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3-20

Industry News

Catch up with
events in comms

22

News Interview

Mitel pushes agency
model in UCaaS

26

Business Profile

Fibre players hook
up in Ethernet deal

42

Company Profile

Daniel Teacher:
A master in IT

44

Market Review

Comms billing with
compliance in mind

50

Comms People

This month's
movers and shakers

Comms Dealer July 2019

Click to open Teams poised to march into VoIP

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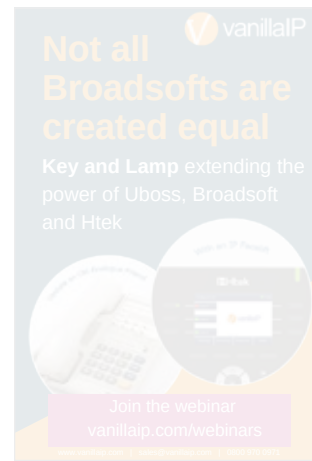
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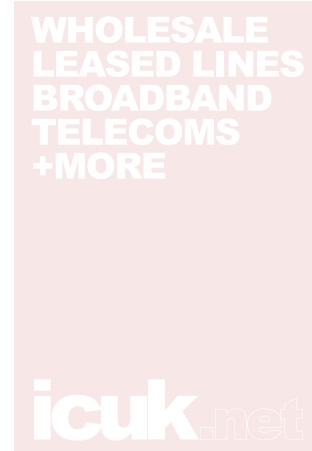
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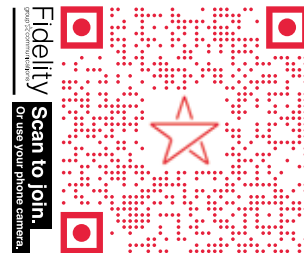
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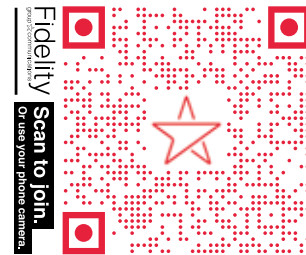


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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

OH FOR a simple life. Instead, we face dilemmas whichever way we turn: We live in 'uncertain times', we cannot predict the impact of 5G, nor when the mass of the market will fall before the sheer weight of the business case for cloud comms versus CPE. How will full fibre change the way

fixed connectivity is understood and sold? What will Digital Britain really look like? From where will spring the most potent competition and rivalry? What will Brexit bring? Will Teams ultimately play a trump card? Where is the next big opportunity coming from? Some say AI and ML, others predict the IoT and 5G, some hail smart cities – all are interlinked and gain strength from their connections – yet the traditional PBX still clings like a limpet to the bedrock of SME communications.

Every indication is that the comms sector is mid-flow in a drift of unknowns. What is certain however is that crashing out is not an option. Also certain is that at this discombobulating time the comms sector faces not just a rare moment of golden opportunity, but one of the biggest, if not the greatest ever, favourable set of circumstances in its history.

This is the oxymoron – how do we square widespread uncertainty across whole swathes of the industry and UK with unprecedented opportunity? On this contradictory premise, the time is not one for punditry nor passive observations, rather clarity of vision and path-beating strategy. The only conceivable way forward is to harness all aspects of uncertainty through focused planning, and take a hard line on resolving the biggest questions with a solid business approach.

Some argue it's time for Hard Brexit. In terms of the comms industry, I would argue it's time for Hard Opportunism. It is prime time to write your own destiny and build your own future. On that there is no doubt.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Aurora secures new CEO and autonomy

DAISY business Aurora Kendrick James has turned the page on a new chapter in its history following a Group restructure that gives the company autonomy to operate as a 200-strong independent software firm led by incoming CEO Ant Molloy.

He was previously Daisy's Chief Software Officer, a position held since January 2011.

The move forms part of a revamp that included the rebrand of Daisy Wholesale to Digital Wholesale Solutions on April 1st which will be key to delivering Aurora's platform to the reseller market.

Aurora has operated in the telecoms and IT reseller space for 20 years.

Its platform, which is modular in design to remove complexity, enables resellers to monitor, control and drive sales, reduce order processing times from days to minutes, provision, bill, support and self-serve via 24-hour portals that incorporate AI and automation techniques.

The platform also provides insights and reporting on key business metrics.

Aurora MD Derek Watson has stepped down but remains with the Group business to lead operational improvements.



Ant Molloy

Molloy said: "The team has worked hard on relaunching Aurora as an independent software business with a simple, clear vision of delivering software and services.

"With the rise of automation, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, this is an invigorating time for software organisations and I am excited for the future of Aurora."

A refresh of Aurora's branding and website is reflective of these changes, noted Molloy, who says the time is right to modernise Aurora's corporate identity. "Our identity is key to how we convey our core values, our personality and enhanced capabilities," he added.

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COMMENT: TIME FOR A CLOUD JOLT



Iain Sinnott

UK CLOUD communications resellers need to understand that now is the time for a compelling event which drives the core UK SME business community away from the traditional dial-tone based world of PBX and into the new world of UC. Why now? Because if they wait much longer it will be the technology giants like Microsoft,

Cisco, Facebook and Google that pocket the rewards for this inevitable transition.

PSTN switch-off, the public's demand for a move from voice to omni-channel contact options, and the increasing commercial benefits of automation over manpower investment are the nearest things resellers are going to get to compelling events. Before they lose their relationship advantage, they need to pick a weapon and inspire their bases and their prospects to move – and move now. Once they are the cloud provider and once they have blended the best services from different suppliers together, they can relax in the knowledge the customer is harder to steal. However, in this fast-paced technology market, they should avoid relaxing for too long!

Resellers who still have their income based in traditional PBX have the most to lose if it is the global players who bring the conversion proposition to the forefront, as they will not even be involved in the battle. They will be considered a much-loved supplier of the past but out of touch with this fast-moving cloud-based market – and although this is a fight not a lottery, you do have to be in it to win it.

It is up to the reseller community, supported by the independent service providers, to grasp the market, give it a shake and deliver the tangible productivity and commercial benefits the cloud communications world can deliver. Only then will resellers earn the profits they really deserve.

Iain Sinnott, Sales & Marketing Director, VanillaIP

ECS Security spins out following MBO

ECS Security's spin out of the Group business last month followed a MBO backed by PE firm Livingbridge and debt from Bank of Scotland.

The MBO, led by David Calder and Nathan Dornbrook, creates one of the largest independent security services companies in the UK serving FTSE 250 organisations.

The former ECS Security firm will be known as Adarma with a headcount of 250 staff.

Calder, the MD and co-founder of Adarma, said: "Our decision to create Adarma reflects our intent to focus exclusively on the security space and FTSE 250 organisations across a broad range of industries.

"Typically, our customer base consists of larger organisations that accept attacks and breaches are inevitable. They realise that it is not a case of if, but when they will face critical security incidents and they want to be prepared for this."

Livingbridge Partner Matthew Caffrey added: "This was an opportunity to partner with a team that can build a business of real scale in the growing cyber-security market."

Simon Sweeney, Director, Strategic Debt Finance at Bank



David Calder

of Scotland, noted: "Ambitious firms like Adarma are a key driver of Scotland's economy, which is why we've committed

to lend up to £1.6bn to help Scottish businesses realise their growth ambitions this year."

Paul Thomson, Group Chief Executive at ECS, stated: "Over the last six years ECS's security business has grown rapidly.

"It makes strategic sense for ECS Group and Security to separate, allowing both companies to focus on their expertise.

"For Group, this also enables us to expand our core offerings in digital transformation in key markets like enterprise IT infrastructure and public cloud, as well as investing to build out other areas of the business."

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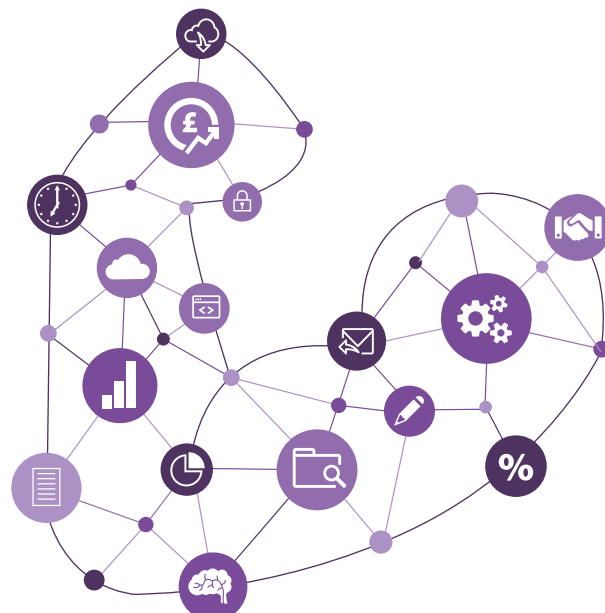
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North east trio join up in new venture



TruStack Directors (l-r) Geoff Hodgson, Richard Common, Joe Olabode, Paul Watson, Phil Cambers and Russell Henderson

A TRIO of the north east's finest IT services providers have joined forces to form a new £10m revenue business.

SITS Group, PCI Services and Pivotal Networks have merged and will be known as TruStack, led by Joe Olabode, Richard Common, Paul Watson, Phil Cambers, Russell Henderson and Geoff Hodgson.

The three organisations share similar backgrounds and are experienced in familiar markets including cloud computing, network design, implementation and support, data centre services, managed services, UC and cybersecurity.

Existing clients include Muckle LLP, Collingwood Business Solutions and a num-

ber of the north east region's Top 200 companies.

In a joint statement the Directors commented: "The merger gives our client base access to a wider pool of commercial, administrative and technical services."

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Full fibre provider Call Flow seals £26m growth funding

FULL fibre infrastructure provider Call Flow has closed a £26.6m-plus growth investment round from European investors.

Call Flow will now bring full fibre broadband under the Trooli brand to more small towns in south east England.

The investment is the first step in Trooli's plan to build full fibre networks that pass over 500,000 premises in the next five years, starting in towns and villages across Kent.

The East Peckham-based company, which was founded by former BT executive Andy Conibere in 2002, currently



Ashley Atkins

operates FTTC networks passing over 12,000 premises, with existing FTTH networks passing more than 6,000 premises.

"There is an urgent need for the higher broadband speeds and more reliable services that only true fibre offers over cop-

per alternatives, particularly in small towns where Internet users feel left behind," stated Trooli CFO Ashley Atkins.

"This investment will enable us to ramp up our build rate and use our rapid deployment method to meet this demand with our ultra-fast broadband services."

Marcus Allchurch, Partner at Acuity Advisors, which advised Call Flow on the investment, said: "In a crowded marketplace for fibre growth businesses, it is vital that good teams, such as Andy and his team, are able to clearly differentiate themselves to maximise options and terms."

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COMMENT: PARTNERSHIP MATTERS



Nick Powell

AS AN INDUSTRY, are we using the right resources in the right way to enable partnerships to flourish and become a force to be reckoned with? The overarching goal we all have in driving revenue growth is the need to excel in delivering exceptional customer experiences. For the channel partner that means delivering an extraordinary

experience for their resellers, and in turn, enabling resellers to deliver outstanding experiences for their end customers.

Having closer integration from both a technology and personal perspective are key elements in driving an overall enhanced customer and partner experience. From a technology viewpoint, having the right digital platforms in place that enables a partner to easily service their end-to-end customer journey is key.

Some points for consideration are transparency and permitting partners to access relevant content and information for their customers easily. This could be marketing collateral, product and technical material or commercial information. Enabling the partner to place and manage orders easily and have a regular engagement process throughout the order journey is vital as it means they too can proactively update their customers.

From a personal perspective, yes technology is a great enabler for communication, but we must not forget the importance of the personal touch and people. We need to understand our partners and their overall business goals, and how we can support and be a key enabler in driving these goals. Engagement needs to be across all teams from sales to marketing to operational and service management, as it's people that truly build lasting relationships.

In this wonderful world of technology, we must never forget the significant need for personal engagement when it comes to driving successful partnerships.

Nick Powell, Sales Director, Sky Business Communications

Trials prime UK for fibre



Richard Allwood

TWO trials proposed by Openreach will prepare the industry for the switch to all-IP tech', says the infrastructure provider.

In what Openreach calls a 'hugely complex task', the upgrade of customers onto full fibre broadband and digital voice services in Salisbury and Mildenhall will set the stage for a wider migration across the UK ahead of the withdrawal of wholesale products and services that run over the traditional telephone network, with the PSTN shutdown planned for 2025.

Openreach intends to work with CP customers (such as BT, Sky and TalkTalk) to build out the project into other regions.

Openreach expects four million homes and businesses to have access to its FTTP service by April 2021.

"A consultation will run until 31st July 2019, after which Openreach will confirm the trial details and timescales with industry, with a view to launch in October this year," said Chief Strategy Officer Richard Allwood.

A previous consultation, which focused on an exchange-based approach to upgrading the UK's digital infrastructure, concluded that the majority of customer upgrades should be voluntary, that the roll out should be done area by area (and exchange by exchange), that CPs should have more input into how Openreach selects areas to upgrade, and that a customer charter should be developed that commits to protecting customers throughout the upgrade process in trial areas.

NEWS ROUNDUP

CONTENT Guru's relationship with Verint has strengthened following the cloud contact centre firm's designation as a Verified Interactions and Workforce Management (WFM) Support Partner. Content Guru has operated as a systems integrator for Verint since 2016.

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT and the ITP have formed a joint membership scheme for IT and telecoms professionals. The scheme offers professional development opportunities, training, seminars, awards and apprenticeships, and will give members access to benefits from both professional bodies. Crissi Williams, CEO of the ITP, said: "The joint scheme will open a host of opportunities for IT and telecoms professionals wishing to expand their knowledge and professional development."

NUVIAS is extending its partnership with Juniper Networks to incorporate recently acquired Mist Systems, a provider of AI-driven cloud solutions. Paul Eccleston, Executive Chairman at Nuvias Group, said: "AI-powered intelligent systems are an area of focus for our business. They promise to deliver great efficiencies and improved productivity."



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COMMENT: COMMUNITY MATTERS



Richard Thompson

IT'S TRUE what they say – 'people buy from people'. This couldn't be truer than when you operate in the channel. When your customers buy from you they are expecting more than just a transactional relationship. Your customers want to feel like they belong to part of something that is aligned to their organisation's values and beliefs. Over the

last couple of years we have successfully amplified our efforts to create a real sense of community within our Partners. Here are three of the ways you can do this:

Host customer events: Utilise customer events to inspire your audience with thought leadership and share best practice from experts. TalkTalk Business recently hosted The Connectivity Matters Summit for 100 of our Partner and carrier customers. The reason the day was successful was because it wasn't a sales pitch, it was about sharing best practice from a variety of experts and our customers really appreciated that.

Be hospitable: Reward your customers with hospitality events such as music concerts, sports games or simply going for a nice dinner. One of the misconceptions is that hospitality is only for C-level customers. Why not treat some of the people that are involved in the daily ins and outs of the job? Instead if a CEO, treat the Product or Service Manager. It's a great way for your customers to bond with the people they interact with daily.

Dedicate time and support: Of course, there's no point spending budget on hospitality and events if you don't dedicate enough time to listening and understanding your customers in the first place. Nothing creates a stronger sense of community than communication. Regular meetings and phone calls are the best way to do this. Plus you can keep your customers updated with what your company is doing through online content such as blogs, whitepapers and newsletters.

Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Tekton set to rattle billing

FOLLOWING a beta launch earlier this year a new entrant to the UK comms billing market aims to 'create upheaval' among established channel billers as it seeks to 'set a new standard' in IT and comms billing services.

Tekton's ZOEY billing platform officially launches this month as a legacy-free carrier grade alternative, incorporating intelligence and integration capabilities that its developers say are important differentiators in the market.

Tekton has overlaid the network level architecture from the current Zygo Enterprise Billing System and invested millions to exclusively develop an intuitive reseller-based platform.

"Our origins were born out of the fundamental need to modernise billing by pioneering carrier grade technology and building intelligence into a channel focused engine," stated Tekton MD Terry McKeever, who is driving the project.

"We are brand new, we don't have legacy restrictions and our features are built for a modern resale environment, so seamless integration with other apps has been a priority."

Tekton provides various levels of integration, giving users



Terry McKeever

as much or as little control over the management of the system as required.

"The platform offers channel resellers flexible billing that facilitate complex tariffing and bundling, in addition to a fully self-servicing portal," commented McKeever.

"Our aim is to contribute to an industry-wide improvement in the billing of telecommunications, while supporting clients through complicated integration and migration solutions."

McKeever noted that the beta launch prompted a number of early client wins including Assimilated Communications.

He also said that Tekton's product development roadmap will see additional features launched over the coming weeks along with ZOEY.

NEWS ROUNDUP

CYBERSECURITY threats have shot to the top of the agenda for business leaders, NTT Security's 2019 Risk:Value research indicates. Cyber attacks (43%), data loss or theft (37%) and attacks on critical infrastructure (35%) – particularly telecoms and energy networks – are the biggest issues for businesses after the economy.

DISTRIBUTORS Nimans, Corptel, Ingram Micro, Westcon and CMS in Ireland have been lined up to sell Jabra's new PanaCast intelligent video solution for huddle rooms into the channel. Jabra claims the product is the world's first smart 4K plug-and-play video solution offering 180 degree panoramic vision, which means that everyone in the room is seen.

FIBRE network operator Zzoomm has targeted Henley-on-Thames as the first town for its new full fibre network and expects to start building later in the summer and complete the work during the second half of 2020. The network will be available to 6,800 Henley homes and businesses. Zzoomm will recruit its own regional teams locally rather than sub-contract the build and maintenance of the network.

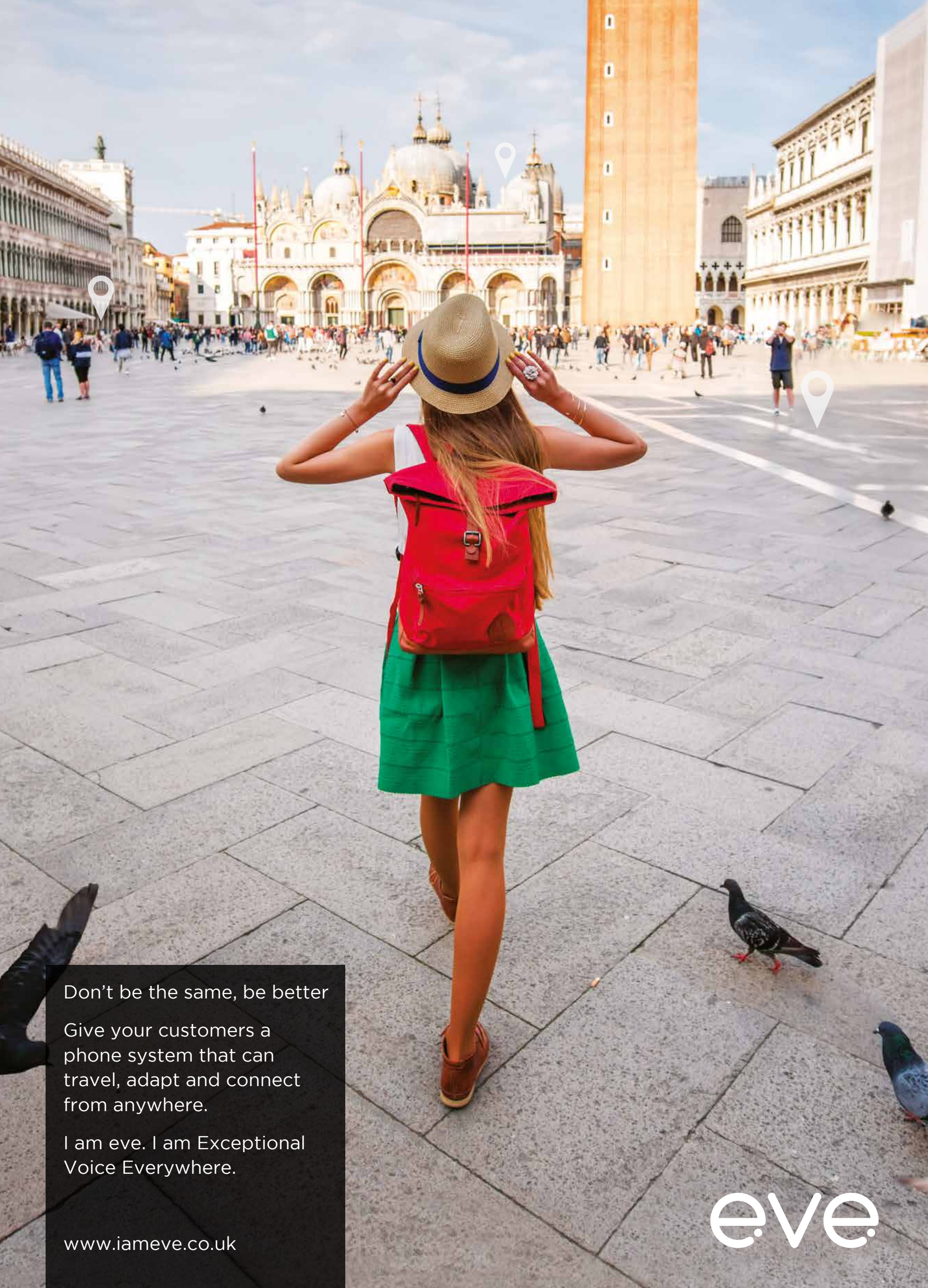
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NEWS ROUNDUP

TANGO Networks and ASC have joined forces to deliver mobile comms recording solutions that leverage Tango Networks' Mobile-X service and ASC's recording capabilities, enabling partners to offer compliance solutions that capture, record, archive and analyse mobile communications.

BELFAST-based Simplicity Group has become one of a select group of communications providers to be awarded Gamma Platinum Partner status in the UK, and is the only Platinum and Technical Alliance Partner with its headquarters in Northern Ireland. This accreditation is the highest level within Gamma's partner scheme.

ZEN Internet has extended the voluntary auto-compensation scheme announced by Ofcom to its channel partners and wholesale customers. "The voluntary auto compensation scheme is a great step for consumers in the UK, but we were keen to ensure that it doesn't stop there," commented Andrew Fryatt, MD, Zen Internet. "Therefore we have extended the scheme to ensure that our partners also receive compensation which they can then choose to pass on to their customers if they wish."

Olympians in 9 Group visit



9's Digital Marketing Executive Stephanie Miles, Ellie and Becky Downie with Mark Saunders

STAFF at Stonehouse head-quartered 9 Group were given a rare opportunity to quiz British Olympians Becky and Ellie Downie, along with young gymnasts from locally based Sheer Velocity Tumbling Club, when the duo paid a visit to the service provider.

The sisters, currently aiming to add to their international medal haul with success at next year's Olympics in Japan, are two of five UK sporting winners recruited to mirror 9's 'Free to Perform' ethos.

They also run their own leopard brand, Double Downies, which has given them an insight into the challenges and rewards of running a small business.

Becky emphasised that the fundamentals for success are similar in business and sport. "There is a need to drive yourself hard and that is probably why many athletes become good business people," she said. "The skills are transferable."

Ellie added: "Once you have a passion for sport, the steely determination never leaves you and clearly that is a great asset to have in business."

9 Group Marketing Director Mark Saunders commented: "Everyone who joined in the day walked away with heightened levels of inspiration and a deeper appreciation of what it takes to succeed at the very highest level."

Revenues hit £100m at Iomart

GLASGOW-based hosting and cloud services group Iomart saw sales break the £100m mark for the year ending 31st March 2019. The AIM-listed company posted revenue up 6% to £103.7m (2018: £97.8m).

Adjusted EBITDA was also up 6% to £42.2m (2018: £39.9m), and adjusted profit before tax rose 6% to £25.5m (2018: £24.1m).

"Over the last 12 months we have reinvigorated our sales and marketing function which delivered a strong finish to the year, with March, the final month of our financial year, recording the highest month of revenue in the period," stated CEO Angus MacSween. "We enter the new year with confidence, underpinned by a significantly larger pipeline of prospects than this time last year."



Angus MacSween

Onecom's Vodafone deal win



Ben Dowd

VODAFONE bigwig Onecom has signed a record partner deal with the operator and set out plans to become a £600m ICT powerhouse within five years.

The collaboration will deliver more than £100m annual revenue from mobile, fixed line, broadband and IT services if all goes to plan.

Onecom intends to triple growth of fixed line services sales over the period and leverage Vodafone's roll out of 5G.

Research by Onecom found that 64% of SMEs could upgrade to 5G within six months of it becoming available to them.

Onecom CEO Ben Dowd commented: "Vodafone has recognised Onecom's significant contribution to growing mobile revenues and driving further growth in fixed line and IoT."

Onecom's ramped up ambitions follow a £30m funding deal with HSBC.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

8X8'S presence in the north west region contact centre market will be more strongly felt following a partnership with EveryCloud. Christopher Peters, VP of EMEA Channel Sales at 8x8, said: "It's an exciting time in north west England with businesses growing faster than many other regions in the UK." EveryCloud Director Keith Purves added: "Investment into the Northern Powerhouse means growth in the region has never been higher."

FOLLOWING the completion of an integration project T-Tech is hosting and directing all calls through Microsoft Teams. "The call functionality means moving away from traditional office desk phones," said MD Daniel Teacher. "It can be used on desktop or mobile and doesn't require additional hardware or equipment." See page 42

UNION Street Technologies has reaffirmed its commitment to customer centricity and training with membership of The Institute of Customer Service. Head of Sales & Marketing Vincent Disneur said: "For many CPs training and support is a key factor when using billing software. Working with the Institute will help to drive new initiatives."

Elite pockets IT firm MWL



Matt Newing

ELITE'S 17th deal since 2008 sees Wrexham-based IT support business MWL Systems join the Group. The financials of the transaction were not disclosed.

The acquisition adds 40 technicians to Elite's IT Services division which has experienced strong growth in the services sector during the past two years.

"As we look to expand our IT services offering and more of our customers are using us for both their communications and IT requirements, strengthening our knowledge base, skills and

expertise is essential," commented CEO Rob Sims.

Elite Group founder Matt Newing added: "Elite will continue to grow through both organic means and acquisition. We have a further £20m in our acquisition war chest and are looking for opportunities."

Elite's Commercial Director Alex Cliffe and Group CFO Rob Burbidge led the acquisition process.

Leveraged finance was provided by the company's existing lender Lloyds Banking Group.

SSE adds CityFibre Ethernet

WHOLESALE full fibre supplier SSE Enterprise Telecoms has extended its partnership with fellow fibre player CityFibre which has now been added as an Ethernet services provider.

The move diversifies the choice of last mile providers and gives access to CityFibre metro networks across 15 cities. Six cities are now live on SSE's portal with the rest set to activate over the coming months.

SSE Enterprise Telecoms CEO Colin Sempill said: "SSE Enterprise Telecoms and CityFibre have both invested substantially in UK fibre networks over the last ten years, challenging the status quo. It was essential to choose a like-minded partner and CityFibre was a natural fit."

Rob Hamlin, Commercial Director at CityFibre, added: "SSE Enterprise Telecoms' customers will gain access to our 1Gbps and 10Gbps Ethernet services. In return, CityFibre will be able to take advantage of the company's reach and customer base to increase connections across our full fibre network infrastructure." See p26

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

Tech hub boost for start-ups

START-UP businesses residing in Salford's MediaCityUK have received a connectivity boost from Vodafone which last month opened a Digital Innovation Hub in the complex.

Located at The Landing the hub aims to give start-up businesses a lift in developing new 5G applications and services.

MediaCityUK houses more than 100 start-up companies which now have access to Vodafone's network experts, new technologies including 5G, IoT, high speed fibre and a space to exchange ideas.

Vodafone is rolling out 5G to 19 towns and cities across the UK this year and plans to establish similar technology hubs in other locations.

Jon Corner, Chief Executive at The Landing, said: "The hub will help unlock MediaCityUK as a living lab for smart city innovation and as a key technology asset for the north west."

Vodafone research concludes that 5G could rocket boost the growth prospects of start-ups, with 60% of those surveyed believing it will help them compete against more established rivals. And 58% estimated that 5G would sharpen up their competitiveness within two years.

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Alarm raised over shoddy marketing

IT IS ACCEPTED as fact nowadays that ICT buyers are more likely to conduct online research to assess their options prior to making a purchasing decision, yet many tech providers are out of the frame even before a buyer logs onto the Internet.

Even worse, the digital marketing solutions ICT resellers require to gain high profile visibility when buyers make their searches may not be all they are cracked up to be, warned Phil Cooper, Digital Marketing Director at revvd, who claims that a 'concerning' lack of digital marketing skills is hampering the progress of those channel businesses in most need of an online boost.

"Organisations need to be visible, credible and attractive online or they will be overlooked or dismissed," he stated.

Cooper claims that many operators in the field of online marketing possess a sharp eye for a gap in the market but as mere casual opportunists they lack the required expertise to discharge effective digital marketing solutions.

"They exploit low barriers to entry in providing a SEO service and lack the necessary breadth of skills," he stated.



Phil Cooper

This 'edifice of incompetence' is a growing barrier for sales organisations that find themselves increasingly unable to tap into the lifeblood of any business – lead generation, claimed Cooper.

In making a stand against the unprofessional practices he says bring standards crashing to the floor, Cooper also claims that revvd (a 9 Group business launched last August) has shown itself as an 'antidote to digital marketing masqueraders' in key areas such as Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), Pay per Click (PPC) and web design. "Creating websites that function correctly is not a generalist skill," he added.

"While SEO is an important behind the scenes improvement to websites and produces organic increases in sales enquiries over time, PPC provides more

instant and measurable results which can be scaled according to budget and requirements."

It would be sensible for channel organisations to seek out proven specialists in digital marketing solutions such as SEO and PPC, urged Cooper, citing a combination of 'creative flair and technical wizardry' as the de facto prerequisites of SEO and PPC strategies.

"But marketers or creative agencies are often, or at least they claim to be, good at design and copywriting yet seldom consider the needs of true website performance and search engine rankings," he stated.

"This requires a range of bespoke technical knowledge and creative skills, and channel businesses need to be aware of these must-haves to source the digital marketing solutions that are necessary today."

Insight in £456.8m PCM buy

IT SERVICE provider PCM has been acquired by Insight for \$581m, creating overall run-rate operating synergies of \$70m by the end of 2021.

The deal expands Insight's global footprint, brings the headcount to 4,000 and bolts on 40 office locations across the US, Canada and the UK.

"Over the past five years Insight has made significant progress, transforming from a value added reseller to a global solutions provider," stated Ken Lamneck, CEO of Insight.

"Together with PCM we will be better positioned to capitalise on our solution area investments through the addition of more technical and sales resources, and access to thousands of new clients, especially in the mid-market and corporate customer segments."

Steve Dodenhoff, President of Insight's North America business, added: "This combination offers the ability to provide clients with greater value at a time when they increasingly need a full-service technology solutions provider to help them transform for the future."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

CITYFIBRE is launching a gigabit speed full fibre network to over 200 businesses in Cheltenham through local partner Bamboo Technology. Paul North, Head of Sales for CityFibre's wholesale business, said: "The town can now take advantage of some of the fastest download and upload speeds in the world, unlocking a host of productivity benefits for businesses."

TOLLRING'S hybrid iCall Suite analytics and call recording solutions are available on MiVoice Business and Panasonic NS700 phone systems, with Avaya IP Office in the pipeline. Director of Sales Operations Simon Whatley said: "The significant proportion of businesses still using on-premises PBX systems can now tap into the advantages of cloud-based call analytics and recording."

CLOUD services distributor intY has opened a new office in the US state of Nebraska as it seeks to expand its operations in North America. CEO Craig Joseph said: "We have identified a growing requirement for our services in North America and are at the point where we need to expand our operations. We see the region as a core part of our strategy."

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Millgate seals Vapour bond

Gvt pledges £40m for 5G trial projects



Tim Mercer and Steve Dono

VAPOUR Cloud has been voted in as IT giant Millgate's tech partner for voice, video and network connectivity.

The £60m Sheffield-based business has 4,500 customers and in recent times has sought ways to develop an integrated technology solution with IT and telephony devices, voice and video comms, network connectivity, cloud storage and all associated licenses and support.

Millgate's Group Head of Sales Steve Dono said: "It's no secret that IT and telephony have come together. Clients now want a secure unified comms solution with consistently high service levels across the board.

"Tech needs to support flexible working, be scalable to reflect the fluidity of business, and have an integrated disaster recovery strategy as standard.

It needs to be quick, cost-effective, compliant and feature-rich.

"We've therefore been on a journey to enhance our proposition over the past five years, and in the last 24 months this transformation has started to take shape.

"While 80% of our revenue is currently coming from the sale of hardware I see this shifting to 60% in favour of us deploying more unified communications solutions."

Vapour Cloud CEO Tim Mercer added: "Millgate is one of the top 100 VARs in the UK, so this is exactly the type of collaboration we've been seeking.

"We don't supply hardware and IT support, so we complement each other well."

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THE UK Government has pledged a £40m investment in 5G testbed and trial projects across UK industry.

The funding was announced by Digital Secretary Jeremy Wright at the 5G World Conference last month.

The latest round of investment is through the £200m project to test 5G technology that's up to ten times faster than 4G and able to support more than a million devices per square km.

Previous investments in 5G testbeds and trial programmes have driven advances in the healthcare, tourism, transport and broadcasting sectors.

The latest investment will support similar work in logistics and manufacturing industries.

The projects will trial ways to help these sectors increase their productivity and output, and could cover different manufacturing processes as well as across road, air and sea based freight logistics.

Digital Secretary Jeremy Wright said: "As part of our modern Industrial Strategy we're making sure that Britain has a telecoms infrastructure that is fit for the future.

"5G is about more than mobile phone consumers hav-



Jeremy Wright

ing a fast and reliable connection anywhere in the country. It's a vital piece of technology that can be used to improve the productivity and growth of our industrial sectors.

"That's why we're developing new trials in areas such as manufacturing and logistics that can benefit from 5G."

The Government confirmed that it will consult on proposals to simplify planning processes in England to support the further roll out of 4G and accelerate the introduction of 5G.

This is all part of the Government's long-term strategy for meeting its digital connectivity targets, outlined in the

Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review. The plans involve tackling barriers to deployment and creating the right conditions for investment to deliver better network coverage.

The Ministry of Defence, in partnership with DCMS, has committed to making 168MHz of new spectrum available for the deployment of fixed and mobile networks. The Government said it will continue to explore opportunities for more spectrum to be made available.

A public competition is expected to launch later this year for bids to be made for the next testbed and trials in 5G across the whole of the UK.

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GCI prepares to go global



Adrian Thirkill

INTERNATIONAL expansion beckons GCI following its acquisition of Microsoft partner Modality Systems, which has bases in the USA, Asia, Australia and the UK.

CEO Adrian Thirkill commented: "The acquisition provides GCI and its customers with established scale and support internationally.

"Geographically, it expands the ability of the combined companies to service larger global companies and widens key new markets in the USA, Australia and Asia."

Modality CEO James Rodd added: "Both GCI and Modality have invested heavily in innovating around Microsoft's collaboration suite.

"We believe there is great market potential given that Microsoft Teams alone is set to become the second biggest workplace collaboration app by 2020, surpassing Slack and Google Hangouts."

GCI CTO Mike Constantine said: "The scale of engineering expertise we now have across the Microsoft product stack puts us in a competitive position.

"Also, we are investing in data centre modernisation services, powered by Microsoft's Azure public cloud to support customers embracing modern ways of hosting and transforming their applications."

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Advanced's partners fly out of the blocks

ADVANCED'S partner business has generated £35m revenues just 12 months after the software and services company launched its channel programme. Partners have delivered over 120 new customers.

Channel Sales Director Dean McGlone attributed much of this growth to the cloud and emergence of Generation Z in the workforce.

"The cloud has reached a tipping point with adoption of cloud-based ERP and finance applications experiencing a significant growth period," he said.

"We have seen the cloud push out more traditional technology formats as Generation Z workers enter employment.

"These workers have been familiar with the Internet and technology since a young age.

"They have an emotional connection to adopting innovation, a technical-first mindset and are prepared to challenge the technical status quo. As digital natives, they are tipped to be the innovators in the workplace.

"They will expect modern technology, flexible working and a digital environment which employers are now forced to accommodate. Our partners are tapping into this opportunity."



Dean McGlone

George Smith, MD at Kamarin Computers, commented: "As Generation Z enters the

workforce we are seeing organisations ask questions around the cloud because employees expect them to use it across all functions. These younger workers are starting to become part of management teams or play an important role in the IT decision making process."

Advanced believes that the cloud will become the primary choice for new customers within two years.

Redwood swoops on Weston Digital

WESTON Digital's omni-channel recording and quality management capabilities will form part of Content Guru's cloud-based contact centre solutions (available through its storm platform) following Weston Digital's acquisition by Content Guru's Group company Redwood Technologies, which is based in Bracknell.

Weston Digital's recording technology is used by the UK Government and local authorities, as well as organisations including Avon & Somerset

Police, BT, Investec, Boeing and Airbus.

Weston Digital Technologies MD Derek Townsend said: "Joining the Redwood family opens up many opportunities for us to bring our technology to its, and Content Guru's, international market."

Redwood Technologies Group CEO Sean Taylor commented: "We have been aware of Weston Digital Technologies for a long time. The acquisition strengthens our customer proposition and synergies."



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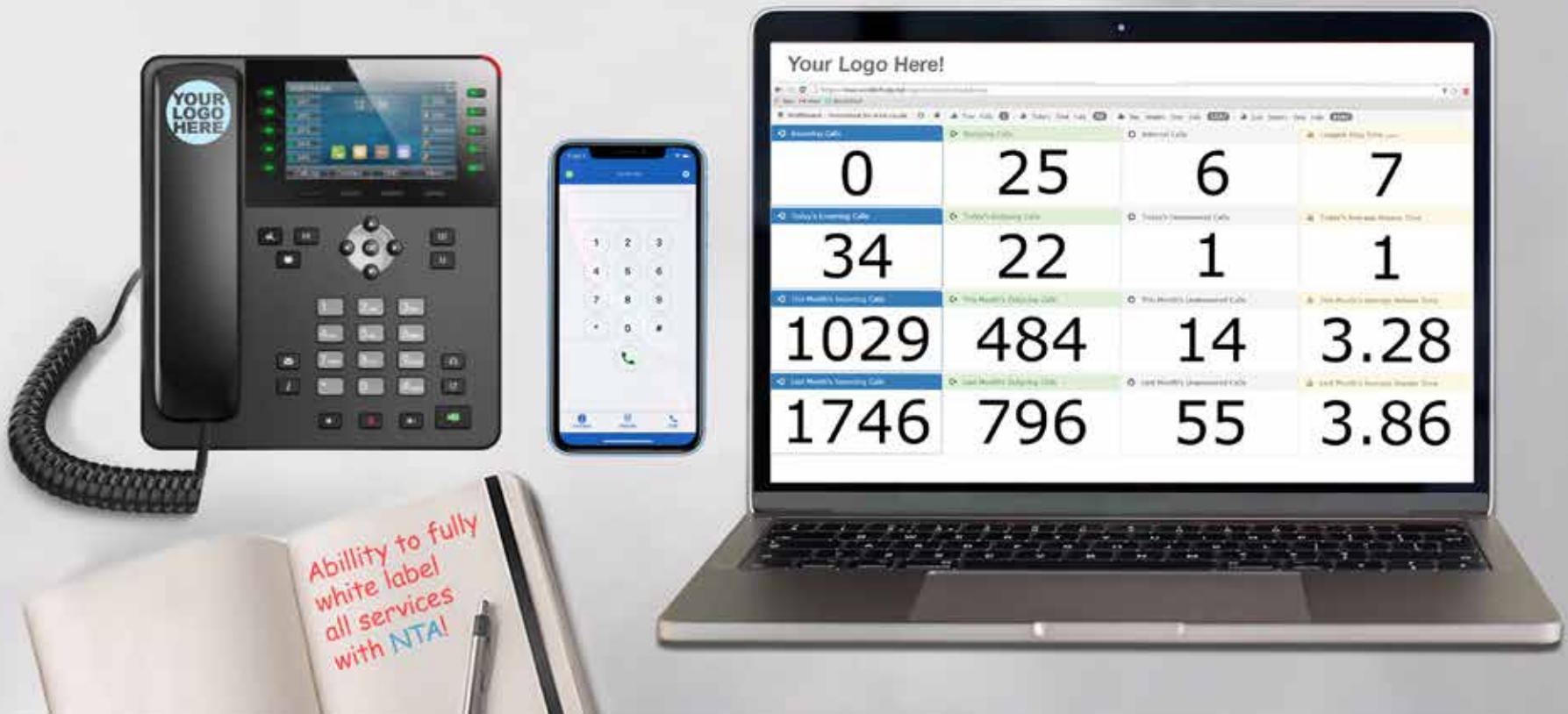
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Ascom eyes the channel



Paul Lawrence

ASCOM has acted decisively on the growth potential it has identified in the channel market, appointing a trio of partnership builders tasked with forging new distribution and channel link-ups.

“Adopting the channel model has been a big step for Ascom,” said UK MD Paul Lawrence.

“The fact that technology now sits within a picture that is increasingly joined up means channel providers not only enable customers to get everything they need from one place, they also have top line visibility of interoperable solutions, as well as an overview of

what will work for customers’ specific setups.

“This combination of factors means the channel will occupy a huge section of the market in the future.”

Tasked with deliver Ascom’s smartphone and messaging products to a broader market are Mike Bennett, Channel Manager for the midlands region, BDM Matt Lock and Lloyd Harrington who joins as Channel Manager for enterprise markets including hospitality, industry and retail.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

ZEN, which has an on-net presence in over 400 exchanges across the UK, has slashed its fibre Ethernet leased line prices for channel partners by up to 46%. “We know that connectivity is becoming increasingly important to modern businesses, but cost is often a barrier to entry,” said Zen Retail MD Andrew Fryatt. “By reducing the price of our fibre Ethernet leased lines we hope to encourage our partners to offer this as an available option to their customers, leading to healthy margins.”

MSP SysGroup has acquired Hub Network Services (HNS) in a £1.45m cash deal. HNS, which was formed in 1997, is a managed connectivity and co-location solutions provider. Its customers include the Welsh Audit Office and the Samaritans. Adam Binks, CEO, SysGroup, said: “The acquisition of HNS further complements our existing managed services, enabling us to offer our customer base a wider range of enterprise-grade managed connectivity services alongside our existing managed IT services portfolio.”

Pragma provokes thoughts on growth with ‘Ideas Lab Tour’

A SERIES of idea exchange and insight events staged by Pragma helped partner delegates to get to grips with new technologies from Ericsson-LG and gain updates on the UC distributor’s other vendor propositions.

Dubbed the ‘Ideas Lab Tour’, the events were staged at venues in Edinburgh, Leeds, Cheltenham and London.

Delegates were also apprised of insights to help them better prepare for 2020, when UC penetration is tipped to reach 100%. Other topics included integration and innovation, AI in contact centres, connectivity



Delegates glimpse the future of the market

and digital sales and marketing. Anthony Beard, Director at Chalvington Group, noted: “It was good to see so many resellers exploring new opportunities. I found the new training academy, product roadmap and feature lists to be useful.”

Pragma Marketing and Sales Director Will Morey said: “We provided our resellers with a glimpse of what the future holds, helped them adopt new approaches to add more gross profit to deals, and differentiate product offerings.”

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Energy annuity breakthrough!

Switch Once Switch Forever with Fidelity Energy

TURNING energy into a recurring revenue product has been the nirvana sought by channel partners for years and it has now become reality.

Following the most successful Dragon's Den pitch in history by lookaftermybills.com, Fidelity Energy is proud to announce 'Switch Once Switch Forever', an opt-in service that utilises the Fidelity Energy portal to automatically run a market comparison covering all the major suppliers before the end of a customer's contract.

The solution intelligently selects the best available tariff with the relative commission built in for the partner.

"Finding a recursive revenue model has always been desired by the telecoms channel," said Fidelity Energy's Sales Director Sean Dixon.

"In telecoms, the customers



Sales Director Sean Dixon and Managing Director John Haw

will come to the channel partner at renewal time to ask for the latest iPhone or system feature, but in energy there is nothing new for resigning a contract, so it often gets missed, resulting in customers falling onto high 'out of contract' rates."

Through Fidelity Energy's CRM, partners are constantly reminded when they need to re-sign customers and it has paid dividends with a 93% renewal rate.

Managing Director John Haw believes partners will soon

get to grips with proposition's power: "When you are agreeing to a contract on behalf of a business you have a fiduciary duty to that customer. We have covered all regulations and legal elements to ensure it is a fair deal for the customer and the partner is protected.

"Customers will be notified before the end of their contract giving them the option to cancel the 'Switch Once Switch Forever' contract and go to market themselves. They will also have a choice to choose a length of contracts

they are comfortable with (from one to five years) and can exclude suppliers they do not wish to do business with."

Dixon added: "This proposition is a no-touch renewal process for partners to secure additional upfront commission when the 'Switch Once Switch Forever' process kicks in at the end of each contract. The customer also saves time and effort knowing that we have secured a deal within their requirements with the same level of commission that was in their first agreed contract. And if the customer

chooses to go to market and find a better deal they can. It really is a no-brainer."

At the renewal period, Fidelity Energy will be able to create a basket of customers all expiring within a few months, thus leveraging that volume for the benefit of all customers in the group. When Fidelity goes to market with energy suppliers it should enable them to significantly outperform the tariffs available to a single standalone business.

Haw concluded: "Say for example you are a small office of 30 people using 40,000 kWh a year, the suppliers see you as a small customer. If we create a basket of 1,000 customers with varying usages that equal 50 Million kWh a year, we can negotiate with those economies of scale to bring the price for the smaller user to below their market rate if procuring alone."

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A model for UCaaS sales

Mitel's popular UCaaS agency and SP model in the US will be just as fashionable across Europe, says VP UCaaS International Rami Houbby who expects his expansion plan to yield rapid results.

With Mitel's UCaaS agency model going great guns in the US the Canadian vendor has revealed plans to ramp up this market approach across Europe. According to Houbby, this reflects a shift in the way UCaaS is sold with the vendor ultimately owning the customer. "Our agency model is gaining traction in the UK," he said. "Channel partners are uncovering opportunities within their customer base and then leaving the heavy lifting to vendors who help close, on-board and provide the customer services. Following Mitel's successful agency model programme in the US we are expanding coverage in Europe and expect to see rapid growth in UCaaS solutions sold via our network of sales partners."

Houbby is seeing fast growth in UCaaS across all UK market segments and across firms of all sizes. "In the UK and western Europe the SMB segment is where UCaaS is gaining most traction," he added. "It enables them to quickly migrate to the cloud and benefit from advanced communications and collaboration features at a monthly cost. As part of this, we're seeing 30 per cent year-on-year user growth through our UCaaS offering via service providers. We now partner with more than 20 mobile operators to offer this solution."

Although more businesses are moving to the cloud and the

UCaaS market is recording double digit growth, it is clear that organisations will transition at a different pace. According to MZA, on-premise UC solutions will continue to represent a significant percentage of the Western Europe comms market with on-premises deployments anticipated to represent almost 63 per cent of demand in 2023. "Many organisations that need an on-site solution are conscious that cloud communications are on their horizon," added Houbby. "As these businesses look to the future, it's important they select cloud-enabled UC solutions that can accommodate their needs today, with the capability to meet tomorrow's challenges. There's no one-size fits all approach for the pathway to the cloud."

Apart from the benefits of the technology itself, the approach resellers take to cloud migration could determine the level of interest they get from customers. "Any transition to the cloud is an ongoing journey, not an overnight rip-and-replace project," noted Houbby. "Companies need to think business objectives first and align their cloud transformation strategy to those strategic goals. There are many different choices customers can make when it comes to their cloud strategy – public, hybrid and private cloud models all have their advantages."

Houbby identified two primary drivers of UCaaS



Rami Houbby

We are investing in European expansion and expect to see rapid growth in UCaaS

adoption. First, simplification and convenience. "UCaaS allows organisations to focus on their core business, not on running a UC system," he commented. "It also ensures the company can benefit from the latest innovations as they are released without worrying about future upgrades. Secondly – cost savings and flexibility. With a monthly operating cost, UCaaS eliminates the need to spend money upfront and flexible plan options mean businesses can scale up and down instantly, mixing and matching

features to meet their needs at any particular time."

Connected world

One of the biggest trends observed by Houbby is the increased demand for integrated unified communications and collaboration applications, including video, chat, online shared spaces to address staff productivity and ever increasing requirements around remote working and mobility. "More and more organisations are conscious that in an increasingly connected world they need

to transform and adopt the latest communications and collaboration technology innovations to remain attractive and competitive," added Houbby. "We see it as one of the key drivers of the migration to the cloud as this technology delivers faster and easier access to key productivity tools."

Houbby does not expect to see one variant of UCaaS to gain dominance over another, but he does consider Programmable Communications Cloud – which embeds voice, messaging, video and authentication capabilities into applications via simple APIs – to be a transformational technology in terms of UCaaS. "This will drive innovation around bringing out business applications that integrate IoT and AI capabilities which cater for vertical markets across the board to address business workflow and process issues," he commented.

"We are seeing applications emerge which leverage such capabilities, particularly driven by CPaaS, but it's early days and we expect this to grow in 2020 and beyond. The opportunity for resellers lies in investing in the skills necessary to build such applications that they can position with their customers. Resellers will be able to offer differentiation beyond voice, continue to remain relevant and inspire customer loyalty while providing greater value to customers." ■



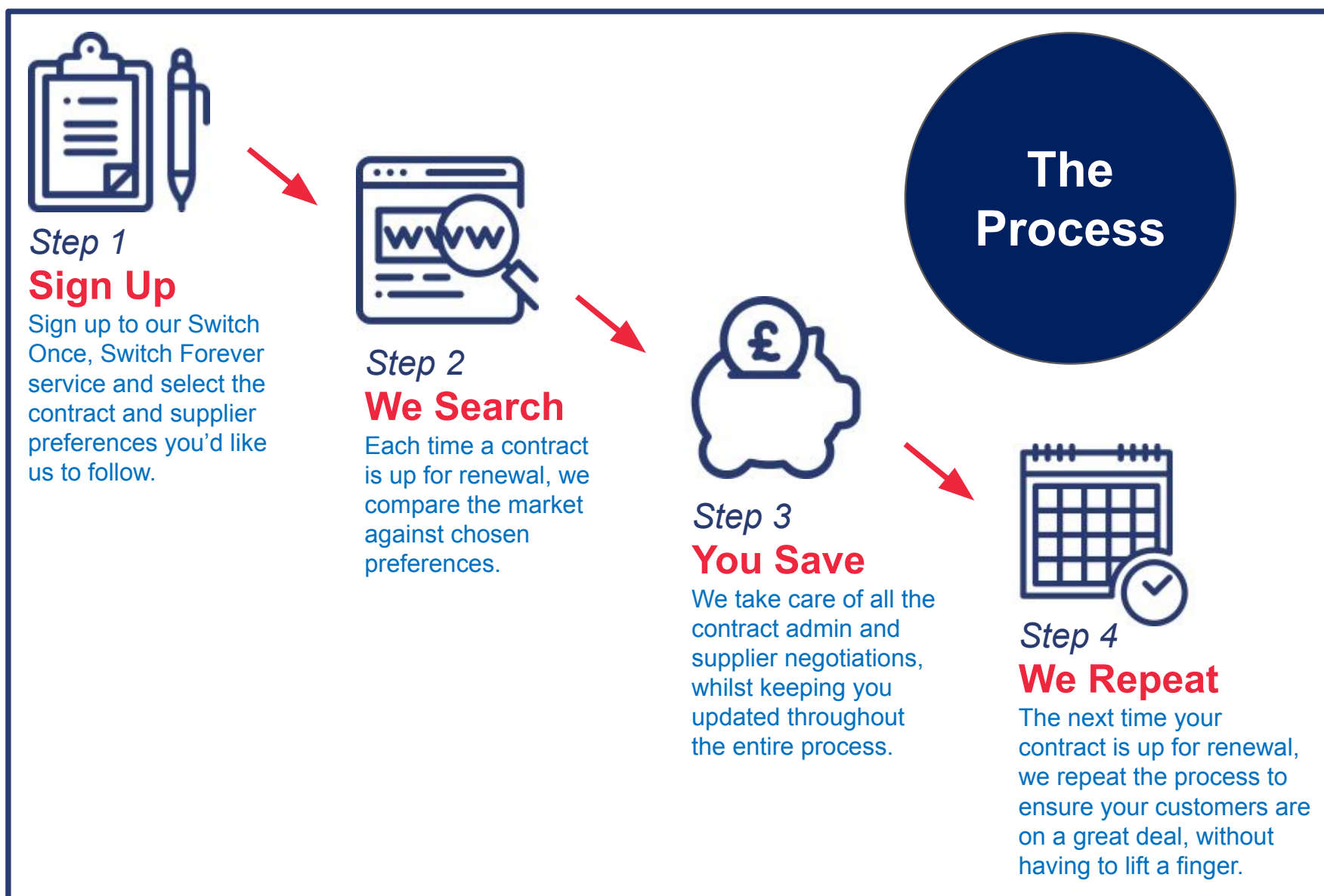
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Fired up Charterhouse go

For Charterhouse Voice & Data CEO Mark Brooks-Wadham national coverage beckons, and a PE boost has a big part to play in creating growth that could realise £75 million annual revenues within four to five years fuelled in part by acquisitions in the UC and cyber space.

Charterhouse was established in 1993 by Brooks-Wadham and David Doherty. Brooks-Wadham began his career with document solution provider Copymore and the shift to IT and comms seemed a natural progression. Doherty had a facsimile background. In a meeting of minds the pair anticipated the impact of an emerging technological revolution, and they felt that customers could be far better served than was the norm at that time. So Charterhouse started life as a business plan sketched out in London's Charterhouse Square (hence the name), and soon afterwards the company occupied a small office in Shoreditch housing five people. The founding vision – that the customer journey and experience is paramount – quickly paid off with revenues of £1 million achieved in the first year.

Today, Charterhouse has over 1,000 UK-based customers spanning all industry sectors and the company supports its clients domestically and internationally where required. The headcount currently stands at 135 with a turnover of £25 million, up from £20.5 million in 2017 and £19.3 million in 2016. A strategic change of direction late last year saw Charterhouse secure PE investment from August Equity. The deal created a



Mark Brooks-Wadham

We have a great opportunity to become a truly national collaboration and cybersecurity partner for UK organisations

platform for acquisitions that will help the business to treble in size over the coming years, becoming a circa £75 million nationwide business. "Organic growth has always been fundamental to Charterhouse and will remain at the centre of our strategy,"

said Brooks-Wadham. "However, by partnering with August Equity we have gained access to funding and its acquisition experience with organisations such as Secure Data, which will help us to become a nationwide operation. The expansion

campaign is a strategic imperative. We are not attempting to be the biggest, but we do want to be the best for our customers. This will be achieved through both organic growth and acquisitions that add to our portfolio and extend

our geographic reach. We want to talk to cyber and UC businesses ideally in the £5 million to £20 million turnover range."

Brooks-Wadham believes that there is an opportunity for a fully fledged communications and cyber business to service the market on a nationwide basis – and that Charterhouse needs to strike while the iron is hot. "The challenges associated with this will be to continue to build the right team, while attracting the right acquisitions that will add new capabilities and geographic reach to our offering," he commented. "In doing so we must ensure that we maintain the culture we have nurtured over the last 25 years, and retain and develop our relationships with existing vendor partners while integrating new ones."

As part of its growth strategy Charterhouse launched a customer portal and in-house 24/7 NOC last year. "Further development of our NOC, combined with the introduction of a SOC will play important roles in the ongoing support of our customers," stated Brooks-Wadham. "We have a great opportunity to become a truly national collaboration and cybersecurity partner. So much so that in hindsight I would have brought investment into the company much earlier. I would also have entered

oes nationwide

the cybersecurity market five years sooner."

Charterhouse expanded its portfolio to include cybersecurity in early 2017, developing relationships with vendor partners including Palo Alto Networks and Darktrace. Both partnerships are thriving, with Charterhouse achieving Platinum status with Palo Alto Networks and becoming one of the largest Darktrace partners in EMEA. "Our expanding cybersecurity practice is being enhanced with identify access monitoring and secure email," added Brooks-Wadham. "In conjunction with our network monitoring offering TOM (Tech Ops Monitoring) we are able to provide complete end-to-end management of any IP device on the customer's network 24/7."

Portfolio matters

Charterhouse's proposition is segmented into three distinct categories – Secure, Connect and Collaborate. As well as Palo Alto Networks and Darktrace, Charterhouse's vendor partners include Rapid 7, XQ Cyber, Virtual1, Gamma, BT, Colt and Mitel, along with EE, 8x8, Vodafone and business process vendors such as Docuware. "We integrate these different products and services to provide bespoke solutions for our customers," stated Brooks-Wadham.

With its strong product portfolio, technology integration and service expertise Charterhouse is able to support all industry sectors. Recent high profile wins have been in the sports and entertainment sector, a UK-wide retail deployment, a security conscious real

estate organisation as well as a number of professional and financial services organisations. "Propositions are changing at an increased pace," commented Brooks-Wadham. "For example, in security we constantly monitor the sector, test solutions and when satisfied they are of value to our customers, on-board them to the portfolio.

"All of this means that every part of the business must be aligned. There will be different requirements and cost implications whether it be engineering, provisioning or project management. Furthermore, companies in our space require a well developed understanding of the future combined with the capability to deliver and monetise these new services and product sets. As ever, we often sit between the customer and the likes of our partners, needing to understand the customer journey and their requisite needs, adding value at every stage."

Another strong market trend at the forefront of Brooks-Wadham's mind is the rise of agile workforces, and Charterhouse is currently evaluating solutions to help drive this growth opportunity. "Vendors are now embracing video conferencing to the desktop and driving true mobile integration," he commented. "Charterhouse is helping to lead the way in deploying these solutions. We also recognise the need to automate for our customers. This means delivering secure access to tools and designing business processes for employees so that they can drive an exceptional customer experience – that's the new currency today." ■

Just a minute with Mark Brooks-Wadham

Role model: My grandmother, always fair and patient. Led by example and engendered confidence with all those she engaged with

What talent do you wish you had? To be more of a technologist

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I competed in many triathlons and marathons with the subsequent broken wrists, feet and ribs to show for it

Name three ideal dinner guests: John McEnroe, I love his genius and fiery disposition, and complete fear of losing; Bono for his music; and Henry Marsh, a neurosurgeon. After listening to one of his talks I understood what pressure really is

What possession could you not live without? My Garmin Forerunner 935

Your main strength and what could you work on? I'm collaborative yet comfortable in making the final decision. But I could work on my fear of failure, which perhaps makes me too conservative at times

Best advice you have been given: Worry about what you can effect, not what you can't

One example of something you have overcome: Chronic asthma as a kid

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? Running some other tech business

Biggest risk you have taken? Risking all of my net worth and capital in setting up Charterhouse

Greatest career achievement? Building Charterhouse from scratch to a £25 million business

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Fibre players hook up

Partnerships have rarely been so indicative of the connectivity market's future direction as last month's link-up between SSE Enterprise Telecoms and CityFibre.

The addition of CityFibre's Ethernet services to SSE Enterprise Telecoms' portfolio gives channel customers more choice when selecting last mile tail providers for Ethernet services. But there is more to the partnership than meets the eye. "It's important to understand where both organisations fit within the industry," stated George Wareing, Sales Director at CityFibre. "SSE Enterprise Telecoms is a high bandwidth provider for UK wide national solutions, with long distance trunk routes. Meanwhile, CityFibre is focused on densifying its metro access networks to serve 20 per cent of the UK across entire towns and cities. We help SSE Enterprise Telecoms get to customer premises in our full fibre network cities, complementing its sweet spot with high bandwidth access services and injecting

fresh choice into the end-to-end solution."

SSE Enterprise Telecoms and CityFibre are well aligned at a strategic and physical network footprint level and have collaborated on a number of projects prior to the Ethernet partnership. "The deal is mainly about diversifying the choice of last mile providers for our channel customers," added SSE Enterprise Telecoms CEO Colin Sempill. "We're offering alternative backhaul solutions with various last mile partners, enabling greater local access options for clients."

The primary objective of CityFibre – and its wholesale business Entanet – is to secure connections on the network and grow its footprint. "Our relationship with SSE Enterprise Telecoms dovetails with the role of Entanet," commented



George Wareing

The shift from bandwidth scarcity to surplus will change how connectivity is perceived

Wareing. "SSE works in a different space with its own channel and a focus on the larger scale wholesale, specialist reseller, enterprise and mobile markets."

SSE Enterprise Telecoms operates a 12,000-plus km private network and an estate of 80 UK data centres. To provide last mile services over CityFibre's network, SSE Enterprise Telecoms has created 15 Network to Network Interface connections, so its customers can benefit from the quickest route back to the core and from one point to another. The company is currently unbundling 177 BT exchanges as part of its Project Edge plan which will increase the overall network reach by 132 per cent and add 180,000 new business postcodes after completion. "We're also ramping up our channel activity with

organisations that align with our business proposition and have strong growth ambitions of their own," noted Sempill.

Alternative strategy

Across the comms industry, observed Wareing, more and more channel partners are recognising the long-term value of alternative access provision. "With fibre being built to every location in our towns and cities, Ethernet provisioning will become more akin to a quick broadband delivery than a major undertaking," said Wareing.

"Previously, you needed a business case to move speeds up by 10Mbps but now it's easy just to provision gigabits of capacity. The shift from bandwidth scarcity to surplus will also change the way connectivity is perceived, while driving the cost per connection down. This also

means expensive technologies like MPLS are being rapidly replaced by lower cost and better SD-WAN solutions. We're finally starting to see the same 'software is eating everything' dynamics changing the world of Ethernet."

According to Wareing, it would be folly to underestimate the impact of the UK's shift to a full fibre enabled economy and the demand it will drive beyond anything we are seeing today. "Next generation digital infrastructure sparks fresh innovation, new possibilities emerge and with that comes further widespread transformation, changing the way people live and work and driving demand for faster and better connectivity services across all sectors," he stated.

In this new gigabit world, Ethernet suppliers will need to compete on flexibility, pointed out Wareing. "Customers will look for suppliers that do a great job on the connectivity and don't try to tie them to multi-year contracts," he commented. "Traditionally, customers needed a lot of help to navigate the complexities of connectivity selection, but in the gigabit era it's no longer a complex decision. Speeds become available at sensible prices and everything runs over fibre – and customers will stay loyal because of the vast improvements in service that become possible over a modern full fibre platform." ■



Colin Sempill

We're offering alternative backhaul solutions with various last mile partners

UC Migration: The devil's in the detail

Given the sharp upturn in UC adoption, you would expect that digital transformation of voice would be a simple process. The reality is that there are numerous legacy platforms of varying ages and architectures, and only a finite resource to analyse them within any UC providers margins.

MIT Dynamic's Mike Ford (CEO) and Paul McGuinness (CTO) have spent the last 15 years working closely with multiple systems integrators, telecoms maintenance providers, valued added resellers and system manufacturers in order to create their industry leading **UCentric** solution. The main requirements for transformation of voice is for speed, accuracy and continuity of service and a seamless and painless migration from legacy to the new UC solution.

These key requirements generate a huge workload within the solution provider as the digital transformation steps become more convoluted:-

- Access to legacy platforms
- Knowledge of the platforms
- Capture of data
- Normalisation
- Blending with other sources
- Highlighting potential issues
- Export to 'bulk loaders'

This process can add weeks or months to any migration plan and can impact severely on resources, costs and change-freeze windows. After spending a great deal of time working with Service providers and SI's, Mike found that it was the best practice to perform an initial network audit as early as possible, before any planned migration or changes, as this provides an accurate dataset of intelligence to hold early data validation sessions with the client. This allowed a review of insights, conclusions and recommendations not only for short term cost reductions and efficiency savings but

also informed discussions about future migration projects. This level of intelligence significantly helps to embed the customer for the short, medium and long term.

Paul realised that the production of myriad Excel spreadsheets wasn't the answer, and working with his team of Agile developers, created a web-based portal that visualises both configuration and utilisation of resources within the existing client network, but also allows a logical and simplified approach to exporting the data in a readily digestible form to be consumed by UC automation solutions. This portal can exist in the cloud, within the resellers network operations centre, or even within the client network if security dictates it.

Paul and Mike found that one of the key outputs of that initial data capture is the issues list, where applying known standard rules, MIT can highlight potential issues that require a resolution before any migration or changes take place. This allows the supplier and the client to better manage the issues in good time, and most importantly prevent incidents post migration. This assists in getting the existing network into an optimal state both to save immediate costs and prepare for the future.

As a supplier progresses through the project, MIT's **UCentric** tool handles new data inputs, any new unknowns which are experienced, and any flexing of the management information reporting to meet new requirements potentially out of the original scope.

By using the **UCentric** tool from start to completion of the initial data capture and migration programme, time to cash is reduced with projects being delivered on time and often under budget.

The **UCentric** solution removes many of these hurdles and provides a simplified approach to the problem by either providing a self-service toolset or an MIT managed service approach to these migrations.

Access to legacy platforms is resolved by an automated connection over modem, IP, RAS/VPN or even from system backups.

Knowledge of the platforms is unnecessary as the **UCentric** platform has pre-built discovery tools for all the major platforms from **Alcatel, Aastra, Asterisk, Avaya, Cisco, Ericsson, IBM, Microsoft, Mitel, Nortel, Siemens** and many more.

Capture of the data becomes an automated task that takes less than 1 hr per 1000 users and can be scheduled out of hours. Normalisation means that the data is always presented in the same format, regardless of the vendor.

Blending with other sources allows **UCentric** to mark users and devices as 'in use' by comparing CDR/SMDR records and identifying other user profiles aspects such as voice mail, call recording and Active Directory accounts.

Highlighting of potential issues solves a lot of post-migration



Mike Ford



Paul McGuinness

headaches. This can be as simple as identifying unused devices to much more complex issues relating to number plans, group membership or actively used features and services.

Exporting to provisioning platforms and bulk loaders is the default output from **UCentric**, but it also has a fully restful API and detailed SQL Schema for direct reporting into existing BI platforms or the creation of custom bulk-loader exports.

When you consider the key factor in digital transformation of voice is 'time to money', i.e. the point at which you can start billing a customer for their hosted voice solution, it makes sense to reduce the time it takes to migrate a customer to as short a period as possible.

The feedback we have seen from end-users is that this process reduces the number of issues subsequent to migration and provides a much smoother transition. This is exemplified by one of our smaller maintainers who was in the process of migrating a number of hotels in the US from legacy on-premised PABXs to a Broadworks hosted voice solution. Previously this process took approximately 3 weeks per hotel. This was reduced to 2 hours using **UCentric**.

Where **UCentric** extends this smooth transitioning process, it is MIT's ability to operate as a true Agile development house and adapt its solution to meet with each client needs. Adding a new vendor usually takes around a week, and even

creating a direct connector into BroadSource EMU was a three-week turnaround.

Due to the way MIT approaches migration projects with their channels, they continually provide the supplier with additional and specific reports as they proceed through the auditing programme, examples of which are:-

Insights reporting: Detailing useful pre-migration insights on existing configuration

Migration considerations: Showing technologies that may not be supported by a hosted solution.

Mobility reporting: Identifying users logging-in at different locations to where they are physically located.

Issues list: Detailing problems that can arise post-migration before the migration takes place

Orphaned and unused profiles: Highlighting redundant programming

DDI usage: Showing extension and DDI usage throughout the cluster at each location

Hunt and Pickup Group usage: Detailing all groups and any issues found within them

Handset Type Usage: Detailing each type of handset in use, their model, type and capabilities

Allocation vs. utilisation: Summarised and detailed lists of actual device and profile usage across the clusters. ■

Please visit our website www.mit-tech.co.uk for information, videos and contact details, where MIT will be delighted to talk to you and to demonstrate all of the capabilities of MIT's **UCentric** solution over a webinar or in person.



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Sponsored by 9 Group for the seventh successive year and independently judged by a panel of industry experts, The Comms National Awards recognises quality across the channel spectrum with awards in both reseller (customer solutions) and vendor (service to the channel) categories. Once again, we will also acknowledge the contribution made to the ICT channel by one special individual who will be presented with the illustrious Entrepreneur

of the Year Award. New categories will recognise channel efforts to improve Diversity and CSR (see www.cnawards.com).

With past hosts including, Jimmy Nesbitt, Ronnie Corbett, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre, Vernon Kay and Stephen Mangan the entertainment as ever will be top drawer. This powerful combination means the Comms National Awards is the ultimate evening for the ICT channel to gather together, recognise excellence and innovation, network with industry friends and colleagues and, of course, have some much-deserved fun!

ENTRY DEADLINE JULY 31st 2019



This year's Comms National Awards, to be held at The Park Lane Hilton on Thursday 10th October, will be sponsored for the seventh successive year by leading service provider, 9 Group.

According to 9's Group Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, the decision to renew their sponsorship was instantaneous: "This awards evening is the highlight of the year and we are delighted to be able to continue to offer our support to Comms Dealer. The atmosphere is always incredible, the guests represent the high achievers of our industry, the winning entries must be outstanding and the organisation of the event is first class every time, so we are proud to be associated with such an enjoyable evening.

"In previous years, our brand ambassadors, Josh Webster and Maddie Hinch, have held the audience spellbound with tales of Porsche Supercup success and Olympic glory, so we hope to be able to continue that tradition this year with another of our sporting superstars. Watch this space.

"We always relish the opportunity to reward and thank our closest partners and key staff members at this event. The winning mood is infectious, and celebrations inevitably continue into the earliest of hours, before joining some of the more rested revellers for a welcome breakfast."

Saunders recognises the Herculean challenge facing the judges: "They face a potentially thankless task, but one that is carried out with boundless integrity and attention to detail. If you win one of these awards, you can legitimately claim to be the very best at what you do and I look forward to seeing a healthy mixture of familiar and new faces on the podium this year.

"Finally, 9 will once again sponsor an award for customer service excellence and it is always a special honour to judge those entries and meet and greet the winners during the gala evening at The Park Lane Hilton.

"Please make sure you are there to enjoy the very best night out in our industry, by entering as many categories as you can and showcasing the incredible range of talent that this industry should so rightly boast about."

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Reseller Vertical Market Category

Vincent Disneur

Head of Sales & Marketing

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"As the industry's leading provider of billing and provisioning solutions, Union Street is very proud to continue our sponsorship of the Comms National Awards. Much like ourselves, the CNAs champions excellence and outstanding achievement within the channel.

"Success in industry awards demonstrates to the market that you are an elite performer with an edge over competitors. Targeting a particular vertical market requires high levels of skill and expertise, truly demonstrating that the winning company is the master of its market. It's a great pleasure, therefore, to be the sponsor of the Vertical Markets category."

Reseller of the Year – SME

Lauren McManus

Head of Marketing & Communications

Digital Wholesale Solutions



"Digital Wholesale Solutions works within the SME sector every day, which is why we are proud to sponsor the category for SME Reseller of the Year. This is a sector that has huge potential so we want to encourage our partners to celebrate their achievements and strive for further growth.

"As a Channel-only business, we are proud to support the Comms National Awards because it brings the industry together to celebrate the successes of both small companies and large enterprises. It is a fantastic opportunity for networking while rewarding your teams for their hard work."

Entrepreneur of the Year

Adam Zoldan

Partner

Knight Corporate Finance



"We work with entrepreneurs daily and we know the value they place on industry recognition which is why we are proud to be sponsoring the Entrepreneur of the Year Award at this year's CNAs. On a more general note, as a finalist or winner of a Comms National Award your business receives a unique endorsement that will enhance the way not only customers, but staff, industry peers and potentially investors and buyers view your business – in our experience perception has a direct and tangible impact on business value. We wish all the entrants the very best of luck with their submissions."

Distribution Category

Paul Taylor

Sales Director

Voiceflex



"Voiceflex is delighted to be sponsoring the Distribution Category at the Comms National Awards, the event has grown in stature over the years and is firmly established as the go to event within the industry. Voiceflex is all about the channel, we are one hundred percent channel focused, if you haven't looked at our applications in a while, it's worth a call. Voiceflex is leading the market with simple but effective WebRTC applications such as click to call and click to call me."

Business Innovation Category

Justin Blaine

Channel Sales Manager

NTA



"NTA are once again very proud to be involved with the Comms National Awards 2019 and this year we are delighted to be sponsoring the Business Innovation Category.

"Having been a winner in 2018 for The Best Hosted Platform, we are fully aware of what the awards mean and how they can elevate your business within a busy and crowded market place!

"We would like to wish all finalists in whatever category they are in, the very best of luck and we look forward to a glitzy evening amongst our like-minded industry peers!"

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Shaun Bodsworth

Managing Director

Inform Billing



"The Comms National Awards are the industry's most prestigious and hotly contested awards, recognising excellence across the ICT channel. After experiencing the tremendous impact these coveted awards have for the winners – much greater and further reaching than we could have imagined – we are proud to once again be supporting the event as a hospitality sponsor.

On behalf of Inform Billing, I would like to wish all entrants the very best of luck and we will see everyone on what will be an extremely fun and enjoyable night!"

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Maddox on core values

Amid the hullabaloo of wall-to-wall digitalisation, Eurolink Connect Managing Director Claire Maddox proves that deep convictions about fundamental business values still count most.

Becoming an ISP in 2009 changed the face and fortunes of Eurolink Connect overnight. But to create growth from grand projects like this takes more than strategy and ambition, it takes supply-side customer care, which Maddox displays in spades. "Having been in operations before I moved into the telecoms sector I'd been on the receiving end of poor comms advice and had a real understanding of what businesses are looking for," she stated. "Being able to view things from the customer's point of view has always been the way I've operated, and over time I've built up my technical knowledge to match my customer understanding."

Eurolink Connect was established in 1999 as Eurolink Telecom, providing companies with cheaper telephone minutes. "The business model was fantastic and straightforward with no stock and a simple concept delivering good margins," added Maddox. "As the industry evolved so did Eurolink and we became an early adopter of WLR and mobile before setting up a recurring revenue model with the addition of telephone systems being the icing on the cake. This prepared us for the changing market as more

and more businesses move to the concept of opex."

These days Eurolink Connect provides telecoms, connectivity, networking, IT and mobile solutions. All of these product categories are critical and build on the firm's pivotal evolution as an ISP in 2009. "It was a game changing year," said Maddox. "Being experts in connectivity naturally moved us into the networking space where we now support customers within their local area network as well as the WAN. We have been able to develop products including our ISP in a Box for MDUs.

"As an ISP we can get to the root causes of customer issues without having to wait for third party suppliers. We are positioned alongside brands such as Virgin, BT and Vodafone at industry development meetings. With this investment embedded in the business we are now able to develop specific solutions for our customers with safe Internet access and fully managed SD-WAN."

Eurolink Connect has operated in the retirement sector for over 13 years and its evolving ISP in a Box solution delivers safe connectivity to residents. This particular market is full of promise. "We have a massive



Claire Maddox

We earn respect whether we are male or female, and it is encouraging to see so many young women in the industry

growth opportunity with this product which allows us to fill the gaps where FTtx roll outs to remote sites fails," commented Maddox. "We are now specialists in the care and retirement sectors, where we have designed offerings through our ISP status for residents as well as the main business."

Organic growth

Eurolink Connect's growth is organic, and through referred business the company generates a steady five to seven per cent increase in revenue year-on-year. Staffing levels have increased by 25 per cent in the past two years, mainly because the company has brought outsourced services in-house to complement its offerings around IT and security. According to Maddox, Eurolink Connect was one of the first businesses in the country to achieve the

ISO27001: 2013 Certificate. "We take security and cyber risk very seriously and the ISO accreditation has helped our team to understand and mitigate the risks, and to ensure that we pass annual cyber penetration tests with flying colours," added Maddox. "Our culture is shaped around data security, enabling us to support our customers with the same best practices."

With the transition to all IP, Maddox expects to see significant changes in the supply chain as WLR3 is withdrawn, and Eurolink Connect provides its customers with more products utilising data and mobile networks. "The move to mobile working is another major influencing factor, as well as cybersecurity," added Maddox. "We have spent much of our R&D in these areas creating

solutions. We believe the modern workplace will be mobile and that users will be reliant on the one device that they can connect with their business, anywhere in the world. We are therefore aligning our business so that our portfolio of products can provide choice and flexibility, particularly as we see vast differences between the generations and how they choose to consume technology. It is important we can support it all."

For Eurolink Connect, IoT will be another key technology together with 5G and full fibre. "Many customers are embracing new technology unaware of the cyber and privacy risks," added Maddox. "So our connectivity model is very much about security and developing our team through education. We provide an important service and if our staff understand the issues and enjoy what they are doing they see opportunities to help customers and build business. I've been instrumental in seeing young people flourish which is an area I love."

Recognition follows effort, commitment and results, and Maddox, who is a woman of strong will, has always stood in good stead. "It's not easy operating in what has been viewed as a 'man's world', but it is all about being professional and demonstrating that you deserve to be there," she added. "I have always been strong willed and embraced opportunities. We earn respect whether we are male or female and it is encouraging to see so many young women entering the industry. There is a place for anyone who wants to be taken seriously."



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Times a-changing in UC

An uplift in the fortunes of UCaaS providers could ultimately come from a rising group of newcomers to the world of work. What resellers really need now is a strategy...

The UC market at large now faces a new personality which could hardly be more different from the familiar user profile. Although wildly dissimilar, they are tipped by Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director Voiceflex, as the driving force behind a developing UCaaS market upsurge. "Millennials are the primary drivers of UCaaS adoption," stated Taylor. "Businesses will need to adapt their communication strategies because in 2025, 75 per cent of the working population will be millennials. Their communication methods are different and they want what they have in their personal life in their business life."

As millennials emerge and coagulate as a force of change, any forestalling of UCaaS and its associated technologies will be swept aside, believes Taylor,

especially in light of what's possible on the horizon. "WebRTC promises a new age of possibilities," he stated. "Furthermore, APIs with the likes of Zapier providing middleware is changing the way we propose communication platforms. AI will also have an impact: 20 per cent of all web surfing is voice activated. The attraction of UCaaS is real business applications and API integration into the application which drives a business both in-house and customer facing."

Embedding voice, messaging, video and authentication capabilities into applications through APIs is a key technology in terms of UCaaS, believes Taylor. "We took on Circuit OpenScape Cloud for this reason," he stated. "In most cases we hardly cover voice, it's a given. On looking at screen time on most peoples'



Paul Taylor

Millennials are the primary drivers of UCaaS adoption

mobiles, voice will be in there but mixed in with messaging. We have picked up deals from resellers who have had quotes on the table for months with no clear driver for the customer to change. Now, APIs and AI are a driver for change. But education is key."

According to Centile UK Director Justin Hamilton Martin there is only one solution to the comms challenges faced by many verticals – and that's UCaaS. "Consider a car dealership, for instance, where salespeople want to communicate seamlessly between the showroom, the car lot and out on the road," he stated. "UCaaS is about removing traditional silos and integrating conferencing, collaboration, mobile and fixed, remote and office together into a single UC,

productivity and reporting experience. It is more important to realise that UCaaS is really about types of users and use cases. UCaaS is liberating organisations from the confines of traditional technology."

Vital statistics

The UCaaS market is registering an annual growth rate of 29 per cent, according to research house Synergy. The statistics clearly indicate a market winner. But the overriding issue is how channel ICT resellers gear up to meet the predicted demand. "The key to UCaaS platform success is the backend, having APIs and connectors that avoid proprietary silos," observed Hamilton Martin. "APIs are an integral part of the future of comms. However, simple APIs are not a realistic path for a lot of resellers,

compared to connectors which take away the need for programming skills and still allow customers to join up different platforms. Resellers by definition prefer to focus on sales and simplified solutions, versus technology creation."

In today's market, communications must boil down to the individual inside an organisation and there must be options to switch on or off as appropriate. Putting users in control is a big part of UCaaS, while still giving organisations the enterprise control they require. "The way to do this is by having service plans that are designed around the user, not the platform," said Hamilton Martin. "UCaaS does this well. The winning strategy is integration with best of breed technologies, while embracing the need to connect into local or cloud technologies, such as CRM systems and networks. The most flexible approach is the one that will win."

UCaaS proponents are confident that it will become the ultimate choice for most organisations, but right now it is important to acknowledge that some are not ready to embrace the shift to digital, even as the ISDN switch-off looms. "It is so important that the industry – vendors, service providers and resellers – work together to educate customers about why it's time to move to UCaaS," urged Hamilton Martin. ■



Justin Hamilton Martin

The most flexible approach is the one that will win

Stand out from the crowd with a bespoke solution from Windsor Telecom

What makes you different? It's a question that we don't often ponder unless it's posed to us. We can easily pick out what makes other people and companies' stand out from the crowd but when it comes to questioning how we operate, how we look or what we do – it's difficult to quantify what is different about us compared to others.

When running a business, we need to look at what makes us different in comparison to not just others but to the competition. Different messaging, target market, goals, products - the list is truly endless, but in the eyes of who you want to attract, what makes you different?

We're not talking about your ideal customer, the one you envision you're selling your products to but the individual ones you're talking to on a daily basis. As individuals, why are they coming to you? What do they want? How do they think you stand out?

Whether it's life or in business, what stands out is unique personal traits or personalisation.

When it comes to business, the ideal way of capturing and retaining a customer's loyalty is by offering them a tailor-made, customer-specific package that no other customer has. If every customer had their own unique product, customised to their specific needs in order to make their lives easier, there would be no need for them to go anywhere else. A bespoke solution doesn't just give the customer the exact specifications that they need, it gives them exactly what they want. A tailor-made, customer-focused product or service doesn't just scratch an itch, tick a box or fulfil

an objective; for the customer, it makes them feel special and that's a feeling you want every customer to have.

At Windsor Telecom, we've been working hard in product development to ensure that whatever the requirement, we're able to help with exactly what your customers need, not just now but for the future as well.

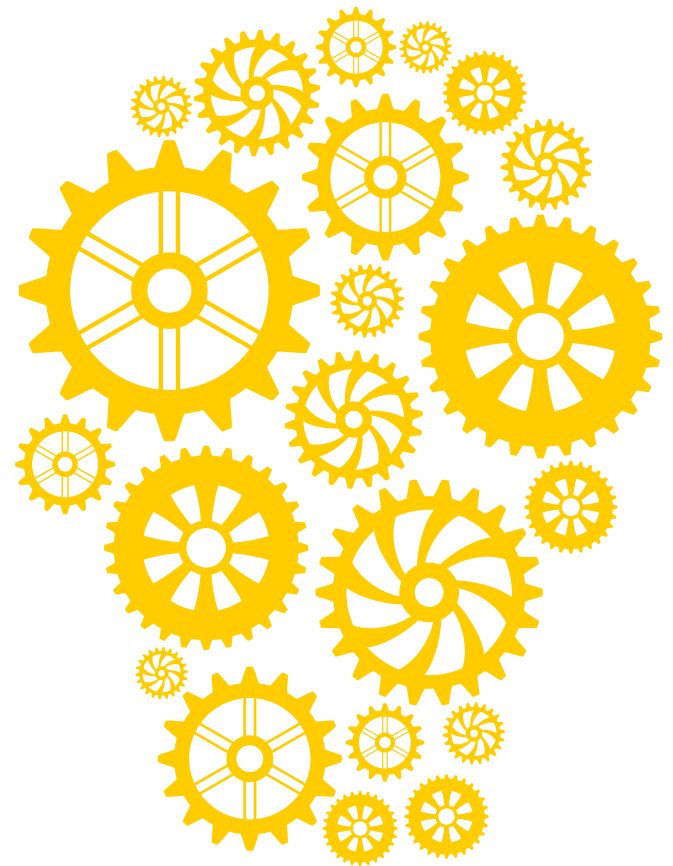
In recent months we've been working closely with a charity who had an extremely specific requirement. As most of their agents (employees and volunteers) work from home, they required a bespoke inbound telephony system that allowed their agents to log in to receive calls without it impacting their normal day.

After understanding their specific requirements, we got to work, creating a bespoke system with two phone numbers including a highly memorable 03 one, perfect for charities. Each individual agent of the charity simply called into the other 03 number which logged them into the system from home giving access to their own individual voicemail inbox and automatically added their home number to the divert list for the main number. To end their shift, they just called the login number a second time to sign out. The way the system operated didn't just mean that it was a specific

employee check in/check out system, as after signing in, calls were then able to be automatically routed through to the employees of the charity who were ready and available, without any manual intervention. Just one call and the charity's employees were signed in and able to access their individual voicemails and take calls, all from their own home.

It's a system that was specific to the way the charity wanted to work, which fit into their business needs. An off-the-shelf product could have covered some of their requirements but it wouldn't have left them completely satisfied and could potentially have left part of the process down to human error. One click of a button missed here or there on a standard system could have sent calls to the wrong number and meant hundreds of missed calls. Our bespoke telephone solution was able to not just be tailored to their requirements but also automate the process, eliminating any chance of error.

For this charity, what makes them different to their agents is the ability to offer a flexible work environment without technical issues hampering progress. In turn, this creates a harmonic environment for people to get in touch with them, allowing them to focus on the day-to-day running of the charity rather than being



“When it comes to business, the ideal way of capturing and retaining a customer's loyalty is by offering them a tailor-made, customer-specific package that no other customer has.”

bogged down by technical limitations or non-automated services. It all just works. Which, at the end of the day is what everyone wants.

What makes Windsor Telecom stand out from the crowd? Like our bespoke products, it's all about the personal touch. Our service and ability to tailor our products to what our partners need, is what makes us unique, as well as the fact that we've been providing a

consistently high-level of service for over twenty years. Our longevity to deliver the best in the industry to our partners knows no bounds. We provide a platform for our partners to stand out from the crowd with bespoke solutions, tailored to what your customers want. Don't provide the product or service that they need, get your customers what they really want. With Windsor Telecom, you can help your customers to feel special. ■

Opportunities in UCaaS

So far, UCaaS has proved slow in unlocking the communication riches of the digital age for the channel, but according to Gamma's Head of UCaaS and Mid-Market Sales Paul Gibbs the time for an upsurge is now and SMEs are prime targets.

There is no denying the strong appeal of UCaaS yet market penetration remains relatively low. The big question is from where will a new era of understanding and demand herald? "The SME space is ripe for UCaaS adoption, with only 10 per cent having embraced the technology as of 2017," stated Gibbs. "For the channel this is the sweet spot. SME workforces are becoming increasingly more remote, they need to be able to respond to their customers quickly and they can't afford a team of people to run their IT systems. SMEs are looking to grow their business and compete with mid-market and large enterprise organisations, and UC is vital in helping them achieve this."

That said, there is also an opportunity to target more established mid-market organisations with a UCaaS proposition. "As the workplace has shifted mid-market businesses are burdened by legacy technology and feel a large proportion of their workforce is not ready for an overhaul in their business communications," noted Gibbs. "However, with the

millennial generation coming through and a need to boost overall business productivity, it's clear a UC strategy is needed. For channel partners it's about adopting a more consultative approach when selling to a mid-market business, and really understanding the challenges throughout the organisation and proposing a tailored solution specific to the customer's requirements."

Maturing market

As the UC market matures and the industry moves away from legacy technology and clunky solutions with poor integration, the market has at last started to experience the benefits that have long been promised from UC, believes Gibbs. "Today, the cloud is better than ever and the primary business drivers for UCaaS adoption – productivity and opex savings – can be realised," he said.

"Businesses want to boost efficiency and support the need for collaboration in a world where employees are constantly on the move and want to work from wherever they are located. We also have a new generation of employees coming through, who expect



Paul Gibbs

The market has at last started to see the benefits that have long been promised by UC

their technology to be fast, accessible and on-demand."

Prospects should be spellbound by the sheer weight of UCaaS benefits, including an increase in productivity while reducing costs, says Gibbs. "This is what every business strives for," he noted. "Resellers should seek out prospects who are using legacy technology, are unaware of the newer technology available to them or are trying to grow their business and need a solution to support expansion."

Industry stats suggest that at the very least employees utilising UC are 13 per

cent more efficient. "For example, a remote worker may have to visit the office for on-site meetings," stated Gibbs. "Typically, this would entail setting an early alarm, unproductive travel time, getting home late and incurring a business expense.

"With UC, it is the polar opposite. UC enables the employee to be online earlier and maximise their working time, while incurring minimal costs to themselves and the business – not to mention the improved work-life balance. UC isn't always an effective replacement for every meeting, but where possible businesses are able to keep their employees

happy and productive, while immediately reducing their costs and carbon footprint."

It goes without saying therefore that businesses working in an agile way with cross functional teams, or are project focused, will be using (or will want to use) team collaboration tools. "Integrating these tools tightly into their telephony and conferencing experience will help further drive efficiencies and productivity," said Gibbs. "The same business may also have teams solely focused on customers and the customer experience, where contact centre functionality will be at the fore, with less or little focus on team collaboration. Again, tight integration will help enhance performance and operational effectiveness."

Many UC opportunities reside in a reseller's own back yard, and Gibbs emphasised that existing customer bases are rich seams of new business. "The cost to acquire a new customer is far greater than that of looking after the existing base," he stated. "When you've already done the hard miles, don't lose sight of the benefits you can gain by continually engaging with your customers."

Gamma encourages partners to look closer to home via UC webinars, workshops and seminars. "Sometimes the day-to-day activities can get in the way of seeing the real opportunity," said Gibbs. "Our partner sessions take away the heavy lifting, enabling partners to focus on what really matters to them – selling UC solutions that accelerate the total contract value, and more often than not the total contract term." ■

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TalkTalk's data insights

big stir in cutting churn

Question. How can one line of business strategy dramatically improve a number of KPIs across most businesses including churn? And how does the same strategy, based on the same principle, play out in driving fibre connectivity sales? The answer is clear to see in TalkTalk's quest for actionable insights.

TalkTalk's Connectivity Matters Summit, staged on May 14th at the Ministry of Sound in London (see the June issue of Comms Dealer for Part 1 of this two part report), showed further proof that data collection and analysis is the clear answer to a number of important network and business challenges. The art lies in how you pull it off, and TalkTalk has become a master of this art. In getting to grips with the nitty gritty of granular data TalkTalk has shown an elite pragmatism that offers partners an opportunity to establish a new relationship with customers, through, among other paradigms, the improvement of critical KPIs. In their session, TalkTalk Chief Networks Officer Phil Haslam and TalkTalk Business Head of Insights Nick Hill illustrated that there is no bar to the benefits of data analysis given enough insight and strategy, which TalkTalk has generated in abundance.

"Insightful data sets help customers to better understand their connectivity," said Haslam. "The answer is in joining up the data and making data driven decisions to, for example, address underlying connectivity issues or help customers understand their usage patterns and behaviour. We make sense of the data we gather through our Service Index, in which silos of information that sit across our network are pieced together, all the way from the premises to deep into the core. We can analyse this data in the context of individual customers."

TalkTalk has circa 13.5 billion data points that it processes every day, all of which form part of its Service Index.

"We aggregate that data and use it in real-time to help diagnose and resolve connectivity issues quicker," added Haslam. "We've started to use this in a much more real-time way to spot whether we have issues in street cabinets, for example, or other real-time incidents that

need jumping on. This way we are able to proactively act on that data and instigate service improvements quicker."

By analysing telemetry data and diagnostic information to gain an understanding of the end-to-end connectivity and the usage patterns that send network demand soaring, and by joining up those dots and explaining it in the concept of service domains to agents, TalkTalk has become far more accurate when diagnosing broadband faults and more focused when explaining to customers how usage can outstrip copper supply. "We have a more targeted approach to customers that would benefit from fibre connectivity," added Haslam.

Tactical advantage

In other words, to leverage data is a tactical victory. It turns what might have remained invisible and anonymous into a recognised advantage that changes the rules of the game on a number of levels. Not surprisingly, from the moment TalkTalk decided to make use of its data, unconditional effort has been heaved into moving the strategy forward. This endeavour was quickly met by a thundering result for the business. So much so that its consumer operation has witnessed a 40 per cent reduction in complaints and experienced many more efficient outcomes from Openreach engineer visits because the most qualified engineer for the job in hand is pinpointed and dispatched. "Ingesting Openreach's service layer data into our Service Index helps us to be more accurate in terms of engineer dispatch," noted Haslam. "Escalations are down, as are customer contacts."

TalkTalk's Service Index is essentially an expression of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with 'service domains'. "These domains are simple and cover, for example, speed

Data is analysed through our Service Index, in which silos of information that sit across our network are pieced together

boost KPIs and cause a



Phil Haslam

over usage," explained Haslam. "Usage may outstrip the supply capability of the copper network, so we use data to help customers understand that the underlying connectivity is as good as it will get, and encourage them to move up the food chain in terms of connectivity types. This is an important part of the Service Index – as is line stability. We use data to make calculations on the variability of speed, and dispatch the most appropriate engineer in terms of managing the line. Another expression of service domain is the network, all the way from the exchange to the core. We measure a multitude of technical parameters to discover any underlying issues."

Key correlations

The essence of this approach is to be all-encompassing in every sense, because there is no such thing as 'insight lite'. "We have put our 13.5 billion-plus data points onto the Microsoft Azure platform where it is aggregated, scored and turned into the Service Index," added Haslam. "We have started to experiment with the model and make correlations, such as the metrics around churn. The next iteration of the Service Index will go beyond broadband connectivity to the home environment and analyse Wi-Fi performance and

usage. All of this information will help customers to understand where the connectivity challenges lie."

Churn is perhaps one of the greatest curses in comms. It blights most, if not all ICT providers at varying levels, and TalkTalk is pressing ahead with a campaign to identify the root causes of churn among partner organisations and promote remedial action. The company is uniquely qualified for the task having shrunk its own churn significantly. "TalkTalk has reduced churn by 0.3 per cent, which means we are saving circa £200,000 revenue a month," commented Hill. "This shows what we can do with partners to help them improve their churn rate."

To underline the point Hill offered insights into how TalkTalk Business is working with partners and their customers to help them improve their business, with a strong emphasis on churn. "We all invest time and money into acquiring customers and often there is a level of sophistication associated with that process," he said. "But it is evident that little sophistication is applied to keeping and saving customers."

He noted that the monthly churn from TalkTalk Business's top 20 partners ranges between > **Continued on page 38**

We have started to experiment with the model and make correlations, such as the metrics around churn



Nick Hill

Continued from page 37

one and four per cent. “There is an opportunity to improve these performance statistics,” stated Hill. “Every partner has data that could unpick their churn story and give them an answer. So we build a churn model based on raw data, statistics and objectivity, and apply true data analysis that provides real results. We gather all of the data and variables that are relevant to a partner’s customer base, and look at the characteristics of customers before applying a set of data modules that enable us to score them. This brings an ordered structure to the base that highlights those with a high propensity to churn. Through these insights we understand why certain customers might leave and target them accordingly to resolve issues and improve performance.”

In seeking to address the myriad of questions residing in data lakes – the answers – like reflections, stare us in the face. The trick is in recognising what’s in front of us and then making a splash. Furthermore, that data analysis should be so beneficial is a strong indication on the critical role of ‘insights’ in the channel. To ignore the direction of flow is to surely invite weakness. So Hill strongly reiterated that the data analysis debate has moved on to give partners fresh opportunities to improve their KPIs, reduce churn and drive more business opportunities. Hence the rising tempo of TalkTalk’s advancing Big Data strategy, being adopted by the company as a springboard for migrating customers to fibre.

“We can accelerate fibre business through the Service Index,” added Hill. “Slow speed and high usage customers are prime targets for an upgrade to a fibre product. We amalgamate all of the relevant data and put it into the hands of operational teams so they can talk to customers with confidence and certainty in a language that users understand, enabling them to take the right action. In terms of email marketing, a one or two per cent conversion rate from a campaign is a result. We are getting multiples of that, registering between seven per cent up to 19 per cent conversions. With personalised data targeted at the right people, the KPIs you want to achieve can be improved by using analysis to move the right people to fibre.”

Automating open high-tech robotics

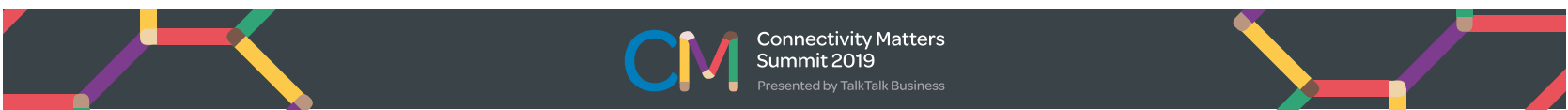
The many benefits of automation and robotics are proving crucial in the evolution of TalkTalk Business’s self-operating network, the optimisation of customer service and in making it easy for partners to do business with the company, says COO Dan Richardson.

TalkTalk developed a new engagement framework and accelerated a 50 per cent project success rate to 98.5 per cent, representing a fantastic breakthrough based on our work in 2017

TalkTalk’s deployment of automation technology arises from its obsession with service efficiency and its addiction to network evolution. It is TalkTalk’s vision of a self-driving network that has already yielded impressive results, even though it was just three years ago that the company embarked on its network automation project, aided by research and advisory firm ISG. When TalkTalk’s RPA journey began in 2016 much time was spent on assessing vendor selection, working out how the project should be structured and how teams would operate within the programme. “We also thought hard about engagement models,” stated Richardson. “In 2017 we tried a number of approaches, some went well, others didn’t. This was a year for learning, developing and understanding the model. Working with robotics day-to-day is a case of fail fast and learn faster. In 2018 we refreshed the framework and took an agile modular approach, breaking down business cases into clearly defined deployments.”

Engagement framework

Removed from their context these categories are remodelled as the building blocks of true business transformation. “We found success in reducing particularly big and complex end-to-end journeys into their component parts, and then applying robotics to each of those elements,” stated Richardson. “In doing so we developed a new engagement framework and accelerated a 50 per cent project success rate to 98.5 per cent, representing a fantastic breakthrough based on our work in 2017. Building on that success, this year we applied more tactical applications and we’ve



Operational excellence with



Dan Richardson

now got faster at identifying opportunities, faster at deploying the team and faster at delivering benefits.”

The entire essence of RPA is operational efficiency, and so far TalkTalk has saved over 40,000 work hours. It is near unbelievable that myths around robotics and automation persist despite crucial time savings like these. “The topic of automation is lively in the press, there are lots of headlines but this is not a technology looking for a solution,” stated Richardson. “In terms of volumetrics, for example, we handle hundreds of thousands of Openreach updates through robots and have picked up over 5,000 engineer appointments.

“We also have volumetrics in real-time ticket management. It’s all about high speed processing. We are now looking at 24/7 data and broadband faults and pick up all tickets for first touch volume

checks through robotics. We now automate service tests, all conducted through robotics. We have applied some precise deployments around EFM, a complex product, with robotics at work across the whole of that piece. Internally we have become more efficient in terms of team performance, and we focus more on adding value and improving service.”

RPA exerts a great and uniquely positive influence on high volume repeatable processes. According to Richardson, it’s not about the big end-to-end picture, but breaking things down into modules and applying robotics to defined sets of processes to deliver benefits quickly, as part of a clear business logic. “It’s not just about strategic implementations, robotics can also solve tactical problems in an agile way,” he said. “Looking beyond RPA, cognitive automation and AI will deliver even greater value.” ■

TalkTalk accelerates self-driving network build – page 40

We found success in reducing big and complex end-to-end journeys into their component parts

TalkTalk accelerates build self-driving network

TalkTalk's ongoing network evolution is remarkable not just for the granularity and depth of its recalibration, but also for the sheer scale of the project.

Networks are now under intense pressure to perform at their optimal level. As such they require attention almost beyond imagination. The focus and care TalkTalk has applied to its own network evolution is reflected in its status as the largest UK deployer of both JDSU test solutions and Juniper's NorthStar platform, which speaks volumes, and is the best indicator of TalkTalk's advance down the road to network supremacy. Following a five year period of collaboration with Juniper, TalkTalk has now migrated onto its next generation edge capability, setting the stage for further improvements. In their Connectivity Matters Summit session, TalkTalk CTO Gary Steen and Juniper's EMEA Business Development Director Colin Evans set the scene for TalkTalk's self-driving network.

In deploying NorthStar, TalkTalk has gained a model of its network, all of the devices and sites and the interconnects between those sites. It also has a complete model of every single traffic flow across the entire infrastructure. Juniper's primary task is to ensure that traffic flows are steered across the network in the most effective and efficient manner, making sure capacity is used most effectively. "We've seen customers recover up to 20 or 30 per cent of their network capacity without adding additional equipment," stated Evans. "This can only be achieved with a centralised tool that can see the whole network and traffic flows."

Keeping ahead of demand

TalkTalk has 80,000 pieces of equipment across its network and 3,300 points of presence in the UK. Not surprisingly, the extent of the network may pose a challenge to its efficient running, especially in the face of increasing demands. "We see 30 per cent year-on-year data growth across the network, and rising," said Steen. "Putting capacity through those 3,300 points of presence within cost boundaries is a challenge. How we deliver the terabits across our network at zero congestion is another big question we are answering."

The key to understanding network dynamics is that from the edge to the core it is telemetry that counts most. "Real-time telemetry is the basis of our Service Index, which contains five metrics of how we drive the customer experience based on a host of information," added Steen. "Rather than just assess 3,300 exchanges in terms of red or green, we brought back all of the data telemetry and deployed JDSU test beds into the network at all exchanges. They provide real-time performance characteristics and its algorithms are split out every day by hour so we can identify the worst performing exchanges. These exchanges may show green, they are not broken,



Gary Steen

The application of analytics and Machine Learning, with an AI approach, will be used in more integrated and adaptive techniques to predict future events

d out of next generation

but for an underlying reason their key characteristics may mark them out as the worst performers.”

All attempts to drive TalkTalk's network to greater efficiency have met with success, and it was no different when pinpointing those areas that once resided under the radar screen, such as the true measure of DNS response times. “Two years ago we were circa fourth or fifth in DNS performance,” noted Steen. “We hadn't investigated this metric closely because the network was working and processing transactions. So we monitored our DNS capability right to the edge of the network using SDN and immediately delivered performance improvements. We are now number one in delivering DNS performance from a UK perspective, having moved from sub five or six milliseconds to below three milliseconds on average.”

Removing complexity

With its focus on improving the network TalkTalk has underlined the dominant influence of automation and real-time telemetry in determining how a modern network should function, and done so with bravura and a great sense of responsibility to customers. In all of this its partnership with Juniper is key. “IP is complex, and Juniper is an automation tool designed to remove and automate complexity and ensure peak performance in capacity, response times, resilience, cost and the customer experience,” stated Evans. “By deploying streaming telemetry in the network we collect massive amounts of data, monitor the packets and look at CPU usage on all routers to assess the health of those devices. We have hundreds of thousands, potentially millions of tunnels that show all of the connectivity over the physical infrastructure. We also collect information around the various protocols.”

Juniper assesses the physical and logical connectivity over the top to ensure there is no single point of failure and that paths are diversely steered. NorthStar also has an offline planning realm that enables ‘what if’ scenarios, and can be used to restore traffic quickly following the event of a failure in a link or a node, for example. Such events are becoming synonymous with self-resolution. “We are on a journey of automation with NorthStar, moving towards Machine Learning,” added Evans. “There was a time when we pulled information from the device – the device now fires data at very high speed and high volume towards the monitoring collector infrastructure. We collect this streaming telemetry, analyse and clean the data, and normalise it where things don't look quite right.

“We also correlate event data, look for anomalies and root causes and apply Machine Learning, for example, to draw conclusions in terms of what might be the future behaviour. If we see a particular signature of a type of network failure, that moves us from a reactive to a proactive response, all driven by



Colin Evans

predictions. Any number of proactive actions can be taken, so multi-level Machine Learning event correlation techniques are important. We need to predict what's going to happen and use the human as back-up.”

Juniper intends to invest further and add new intelligent capabilities such as ‘elf bots’ that enable robotic techniques to assess network events and the health of the infrastructure. Taking this further, Juniper is moving to a far more cognitive, machine and event driven model in which telemetry becomes all encompassing, removing human intervention where possible. “We provide complex algorithms with bots which do automated decision making,” added Evans. “In this model the application of analytics and Machine Learning, with an AI approach, will be used in more integrated and adaptive techniques to predict future events.”

TalkTalk has been one of the comms sector's most exciting operators, and its evolution displays a tightening grip on the network end-to-end, even taking on the strategic challenge of the on-premise environment. “We obsess about the network, the last mile and exchanges,” stated Steen. “But to navigate the premise environment we work with Assia's CloudCheck Wi-Fi management solution which sits on the firmware of the router and collects telemetry data. It also optimises the performance and we have witnessed an 80 per cent rise in throughput from increased capacity. This is early days for us, but we are looking at giving resellers this capability.”

We see 30 per cent year-on-year data growth across the network, and rising



Teacher: A master in IT

MSPs are most effective when deploying integrated Teams and telephony supported by AI and robotics, according to T-Tech Managing Director Daniel Teacher.

Teacher's background speaks volumes on T-Tech's outlook and trail blazing pedigree. Having always been fascinated by emerging technologies in youthhood Teacher secured a job with Sony as an engineer prior to undertaking a university degree in IT and finance. Next came a four year stint at Deloitte as a consultant on large and important transformation projects, gaining enterprise skills and experience in setting goals to modernise technology systems for growing SMEs.

Teacher established London headquartered T-Tech in 2010, initially as a service provider to SMEs. "The vision wasn't just to be any service provider, but to really push the boundaries, challenge the status quo and bring enterprise skills into the SME space," he said. "In my previous role at Deloitte I developed relationships with lots of owner managed businesses and felt they never got the service they needed. A common pain would be that IT and communications was poor, constantly impacting on productivity. This, I thought, was something I could provide a solution for as a trusted partner who can advise and input the right technologies. So I developed T-Tech into an IT service

provider and a consultancy for businesses looking to be strategic about their IT."

To create a one-stop MSP for SMEs and bolster its Microsoft Teams proposition via the addition of telephony T-Tech acquired Suffolk-based Ladybird Communications in December last year. Ladybird operates as a standalone division within T-Tech Group and its Head of Telecoms Melvyn Bird had previously worked on projects with Teacher for a number of years. The acquisition came to fruition last month with T-Tech's integration of hosted UC and Microsoft Teams, delivering call functionality without the need for additional hardware or equipment.

"In launching Teams we drew a lot of attention to our development capabilities," stated Teacher. "We acquired Ladybird mainly to enable our customers to source a full Microsoft Teams solution. Although Ladybird continues to operate as a standalone division we are excited about this merger and how we can combine our resources."

T-Tech is a Microsoft Gold partner and currently employs circa 50 people. Teacher expects to hit the £10 million revenue milestone within the coming years by ramping up T-Tech's work in the SME



Daniel Teacher

Robotics is the first piece of software I have seen that has a true business case

space with a strong emphasis on the accountancy sector. "A number of our customers are accountancy and financial firms, but we also operate within the education and charity space too," added Teacher. "Our target market focuses on working with the top 100 accountants in the UK. As part of this we have developed deep industry knowledge, insight and specific industry solutions, and we expect to work with more organisations in this sector in the future."

Solutions that count

For accountancy firms, T-Tech's in-house IT team has created tailored solutions that deliver effective practice management based on intelligence, automation, CRM, MTD, support, Office 365 and cloud hosting, iManage and Azure, digital signing and electronic LOE. "The accountancy market is on the cusp of

a new era with ever more regulation and technological disruption," explained Teacher. "Partners and practice managers need to adapt to meet the new demands from customers and staff, or risk losing their edge. We work closely with partners to help them drive their practices forward, utilising technology and how it can transform their practice, delivering efficiency, increased knowledge and better decision making from concise reporting, and a more engaged workforce."

Teacher's expansion plans also include conveying enterprise management consultancy and enterprise technology solutions into the SME market, and bringing new technologies to customers like robotics and Teams with telephony. "We were among the first to market the virtual workforce, and we intend to fully develop

this function over the next few years," he added.

Teacher refers to T-Tech's partnership with Microsoft as a 'significant relationship at all levels'. "We are fully aligned to its strategy, and with Teams you can expect true convergence of IT and telecoms into one solution," he noted. "Our biggest opportunity resides in robotics, AI and Teams. Lots of SMEs struggle to get efficiencies. Robotics, for example, is the first piece of software I have seen that has a true business case.

"As with Microsoft Teams, this is a big play for us and will be a true challenger to all markets. Home and mobile working is also crucial. The modern workplace with agile and flexible working is something we and all businesses should be striving towards. We are energetic advocates of this modern way of working because people don't realise that it's what they need. Technology is transforming the workplace, and this is what we want to help our customers to achieve." ■



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Billing with compliance

As at all times when Ofcom regulation that impacts CPs comes into light, the channel undergoes a learning project to evaluate and understand the implications of fresh policies. Right now, it's time to move forward with new mobile switching regs and consider how they fit into the bigger regulatory picture from a billing perspective.



Samantha Denny

From July 1st mobile users will be able to switch mobile provider with a free text as new reforms announced by Ofcom in December 2017 come into force. Providers are also banned from making notice-period charges after the switch date. "The text to switch legislation relates to single user accounts, where a request may come into the mobile network operator and then be passed through the supply chain to the reseller," stated Darren Salisbury, Director at Inform Billing. "They must respond to the end user with a PAC and end of contract charges within 48 hours. This has an implication on the data that is held within the reseller's billing platform and how the platform calculates charges at any given point."

Complying with this regulation will present a logistical challenge for CPs who will need to obtain and disseminate the required information within the prescribed timescales, noted Vincent Disneur, Union Street's Head of Sales and Marketing. "The primary

obligation on CPs, generating PAC codes, will require action at a network level," he said. "It will be interesting therefore to see how MNOs and service providers respond to these changes.

"In addition, CPs will be required to supply information about early termination charges and outstanding handset costs. This move seems to complement other new regulation, scheduled for implementation in February 2020, which will require CPs to provide customers with notifications of when minimum contract periods are coming to an end and to supply best tariff information."

Samantha Denny, Service Operations Manager at Aurora, emphasised the level of integration required to ensure compliance with the new legislation. "Customers will need a system that can talk to the networks and get messages back and forth in very short timescales, ensuring that it all links up to the billing so that it's stopped at the right time and it's

Despite the wealth of knowledge and information available at our fingertips, end customers seem more uninformed than ever

clear to the end customer they've received their final invoice," she stated.

On 15th February 2020 Ofcom will introduce the new requirement on CPs to provide End-of-Contract Notifications and Annual Best Tariff Information. Ofcom has stated that under this new regulation, 'Broadband, mobile, home phone and pay TV companies must notify both residential and business customers of when their minimum contract period is coming to an end'. "CPs are also required to provide customers who remain out-of-contract with best tariff information at annual intervals," added Disneur. "There are slightly different requirements for business customers as there are for residential ones. This will allow CPs greater

flexibility to determine what is appropriate for business customers on a case by case basis. Although this does not relate to billing operations specifically, billing software could be well placed to assist CPs in complying with these regulations."

One to watch



According to Denny, the End of Contract Notification that comes into effect early next year will be a 'big one' and cause resellers problems. "The challenges we believe it will cause are as follows," she explained. "Many providers don't have their contract information stored in a single place, so finding out which customers are approaching, or out of their minimum term will be difficult. Communicating to each customer will in most cases be a manual

process which will take a lot of time and effort. And contract renewals are not always an easy process and likely to become more common if these regulations come into effect."

There is no hiding from scrutiny as Ofcom focuses more sharply on improving transparency and reducing costs for the end customer. "In recent years that's been mainly focused on consumers and small businesses, but the regulatory changes coming into effect this year and into next are encompassing businesses of all sizes," added Denny. "Despite the wealth of knowledge and information available at our fingertips, end customers seem more uninformed than ever about what they're being charged for and what their options are to reduce costs or move provider. Ofcom is trying to improve that scenario."

Other regulation recently brought forward via Ofcom is focused on offering protection from fraud or unexpected costs, leading to

Continued on page 46

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A F F I N I T Y

Aurora

Continued from page 44
bill shock, observed Salisbury. "While the principle of much of the legislation is right, it is my belief that the underlying intention of some recent pieces of legislation has been lost because of all encompassing definitions and changes to the Telecommunications Act," he added. "Legislation is proving a challenge, particularly where the channel is not specifically considered and the purpose of the legislation is to control large network providers and provide protection to consumers. We now have a situation where multiple links of the supply chain are forced to invest significant sums in developing solutions which will benefit very few end users."

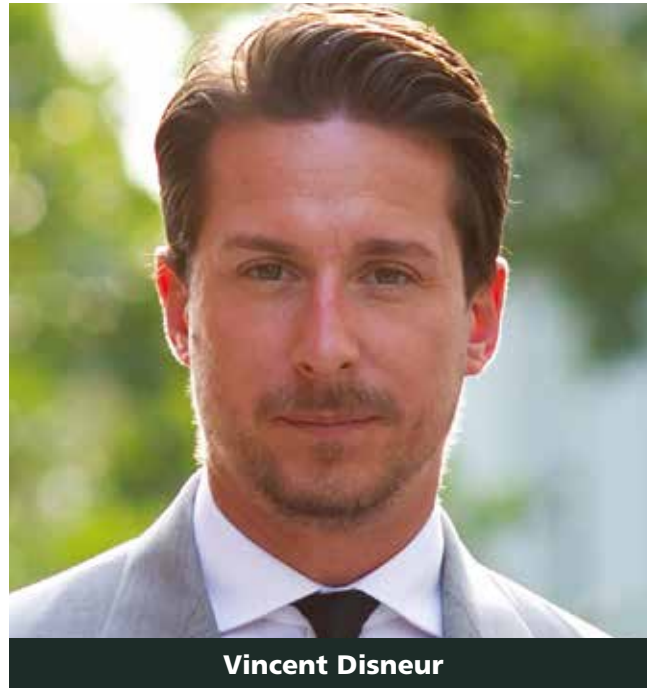
There is another legislation in consultation regarding Bundled Mobile Fees, pointed out Denny. "The proposed legislation is to ensure mobile bundles being sold are fairer, with prices being made more transparent for mobile customers who pay for handsets and airtime within the same contract," she said. "Providers will need to ensure that they are able to break down the costs of the package clearly and be able to inform the customer that the deal is coming to an end depending on the exact legislation Ofcom sets."

There are a number of other consultation processes underway, noted Disneur, including a proposed price cap for calls to 070 'follow-me' number services. "It always makes sense to keep an eye on recent consultations as some of them may require considerable implementation," he added. "Longer-term, with the PSTN switch-off on the horizon, Ofcom has initiated various consultations such as the Future of Telephone Numbers and the Future of Interconnection and Call Termination. With this in mind, it's probable that over

the coming years we will see major changes to area codes, the numbering scheme, a new number database and significant changes to porting and routing. We would recommend that CPs keep these likely changes in mind when planning any medium to long-term commercial strategies."

Some Ofcom legislation lacks all sense of guidance or leadership, believes Salisbury. "New legislation can create confusion as to who it applies to and who is responsible for implementation," he observed. "For example, price caps were recently imposed on Directory Enquiries services applicable to all customers regardless of whether they are consumers or businesses. Price caps were also imposed on Internet calls within the EU, but only for consumers and specifically only those on a 'default' tariff. These are just two examples of several recent pieces of legislation that are inconsistent and lack clarity, making it difficult for those who do not have armies of lawyers to decipher the law makers' intention."

Other examples such as 'mobile bill limits' and 'text



Vincent Disneur

It always makes sense to keep an eye on recent consultations as some of them may require considerable implementation

to switch' involve deep levels of consultation between Ofcom, the relevant fixed or mobile network operators as well as the Government departments responsible for writing the legislation. "The ongoing omission of a channel voice within these

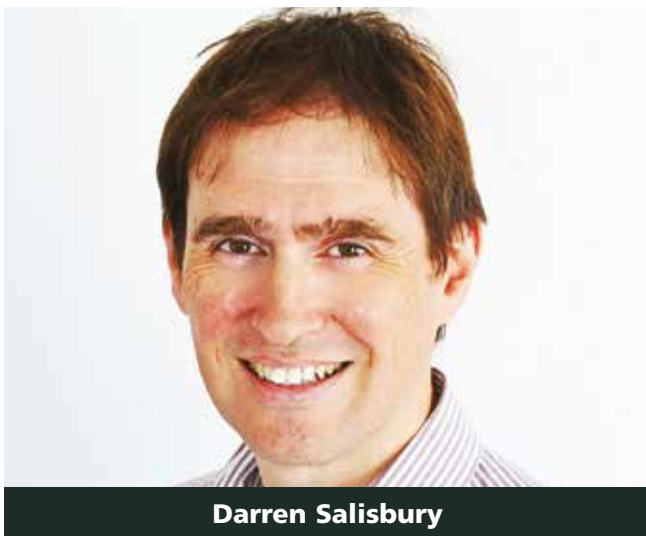
consultations will continue to provide implementation challenges where due consideration has not been given to the impact on the channel," stated Salisbury. "Part of the problem stems from information flow and the lack of anyone taking responsibility to provide the information to resellers, as well as a lack of consideration for the technical involvement required. Education is key and most billing providers can and should play a part. However, the onus should be on networks and aggregator providers to provide a better method of information flow and education on regulatory compliance."

Not surprisingly, in 2016, Union Street appointed a dedicated Standards and Security Officer to monitor and provide advanced warnings of any proposed regulation that could impact the billing process. "Where appropriate we contact CP clients to share our interpretation of regulation and to advise of any corresponding enhancements

we might be making to our software to help them with compliance," stated Disneur. "We provide advice at a general level but always advise that CPs err on the side of caution by conducting their own research and drawing their own conclusions. In the channel there is a great deal of variance from one business to another, meaning that it's rarely possible to provide one-size-fits-all advice on compliance. Ultimately, the regulator itself is the best source for clarification."

Not every piece of regulation and policy derives from the UK's telecoms regulator. In recent years the comms industry has seen the European Parliament's introduction of Roam like at Home and the GDPR, the DCMS's implementation of Mobile Bill Capping, and HMRC's introduction of a reverse VAT mechanism on the sale of wholesale communications services. "Predicting changes from regulators other than Ofcom is more difficult, but by working together with our CP partners we can ensure we are well prepared," added Disneur.

The recent regulations and upcoming regs call for resellers to have a system that seamlessly integrates with their processes from start to finish, allowing for easy communication between them and their customers over a variety of channels. "Resellers with multiple systems to manage different parts of their process, that aren't aware of each other, will struggle to properly manage the new regulations and be compliant for their customers," said Denny. "Resellers need to increase transparency and communication with their customers, be more aware of contracts and billing, and be more responsive and quicker to act than ever before when their customers contact them." ■



Darren Salisbury

The onus should be on networks and aggregators to provide a better method of information flow and education on compliance



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Leasing: Is it still an option



A decade or so ago when resellers sold customers a telecoms system, large or small, it was a simplicity itself to offer a lease package as this eased the CapEx hit for the customer and gave the provider cash upfront to fund continuing business.

These days, customers favouring cloud telephony infrastructures to save upfront costs pay for the services like magazine subscriptions on a monthly basis. Ergo, lease-term finance deals on equipment seem less attractive since customers aren't buying as much hardware or software.

So how do leasing and finance specialists fit into this new 'as a service' world?

Emerging hosted solutions can be complex and the last thing end users want, when it comes to financing them, is added complexity. Simplicity will rule the day. Telecoms and IT providers that offer a 'one stop shop' of bundled packages combining cloud access with hardware devices and end points will have a valuable advantage over their competitors.

Many ICT cloud solutions still require basic hardware and infrastructure to work. Data and applications have to be stored somewhere, and end users still require laptops, IP phones or other devices to access information or make connections over the Internet.

It's almost a given that customers that receive one invoice each month that allocates a proportion of the bill for network/Cloud services, and the other for equipment, will be much happier and much 'stickier'.

The pace of technological change has always challenged companies and their ability to keep up. The evolution of the Cloud is no different — it's going to take some time and it's going to bring some turbulence as new solutions are introduced and companies figure out which solutions are right for them, but as contributors to our Kaleidoscope call round this month concur, leasing is by no means a dead duck in the 'cloudy' waters.



DAN MACKRELL
SHIRE LEASING

HAS LEASING MOVED WITH THE TIMES?

In my experience, particularly in the FinTech space, I have seen significant development. Not only how accessible and automated leasing solutions have become, but also the types of products and services which can now be included within a lease.

HAVE THE LEASING MODELS CHANGED?

Shire Leasing have developed new financial products such as the Technology Rental and Managed Rental agreements. These are ideal for managed services, especially since there's been a growing requirement to fund predominantly soft costs.

CAN YOU LEASE CLOUD TELEPHONY SYSTEMS?

Most upfront costs associated with a hosted solution can be funded on a lease, including perpetual/fixed term licences. So, the customer pays for the solution monthly as they use (as with a subscription), whilst generating immediate revenue, like the on-premise model.

DO LEASE COMPANIES HAVE A FUTURE IN ICT?

Historically, leasing companies have provided finance to businesses so they can move capital expenditure to an operational expense. This fits perfectly with customer demands to consume ICT solutions on a subscription model, so the future is bright!



DAN PROCTER
HENRY HOWARD
FINANCE

HAS LEASING MOVED WITH THE TIMES?

Our industry is very focussed on traditional hard assets; telecoms and other technology assets are a very small proportion in the UK. In general, leasing is a little behind the times because of this, but HHF are now leading the way with FinTech to revolutionise service delivery models.

HAVE THE LEASING MODELS CHANGED?

HHF has changed leasing models to focus on financing the channel partner to assist with their service-based delivery. A hybrid model of vanilla customer leases, revolving credit facilities and structured finance are essential for any channel partner looking for a single automated workflow with their chosen provider.

CAN YOU LEASE CLOUD TELEPHONY SYSTEMS?

HHF will allow margin to be accelerated on subscription-based Cloud systems, but fundamentally the subscriptions build long term value via residual income.

DO LEASE COMPANIES HAVE A FUTURE IN ICT?

The transaction for a 20-user system is now £2,000 as opposed to £20,000 but the exponential increase in deals means that the lease company can spread risk over more customers with smaller exposures. The future is good!



JUSTIN BLAINE
NTA

HAS LEASING MOVED WITH THE TIMES?

Yes, most definitely, as procurement has changed from physical hardware to SaaS and PaaS based licensing and subscription models, lease companies have had to now recognise that there is a value in this and therefore financed it accordingly.

HAVE THE LEASING MODELS CHANGED?

The model hasn't really changed, there is a term, value and then lease rate. What has changed is that they now finance what we used to term as fresh air e.g. licenses which they used to be reluctant to do.

CAN YOU LEASE CLOUD TELEPHONY SYSTEMS?

Cloud telephony systems can now be leased, the benefits include being able to get the money upfront to maintain cash flow or just finance hardware which typically the end customer is happy to pay for over the rental period.

DO LEASE COMPANIES HAVE A FUTURE IN ICT?

I see no reason why lease companies cannot thrive, as more resellers move into the cloud technology in both the IT and Comms sector, they just need to provide leasing on Managed Service contracts, professional services, licensing and hardware.



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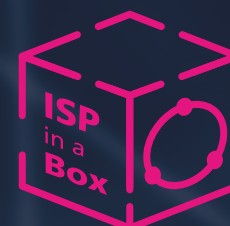
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n in a cloudier landscape?



SIMON MUNDAY
NIMANS

HAS LEASING MOVED WITH THE TIMES?

Leasing continues to evolve and diversify. For example we are using online portals linked directly to the finance companies which is a lot quicker and streamlined. In addition, e-signatures also speed up the process.

HAVE THE LEASING MODELS CHANGED?

The benefits of leasing haven't changed over 20-30 years such as tax advantages and reducing the need for upfront cash outlays. But what has changed is the type of solutions that can now be leased such as software as well as hardware.

CAN YOU LEASE CLOUD TELEPHONY SYSTEMS?

100% software can now be financed as licences become ever more popular. This helps resellers offer the most cost-effective solutions to ultimately win more business.

DO LEASE COMPANIES HAVE A FUTURE IN ICT?

The future of leasing remains bright and it's as popular as ever. Businesses can share the financial pain of investments in many dynamic and appealing ways. Demand continues to grow.



KERRY HOWELLS
TOWER LEASING

HAS LEASING MOVED WITH THE TIMES?

Not all leasing companies are moving with the times, however, we understand the telecoms industry and work closely with our partners to align our finance offering to their business needs

HAVE THE LEASING MODELS CHANGED?

Ours have definitely changed. We now look at the entire telecoms offering and have found ways to provide solutions via a managed service offering and subscription-based finance solutions.

CAN YOU LEASE CLOUD TELEPHONY SYSTEMS?

Yes. There is always a balance to be met with some of a reseller's customer base being on lease and others on a monthly subscription. The cash injections of leasing will help with the growth aspirations of the business, but this can't always be achieved if their entire customer base is on subscription only.

DO LEASE COMPANIES HAVE A FUTURE IN ICT?

Some leasing companies that choose not to understand the changing comms market will fall by the wayside. This creates further opportunity for Tower and other likeminded finance companies. The future of finance into the comms industry is bright.



JAMES REED
TECH DATA

HAS LEASING MOVED WITH THE TIMES?

The explosion of the mobile handset over the last 20 years has really helped to promote leasing and now subscription is the only way to really fund your handset.

HAVE THE LEASING MODELS CHANGED?

The leasing models have changed in favour of the resellers, enabling them to have more control of customer requirements, with solutions such as Bill and Collect, as-a-Service and Managed Service agreements. By allowing resellers to be the front face of the finance model, it facilitates consistency with the reseller and their customer.

CAN YOU LEASE CLOUD TELEPHONY SYSTEMS?

Cloud telephony is something that we often finance on our Tech-as-a-Service subscription model. The reseller can offer a complete unified telephony solution on a monthly payment deal.

DO LEASE COMPANIES HAVE A FUTURE IN ICT?

The future is exciting! Most communications companies are moving towards offering more than just telephony. Resellers want to offer an entire unified solution, introducing more IT services and with the addition of mobile, leasing is a great way of offering a complete solution.



MARTIN ARDERN
BNP PARABAS

HAS LEASING MOVED WITH THE TIMES?

Technology is evolving fast and no leasing provider can stand still if they want to be competitive. We pride ourselves on our ability to embrace change in this fast-paced environment.

HAVE THE LEASING MODELS CHANGED?

We are continually adapting to meet the requirements of the sector. Our extensive knowledge of the market allows us to be flexible and offer market-leading products to meet the expectations of our customers.

CAN YOU LEASE CLOUD TELEPHONY SYSTEMS?

As the 'On demand' economy grows, so does the requirement for hosted and cloud solutions. To reflect this changing customer need BNP Paribas Leasing Solutions has developed products to enable the funding of on and off premise equipment.

DO LEASE COMPANIES HAVE A FUTURE IN ICT?

Leasing is set to become even stronger and more in-demand. Customers need to regularly refresh technology to ensure they remain competitive in their market. The key to success is understanding our customers' business models and future-proofing our offering.



IAIN SINNOTT
VANILLA IP

HAS LEASING MOVED WITH THE TIMES?

Leasing has evolved but the client requirements have fundamentally changed. In the on-demand cloud world, end user requirements for finance have reduced, but demands from service providers have increased.

HAVE THE LEASING MODELS CHANGED?

Yes, it's much easier now to get leasing based on software licences only. No longer is there a requirement to have a hardware mix for example, which works well for some.

CAN YOU LEASE CLOUD TELEPHONY SYSTEMS?

You could, but leasing has moved up the tree so the service provider is more likely to sign a wholesale leasing agreement and provide hardware to end users on more flexible terms to better fit the Cloud world

DO LEASE COMPANIES HAVE A FUTURE IN ICT?

With current low interest rates, it is still a great way to finance hardware and software for the Service Provider.



VINCENT SCALZONE
SOCIETE GENERALE

HAS LEASING MOVED WITH THE TIMES?

Leasing has been around since 1960s, initially used for financing 'hard' assets as opposed to technology/hardware. Today, digital tools enable the leasing process to be a quick and easy solution for the acquisition or 'use' of any business critical assets.

HAVE THE LEASING MODELS CHANGED?

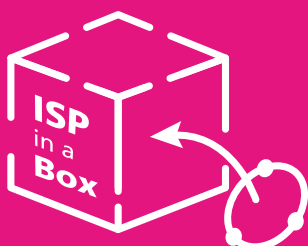
Yes, over time the leasing options have changed and adapted with the change in product demands i.e. software only, services contract etc. Upfront services and maintenance collection are now acceptable 'products' which can be added to a lease contract.

CAN YOU LEASE CLOUD TELEPHONY SYSTEMS?

Absolutely! As cloud telephony is sold through licenses, leasing gives the customer the flexibility of managing their costs and making system upgrades and refreshes easy and affordable. The resellers benefit from accelerated revenue and lower customer credit risk.

DO LEASE COMPANIES HAVE A FUTURE IN ICT?

It's now more common for products to be sold 'as a service' and pay over time. Ownership for critical assets is less of a customer requirement, therefore leasing companies are instrumental in helping resellers successfully sell their products and services.



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Bamboo's IoT whizz



Raymond Kay

CHELTENHAM-based Bamboo Technology Group has pulled in Raymond Kay as Director of IoT. He brings 40 years experience in technology, comms and connectivity, including a 23 year stint at Vodafone Global Enterprise where he was Head of M2M/IoT UK.

"The early days of M2M were exciting and interesting times," he stated. "I started with a small team at Vodafone and we enjoyed an agility that comes with the speed of change and innovation in new markets, new products and new opportunities.

"The market is constantly changing, but that speed of innovation and the opportunity IoT offers everyone, from entrepreneurs and start-ups to corporates, remains the same today."

Kay's hire follows the

appointment of IoT Solutions Consultant Chris Damon who joined Bamboo in March. Managing Director Lorrin White added: "Ray's appointment demonstrates the importance of M2M and IoT to the business and our ability to help customers embrace new technologies."

Also on the move...



Fabio Albanini

FABIO Albanini's knack for achieving impressive results made him the obvious choice for Snom Technology as it sought to recruit a new Head of International Sales. Albanini was previously responsible for

managing sales in Italy, France, Spain and the UK, but his new role includes all of Snom's EMEA countries except the DACH region. "Fabio has had a string of successes over the last few years," stated CEO Gernot Sagl. "His appointment to lead the EMEA markets comes as no surprise."

AVANADE CEO Adam Warby has stepped down, making way for Pamela Maynard who was previously President of Product and Innovation. Avanade is the 20 year old joint venture between Microsoft and Accenture. Warby said: "I am



Pamela Maynard

confident that Pam is the right leader to take Avanade into the next chapter. During the last 11 years she has driven unparalleled results for Avanade in the key roles she held, and has been a vocal advocate for

inclusion and diversity across the organisation." Maynard added: "Our clients are looking to drive innovation and growth in the digital era, and we are positioned to help them tap into the enterprise-wide potential of Microsoft technology."

Pragma gets two recruits



Grace Lawless

PRAGMA has hired Grace Lawless as Operations Director and Buddhika Karunasekara as Digital Marketing Manager. Lawless will also lead the company's systems strategy and implementation plans. "Grace and Budd will bring fresh perspectives and approaches to help us continue on our trajectory of growth," said MD Tim Brooks. Marketing and Sales Director Will Morey added: "Grace and Budd's expertise and support will help shape Pragma into a more agile business."



Budd Karunasekara

GROWING deal activity has prompted Knight CF to appoint Chris Collins as Corporate Finance Executive and Nick Townley-Wells as Corporate Finance Associate. Collins joins from The Camlee Group and Townley-Wells was previously part of the Restructuring Services department at Deloitte.

Aylwin signs up to Babble



Charles Aylwin

BABBLE'S hire of former 8x8 channel chief Charles Aylwin as Sales Director signals a stepping up of the LDC-backed comms provider's growth ambitions.

Aylwin is tasked with expanding the company's core markets in comms, contact centre and cybersecurity. His industry experience encompasses mobile communications and network infrastructure and includes a ten 10 year stint at Voicenet Solutions where he became EMEA Head of Channel for US giant 8x8 which acquired Voicenet in 2013. Babble CEO Matthew Parker commented: "I have known Charles for nearly four years from his time at 8x8. He is a talented and experienced business and sales leader."

Aylwin added: "I'm joining Babble at a pivotal stage in its development to grow the business and increase the footprint across our propositions and verticals."

Aberdeen VAR in hiring mode



Carolynne Yule and Murray Duguid

ABERDEEN-based Converged Communication Solutions is in expansion mode, filling two newly created positions with the appointments of Carolynne Yule as Client Engagement Coordinator and Project Manager Murray Duguid. MD Neil Christie said: "Carolynne and Murray have varied career backgrounds and bring new skills and perspectives to the business." These hires follow the instatement of Gerry Grant as Chief Security Officer in March this year.

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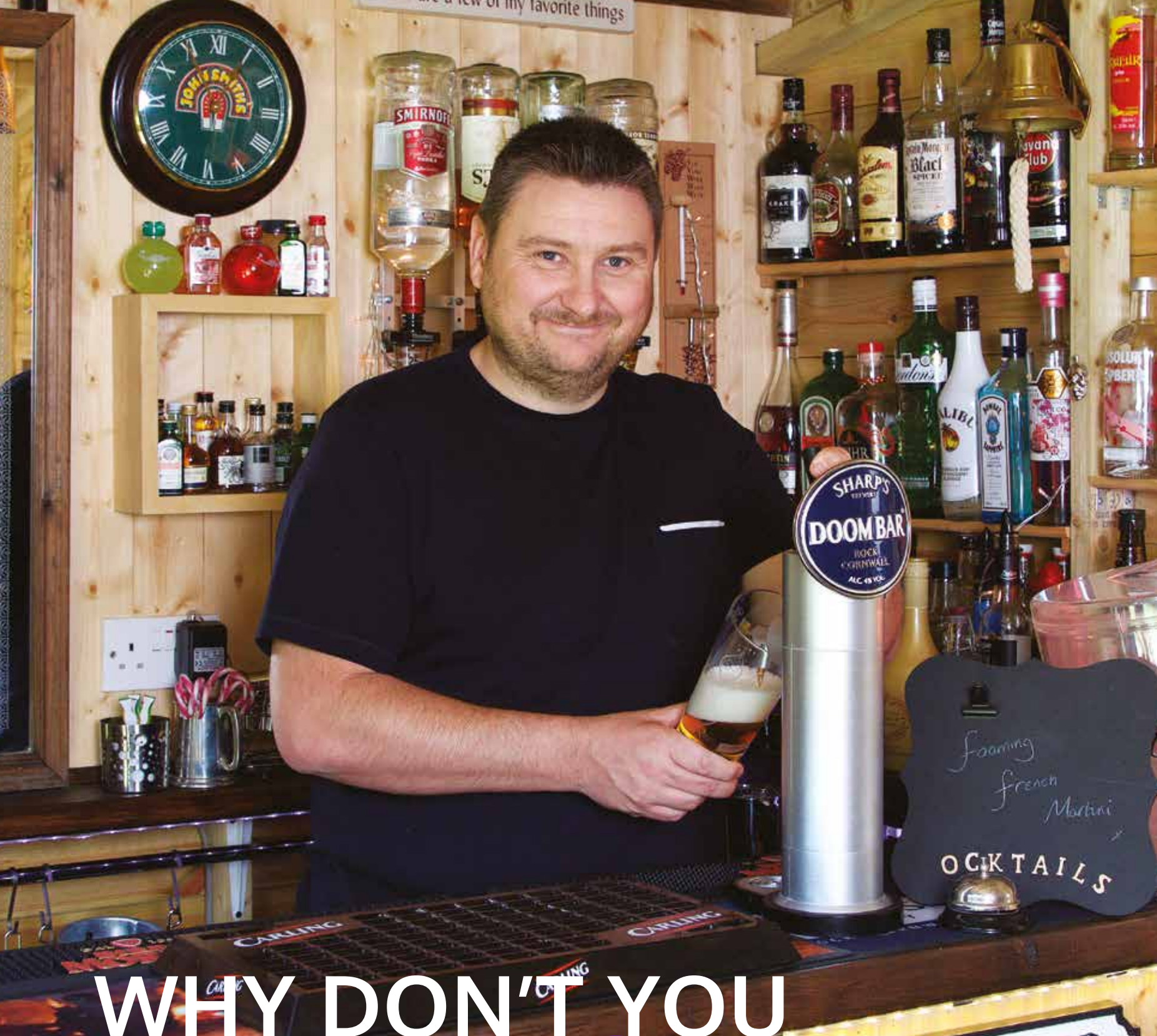
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