Gary Smithers while working for an IT company. On considering their complementary skills – Smithers is a technician and



Andy Stevens

## Our main priorities are to transition the business and maximise the opportunities available to us

Stevens more commercial and entrepreneurial – the pair decided to build a business together. The company's 2018 revenues came in at £7 million. It has circa 500 clients from a mix of public and private sector organisations and employs 35 staff. "Our first big deal in 1995 brought money into the business and enabled us to start building a team and a regular client base," explained Stevens. "Key milestones include achieving Microsoft Gold competency, Fortinet Platinum Partner, moving offices, achieving ISO27001

and 9001 and creating our own SaaS platform."

### Key services

Today Nouveau Solutions operates as a MSP. Its proposition includes security and a fully managed SIEM service, business managed IT services and support, Microsoft development and implementation services, as well as a wide range of data centre and cloud offerings. The shift to proactive monitoring services, particularly around security managed services, also proved key.

"We have built a SIEM proposition and proactive monitoring team," added Stevens. "Our security side of the business has more than quadrupled. We have also seen a reduction in traditional infrastructure as businesses move to the cloud and associated services. Current focus areas also include SD-WAN, vulnerability management, Security as a Service and building out our cloud stack."

Forming stacks in the cloud is nothing new for Stevens who spent a number of years in the Parachute Regiment. "My army career taught me about management and empowering people to make their own decisions within boundaries," he added. "This is something that I have encouraged throughout my time at Nouveau."

Stevens first entered the IT industry through his parents who worked for a military IT company and introduced him to a job opportunity as a Systems engineer. It was here that he met Smithers who was an apprentice. "Little did I know back then that we would be setting up a business together years later," he mused.

Also long gone are the days when it was deemed acceptable for resellers to simply ship tin, believes Stevens. "Resellers need to provide a different mechanism to supply services, in a proactive managed services way as part of the shift towards opex rather than capex, and become a trusted IT partner," he stated. "Never be frightened to challenge the client and ensure you deliver the right business outcome for them." ■



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# Connectivity Matters the future is bright



“In the last year, TalkTalk Business have re-focused our strategy on simplicity. Being easy to do business with is key for us.”

Richard Thompson, TalkTalk Business

On 14th May, TalkTalk Business are taking over the Ministry of Sound venue in London to hold a unique event unlike any other in the channel– the Connectivity Matters Summit. They are uniting thought leaders, disruptors and champions of the tech community for one extraordinary day and bringing their Partners along for the adventure.

**2**019 is a huge year for UK connectivity. Britain is experiencing the largest sustained period of disruption in connectivity since we went digital. With the roll out of new connectivity variants including 5G and FTTP, and a huge crossover of tech in both the business and consumer market, the connectivity rules have gone out the window.

Our priority first and foremost is our Partners. With so much disruption in the connectivity market, we want to reaffirm that we will help steer our Partners through any uncertainty and support them every step of the way. The industry is going to get more complex in the years ahead. We'll have new fibre products being rolled out at

scale, including SOGEA and G.fast, and we'll have a much broader range of infrastructure providers than we do today.

In the last year, TalkTalk Business have re-focused our strategy on simplicity. Being easy to do business with is key for us, as no one is going to do business with you if they can't understand what you do and how you can help them. This is where our simplicity strategy helps. In addition to this, we take our customer feedback very seriously, with quarterly CSAT surveys which drive our focus. The Connectivity Matters summit is a one-day event for TalkTalk Business Partners where we champion innovation in the industry, share insights into the future of connectivity and explore

# Partners Summit – for our Partners



what it means for businesses looking to thrive in this new and disruptive landscape.

## Sharing best practice

By drawing on the expertise and best practice from the brightest players in the telecommunications and tech industry, we can learn from one another, grow stronger together and deliver excellent value for our Partners.

Sir Charles Dunston will commence the day's content with his opening speech about the opportunities in the connectivity market, drawing on his own personal journey from Carphone Warehouse to TalkTalk. David Rowan, UK Editor of Wired magazine, will then explore how companies around the world are harnessing new technologies to meet customer demand, and how connectivity is critical to underpinning this innovation. Tristia Harrison, CEO of TalkTalk, will discuss the future of fibre and how we can make fibre a reality. As well as special keynote speakers, we are hosting four interactive sessions

brought to you by the TalkTalk Business team and some of our key Partners, including Juniper, ISG and Google. Each session will provide practical takeaways focusing on big data, self-driving networks, robotics and AI.

## Championing our Partners

As a Partner-centric business, we want to use The Connectivity Matters Summit as a platform to celebrate the brilliant work our Partners do. Many of our Partners work in different industries, yet we all have one thing in common, connectivity.

To showcase the innovative solutions that some of our Partners use to meet their customers' demand, Kristine Olson Chapman, Managing Director TalkTalk Business, will host a panel discussion with three Partners from different industries. Kristine will be joined by Gary Marven, CEO MLL Telecomm, Wiljan Van Delst, VP of Carrier Management Verizon, and Rufus Grig, CTO Maintel and will be asking the question,

“What do customers need from their suppliers?”

## Full fibre future

It wouldn't be a connectivity event without discussing Fibre. Tristia Harrison, CEO TalkTalk, will set the scene for Britain's Fibre future, including what it means for customers and how TalkTalk is positioned to deliver it.

To compliment this, Guy Miller, Director of the Fibre for Everyone programme for TalkTalk, will host a panel debate with four of the most influential providers, including Openreach among others. The panellists will be discussing the challenges and opportunities to new connectivity variants such as FTTP and 5G. Whether you're a wholesale Partner or selling to the B2B2C market, the crucial thing is that Fibre is for everyone and we hope this panel will spark some interesting discussions on how to educate customers and ultimately move more customers onto Fibre.

## Building a community

Finally, one of the key things we

want Partners to get from the Connectivity Matters Summit is a sense of community.

We value and welcome our Partners feedback. We have created an event app that allows attendees to ask questions, answer polls and share their thoughts throughout the day. In addition, we will be hosting networking drinks at the end of the day, we sincerely hope that everyone will stay and enjoy a few drinks with us.

I am really excited to meet more of our Partners and continue to develop strong relationships built on trust and communication. We are passionate about celebrating our Partners' success and helping them achieve future growth. If we win, they win.

We don't know exactly what the future of connectivity looks like, however what we do know that it is full of opportunity for our Partners. ■

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# 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.

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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.



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## MEET THE SPONSORS



**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!"



**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 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."



**ADAM CATHCART, MANAGING DIRECTOR, 9 GROUP**

"With our comprehensive portfolio, 9 has been a leading provider of IT and telecommunication 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 Margin in Voice & Data 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. Make an appointment to see us at MiVaD to see how you could join the FONtevo channel."



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

We are excited to be sponsoring one of the most important events in the industry. At Margin in Voice and Data 2019, we will be showcasing our extraordinary connectivity solutions including our own Ethernet Network, V.E.N., Pre-Ethernet and 10GB services to name but a few. These will provide the channel with a genuine alternative to the main large Ethernet carriers, giving our partners access to a multi-award-winning and trusted network operator. Come and speak to us about how Vaioni Wholesale can help you stand out from the crowd."



**SEAN DIXON, SALES DIRECTOR, FIDELITY ENERGY**

"Fidelity Energy now has over 350 telecoms partners who offer energy as a service to their customers. Partnering with Fidelity Energy enables you to leverage your current relationships along with our energy knowledge to help secure the best energy deals for your customers. The average commission per customer is around £4,000 and we have a 39% closure rate with our partners. This is due to their great relationships and our prices from suppliers, with over £130 million contracted to date. Arrange to meet us at Margin in Voice & Data to find out more."



**DANIEL ALVAREZ, HEAD OF CHANNEL, GLIDE**

"Historically, most connectivity options have come from a core of players. With the fibre revolution, channel partners now have access to multiple ISP's all with their own business models and goals, not to mention delivery models and SLA's. With the shift to move as many services to the cloud as possible, full fibre now holds the key. One of the main challenges for resellers is the number of portals and suppliers they need to reach as many prospects as possible and to support their existing customers to maximise profitability and save time. We're looking forward to discussing these opportunities with potential partners at Margin in Voice & Data 2019."



**SHAUN BODSWORTH, MANAGING DIRECTOR, INFORM BILLING**

"As an experienced billing specialist with significant flexibility within our software applications, Inform Billing can easily support SaaS and dynamic connectivity areas where accurate billing is vital. Our solutions keep the bill to the customer simple, whilst providing the critical detail for revenue assurance and supplier invoice validation. Within the Exhibitor Zone at Margin in Voice & Data, we will be available all day for delegates to drop by and talk to us about their general billing requirements or to gain advice on billing recurring subscription services and more inclusive package style propositions."



**JUSTIN BLAINE, CHANNEL SALES MANAGER, NTA**

"NTA are once again looking forward to this year's Margin in Voice & Data. This time we will be focussing on our brand-new feature set that has been developed for our award-winning Hosted Telephony platform, this is particularly geared towards margin retention for our partners and promoting their brand as handsets and the platform are completely white labelled! Our platform is agnostic so with the changes in connectivity technology and our PaaS and SaaS offering this really does deliver a real differentiator for our channel reseller community. We look forward to meeting with partners at this thought leading, relationship building conference."



**VINCENT DISNEUR, HEAD OF SALES & MARKETING, UNION STREET**

"MIVAD is, without question, one of the years most important conferences for the channel. It's a must attend event for any forward-thinking reseller that's looking for develop their business, providing a veritable goldmine of information for capitalising on emerging opportunities and for developing product portfolios profitably. We're looking forward to engaging with both new and existing clients, to finding out how we can add value to their businesses and to showcasing the latest enhancements available in aBILlity™ the UK's market leading billing system."



**IAN ROWAN, UK CHANNEL MANAGER, WILDIX**

"The way end users purchase technology has changed. It's no longer acceptable to be a pure reseller selling someone else's product on a Capex sale. Partners must become the product they sell. By providing a fully managed service, along with a product that allows you to create value-add, this is a must for any business that wants to avoid becoming a victim of the disintermediation that has been created by the likes of Amazon in the internet market place. Adapting to a recurrent model is not a simple transition but a must for a business with a long-term future and we are looking forward to meeting partners who share this vision at Margin in Voice & Data 2019."



**HENRY WEST, CHANNEL SALES DIRECTOR, FLUIDONE**

"FluidOne is a major network aggregator with over 30 carriers and suppliers delivered into its Platform One software defined core network which puts the control and flexibility of its connectivity services into the hands of our partners. With the ability to deliver all services at Layer 2 and Layer 3 plus a Virtual Core Network proposition, we have solutions that suit all the needs of channel partners to deliver high quality On Net services for Ethernet, EOD, FTTC, FTTP, G.FAST, IoT, Mobile, Wi-Fi, Cloud and Hosting, all of which can be accessed, consumed and managed in life via a single in-house developed portal called DASH. Come and meet us at Margin in Voice & Data to found out more."



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# Gamma signs Boden



**Mark Boden**

FORMER Daisy Partner Services relationship builder Mark Boden has joined Gamma as Head of Channel – North, overseeing partner relationships for the region and managing the team responsible for circa 300 channel partners. While at Daisy Boden developed relationships with some of the largest network and system integrators in the UK. Previous roles include senior sales and account management positions with a number of companies selling core data and telephony services. “The northern region of the UK houses over 300 of our channel partners, a huge proportion of Gamma’s partner base,” said Boden. “Our northern partners are engaged and I’m keen to build strong relationships with them.” In other Gamma people news Zach

Woods’ promotion as Account Director follows 11-plus years of service, stepping up from his previous role as Business Development Manager. These appointments form part of an organisational restructure of Gamma’s channel sales team that takes into account geographical factors.

# KCOM eyes up Hawkins

KCOM National Network Services (NNS) has appointed Dave Hawkins as Head of Channel Sales. He brings over 18 years industry experience to the role and started his career in technical positions before moving to sales and account management. Hawkins spent 11 years at Virgin Media working in wholesale markets and also gained experience as a Network Build Engineer with BT. He joins KCOM from TalkTalk Business where he was SI Channel Account Director responsible for major and wholesale accounts.



**Dave Hawkins**

“Emerging technologies mean the role of channel businesses is constantly evolving and there is an increasing need to add value to customers,” commented Hawkins. “Channel businesses can expect a more streamlined customer journey and a dedicated, experienced team working with them to provide bespoke solutions.”

## Also on the move...



**Tim Howard**

EXPERIENCED bean counter Tim Howard’s appointment as GCI CFO is a ‘perfect fit’ enthused CEO Adrian Thirkill. Howard brings 30 years finance experience to the role with over half that time spent in leadership positions across

multiple hi-tech industries. Previous roles include spells at Barclays, BAE Systems and Deloitte, listed blue chip companies and PE-backed SME and start-up organisations. Thirkill said: “Knowing Tim and the reputation he brings as a great strategic thinker and pragmatic problem solver, his financial background in the hi-tech sector is a perfect fit.”

THE HIRE of Jayne Lawrence as Channel Account Manager by Wildix is reflective of the hosted UC provider’s expansion and growth ambitions. The company expects to double its UK headcount this



**Jayne Lawrence**

year. Lawrence brings over 18 years industry experience including spells in reseller and channel roles. Channel Manager Ian Rowan said: “Jayne’s appointment is essential for us to continue offering partner support

while managing the growing interest in Wildix. We also plan to strengthen our technical and partner support networks.” Rowan highlighted one partner which has expanded its team by eight new staff to support growth in its Wildix business.

# Sky Business engages Flint



**Elizabeth Flint**

SKY Business has appointed Elizabeth Flint as Head of Propositions for the Business Communications division, responsible for bringing new services to market and managing

the Ethernet portfolio. She has over 25 years experience in the ICT sector and was most recently charged with redefining the product portfolio propositions for a major UK comms provider. Previous roles include working with multiple telecoms providers as a consultant. Flint also held EMEA positions with a number of US corporates with a remit to drive partner and marketing communications programmes.

“Digital transformation and technology innovation is shaping how we do business,” said Flint. “My role will be to use the voice of our partners and their customers to continue transforming our offering into a portfolio that will help businesses on their transformation journey.”

FORMER Vodafone and O2 Head of ISP Matt Dykes has joined Abzorb Systems as Chief Commercial Officer. “The company has consistently posted double digit growth over the past three years and my goal is to make sure this organic expansion continues,” commented Dykes.

# Exertis recruits Ops big cheese



**Andrew Beaumont**

EXERTIS Supplies Operations Director Andrew Beaumont has been promoted to the Managing Director role following the departure of previous MD Raj Advani who has relocated to Europe but remains with the business as Commercial Director. Beaumont reports to Exertis UK&I MD Paul Bryan. “It is great that we have someone who knows the business so well as Andrew to succeed Raj,” he said. “Andrew has many years experience in the supplies market.” Beaumont joined Advent Data in 1998, spending over 13 years as Financial Controller before moving to Myers Group in 2014 as Head of Finance. He returned to Exertis Supplies as Operations Director in 2017. “It’s an exciting time to be at Exertis,” said Beaumont.

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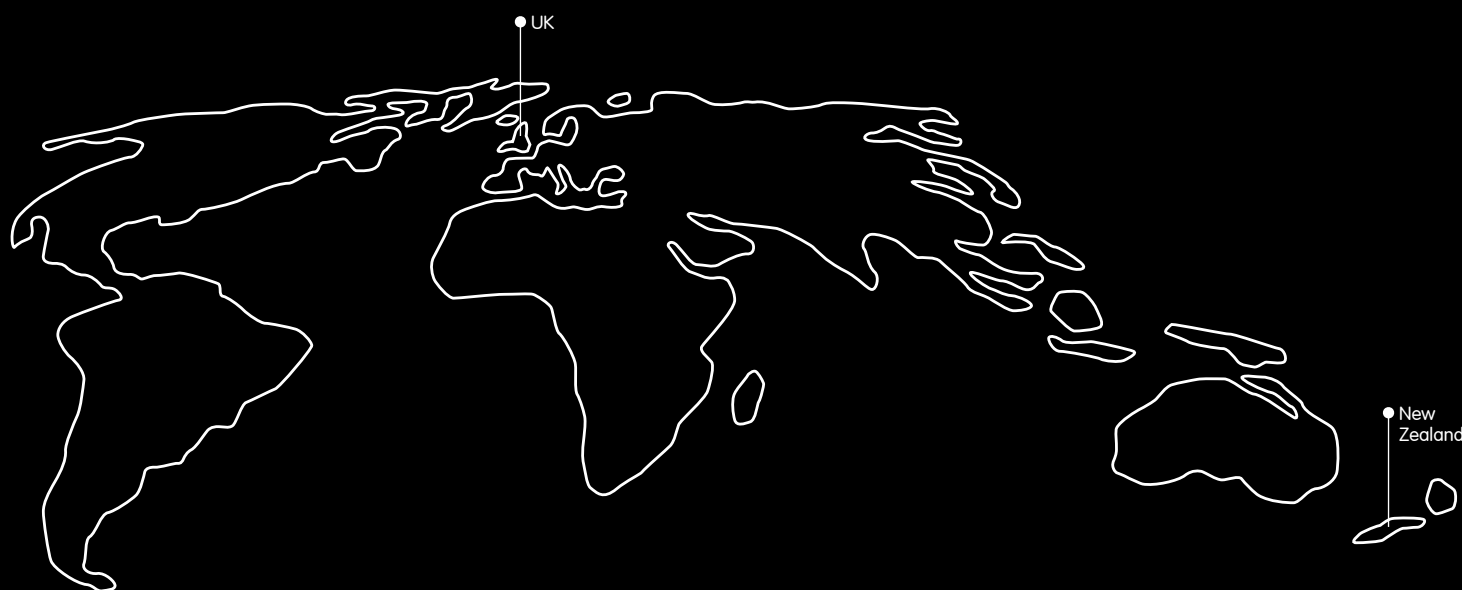
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