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# Nimans launches Beyond business

IN RATCHETING up its ambitions in the connectivity arena Nimans has also bolstered its expansion strategy with a relaunch of the network services arm.

### SPECIAL REPORT

Nimans' adoption of the Beyond Connectivity moniker this month marks the creation of a distinct connectivity business within the Group and introduces a new name to the UK's network services channel market.

The move also brings greater clarity to Beyond Connectivity's expansion ambitions and signifies a ramping up of channel strategy and activity.

"A key priority is growth, which comes in many forms,

including nurturing and growing the existing base while on-boarding new start-up and innovative resellers," commented Head of Sales Graham Wilkinson (pictured), the man at the centre of the new campaign.

According to Wilkinson the rebrand – which followed a comprehensive root and branch business review – builds on Nimans' heritage in traditional connectivity, adding flexibility and foresight while boosting its presence in the market and ability to transform businesses.

"In extending our strategy 'beyond' the near-term we are better equipped for tomorrow," he stated. "We're more agile and can begin to influence change ourselves in real-time.

"The rebrand also highlights how far Network Services has evolved as its own business.

"We've outgrown our previous brand and can achieve more with a new identity and vision that puts us at the vanguard of Digital Britain in an era of ever greater hyper-connectivity."

See page 19 for the full story

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

ON LEADERSHIP it is increasingly clear that a big shake-up can help focus the mind. Case in point: As we went to press the PM was facing a Commons showdown, and Parliament was all over the place as MPs lined up for a key Brexit vote that would determine quite a lot going forward. The point being

made in this column is not a political one – but one of perception – that a shake-up is required to more sharply perceive and benchmark new perspectives.

Parliament in showdown mode served to sharpen and intensify beliefs and commitments as MPs took active charge of their leanings and acted decisively as they saw fit – perhaps with more verve than ever before in their careers. But to the outside observer, like me, a bigger picture may have crystallised.

This uproar was caused by strong leadership. Politics and outcomes aside, Mr Johnson demonstrated determined single-minded leadership from the off, which perforce did cause ripples. And in creating this new benchmark of 'leadership' we soon realise that the nation has been lacking it for many a year, and perhaps performed more sluggishly as a result. Right now the nation requires strong leadership one way or the other and this dire need has thrown into sharp relief just how much it's been lacking.

How else can we move forward other than by driving through disruptive and transformational times and coming out the other side stronger and more capable – whatever the situation? We can see more clearly now that the path to any conceivable success in our industry's big digital disruption will require clear minded, determined and change-focused leadership from the top.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• UK plc displays a growing commitment to diversity, but does the ICT channel understand the real value of a diverse workforce? (p48)

# IT Lab grabs MSP Mirus IT

ECI-backed IT Lab's acquisition of Milton Keynes-based MSP Mirus IT creates a £75m business and builds on the purchases of Content and Code in September 2018 and Perspective Risk in May 2017.

Mirus IT was established in 2002 as a provider of IT support for local SMEs. IT secured a presence in the managed print sector with the acquisition of Leighton Buzzard business 2r Systems in June 2017.

The deal boosted Mirus's revenues to circa £10m and headcount to 100-plus.

Mirus also has a focus on Office 365 integration and the provision of security services. Vendor partners include Microsoft, Gamma, Datto, Mimecast and Olivetti.

IT Lab CEO Peter Sweetbaum commented: "We have admired Mirus for many years and share a common focus.

"By coming together we are able to help Mirus' clients benefit from Microsoft's 3 Clouds and the transformational capabilities of Dynamics, SharePoint, Teams and Power Apps in addition to Mirus' Office 365 and Azure offerings.

"IT Lab's cybersecurity services, including our Sec-



Peter Sweetbaum

urity Operations Centre and Penetration Testing services, will also provide Mirus' clients with more options in an increasingly security focused world."

Mirus CEO Paul Tomlinson added: "In early 2019 we reviewed our long-term strategy as our customers' needs and the industry were changing rapidly.

"To address this we needed to join a larger organisation with the range of additional skills our clients require.

"During the 17 years I have been running Mirus I have kept a close track of other technology providers and always respected IT Lab.

"The breadth of skills within the group will allow us to address our clients' changing needs and provide long-term career opportunities for myself and our people."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

ATOS'S UK channel campaign has shifted up a gear following a deal with Ingram Micro to distribute Unify's entire UCC portfolio including OpenScape products and Circuit. The link-up builds on an existing partnership and brings a sharper focus on the UK cloud comms market which will be supported by Ingram Micro's 2016 acquisition of Comms-Care.

INCOMING TalkTalk Business MD Jonathan Kini wasted no time in pledging his commitment to Digital Britain and channel partners. "I'm joining at an exciting time as the business steams ahead with its investment in a full fibre future," he stated. Kini's previous experience includes senior roles at Virgin Media and Vodafone across B2C and B2B, most recently working for Drax as CEO of the Customer Business. He is also an advisor to the Bank of England. Kini reports to CEO Tristia Harrison and his appointment follows the departure of former MD Kristine Olsen-Chapman.



Jonathan Kini



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NEWS ROUNDUP

GLASGOW located Cloud Cover IT is set to extend its reach in key markets following a £325k funding boost from Scottish Enterprise, UK Steel and Business Loans Scotland. The CSP was founded in 2012 and has more than 150 clients, including some in Africa, Scandinavia and Ireland. The investment will be used to create more jobs and develop business in growing markets such as the IoT and manufacturing sector, said the firm. In addition to infrastructure and cloud services the company specialises in Microsoft SharePoint data management and analytics.

PARK Place Technologies has snapped up network performance monitoring company Entuity, its first purchase outside of third party maintenance. Chris Adams, President and CEO, Park Place Technologies, said: "When Entuity is integrated with our ParkView monitoring product we will deliver enhanced network visibility and NOC services, driving uptime for our global customer base." Entuity is Park Place Technologies' 12th acquisition since 2016 and second in 2019, following the purchase of MCSA Group in April.

## Struggling Gaia hits the rocks

FALTERING £20m education VAR Gaia Technologies based in Wales has called in the administrators following severe cashflow problems.

Gaia provides ICT technology products and services to UK schools, colleges and universities, and a number of international establishments including in China.

Ben Woolrych and Anthony Collier from FRP Advisory were appointed joint administrators and they expect 'significant interest' in the company.

Collier commented: "Gaia Technologies has grown rapidly over the last few years having secured a number of significant contracts, but severe cashflow issues have resulted in it being placed into administration.

"We are working to assess the financial position of the company and will be looking to identify parties who will take the business forward."

Gaia was established in 1992 and has circa 500 education customers, and is on the UK Department for Education's approved list through the ICT service suppliers framework.

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# Wilson targets top spot after PE boost

A £2BN PE growth investment from BC Partners has put a rocket boost under Advanced's growth ambitions.

Vista Equity Partners – which acquired Advanced in 2015 – will continue as an investor, holding a 50-50 share of the business with BC Partners.

"The funds will support our aspirations to become the number one provider of business software solutions in the UK, while expanding our global footprint," commented Advanced CEO Gordon Wilson.

Since 2015 Advanced has grown rapidly with over 900 new staff employed across three regional service hubs.

The fast growing company has also launched 14 cloud-based SaaS solutions and completed six acquisitions, extending its offerings to UK mid-market organisations in the public, private and third sectors.

"Vista and BC Partners will work to support our growth through continued improvement of our cloud-based software solutions and extending our offering through M&A and further innovation," added Wilson.

Nikos Stathopoulos, who is a Partner at BC Partners, commented: "Advanced has the



Gordon Wilson

hallmarks we look for in our investments, a market leader in a growing sector with a strong

management team and multiple levers for growth, both organic and by acquisition."

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# Fewer women in ICT than way back when

THE latest analysis of working trends undertaken by the Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo) reveals that the percentage of women working in IT has fallen over the past 20 years despite efforts to encourage more females into careers in STEM.

According to the DTI and the Skills Task Force women made up a third of the ICT workforce two decades ago.

It was noted at the time that this figure was declining with females representing just 20% of students on IT-related university courses in 1999.

2019's A-level results reveal that computing is the only STEM subject where boys continue to dominate, with just 13% of the 11,124 A level entries coming from girls.

Ann Swain, Chief Executive of APSCo, said: "It's shocking that the percentage of women working in IT is actually falling.

"While it's encouraging that employers, universities and schools are acknowledging the dearth of female professionals



**Ann Swain**

in STEM, and agreeing that more must be done, it is still a shame to see that female talent is undervalued and still under-represented in the technical disciplines today.

"To increase the presence of women in STEM we must continue teaching school children about the exciting opportunities available to both genders, and

employers must have inclusive policies in place such as flexi hours, part-time and remote working. This will not only help create greater equality, but also a sector more diverse in skills and aptitudes."

**Driving channel diversity, p48**

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## FibreNation in partnership venture with Makehappen

FIBREATION has partnered with the rebranded Makehappen Group in a multi-million-pound contract which forms part of its roll out of full fibre capabilities to more than three million UK homes and businesses.

The venture partnership follows the joint acquisition of comms provider Future Network Solutions, traffic management and utility company 2 Works and vehicle hire business 2 Rent, all operating under the Makehappen Group moniker.

Makehappen will manage the infrastructure build and it claims that the combination of a



**Paul Crane**

new methodology and top notch equipment will enable it to build faster and safer networks with less disruption to residents and business owners.

The partnership has completed a successful network build

of its gigabit-ready fibre to a further 40,000 homes and businesses in York.

The focus now is on rolling out across other northern locations including Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon.

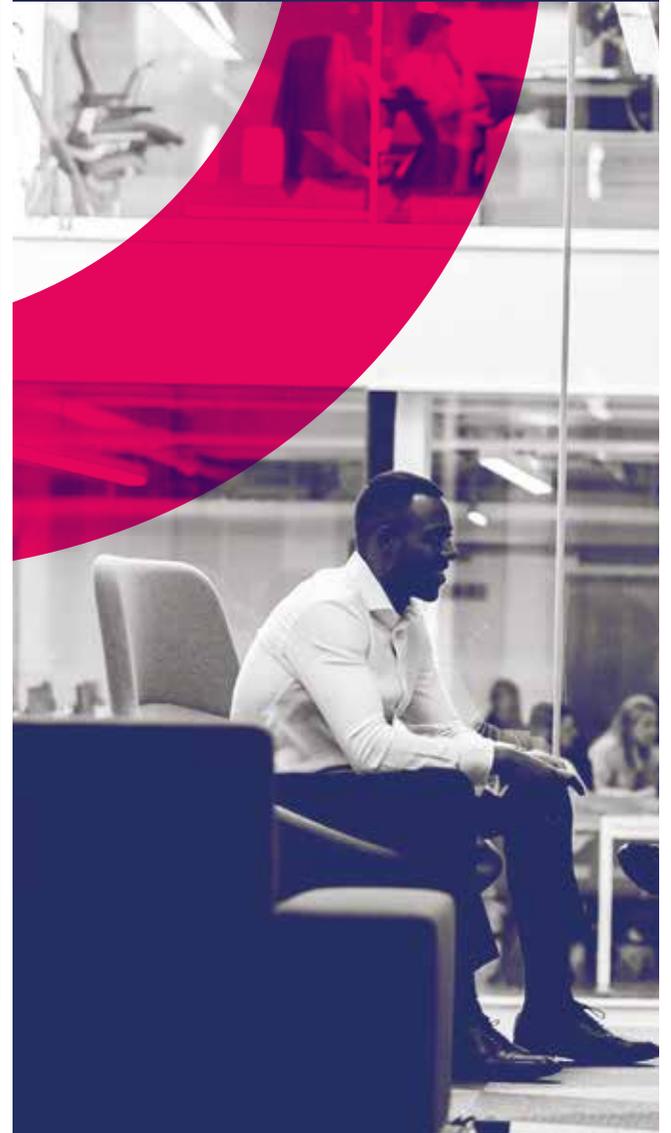
Paul Crane, Head of Engagement and Rollout at FibreNation, commented: "Full fibre is more than just a quick Internet connection, it connects us to our community and how we run our lives day to day.

"It encourages business growth and builds a stronger, smarter society and we must embrace it now."



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# Baur poised for biz sales



Mike Baur

SCANSOURCE is pressing ahead with plans to sell certain businesses outside of the United States, Canada and Brazil.

ScanSource will continue to operate and invest in its digital distribution business in these geographies, including its recent acquisitions of intY, Canpango and Intelisys Global.

The planned divestitures saw net sales of \$623m for fiscal year 2019 and at June 30th 2019 working capital of \$205m. ScanSource currently has circa 490 staff in these geographies.

“After considering our strategic options we decided that

the planned divestitures would offer opportunities to accelerate our profitable growth and cash-flow,” commented Mike Baur, who is ScanSource’s Chairman and CEO.

“These actions enable us to focus our investments on higher growth and higher margin businesses in the United States, Canada and Brazil, as well as our digital businesses globally. This will give investors increased insight into our long-term growth opportunities.”

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

FUJITSU is to offer RingCentral’s Office and Contact Centre portfolio as part of its Digital Workplace solutions. Commenting on the partnership, Annette McInnes, Head of Employee Experience at Fujitsu, said: “Employees want to be more autonomous, entrepreneurial and free from the constraints of traditional working hours. Businesses must create a compelling employee experience that enables and supports their expectations.”

FOCUS Group has relocated to a £9.5m 25,000 square foot purpose built office in Shoreham-by-Sea. The company moved to its previous HQ in Southwick in 2010 and since grew from 40 to almost 300 staff. The business is on target to achieve EBITDA growth of over 60% this year with continued organic growth and a healthy M&A pipeline for 2020. “Forced to set up satellite offices locally, our facilities were tired and did not reflect the entrepreneurial business that we are today. Something had to change,” commented Director Chris Goodman.

# Vapour Cloud hooks up with PTG in £1m tech refresh deal

HALIFAX-based Vapour Cloud and Leeds business Pure Technology Group (PTG) are poised to complete a joint £1m comms technology overhaul for Motor firm JCT600.

The fourth generation family business is now a £1bn brand with 50 locations in the north of England.

The project kicked off last summer and is nearing completion with all dealerships using a new cloud-based telephony platform. PTG will now design, deploy and support a Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) within the Microsoft Cloud.



Lee O’Conner (PTG), Chris Gensmantel (JCT600), Tim Mercer and Gary Saunders

Vapour CEO Tim Mercer said: “JCT600’s phone systems were previously updated on a site-by-site basis as necessary.

“But this staggered telecoms investment leads to inconsistencies in how the technology is utilised and the potential level of service delivered.”

Gary Saunders, who is Pure Technology’s Sales Director, commented on the deal: “This cloud journey has represented a complete digital transformation for the company – an overhaul that will see every dealership harness the power of intuitive WebRTC technology.”

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# £30m pledge aids Voneus

## IT resellers in Foehn's sights

MACQUARIE Capital is to invest up to £30m development capital in rural superfast broadband business Voneus. Proceeds will be used to refinance debt and support the roll out of high speed broadband.

Voneus uses Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) technology to provide superfast broadband to rural homes and businesses in the UK.

It began its commercial life in 2015 and has installed superfast broadband in around 4,000 homes and businesses in 25 rural communities, with a footprint that covers Lancashire and Yorkshire as well as the Cotswolds and Devon.

Voneus Chairman Robert Bates said: "Macquarie Capital's backing is an endorsement of Voneus' business model and vision, as well as an indication of how much work still needs to be done to connect the many homes and businesses across the UK that still do not have access to decent broadband services.

"Not only will it help us speed up the roll out of fixed wireless services in hard-to-reach communities, it means that, longer term, we will be able to add full fibre broadband to our portfolio. This will be



Robert Bates

a complete game-changer for these hitherto neglected areas."

Macquarie Capital specialises in infrastructure development with £20bn currently under construction or development globally.

Oliver Bradley, MD Digital Infrastructure Investing at Macquarie Capital (who led the transaction) commented: "The roll out of superfast and ultrafast broadband has too often focused on the UK's urban centres, leaving untapped investment requirements in the UK's rural communities.

"There is a significant opportunity to work with Voneus to accelerate the deployment of UK rural broadband. This will help unlock economic and social benefits for the UK."

AFTER 20 years of selling direct, UK cloud comms specialist Foehn has launched into the reseller channel and set its sights on IT resellers.

Leading the charge is former VersaTel and Telcoinbox channel developer Brian Rocks, Head of Channel Sales, who believes the traditional reseller market for hosted or cloud-based communications has hit a competitive high.

"Suppliers have saturated a market that is now pushing prices down and putting reseller margins at risk," he said. "An explosion of new product features, increasing technical complexity and marketing noise serves to confuse end users who seek simplicity.

"It's no secret that many IT resellers are now ready to take on the hosted proposition. Thanks to the accessibility of the cloud, the expanding scope

of collaboration systems and the progress of WebRTC, voice and comms are often sharing the same space dominated traditionally by productivity software and the big operating systems."

Rocks maintains that in the past IT resellers were often apprehensive about working with voice, but such views have changed along with the domination big vendors once enjoyed.

"It was a different world then," he said. "Now that voice is an application, often integrated with other business processes, interest is growing among IT resellers, MSPs and network providers. These are the comms resellers of the future.

"Agility, customisation and personal service are the three weak spots in the armour of the big vendors. In turn, this can leave their resellers wanting when it comes to responsiveness and bespoke solutions."



Brian Rocks

### NEWS ROUNDUP

IT SUPPORT services company Complete IT has been acquired by Sharp Business Systems UK. Complete IT will continue to operate as an independent business under its own brand name. Sharp Business Systems UK MD Stuart Sykes said: "We will continue to invest and focus on developing the service portfolio."

THE Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO), a publicly owned central purchasing body based in Wakefield, has launched a £400m data centre, cloud hosting and data security framework. The YPO is owned and governed by a consortium of county, metropolitan and borough councils in Yorkshire and north west England. The new framework is divided into 12 lots and runs until 31st July 2023.

IOT solutions distributor Alliot Technologies, which launched in January this year, has joined the Northern Powerhouse Partner Programme. Minister for the Northern Powerhouse, the Rt Hon Jake Berry MP, said: "Alliot's technical know-how will be a vital tool in enabling businesses to adapt to new technology and equipping people with the skills they need to thrive in the global digital economy."

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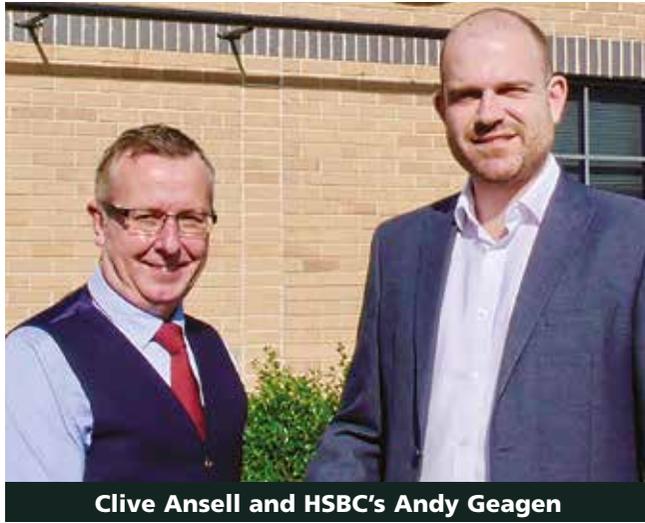
NEWS ROUNDUP

DXC Technology is to launch a Google Cloud Platform Centre of Excellence (COE) and a Google Cloud Artificial Intelligence (AI) COE. Google Cloud has also joined the DXC Partner Network as a strategic partner. The partners will co-invest and collaborate on solution development, training, certification and marketing campaigns to sell and deliver Google Cloud Platform services.

COMPUTACENTER (UK) has acquired Arrow's UK asset disposal business. "While we have investigated working with other partners, we believe that acquiring RDC is the most straightforward way to guarantee continuity of service to our major accounts, particularly given our historic knowledge of the business," commented Mike Norris, Computacenter's Group CEO.

MASERGY has lifted the lid on the next evolution of its Intelligent Service Control portal claiming that it will enhance the user experience and boost transparency and analytics. Masergy says the new ISC portal will simplify and unify network and application management with real-time visibility, analytics and service control purpose-built for the multi-cloud enterprise.

# 360 Group in funding deal



Clive Ansell and HSBC's Andy Geagen

CAMBRIDGESHIRE located 360Group has secured a £750k finance boost from HSBC UK. The deal is expected to spur growth by up to 200% by 2020.

The 360Group, which is comprised of 360 Commercial Properties and 360Coms, used £500k of the funding to re-mortgage its commercial property.

A further £250k overdraft facility is being leveraged to improve cashflow. The funding boost also helped 360Coms to implement a new billing system and tap into a broader spectrum of wholesale suppliers.

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360Group MD Clive Ansell commented: "Investing in the company has allowed us to evolve our billing and business model, making us more efficient and more price competitive.

"In short, we've been able to fund rapid growth by more than 50% since working with the team at HSBC UK and we anticipate that we'll continue to grow substantially."

Paul Armstrong, Area Director for Business Banking at HSBC UK, commented: "The 360Group has ambitious growth plans and the funding will allow it to take tighter control of business processes and become more competitive."

# SCC posts record set of results

IT GROUP SCC posted record earnings for the sixth consecutive year reporting £2.2bn turnover with sales up 18% across EMEA, supported by a strong performance from the product divisions in France and the UK, generating growth of 20% and 23% respectively.

Services revenues in all territories grew £337m, up 4%.

SCC Chief Executive Officer James Rigby commented: "The focus across the group will remain on growing our services business and developing the right value adding product business for our customers.

"During the year we have invested across all of our capital programmes. Re-investing profits back into the business is a key part of our strategy to ensure that the group is able to meet the needs of our customers and remain relevant.

"All companies today are digital and operate in digital environments and this presents great opportunities for us.

"Funds are available to support investment programmes, organic growth and targeted acquisition opportunities."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

CORK, Limerick, Dublin, Galway and Waterford have gone live with commercial 5G following a roll out by Vodafone Ireland in partnership with Ericsson. Vodafone will expand the network to other locations in Ireland over the coming months. Vodafone's new 5G network consists of fully standardised Ericsson 5G, which is being deployed over Vodafone Ireland's recently acquired 5G spectrum.

BROADCOM is acquiring the enterprise security business of Symantec in a \$10.7bn cash deal. Hock Tan, President and CEO of Broadcom, said: "M&A has played a central role in Broadcom's growth plan and this transaction represents the next logical step in our strategy following our acquisitions of Brocade and CA Technologies."

IN A LITTLE over two years since launch Pangea's IoT Partner Programme is now 200 strong. "It's been incredible watching the Programme grow so much in such a short space of time," said MD Dan Cunliffe. "We look forward to the continued growth of the Programme, and we aim to continue using our IoT ecosystem and expertise to secure success for partners."

## Panasonic BUSINESS

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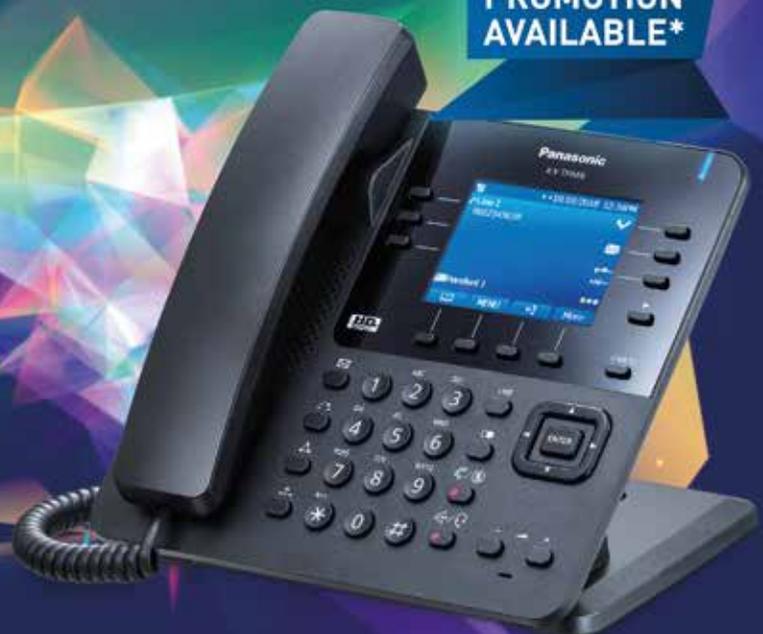
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## BroadSoft email app rolled out

DEVELOPER of apps for the Cisco BroadSoft platform, Kakapo Systems, has launched Email queues for BroadSoft, building on the existing Unity Contact Center suite that adds Web Chat, Twitter and Call Back queues (on top of BroadSoft ACD voice queues), to create an omni-channel offering.

Steve Tutt, Marketing Director at Kakapo Systems, commented: "Email is one of the most accessible customer contact routes but trying to manage shared mailbox through traditional email platforms is often unworkable. This solution is tailored for SMB customers, allowing them to embed email routing within their existing ACD customer service channel.

"Emails are delivered to agents in the same interface they handle BroadSoft ACD calls which, we believe, improves the overall contact experience for inbound customers."



Steve Tutt

## 01T kicks off partner push



Simon Stokes

A WHITE label service to help UK channel partners design, build and manage high bandwidth international connectivity has been launched by network provider 01T.

The proposition includes pre-sales technical design and a referral agency agreement.

Commercial Director Simon Stokes stated: "With demand for low latency and high bandwidth international connectivity providing an opportunity in the channel, competitive boundaries are shifting.

"International expansion is an emerging trend and channel partners need support to match the need for increasingly complex network requirements."

Stokes noted that 01T decided not to build a channel model for mass API access. "The result

is that we can provide each client with a custom built network with the highest level of redundancy guaranteed by a globally standardised SLA," he added.

"Businesses operating in the channel no longer have to procure using traditional routes that are under supported, poorly designed and delivered across long time frames. Our approach means that we can deliver projects quickly. With one client we were able to reduce planning and install time by 79% compared to an incumbent."

01T's recent projects include global point-to-point services using subsea cable systems to connect London, South America and Asia, deploying 100Gbps Wavelength (DWDM) services in the media, finance and gaming industries.

## V12 gains visibility in networks

SWINDON-based V12 Telecom has greater visibility into its networks and applications following a link-up with Highlight.

V12 Telecom co-founder and MD Charles Rickett stated: "One of our most popular products is the supply of Ethernet Internet connectivity to a large number of UK customers through multiple carriers.

"While each carrier offered their own monitoring tools, keeping track of five or more different systems was not an option. If something went wrong, particularly out of hours, we had no visibility and no control. Highlight gives us a single window to see across our entire IT estate, and one portal to monitor multiple providers and customers."



Charles Rickett

## Q3 losses as Avaya sets plan

AVAYA reported a net loss of \$633m for its third quarter to the end of June, after it placed an impairment charge of \$657m to write down goodwill at its Products & Solutions division due to reduced prospects.

The US vendor also withdrew its long-term outlook, saying this will be updated after it completes its evaluation of takeover offers.

When updating the market on the strategic alternatives process Avaya is currently conducting with JP Morgan, President and CEO Jim Chirico commented: "We are in advanced discussions with multiple parties on a range of transactions to maximise shareholder value."

Avaya also reported that GAAP revenue for the quarter was \$717m, \$25m higher than the third quarter in 2018.

The GAAP gross margin was stated as 54.4%, compared to 50.9% last year. A GAAP operating loss of \$613m was primarily down to the aforementioned impairment charge.

The firm made an operating loss of \$49m in the third quarter of 2018.

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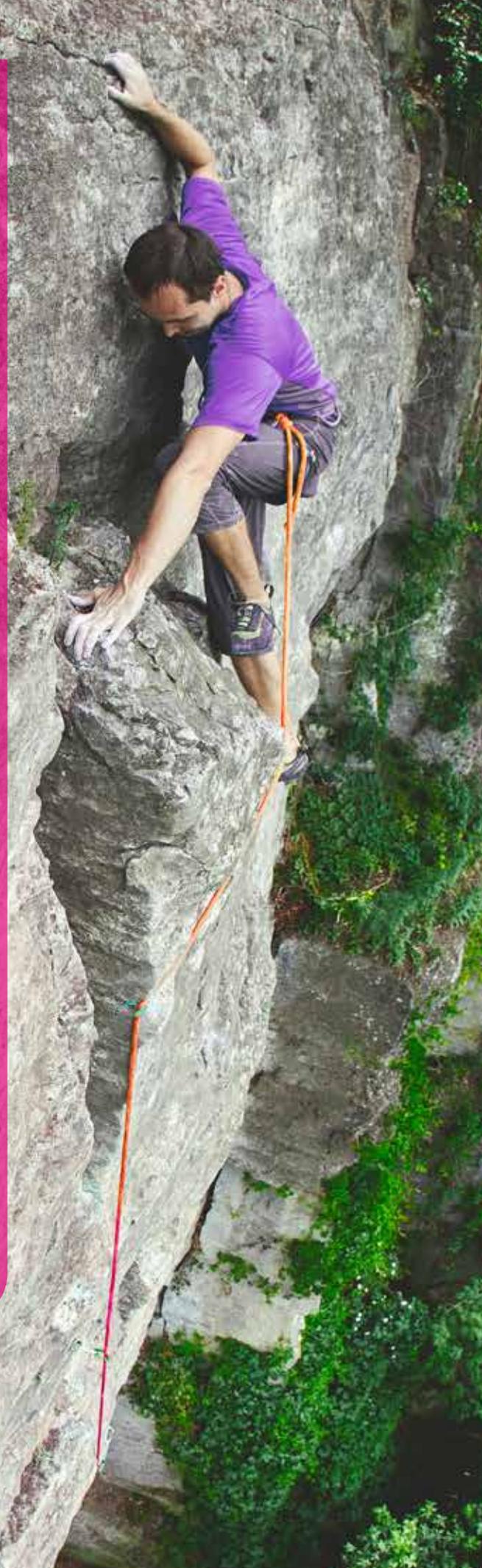


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NEWS ROUNDUP

FOLLOWING a product refresh Glide has introduced symmetrical speeds for uploads and downloads on full fibre products. "It's what businesses with more users and more software systems really need," stated Head of Channel Daniel Alvarez. "Organisations are uploading and transferring large amounts of data, increasing their use of cloud-based systems and apps."

EXTREME Networks has completed the acquisition of Aerohive Networks. The deal adds cloud management and edge capabilities to Extreme's portfolio of software driven networking solutions and expands its capabilities in Wi-Fi and NAC technology. It also brings new SD-WAN capabilities to Extreme's solutions mix.

INTEC Business Solutions has acquired a controlling interest in Cheshire Business Services (CBS) for an undisclosed sum. CBS MD Chris Jones retains a shareholding and continues in his role. inTec's strategy is to acquire telecoms resellers and overlay tech capabilities, enabling them to offer a broader range of services. inTec Chairman Simon Howitt said: "Adding inTec skills and resources will help to take CBS forward."

# Key investor backs Vaioni



Sachin Vaish

VAIONI Wholesale has secured a multi-million-pound investment from Panoramic Growth Equity to fund expansion plans and achieve its goal of becoming the 'digital transformation partner of choice'.

The Manchester-based network operator, founded by MD Sachin Vaish in 2008, says it will forge ahead with a 'disruptive channel agenda' centred on a connectivity and WAN portfolio and its national Ethernet platform V.E.N.

According to Vaish, strategic relationships with all the top UK carriers means the network now connects 250,000 postcodes across 100 UK cities and towns with 100Mbps-10Gbps Internet speeds.

"Receiving this investment takes our total investment fund to £5.5m and will enable us to accelerate the business's growth strategy," stated Vaish.

"This will include the roll out of Vaioni's Software Defined Network strategy, bringing network automation to customers and enhancing the product range with UC, Internet security and cloud."

David Wilson, Partner at Panoramic, added: "We have been impressed by the growth that Vaioni has achieved to date, the strength of the management team and the opportunity to expand its network and product portfolio across the UK."

Wilson will join the Vaioni board as part of the deal.

# Sky seeks to develop closer ties

SKY Business Communications is seeking to develop closer ties with partners and is working with consulting firm Cartesian on how best to maximise the potential of joint opportunities.

The company has long pursued an end-to-end partner support strategy and claims its 'freedom from legacy' status underpins a level of flexibility in the support and delivery of wholesale Ethernet services that is beyond the reach of traditional rivals.

Sky Business Communications is now getting more granular in its approach to partners.

"Over the past six months we have invested in market analysis," commented Sales Director Nick Powell. "The results will provide valuable insights and form the basis of our first leadership workshop. We will invite senior industry leaders and ensure we work together to shape the future of the industry and our approach."



Nick Powell

NEWS ROUNDUP

FIBREATION'S full fibre broadband roll out campaign is gathering pace with Dewsbury targeted as its next gigabit-ready town. The development follows a roll out in York. The first properties in Dewsbury are expected to be connected by October 2019 with work due to be completed by 2022. Paul Crane, who is the Head of Engagement and Rollout at FibreNation, commented: "There is a huge discrepancy between the UK and the rest of Europe when it comes to full fibre connectivity – we must bridge that gap."

VMWARE'S capacity to provide integrated security has been significantly strengthened by the acquisition of endpoint protection company Carbon Black in a \$2.1bn cash deal. Carbon Black has circa 5,600 customers on its books and approximately 500 partners globally. "The security industry is broken and ineffective with too many fragmented solutions and no cohesive platform architecture," claimed VMware CEO Pat Gelsinger. "By bringing Carbon Black into the VMware family we are delivering an enterprise-grade platform to administer and protect workloads, applications and networks."



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# Fidelity adds utility IoT monitoring tool

FIDELITY Group has coalesced its knowledge and experience in ICT and energy to bring a new utility monitoring solution to the channel.

Fidelity says its new Buddy Ohm IoT system can be installed anywhere in a business premises enabling customers to pick key problem areas to report on.

The unit connects cellularly to the Internet through wireless sensors which are fitted next to power panels and meters.

This enables data to be sent and received while avoiding disruption to any existing network or systems. "We pay our utility bills every month, but what do they really tell us?" said Fidelity Group Head of Sales Nicola Mercer.

"Buddy provides insights into real-time resource usage, enabling businesses to track performance, spot trends and uncover anomalies that can help reduce waste and improve efficiencies. Buddy will help reseller customers improve productivity, make savings and improve sustainability by harnessing real-time utility and resource data to monitor business expenditure."

Fidelity believes that Buddy fits the growing need for more



Nicola Mercer

sustainable energy monitoring and management.

According to Mercer, providing new insights to drive down monthly resource spending, track building utility usage and costs is essential in a more environmentally aware world.

"With Buddy there is no need for expensive building management systems as it can affordably gather data to help resellers or their customers recognise saving opportunities," she commented.

"With increasing energy efficiency compliances and responsibilities there is a growing need

to be accountable for your commercial use.

"Buddy can help organisations comply with laws set out by SECR (Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting) by providing managers with the visibility of energy usage and emissions, reporting statistics and required information.

"This is not only a door opener for partners, it's a simple way to add value and recurring revenues from existing customers who will love them for the money Buddy will save and the efficiencies it will bring to their working environments."

## Spend by SMEs up circa 40%

SMEs seeking to keep pace with new digital services such as cloud, the IoT, fibre communications and more recently the roll out of 5G have spiked their spend on comms by circa 40% on 2016 figures, spending on average £2,000 a year.

But they are not necessarily happy with the service they get. Research by Onecom also found that many SMEs experience a poor service – the main complaints being fixed line, mobile and Internet services – and nearly two thirds (65%) are considering switching services over the next 12 months.

Circa 35% are looking to update to a 5G mobile service, followed by 31% who plan to sign up for superfast broadband.

Ben Dowd, Onecom CEO, said: "The importance of telecoms to the success of an organisation has never been greater, and with the roll out of 5G alongside increasing investment in superfast broadband it is only going to get bigger."



Ben Dowd

## NEWS ROUNDUP

DAISY Corporate Services is to provide a full range of services and solutions to public sector organisations across the UK after securing places on ten lots of Crown Commercial Service's new Network Services 2 framework agreement (RM3808). The achievement builds on Daisy's previous successes as a provider on all lots of the preceding Network Services Framework Agreement (RM1045), which supported the UK public sector in conducting 471 procurements, totalling more than £70m of services from Daisy.

JOLA has added a range of Three IoT and M2M SIMs to its portfolio. Its partners can now order 4G data packages on any mobile network ranging from mobile broadband to the IoT. The company has also launched a new global tariff checker, called Tariff Tool, that helps resellers to find the appropriate SIM. Sales Director Lee Broxson said: "We are seeing an increase in demand for bespoke M2M and IoT SIM packages from resellers selling to customers in security, monitoring and public safety."

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## Simplicity puts EBS in front for energy deals

ESTABLISHED in 1985, EBS is a market leader within the telecommunication sector with a portfolio of customers throughout the UK. The company supplies a broad spectrum of products and services including mobile phones and data solutions, fixed line, hosted and broadband. Building long-term strategic partnerships with their customers and suppliers lie at the core of EBS's business development strategy. It was their close relationship with the Carphone Warehouse which led to an introduction to Fidelity Energy as Andrew Dawson, Sales Director at EBS explained.

"We met the team from Fidelity Energy and once we heard their proposition, we were immediately interested in joining them as a partner. What attracted us most was how easily it could be incorporated into our existing business model."

The core philosophy at EBS has always been to deliver an unrivalled and sustainable level of customer service. This is reflected in the way Fidelity Energy works with partners to help them land deals and administer client onboarding, which chimes with EBS's business methods.

"Once we were familiarised with Fidelity Energy's portal, quoting customers became a straightforward process. If we ever need more advice, Fidelity are always on hand to help," said Dawson. "We are in contact regularly and they offer great advice on the potential of any individual deal, no matter how great or small. They also supply any marketing material we need to enhance the proposition."

EBS only started selling energy in April, but has already achieved several sign-ups, so

does Dawson recommend other telecoms providers explore the energy proposition and talk to Fidelity?

"I would say a definite yes because Fidelity Energy make the sales process as easy as it can be and there is very little after support needed for the customer compared to telecoms. Much rests on whether energy is a priority for the business. That's the key we strive to deliver on every lead. In our experience, most customers are receptive, and some are already actively seeking better energy deals.

"In today's crowded markets, diversification is paramount. Especially for a small to medium sized business like us. Providing energy to customers, many of whom you will already have a close relationship with, is a valuable opportunity for any business looking to diversify revenue streams."

Sean Dixon, Sales Director at Fidelity Energy, is impressed with EBS's commitment and success to date pillared on the company's strong client relationships: "We partnered with EBS in April this year and the addition of energy to their portfolio has already seen positive results.

"When taking on energy, the key to a partner's success is to have strong customer relationships and the desire to learn about the business energy industry, which is an extremely complex market to understand when you have no prior knowledge. EBS incorporated the inclusion of business energy to their brand seamlessly and is something we try to emulate with any new partners. They have great relationships with their current customers and some promising leads in the upcoming pipeline, so we are looking forward to watching this partnership flourish."



Sean Dixon: The key to EBS's success is the customer relationships they already have.

# Fintech investment in UK near doubles

RISING fintech investments in the UK and German markets are in stark contrast to fundraising and deal activity in China which, soaring a year earlier, ground to a near halt in H1.

According to Accenture the total value of fintech deals globally in the six months ended June 30th was \$22bn, compared to \$31.2bn in the same period of 2018, a decline of 29%.

The drop was due mainly to the lack of a mega deal like Ant Financial's record \$14bn fundraising in May 2018.

Discounting that transaction, global fintech investments would have climbed 28% in the first half of 2019 over the same period last year.

The value of deals in the US jumped 60% to \$12.7bn, even though the number of transactions was virtually the same as H1 2018 (564 versus 563).

Fintech investment in the UK nearly doubled to circa \$2.6bn and the number of deals jumped 25% to 263.

"There's been a lot of interest and demand from consumers



Julian Skan

for new fintech propositions, particularly in the UK and elsewhere in Europe," said Julian Skan, Senior MD in Accenture's Financial Services practice.

"Fundraising is also moving to support the scaling up of challenger and collaborative fintech, which will cause lumpiness in some rounds as we get to the business end of the investment cycle where investors look for returns based on a sustainable bottom line, rather than another buyer.

"However, the question is – how long can that last?

Fundraising is likely to reach a plateau soon and will most likely dip going forward."

Other European markets also made big strides with investments in German fintechs more than doubling in the first half of 2019 to \$829m from \$406m in the same period last year.

Fundraising in Sweden more than quadrupled to \$573m while fintechs in France raised \$423m in the first half of 2019, 48% more than the prior year.

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## Lill to lead Nycomm's Yealink arm and drive growth markets

DAWN Lill's arrival at Nycomm as Channel Business Development Manager for the distributor's Yealink business unit is reflective of the firm's sharper focus on driving UC and collaboration sales spanning deskphones, audio conferencing and video-based technologies, in particular Microsoft Teams certified devices.

Lill brings 30 years experience and joins from Voiceflex where she was a Dealer Account Manager. Previous roles include stints at Rocom, a spell in the healthcare sector, Mitel and working as a consultant.



Dawn Lill and Warren Bone

Warren Bone, Head of the Yealink arm at Nycomm, stated: "The Yealink brand has gained global traction and Dawn's arrival is a tremendous boost."

Lill added: "I aim to build on my expertise in solutions sales as the Yealink brand penetrates deeper into the market."

More new appointments – p60

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# 'Beyond' is beckoning

Nimans has a long-held expansion agenda and the role of network services in this is towering, reflected by a rebrand of the Network Services arm to Beyond Connectivity led by Head of Sales Graham Wilkinson who explained why the move is a vital development and a 'bold vision for the future'.



Graham Wilkinson

informs his approach to the task in hand. He joined the Royal Navy after leaving school at 17 and trained as a chef. A subsequent three year stint in accountancy preceded a spell selling air conditioning and extraction units before joining Martin Dawes Telecoms 25 years ago. Wilkinson then spent 15 years with the incumbent developing and building its BT Local Business Channel and five years at RingCentral before joining Nimans in April this year. "I was looking for a new challenge and wanted something more dynamic and diverse – Nimans gave me this and I am loving the fast intense pace of where we can take telecoms in the future," stated Wilkinson.

**N**imans' growing network services arm was perhaps bound to spin out brand-wise, such is the rate of growth it has experienced and the strength of the case for a distinct operation. The rebrand does not however signify disengagement from Nimans but reinforces a principle that has long been advanced by the parent company – that communications infrastructure is a key part of the organisation and an engine of channel growth. The question now is – what does the rebrand mean? According to Wilkinson the new brand displays both strategic vision and ambition and builds on Nimans' heritage in traditional connectivity. Indeed, the revamp has as much to do with a way of thinking as anything else.

"The rebrand highlights how far Network Services has evolved as its own business, which opens up exciting opportunities for me and the Group," stated Wilkinson. "In thinking beyond today we are better equipped for

tomorrow and 'beyond'. Rather than chase change we can adapt alongside it in real-time. We're more agile and can begin to influence change ourselves. The rebrand also gives Beyond its own identity and web presence and provides a distinctive voice in the market. Equally, it builds on the company's existing policy to remove complexity from propositions."

The fact that the connectivity marketplace can be laden with complexity should not exclude resellers from securing a slice of the cake. This, says Wilkinson, is why Nimans turned its back on anything remotely complicated. The company has also rightly taken the view that actions speak louder than words and pictures. "Our new brand is not encapsulated in a logo, tagline, slogan or campaign," stated Wilkinson. "Brand is what we do, how we present ourselves and how customers experience us."

More to the point, the rebrand signals a 'coming of age', noted Wilkinson.

"We've outgrown our previous brand and can achieve more with a new identity," he added. "It puts us at the forefront of Digital Britain in an era of hyper-connectivity. When you start to look into the potential of superfast speeds with little or no jitter, real-time applications truly become real-time, enabling developments such as driverless cars, drones for Amazon deliveries and extending the scope of emergency services to live stream doctors to accident sites and guide paramedics.

"These scenarios merely scratch the surface of the infinite scale of applications that will emerge over the coming years. This is why we decided to adopt a new strategy and brand identity, all seriously considered and meticulously planned."

The rise of fibre and 5G is already reshaping the connectivity landscape, observed Wilkinson. "Fibre

roll outs are running at a phenomenal rate and with the Openreach switch off in 2025 this can only accelerate, which along with 5G presents a huge opportunity for IoT and the art of the possible," he added. "Nimans has reacted to this changing landscape in terms of how customers connect and communicate, and the underlying market forces at work."

#### Proposition

Beyond Connectivity's proposition comprises mobile (including EE, Vodafone and O2), network connectivity (BT, TalkTalk, Virgin, Vodafone and Colt among others) and its Simplified Hosted platform. "As we move into the new world of UC and cloud-based products all of the above play an important role," said Wilkinson. "And as technology continues to accelerate we will develop and grow our proposition."

Wilkinson's own career has also developed nicely and

The disciplines inculcated during Wilkinson's time in the Navy serve to strengthen his resolve and confidence. And the full scope of his experience – from working in accountancy and blue chips – continues to influence how he will stay ahead of the game. "A key priority is growth – which comes in many forms – including nurturing and growing the existing base while on-boarding new start-up and innovative resellers," added Wilkinson.

"Furthermore, cloud-based applications are controlling how we live, work and play. Everything from social media, shopping online to working environments are now based on cloud technologies that continue to evolve on an almost daily basis. Being involved in these trends and understanding the emerging technology will steer how Beyond Connectivity will move going forward. We won't be standing still that's for sure." ■



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# Rise of omni-channel

Deciding how to communicate with a business should be the ultimate customer right. Small wonder contact centre technology is the order of the day, according to Valur Svansson, Principal Consultant – CX, EX and Emerging Technologies at IP Integration.

**S**vansson is witnessing interest in omni-channel CC from all types of businesses but particularly from retailers, financial services companies as well as entertainment and media brands. “These organisations tend to be digitally savvy,” he said. “The likelihood is they have already completed or are part way through their digital transformation programmes, and they understand that they need to innovate to attract and keep clients.”

According to Svansson the sector with the most potential is probably utilities. “Utility providers routinely interact with their customers to collect meter readings, trouble-shoot service problems, renegotiate deals and more,” he stated. “Much of this interaction is still done over the phone. There’s massive potential to shift this communication to self-service apps and the web.”

To deliver the best possible experience, it’s critical that all customer information and interactions are captured and visible across all channels, believes Svansson. “All too often, a customer who has filled in a web form or has interacted with a chatbot

will have to repeat the same information if they need to call a contact centre and speak to an agent,” he added. “It’s a waste of their time and doesn’t make them feel valued. It’s a waste of time for contact centres too. One of the main reasons that organisations migrate to omni-channel contact centres is to speed up the time it takes to resolve customer queries.”

When proposing an omni-channel CC solution to prospects an automatic gate opener is that all organisations want to achieve efficiency gains. “If you can explain how to reduce the time to resolution it’s relatively easy to show how you can boost productivity and customer satisfaction levels,” added Svansson.

When done right, omni-channel should integrate seamlessly with all digital channels, including mobile. “Imagine a washing machine owner conducting an online search for a new filter,” explained Svansson. “From there, they go to the manufacturer’s website where they ask a chatbot how easy it is to replace a filter. Then, a couple of days later, they call the contact



Valur Svansson

## One of the main reasons organisations migrate to omni-channel contact centres is to speed up the time it takes to resolve customer queries

centre to order a new machine. If the agent knew about their search history they could offer a service instead of a new machine.”

### Next generation

Now that generation Z is in the workforce and has started to amass some spending power, contact centres will innovate further to compete for their custom, observes Svansson. “How often does an 18-year-old use their mobile to make a call? The answer is almost never,” he said. “Contact centre operators need to adopt this mindset, shifting emphasis from voice to self-service digital channels. They also need to bear in

mind that this generation has high expectations. They expect digital companies to be proactive, offer instant answers and know their entire customer history. It takes technical expertise to make that happen.”

Automation is the next big thing for contact centres, noted Svansson. Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Robotic Desktop Automation (RDA) will take over routine, often mind-numbing tasks from agents to free up their time. This will present technical and human challenges, believes Svansson.

“From a technical standpoint, programming for RPA

or digital agents isn’t a straightforward tactical job,” he said. “You first have to analyse the process you want to automate to see if it’s fit for purpose, benchmarking it against industry best practices. If you automate a process that’s imperfect or broken you’re effectively automating your ability to make mistakes.

“From a human perspective, upskilling and looking after agents is a key requirement. While the digital agents will take care of routine tasks, humans will step in when a more personal touch is needed, for example, when a customer is irate or upset, or when the transaction is complex or high value. Training is key, but so too is providing an excellent employee experience where staff feel valued and have a deep sense of loyalty.”

While in the past contact centres have been closely coupled with traditional telephony, in the future they will be more aligned to mobile and apps. “Expect plenty of innovation in this field, especially as brands cater for digital natives who regard their phone as their personal assistant,” said Svansson. “Video is also interesting. While it’s still in its infancy there are examples of video being used as a comms channel in financial services when customers want to open accounts, and in the health sector.

“We envisage plenty of other instances when customers will want to speak to an agent face-to-face, for example, to provide evidence for an insurance claim. This could be very powerful, but will require highly trained, empathetic agents.” ■



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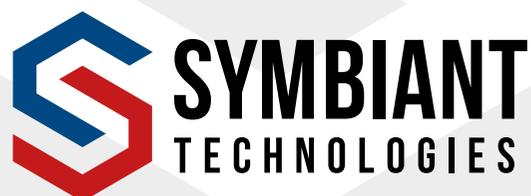


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# A businessman who's true

Embarking on a franchisee recruitment campaign is the latest in a long line of measures intended to boost Pink Connect's growth prospects, explains Managing Director James Pink.

**P**ink's objective to double revenues is as crystal clear as the merits of each component of his growth strategy – which in addition to franchising external sales and growing the internal sales arm – includes close consideration of the separate profit centres of the business, particularly retaining and growing existing customers, tasking separate staff with new business acquisition and taking every opportunity to resign 60 month agreements. The increasing relevance of GDPR and the push for meaningful security has also proved fruitful.

Businesses are today subject to two separate eruptions. One concerns security as SMEs are not doing enough to counter the threat; the other eruption is the spread of FTTP. It is Pink's view that both offer significant growth opportunities, and he is preparing the ground for big advances in these important markets. On the issue of security he commented: "Security has been low on SME agendas and they still typically say 'it won't happen to us, they won't hit the little guy'; but I foresee that large fines from the ICO and escalating losses from criminal activity will feature ever more prominently as we move into 2020.

"It is clearly a poor and risky business strategy to bury your head, especially when you consider that the Crime Commissioner estimates that 160,000 people are engaged



James Pink

## In 2002 with a pot of cash and no route to market we decided to establish Pink Connect

in cybercrime in the UK alone. That's a lot of clever people looking to profit from someone else's hard work."

Cybercrime together with the Information Commissioner's Office fines will kill huge numbers of businesses in the next ten years, believes Pink. "Billions of hard earned pounds will be spirited away by clever people who will

never be caught, let alone prosecuted," he added. "The police are still running Windows 7 on 100,000 PCs, so what chance do they have? It's like the Wild West with no sheriff."

### Security matters

To introduce a semblance of law and order Pink Connect has developed the Sentinel Unified Threat

Management device which offers SMEs easy installation and meaningful security. "We see the relentless march of cybersecurity threats of primary importance – it is an issue for all businesses," added Pink. "Our security offering is a one-stop-shop solution that guarantees a business is compliant and secure at an affordable price point. No business can be

GDPR compliant without such a device, and it puts us in a business critical position with the customer, trusted with their security, connectivity and IT support, earning monthly revenue for long fixed-term contracts, and any changes have to be run past us so we are in a prime position to cross sell our whole product set. Security is a core product for

# July in the Pink

us and key to capturing all client consumed services."

On all past evidence Pink can lead business growth campaigns and win in his chosen markets, and FTTP is no exception. "We are also selling FTTP by identifying trading estates and business parks with poor Internet access – there are thousands of them – and installing FTTP by amortising the cost between the businesses on the site, using the Gigabit Voucher scheme," he added. "Say a 60 business unit park requires a £30,000 investment to bring FTTP to site, we just need 12 of the 60 businesses to want better connectivity to fund the scheme. The approach is seen as manna from heaven by organisations struggling with poor ADSL as we can offer either 160Mb or 330Mb connections for £80 or £120 and it puts Pink Connect in a prime position as we are first on the scene with the real answer."

## Key opportunity

But franchising offers Pink the gift of his dreams, and he is embracing it, doing everything possible to maximise on past successes with a renewed ambition. He has a focus on franchising far beyond the activity of the past ten years, and has reset his strategy to double revenues over the near-term in large part fuelled by a franchisee recruitment campaign.

"Growing our business through franchising is our biggest opportunity," he stated. "We see growth through franchising as sustainable, reliable, long-term and good for all involved. It also gives us the opportunity to

leverage our knowledge and SME offering through franchisees in every postcode in the UK. The business generated is effectively free for Pink Connect, the franchisee retains 32 per cent of turnover, a high percentage for any business and we almost never lose a customer because we have local representation on the doorstep. We

## The integrity I saw in my father is embedded into Pink Connect and reflected in everything we do

have prioritised finding the right 20 franchisees in 2019. Franchising has been incredibly good for all concerned."

Pink also acted impeccably when establishing the company with his wife Gisela soon after they married in 2002, and then crafting a one-stop-shop. "The ability to reduce call costs from those of the incumbent got us off the blocks initially," commented Pink. "After we agreed terms with Openreach we were able to bill all lines, increasing turnover and profitability with our whole client base within a month. The introduction of broadband helped to secure customers with the essential conduit for business. Having run several businesses requiring the standard distress purchase items to

trade, like power, phones, Internet, security and mobile, the product set we now present to prospects makes sense for almost every business we approach."

The result is that the provision of multiple product sets to customers has nurtured long-term commitment and increased client value. To achieve this happy state Pink's portfolio is also built on partnerships with Openreach, Gamma, MyPhones, Wavenet, Ubiquiti, Cisco and Microsoft. The company services circa 1,000 B2B customers (ranging from one man bands to multi-sites for global organisations), and generates turnover approaching £2 million (with plans to hit £4 million post haste). Pink Connect's 16 staff are based at its Shipston on Stour head office.

Its three franchisees have each been in operation for over 10 years, and in addition to plans to recruit more franchisees during this year and next Pink will take on four more direct sales staff to develop existing customers, target connectivity and hosted VoIP sales, business mobile and new commercial power business. "We have all the back office capacity we need to handle twice our current turnover as we have invested heavily on remote access and service control," added Pink.

What is also clear from Pink Connect's activities is that hosted VoIP is central to its offering. "We have co-developed our Pink IP pro platform and pricing structure," Pink explained. "This allowed us to sell Pink IP pro into situations that are hard for BroadSoft resellers to

**Continued on page 24**

## "Platform and PBX migration expertise your business can count on."

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Continued on page 23 enter, like schools and hospitality etc, where low call volumes and large handset numbers prohibit traditional hosted VoIP suppliers succeeding because of their high per-seat price constraints."

Microsoft Teams is another important next step for Pink. As a Microsoft partner he has a large customer base using 365, so they already have the software deployed across their organisations. "To capitalise on this we are developing compatible SIP trunks and a billing platform to allow us to profit from this strong new competitor," he added. "The managed roll out of on-premise servers to Microsoft 365 is a complex area to get right. We have invested in the staff to take customers through this step and make it a pain free experience."

**Full specification**

A policy of marrying end user requirements more closely to Pink Connect's all encompassing proposition is vital and has significantly contributed to its success. "It is essential for any supplier to offer a complete business product set," added Pink. "VoIP, security, access and cloud IT have moved towards each other and are inextricable on site. As soon as one facet

needs to be looked at the quoting supplier will pitch a complete solution and net the customer for everything, for good. Good luck selling boxes on the wall!"

Luck had no role to play in Pink Connect's formation and subsequent successes. You could say Pink was fuelled up for the journey having

**It is essential to offer a complete business product set. VoIP, security, access and cloud IT are now inextricable on site**

started his career selling petrol. "I was running a petrol station in Kent when a regular customer said 'have you looked at the telecoms business, it's residual income'," explained Pink. "I didn't know what residual income meant so found out and quickly signed up to a multi-level marketing (MLM) telco. The telecoms sales side came easy to me, the MLM

part not so. However, after a short time I was earning substantial residual income but realised I should find a more commercial deal for my B2B customers. So I signed with a WorldCom reseller and business flew for 18 months when, to everyone's surprise, WorldCom bought our customers for a large multiple of turnover. With a pot of cash and no route to market we decided to establish Pink Connect."

Pink is right to describe himself as an entrepreneur, people person and natural salesman, and he learnt the importance of integrity, customer service, consistency and commitment from his father, a life-long salesman who built 30 year relationships with customers in the wholesale bedding trade. The influence of Pink senior continues to be strongly felt.

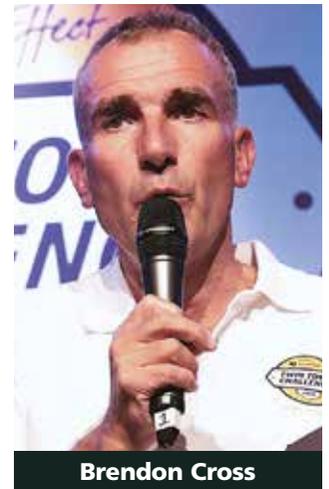
"The integrity I saw in my father is embedded into Pink Connect and reflected in everything we do," said Pink. "We are passionate about making a difference with people and children. To that end, we sponsor 14 children around the world for their education and medical needs. We also take on apprentices and sponsor staff education both in telecoms and IT, and outside the industry in personal development."

# Cross revs up for final rally

The Twin Town Challenge – the mad-cap car challenge co-organised by STL Communications boss Brendon Cross – will come to the end of its fundraising road next spring with the fourth and final event. Cross hopes ICT channel teams will rally to the cause and help make the last challenge a bumper money maker. The event in May next year will see 100 cars costing less than £500 travel to Witney's twin town of Le Touquet for a weekend of challenges to raise money for Charlbury-based charity SpecialEffect.

**What a spectacle**

"The Twin Town Challenge is an amazing sight with a hundred cars, 400 people in fancy dress and over 50 volunteers," enthused Cross. "For the last ever Twin Town Challenge we have a fabulous programme of events planned in and around Le Touquet, including a day at Abbeville circuit as well as the now infamous street party with live bands in the middle of Le Touquet."



**Brendon Cross**

All the costs of the event will be covered by sponsorship, which means that every pound paid in entry fees as well as the fundraising goes to Charlbury-based SpecialEffect, which puts fun and inclusion back into the lives of those with physical disabilities using technology ranging from modified joy-pads to eye-control.

The charity has already benefitted from the £840k raised by the Twin Town Challenges in 2014, 2016 and 2018.

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# Dunne's growth recipe

When cheffing no longer cut it, Managing Director Martin Dunne decided to cause a stir in the comms industry and bring Mtech Communications to the boil.

**D**unne was once a sceptic on pursuing a career in the comms sector. Uninspiring jobs made the prospect unappealing, and there seemed more chance of rising majestically, like a perfectly executed soufflé, in returning to the kitchen environment from where he came. The shift to comms could well have been a brief hiatus from cheffing, because cold calling and doing research were repetitive jobs that lacked fizz. "Had I not been tasked with driving a salesperson to an appointment I would have left," stated Dunne. "I then moved through the business via telemarketing into sales and telemarketing management, becoming Sales Director and Group Sales Director in a career spanning 15 years before starting Mtech."

The move from trained chef to telecoms was as you might expect unplanned, but as noted above there has been nothing adhoc about what was to follow in short time. Christchurch-based Mtech Communications started life in February 2018, set up by Dunne and his partner Laura. They first operated out of their living room but a poor Internet connection and bad phone signal prompted a move to an office with space for one person with a single desk, but that's not to say there have been any constraints in growing the business.

"We have grown at an incredible rate," stated



Martin Dunne

## With Mtech we started from nothing and I had to learn fast on aspects of the business that were new to me

Dunne. "In my previous role I became familiar with growing sales teams and I have adopted a similar method at Mtech. In our first year we moved office five times, generated just over £2.2 million and have built a base of over 200 customers. Our plans are to double revenues in our second year and pursue steady growth in years three and four when we will establish a franchise model."

### Relishing challenges

There is no other explanation for Dunne's stellar growth path other than his complete relish of the task in hand, an exhilaration that was beyond reach in his previous role. "I've had a great career in a larger business with multiple promotions and a key part

to play, but ultimately this was attached to an existing company structure – we were simply growing it," he explained. "I only had to worry about achieving sales targets and growing the overall performance. With Mtech we started from nothing and I had to learn fast on aspects of the business that were new to me. I've learned about provisioning, billing, installation and support along with gaining suppliers and agreeing terms. It's been a massive learning curve, but I love the challenge."

In the case of future growth, the plan is clear, and hinges as much on the power of technology to transform lives as it does on the usefulness

of traditional telephony in keeping customers happy. "We are the tech generation and understand the importance of what technology can bring us," he added. "Communications in general is becoming more about texts, emails and social media. This is also true in business to business. This means that the telephone is more vital than ever. It is still the quickest way to speak to someone; and if you receive a call it is clearly important as an urgent response is likely required."

Mtech's technology partners include Ericsson-LG via Pragma and Tollring for call recording and call reporting software. Mtech uses Audpro for its on hold marketing offering along with Phonelink CTI from Mondago. "Our proposition is simple, to become a one-stop-shop for telecoms and associated services," added Dunne. "We will be looking to offer IT support, printers and copiers, and potentially CCTV. One of the main reasons people change is not just to save money, it's to save time and hassle."

But the motivation to save time and hassle could have the opposite effect when unscrupulous telcos blatantly renege on their duty to do what's right for the customer. "The way certain companies over inflate termination charges and use scare tactics to bully the new provider via the client is wrong," stated Dunne. "It's a small minority that do this, but when a company goes against their

### Just a minute with Martin Dunne...

**Role model:** Sir Alex Ferguson: I admire how he kept a team focused and motivated for so long

**What talent do you wish you had?** To rewind time and try for different outcomes

**How would you like to be remembered?** As helping lots of people from all walks of life

**Best advice you have taken:** Never make a promise you can't deliver

**How do you relax when not working?** Aside from being a dance dad to my seven year old daughter Coco, I love to play with my lawn mover and other garden machinery with my two sons Harry and Freddie

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Starting Mtech when my partner was six months pregnant with our third child

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** My greatest strength is my ability to lead; but my weakness is that I always look for the good in people. This can have a negative impact and lead to getting burnt

own terms to make more money from a customer leaving, than if they were to service them for the duration of the contract, that's anathema to me. It's annoying to lose a customer, but that's part and parcel of business. That aside, I love the industry, it is exciting and ever-changing which keeps us all on our toes." ■

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# THE COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS 2019

10<sup>th</sup> October / Hilton Park Lane / [cnawards.com](http://cnawards.com)

## Get the recognition you deserve by entering the UK ICT industry's most prestigious awards process

Now in their 18th year, the Comms National Awards is the ICT channel's most respected and coveted prize and now's the time to power up your involvement.

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](http://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!

### BOOK YOUR TABLE NOW!



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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To view the line-up of finalists go to: [www.cnawards.com/finalists.php](http://www.cnawards.com/finalists.php)

## A WORD FROM OUR SPONSORS...

### Positive Impact Category

**Alex Tempest**  
Managing Director  
BT Wholesale



"At BT Wholesale we feel that businesses are beginning to display a greater commitment to workplace diversity, and the ICT Channel is now starting to see and understand the real benefits such positive cohesion can bring to workgroup performance. We certainly value the benefits it brings to our business, and we have an ongoing commitment to ensuring that our people reflect the diversity of our customers. As such, BT Wholesale is proud to sponsor the diversity and CSR category at this year's Comms National Awards celebrating businesses looking to challenge the status-quo."

### Reseller SME Mobile/IOT Solution

**Henry West**  
Channel Sales Director  
FluidOne



"FluidOne are delighted to sponsor the Comms National Awards. As an industry leader and innovator, we pride ourselves on the work we have achieved over the years in the Channel, with our ground-breaking portal, solutions and continued commitment to our partners to deliver the very best customer experience in the industry. We're proud to be sponsoring the Mobile and IoT category as this aligns tightly with the launch of our mobile connect propositions, further enhancing our offering to our channel partners."

### Reseller Unified Communications Category

**Graham Wilkinson**  
Head of Sales,  
Beyond Connectivity  
Nimans



"Beyond Connectivity is an exciting new rebrand of Nimans Network Services – and is going further to make connectivity simpler. We are thinking beyond today by offering next generation services based on our simplified network services proposition. It's an exciting new era and a bold vision for the future. The Channel Network Awards represents the perfect opportunity to launch the new brand and engage with a key target audience. By sponsoring a Unified Communications category, we value and recognise how the channel continues to push the boundaries of success as part of its pursuit of excellence – the hallmarks of Beyond Connectivity itself!"

### After Party Sponsor

**Richard Thompson**  
Director of Partners  
TalkTalk Business



"TalkTalk Business is proud to be part of the Comms National Awards once again, sponsoring the renowned after party. The evening has quickly become an unmissable event for the channel community, bringing together the best players in the industry for a night of fun and celebration. I know first-hand how much effort channel businesses put in to ensure the success of their customers and this is the night to enjoy all of your hard work. On behalf of everyone at TalkTalk Business, we wish all of the entrants the very best of luck and we look forward to seeing you all on the dance floor!"

### 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!"

### Enterprise Reseller of the Year

**Neil Wilson**  
Head of Products and  
Marketing  
Virtual 1



"We are delighted to be sponsors of the Enterprise Reseller of the Year award at this year's Comms National Awards. After another strong year in the market it's vitally important to celebrate and recognise some of the outstanding channel achievements.

"Enterprise Resellers are a part of the channel we frequently work with and it's been fantastic to see some of the highly innovative solutions these companies deliver for their customers. Good luck everyone!"

### Hospitality Sponsors



# NEW BRAND GOES BEYOND TO MAKE CONNECTIVITY SIMPLER

A new name is entering the network communications arena, to provide resellers with a real opportunity for growth – based on much more than traditional connectivity.

‘Beyond Connectivity’ is an exciting new rebrand of Nimans Network Services – and promises to ‘go further’ to make connectivity even simpler.

big name brands such as BT, EE, Vodafone, O2 and TalkTalk.

The rebrand gives ‘Beyond’ its own identity and web presence to differentiate itself and provide a distinctive voice in the market. Equally it builds on the company’s existing Simplified proposition of making the complicated simple, Graham emphasises.

change ourselves. Our team of experts go above and beyond every day to deliver the best service, solutions and support – whilst our technical tools and dashboards take the complexity out of working, to make things simpler.”

He continued: “Our new brand is not encapsulated in a logo, tagline, slogan or campaign. Brand is what we do, how we

providing a competitive edge through better brand positioning.”

Graham concluded: “We have a clear and separate identity that reflects our friendly, professional, accessible and reliable team, based on a 20-year pedigree with lots of expertise and experience. We’ve outgrown our previous brand and can achieve more with a new identity.

“Beyond Connectivity will be known as Beyond on a daily basis and it puts us at the forefront of the Digital Britain in an era of hyper-connectivity. We’re coming of age.

“It’s about taking the natural next step and building on relationships based on a desire to succeed. Opening up new avenues and making it clearer what we are, who we are and what we can do for our customers. This is not just a brand but where the company is heading to shape our future. We are going above and beyond... going further to make connectivity simpler.”



“We are thinking beyond today by offering next generation services based on our Simplified network services proposition. It’s an exciting new era and a bold vision for the future,” says Graham Wilkinson, Head of Sales, Beyond Connectivity.

Beyond Connectivity encompasses cloud communications (hosted pbx), mobile, networking (inc broadband) plus services ..... working with

“Following a detailed brand review we decided to adopt a new strategy. Our new name and brand identity has been guided by reason. Seriously considered and meticulously planned. “By thinking beyond today we are better equipped for tomorrow and beyond. Adopting this strategy means that rather than chasing change, we can adapt alongside it in real time. We’re more agile and can begin to influence

present ourselves every day and how our customers experience us. Go further is our brand promise and company mantra. It supports our existing customer centric culture and reflects our positive forward thinking approach to connectivity, technology and service.

“The rebrand will help us raise awareness to attract new customers. It enables opportunity for growth by

For more information please

visit: [www.beyondconnectivity.co.uk](http://www.beyondconnectivity.co.uk) or email: [sales@beyondconnectivity.co.uk](mailto:sales@beyondconnectivity.co.uk)

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# Banking on technology

What should ICT providers put at the heart of their approach to the finance sector? And how can they catch the attention of tech buyers and find a way into this market? TIG CEO Des Lekerman has the answers.

**T**ech solutions are now far more sought after by financial firms seeking to resolve a number of issues, including operational and regulatory challenges. "We've seen firms within the finance sector turn increasingly to technology to streamline business operations and cut down on costs during a time when increased regulation and fees are putting pressure on revenues," stated Lekerman. "Moving to cloud-based systems and storage means that companies are able to become more agile, and the costs of onsite infrastructure are lowered which makes a tangible difference to headline profits."

The fear of storing data on the public cloud has long been an agony for finance firms, but their doubts begin to ebb when they become more open to the benefits of public cloud solutions, observed Lekerman. "In addition to this, buy and sell-side firms are increasingly looking at machine learning as a means to boost operational efficiencies as well as gain a competitive edge," he added.

The biggest motivator for TIG's clients and investors within the financial services sector has always been, and

still is, cybersecurity, but how this is handled has evolved significantly, according to Lekerman. "Reporting and due diligence in the way data is managed demands the highest levels of security, and any breaches can have a huge and everlasting impact on the reputation of the business," he added. "The Azure Cloud has been approved by global financial bodies as meeting industry specific regulatory requirements and certification controls, so for our clients storing their data in the cloud is a layer of security that comes along with the operational efficiency of working in this way."

In terms of data storage, the future is in the cloud and any organisation that hasn't started to implement this yet is at risk of being left behind, warned Lekerman. "The biggest challenge for finance sector ICT buyers is to decide which type of cloud storage solution will work best for their business, whether that's public, private or a hybrid of both," he stated. "Increasingly, in addressing this question the role of the COO and ICT buyer are merging because there are real operational outcomes that the IT manager can influence through the type of technology they invest in."



Des Lekerman

To provide the best solution tech providers need to truly understand the way each client operates and collaborate with them to improve the functionality of the business overall. "Specialising in the finance sector means having a deep understanding of the regulatory and security requirements that impact the way firms work. How else can you advise them on the best way to implement technology?" asked Lekerman.

#### Tech worth backing

In terms of future success in this sector, the emerging technologies ICT suppliers should back and start thinking about now must reflect an increased level of interest in the outcomes of data analytics and machine learning, observed Lekerman. "Data warehouses are no longer reserved for enterprise level, and business leaders have an understanding of the power that can be harnessed through in-depth analysis

**The biggest challenge for finance sector ICT buyers is to decide which type of cloud storage solution will work best for their business – public, private or a hybrid of both**

of their data," he stated. "Finance sector clients in particular have mountains of data that can influence the next move they make as a business, but only if they are able to analyse the right things at the right time. In the long-term we see data

warehousing capabilities as a major asset for our business and for suppliers generally."

Any organisation within the finance sector will be operating in a highly specialised field, with different regulations and working practices governing the data and technology they use. TIG has built up knowledge of this sector over a long period of time and still conducts regular catch-ups with clients to ensure it is doing everything possible from a technology perspective.

"Staying up to date with regulatory changes and understanding the problems our clients face are key to success in this area," said Lekerman. "Being a dedicated and reliable name within the finance industry has led to the majority of our leads and customers coming from recommendations and referrals. It's self-perpetuating so long as you deliver what you promise." ■

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# Contrasting fortunes ma

Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabuyte.com, reports on the trading performance of leading companies in the comms space during the last quarter.

**T**here was plenty of corporate activity in Telecoms Services (TS) last quarter, mirroring broader Megabuyte trends, with a mix of private equity, M&A and capital markets, with comms infrastructure the predominant theme accompanied by contact centres and Microsoft. The take private battle for KCOM concluded, while the driving attraction of its fibre network was mirrored in funding for Community Fibre, Call Flow, Voneus and Quickline (but still not yet TalkTalk). Meanwhile, all of the UK mobile network operators moved forward with monetising their towers infrastructure.

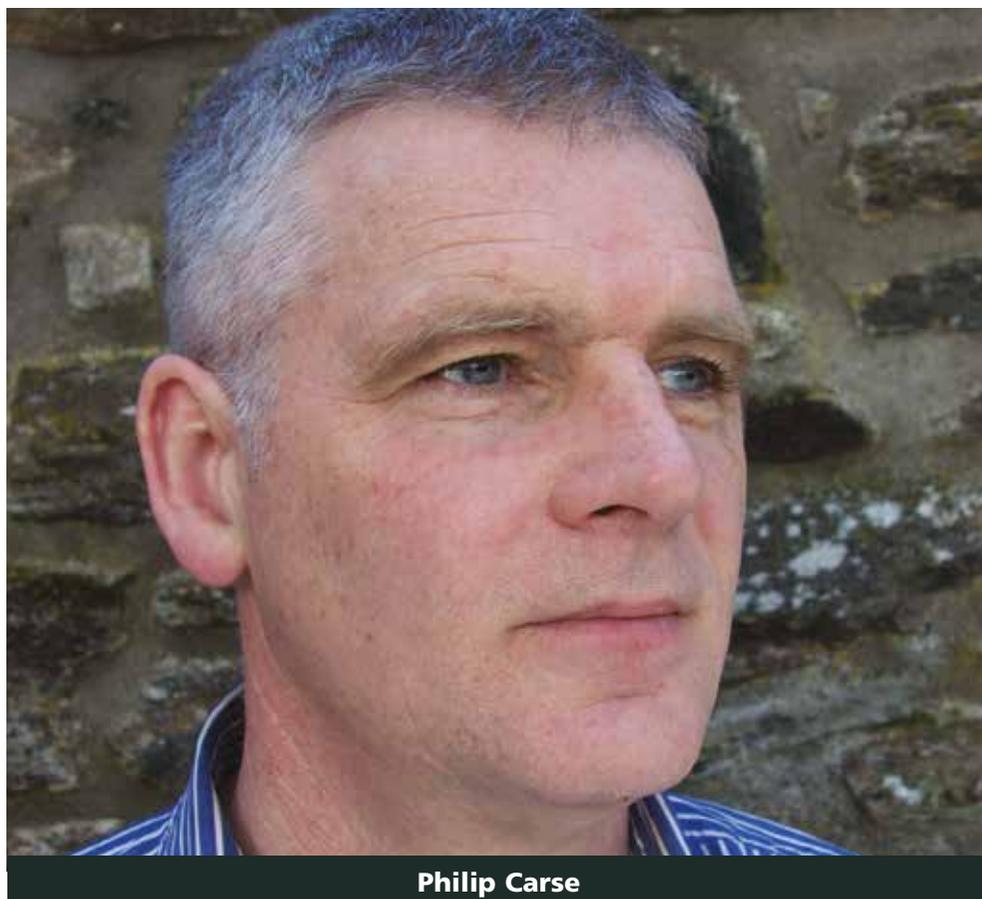
Private equity was also evident in business comms services with an MBO at Onecom and M&A by private equity backed companies G3 and GCI, and in M2M with deals by Wireless Logic and Wireless Innovation. Not to be outdone, owner managed comms provider Elite also made an acquisition. Finally, BT continues to offload non-core assets as it focuses resources on fibre and 5G investments, selling its fleet services business and reportedly selling its legal tech business Tikit.

Worthy of particular note in a busy period for financial reporting were less bad than expected results from KCOM, which highlighted

the attractions and challenges facing new owner Macquarie following the take private; stellar organic growth at business comms provider 4Com, network integrator MLL Telecom and telecoms network support service provider Indigo Telecom; a continued recovery at Olive and Redcentric; more buy-and-build progress for Arrow Communications and Adept Technology; more of the same solid story for Gamma; a profit warning for conferencing's LoopUp; and contrasting satellite reseller results from NSSL Global and Navarino.

Megabuyte has developed a company ranking methodology called the Scorecard, based on growth, margins and cash flow. The Telecoms Services peer group has a Megabuyte Scorecard rating of 48, versus 50 for the Megabuyte universe. Its medians are: 6.8% for one-year organic growth (second quartile), 12.5% for three-year revenue growth (highlighting considerable M&A, third quartile), 12.6% for EBITDA margins (third quartile), 0.4pp for EBITDA margin expansion (third quartile), and 84% for OCF conversion of EBITDA and 57% FCF conversion of EBITDA (both second quartile).

The peer group top ten includes a strong showing by M2M and Messaging



Philip Carse

## Worthy of particular note in a busy period for financial reporting were less bad than expected results from KCOM, which highlighted the attractions and challenges facing new owner Macquarie

companies (Wireless Logic and CSL), and Networks and Connectivity (M247, WIG, Exponential-e and euNetworks), with a couple of Comms and IT resellers (Bistech and Charterhouse). The others are conferencing's LoopUp and a maiden top ten score for telecoms network support service provider Indigo Telecom Group. Note that messaging service provider Commify, which was in the top ten, no longer qualifies for a Scorecard rating as its last accounts were for the year to June 2017 (the

company has extended its latest accounting period to December 2018). Significant movers in the quarter included Arrow (+5 to 58) and Olive (+9 to 37).

**Below par performances**  
Telecom Services shares underperformed over the last quarter, down 8.2% versus -5.1% for ICT services, -1.0% for the Megabuyte All-Share and +2.6% for the FTSE All-Share. This was led by a 60% fall for LoopUp on its profit warning, compounded by 10-15% falls for BT, TalkTalk, Maintel and Redcentric, with

only KCOM (+23%) showing any meaningful growth due to the takeover battle. The performance is more in line on a 12 month view, but still subdued at -3.0%, ranging from Telecom Plus, Gamma and KCOM (+27-31%) to LoopUp (-69%), Maintel (-44%) and Vodafone (-18%).

**IS Research publishes www.megabuyte.com, a company analysis and intelligence service covering over 1,300 public and private UK ICT, software, media and business services companies.**  
philip.carse@megabuyte.com



# Market busy period

## COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

### Vaioni broadens horizons with Panoramic investment

Manchester-based connectivity service provider Vaioni has received investment from London and Glasgow-based private equity investor Panoramic Growth Equity, which apparently invests £1-5m in growth companies from a £65m fund. Vaioni only publishes abbreviated accounts but is clearly on a growth track. Average headcount increased a third to 34 in the year to September 2018, during which time the company states 27% revenue growth; and in December 2018 the company moved into new offices. Our Discovery database estimates £9.1m revenues for Vaioni based on staff numbers and trade debtors.

### B2B trends turn negative for Virgin Media in Q2

Liberty Global reported subdued second quarter to June 2019 results for Virgin Media, showing EBITDA down 2.5% to £547m on revenues up 0.4% at £1,279m, while capex continued its reducing trend, down 18% at £289m. In line with recent trends, the core residential focused Cable division reported modest growth (+1% to £913m) while Mobile reported modest declines (-1.8% to £160m). However, B2B reported its first decline for many a quarter (-1.0% to £190m, the lowest revenues for seven quarters), with slowing growth in SoHo (+16% to £22m) failing to offset accelerating declines in larger businesses (-2.9% to £168m), attributed to lower data and installation revenues.

### Vonage in the black, eyes and appeases investors with Will.i.am deal

US-listed UCaaS player Vonage reported second quarter to June 2019 revenues and EBITDA 2% and 4% ahead of expectations, up 14% to \$298m and down 16% at \$38m respectively, driven by 35% growth (25% organic) in Business revenues to \$200m, while Consumer revenues maintained their long-term decline, down 13% to \$98m. Vonage also announced the \$6m acquisition of Over.ai, a Tel Aviv-based voice and conversational AI provider for enterprise communications, from singer will.i.am, whose 23 techies take Vonage's R&D team to over 100. The shares rose 14% to \$13.43, valuing the company at 23.4x 2019 EBITDA.

### Macquarie backs Voneus for rural wireless broadband push

In another next generation network deal, Macquarie Capital (which has taken KCOM private through one of its infrastructure funds) is to invest an initial £10m and up to £30m in London-based Voneus, which provides 24Mbps broadband in rural areas using wireless technology for up to £35 per month for unlimited services. The monies (from Macquarie's in-house development fund) will enable Voneus to target more of its estimated 900k addressable homes as well as start to connect some of its existing 4k homes to full fibre broadband. Voneus has to date only filed micro accounts which, for the year to March 2018, showed £2.4m capex compared with just £0.4m prior to that year,

and retained losses of £0.6m, taking total losses to £1.8m.

### telent enjoys high fibre diet

Latest accounts to March 2019 for telent, the ex-Marconi UK & Ireland technology business, show a growth year boosted by taking full ownership of a JV with the failed Carillion to support BT Openreach and Gigaclear fibre rollouts, with EBITDA up 13% to £32.2m on revenues up 38% (estimated 3.4% organic) at £542.4m. While growth in the current year will be supplemented by a major contract with Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, the firm anticipates a reduction in fibre work for Openreach from fiscal 2021 as it engages with more partners.

### BT in-line as Consumer and Openreach reverse trends

BT reported an in-line first quarter to June 2019, with revenues and EBITDA down 1% at £5,633m and £1,958m respectively, while capex rose 11% to £931m due to network investments and customer driven costs. The main features of a fairly dull set of results were a shift to revenue declines for Consumer (-1% to £2,550m after several quarters of 1-4% growth) and a move to growth for Openreach (+1% to £1,269m after five quarters of decline), while Enterprise (-5% to £1,516m) and Global Services (-5% to 1,085m) maintained prior trends. BT reiterated full year guidance (for circa 2% underlying revenue and EBITDA declines, though EBITDA is now some 10% higher due to new IFRS16 lease accounting rules).

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# Good assessment of sales



JOHN DONOHOE  
BELIEVE

**W**ith financial demands to meet targets, multiple management priorities, tight deadlines and limited funds, few ICT businesses now have the luxury of running by the seat of their pants, writes John Donohoe, partner at sales training specialist Believe.

With a good assessment process in place, improved efforts can be focused on activities that deliver the highest ROI for both the supplier and especially the customer. We have found that few business leaders have been introduced to the benefits of using continuous assessments to quickly implement sales improvements within their sales and customer support teams.

With the ICT sector in a constant state of growth, convergence of services, delivering content to multiple devices and, not least, key security fears, the skillset of the modern salesperson needs to be rich and diverse – not just a hard close or as low a price as you can sink to!

A cornerstone of a winning sales system is the examination of management, staff and sales processes. We have worked with ICT clients who have NO measure of activity to generate prospects, set up meetings, create proposals or even how many sales they get!! These customised assessments give you the required baseline information to identify strengths and weaknesses of existing processes, strategies and skills and to prioritise on areas that will give you the levels of professional performance.

ICT companies need to shed light on potential areas for improvement with the quality of your teams pipelines and how they properly qualify this, the effectiveness of your sales management capabilities, whether all of your teams are on the same page and if your salespeople are capable of executing your strategies for growth and success and identify business opportunities lost as a result of weaknesses among your existing approach.

The key purpose of the Believe sales system is that you'll learn who is trainable, how much development they'll need and the kind of help from which each will benefit. This could be improved product knowledge, questioning skills, understanding how to create powerful business needs, financial awareness and many more.

And if you are attempting to transition your company from good to great, you need to know which of your existing people should be on the bus, which seats they should be in and who, maybe, should be off the bus! As the great multi skilled American sportsman Herschel Walker stated " If you train hard, you'll not only be hard, you'll be hard to beat."



ROB DOWNES  
9 GROUP

**DO YOU REVIEW YOUR SALES PROCESSES REGULARLY?**

Absolutely. We need to reflect the agility and speed of change in our market, so inertia and any comfort with the status quo would be prohibitive. Effective managed service sales demand a much more involved and sophisticated approach.

**ARE YOU TRAINING SALES TEAMS DIFFERENTLY TODAY?**

Yes. Successful sales are now far less transactional and much more consultative in nature, so our training has had to address that. The emphasis must be on teaching an informed, but flexible manner.

**DO YOU TRAIN IN HOUSE OR USE AN EXTERNAL AGENCY?**

Entirely in house. We have a team of technically proficient solution sales specialists. They share specific product knowledge and expertise between themselves, as well as cascading information to our field sales team, who manage our partners and can engage directly with their end users, if requested.

**WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO THE BEST ICT SALES PEOPLE HAVE?**

The best ICT sales people must be able to tell our story in a way that the customer can relate to, translating jargon into meaningful and attractive language. Being comfortable with describing concepts and alternative scenarios is now vital.



NIKI FOOTE  
FIDELITY GROUP

**DO YOU REVIEW YOUR SALES PROCESSES REGULARLY?**

Yes, we do reviews constantly. Sales is a cut-throat world, so we ensure our process is constantly developing to fit both our partners and customers' needs. We keep up to date with latest industry news and trends in order to adapt our approach.

**ARE YOU TRAINING SALES TEAMS DIFFERENTLY TODAY?**

Sales is constantly adapting. The basics no, but clients' needs and requirements change regularly, so we have to ensure the team know how to work with the likes of Brexit and the shutdown of ISDN For example.

**DO YOU TRAIN IN HOUSE OR USE AN EXTERNAL AGENCY?**

Both. We have an e-learning platform for developing sales techniques, commercial understanding and specifics such as GDPR training; we utilise our suppliers expert product knowledge to enhance our own; and department heads conduct formal and informal training.

**WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO THE BEST ICT SALES PEOPLE HAVE?**

An ability to understand the specific requirements of the customer and design the best solution; passion and knowledge about the products and services we offer; an understanding of the market and market trends; and a hunger to close deals!



SEAN BODSWORTH  
INFORM BILLING

**DO YOU REVIEW YOUR SALES PROCESSES REGULARLY?**

We continually monitor active opportunities and flex sales processes dependent on the individual customer's circumstances. Where there are requirements outside of the 'norm' it's useful to discuss these as a team and agree a standard approach going forward.

**ARE YOU TRAINING SALES TEAMS DIFFERENTLY TODAY?**

Only to reflect changes in priorities and to adopt new technologies. The key with sales is to remember the basics - just because you can, doesn't mean you should jump straight into a screen-share and risk missing key elements of qualifying.

**DO YOU TRAIN IN HOUSE OR USE AN EXTERNAL AGENCY?**

Because our software and services are very niche, most of our training is completed in house through job shadowing. Knowledge of the industries we serve is best learnt externally and it's always beneficial to have an external mentor.

**WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO THE BEST ICT SALESPEOPLE HAVE?**

The best salespeople are skilled at actively listening, identifying pain points and relating these to appropriate solutions. ICT sales is very consultative, it's fundamental to build trust and respect and above all, to focus on benefits not features!



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# processes will deliver ROI



SHAHRAM  
BAGHERZADEH  
LOOP VOICE & DATA

#### DO YOU REVIEW YOUR SALES PROCESSES REGULARLY?

Yes, we review our sales process every six months. This is mainly due to suppliers' requirements and customer demand.

#### ARE YOU TRAINING SALES TEAMS DIFFERENTLY TODAY?

Absolutely, today we are facing a new generation, faster technology, higher competition and higher demand from end users and we must move with the times and today is yesterday.

#### DO YOU TRAIN IN HOUSE OR USE AN EXTERNAL AGENCY?

Both, it is important to have regular in-house training about the process and products, and time to time we use an external agency to improve our knowledge and learn new ideas.

#### WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO THE BEST ICT SALES PEOPLE HAVE?

They should be able to translate ICT into very simple terms to the clients and make sure they are ahead of the game.



VINCENT DISNEUR  
UNION STREET

#### DO YOU REVIEW YOUR SALES PROCESSES REGULARLY?

Absolutely. We actively encourage our team to try new things and bring ideas to the table. We hold regular sales meetings to review progress on key accounts and discuss all aspects of the sales process.

#### ARE YOU TRAINING SALES TEAMS DIFFERENTLY TODAY?

Our approach is always evolving. Social media and content-based marketing has had a particularly transformative impact on the way buyers research products and the sales cycle, so naturally we've adapted our sales tactics accordingly.

#### DO YOU TRAIN IN HOUSE OR USE AN EXTERNAL AGENCY?

External trainers will often, not always, have a 'one-size-fits-all' approach that doesn't allow for the different personalities, strengths and weaknesses of your people. Knowing your team, understanding their challenges and coaching them accordingly produces the best results for us.

#### WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO THE BEST ICT SALES PEOPLE HAVE?

Charisma, personability, work ethic and the ability to listen. Fully understanding a customer's challenges and requirements are key to any solution-based sales role. When it comes to ICT, you must know the product and technology inside out.



TOM MAXWELL  
NIMANS

#### DO YOU REVIEW YOUR SALES PROCESSES REGULARLY?

We constantly review and monitor our sales processes. Customer service first and foremost is paramount, but just as important is the ability to meet customers' needs as technology continues to evolve.

#### ARE YOU TRAINING SALES TEAMS DIFFERENTLY TODAY?

Back in the day it was pretty much more about products and how to configure them etc., but today it's about the wider technology and the bigger picture such as around end point devices. It's about staying one step ahead of the game.

#### DO YOU TRAIN IN HOUSE OR USE AN EXTERNAL AGENCY?

We have a multi-tier approach. We work closely with manufacturers and also have our own in-house training academy that provides knowledge and skills as well as unbiased feedback on call quality and wider service levels.

#### WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO THE BEST ICT SALES PEOPLE HAVE?

The ability to listen and consult is essential. Remain open minded and see the bigger picture. Give customers options and a broader perspective of the solutions and options available. Make recommendations based on benefits to the customer.



DEBBIE ELLIOTT  
WINDSOR TELECOM

#### DO YOU REVIEW YOUR SALES PROCESSES REGULARLY?

In essence, yes. It is impossible to remain rigid in an industry that moves so fast. Whilst a structured approach is always practised, we are the trusted advisor to our customers and prospects alike, so fluidity is important.

#### ARE YOU TRAINING SALES TEAMS DIFFERENTLY TODAY?

Without a doubt. Old clichés such as 'it's a numbers game' are just out dated. We are providing a solution that eases the pain of our customers. Trust is everything.

#### DO YOU TRAIN IN HOUSE OR USE AN EXTERNAL AGENCY?

Both. We believe in adopting processes that work for other key players in the industry. Those mixed with our knowledge and techniques allow us to push forward with our company ethos always being promoted. Being the best needs constant work.

#### WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO THE BEST ICT SALES PEOPLE HAVE?

The ability to listen. Really understand a customer's needs and question their motives. Challenging customers and making them understand what will really work means that we don't take what is on the table, we rebuild the table.



MICHAEL O'DONNELL  
OPUS

#### DO YOU REVIEW YOUR SALES PROCESSES REGULARLY?

We regularly review our sales processes to ensure they are aligned with changes in strategy, focus and marketplace buying decisions. This is particularly important as we launched a new sales academy and are training graduates in their first sales role.

#### ARE YOU TRAINING SALES TEAMS DIFFERENTLY TODAY?

Yes. With both applications and services becoming more integrated, our customers are having to consider and manage a wider ICT landscape meaning we are often presenting to larger, more role diverse groups of people who are invested in buying decisions.

#### DO YOU TRAIN IN HOUSE OR USE AN EXTERNAL AGENCY?

We have adopted a mixture of internal and external training modules particularly in the case of our sales academy. Less experienced sales staff are also mentored by the senior sales managers and directors, partnering on opportunities where needed.

#### WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO THE BEST ICT SALES PEOPLE HAVE?

Communication skills, both listening and speaking are essential, along with ambition, motivation and strategic thinking. Specialist knowledge of products and services is also key, along with alignment to our core values of keep learning, working together and never giving up.



RHYS BAILEY  
FOCUS GROUP

#### DO YOU REVIEW YOUR SALES PROCESSES REGULARLY?

Yes, all parts of the sales process are reviewed regularly. We often change proposals and presentations from the feedback that we receive.

#### ARE YOU TRAINING SALES TEAMS DIFFERENTLY TODAY?

It is more about the access to resources for them to feel empowered with knowledge. We have team leaders and presales specialists walking the floor and attending appointments to ensure salespeople have all the knowledge and support they need to be a success.

#### DO YOU TRAIN IN HOUSE OR USE AN EXTERNAL AGENCY?

Both, however the most impact we see is side-by-side coaching, utilising people that have been with us a long time that can help coach and nurture newer staff. This eradicates bad habits and keeps sales people engaged.

#### WHAT ATTRIBUTES DO THE BEST ICT SALES PEOPLE HAVE?

They need to be innovative and adaptable and good listeners. The market is full of a vast variety of buyers and salespeople must be able to act quickly and decisively on the needs of the person in front of them. And they must be accountable and do what they say they are going to do.

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# Matching technology to fin

Organisations making up the financial sector have become voracious consumers of new comms technologies of all kinds – nothing else will cut the mustard.

**E**stablished players in financial services are striving to accelerate technological change within their organisations to improve the customer experience, reduce costs and manage compliance. Those that fail to transform are under threat from more agile start-up businesses better able to leverage new technology like machine learning and Artificial Intelligence, warned Ian Bevington, Marketing Manager at Oak Innovation.

“Gone are the days when banks could build customer loyalty through regular face-to-face contact,” he said. “With most interaction now online the rare opportunities to talk need to be exceptional. Quality management can help to develop call tactics, create scorecards, provide agent feedback and support continuous improvement across frontline teams. When managing business customers financial organisations are now looking towards video contact centres to build meaningful relationships with clients.”

In an online world where bad news travels fast, protecting reputation is critical, pointed out Bevington. “Technology has a vital role to play in keeping personal data safe, combating cybersecurity

threats, ensuring adherence to policy and managing dispute resolution,” he added. “Call recording is key to proving who said what, clearing up misunderstandings and preventing a costly escalation.”

The widespread availability of cloud-based services is simplifying deployment, but bringing many more partners into scope. “For example, the integrated recording offered alongside some hosted telephony services may be unable to meet MiFID II requirements,” explained Bevington. “Consequently, we’re seeing strong demand for high availability SIP extension recording capable of storing calls in a tamper-proof environment for up to seven years. In this sector, resiliency and system health monitoring are essential to minimise outages.”

Fraud losses on UK issued payment cards totalled £610 million in 2016, the majority associated with Card Not Present (CNP) transitions. Improved online security has caused fraudsters to direct their attention to card payments over the phone. “Over the past year we have seen strong demand for payment services,” noted Bevington. “Operating out of a PCI DSS Level 1 certified data centre, the



Ian Bevington

## When managing business customers, financial organisations are now looking towards video contact centres to build meaningful relationships with clients

solution de-scopes the office environment from card data. Customers can choose from agent assisted, self-service and click to pay options.”

### Digital trends

According to Brett Morris, CFO at Olive Communications, the trend is also towards more everyday high street services being replaced by digital banking and omni-channel contact centre solutions. “Retail banks are embracing the latest in UC technology rather than rely on traditional face-to-face or pure telephone banking services,” he said. “Financial institutions are also leveraging and scaling technology to facilitate

transactional processing at a lower cost to serve.

“The implication of this, in tandem with GDPR compliance, is that security is at the forefront of every bank’s technology agenda. With cyber incidents reported by UK financial services firms increasing nearly 12-fold in 2018 on the previous year, protecting against cyber attacks is now a top priority for financial institutions.”

These organisations are moving away from internal technology solutions designed to manage, record and analyse transactional data, observed Morris, in favour of more externally

facing interactive systems which offer a greater customer focus and add value. “These are designed to better serve the customer and protect against, for example, fraudulent behaviour using the latest in AI and machine-learning,” he added.

“As a result, finance companies and banks are prioritising investment in the latest solutions that enable them to build and develop omni-channel customer-focused contact centre solutions that will transform the way they interact with today’s digital savvy customer. Whether that’s through AI-enabled webchat, email, social media, video or telephone call, modern day banks are acquiring solutions that give people the choice and flexibility they expect to contact their bank or financial adviser when and how it suits the customer.”

Financial institutions are therefore opting to migrate from on-premise communications platforms to more flexible cloud-based solutions that can easily be upscaled with new functionality as and when the business demands, observed Morris. He also noted that as tech solutions become more extensive and pervasive there are trade-offs to be made between the potentially fraudulent activity that customers could be exposed to and the ease of use that customers demand. “The management of these competing priorities typically comes at a cost, and in a highly competitive sector it is important to balance these challenges against one another so that the solution can remain flexible enough to adapt in line with customer needs

# Finance sector opportunities

and evolving technology, while limiting risk for the customers," said Morris.

## Authentication

To create more flexibility and optionality for banks and financial service providers, and at the same time maintain high levels of security, it is important to ensure that every access/entry point to the technology has proper authentication to identify those using it. "While the technology is obviously key, just as important is the intellectual property that sits behind the design and implementation of these solutions," added Morris. "This comes with the experience of having implemented solutions as well as staying current with the latest trends and technology."

Big data with machine learning and AI are key to future success in the financial sector, believes Morris, along with tools that enable customers to better manage their financial futures, such as budgeting and savings tools which are now starting to gain traction in the mass



**Brett Morris**

market. "We are also seeing an increase in automated credit card and personal loan application processing for retail customers and SMEs, but not yet for the enterprise sector," added Morris.

Building trust as a service provider to financially focused organisations is key, and the way to do this is to work with them every step of the way through their digitalisation process, advises Morris. "Rather than rolling out a large scale digital transformation solution it is better to build a DX

strategy incorporating a UC platform or a cloud omni-channel contact centre rolled out over time," he said.

## Step by step

"For example, start by moving the existing functionality of on-premise solutions to the cloud, then add components of omni-channel functionality in a well structured and pre-planned manner. This managed approach helps the customer to better understand the value the solution is bringing to the business and de-risks a big

**Finance companies and banks are prioritising investment in the latest solutions that enable them to build and develop omni-channel customer-focused contact centre solutions**

bang approach that can overstretch company resources."

Financial services organisations are starting to understand the value that analysing voice conversations can bring, with some key areas receiving particular attention from comms and AI vendors, according to Red Box CEO Richard Stevenson. "Specifically, they're beginning to act on the benefits that insight brings to the customer experience," he said. "They're also able to adhere to regulation on a scale not previously available,

which is imperative with the recent introduction, and potentially significant fines, of MiFID II and GDPR."

Without resilient, high quality voice capture and accurate speech to text transcription services, data sets will not be AI-ready with machine learning and analytics tools hindered in their capacity to deliver, according to Stevenson. "We are seeing significant importance placed on data, AI and analysis," he said. "But the quality and accessibility of voice **Continued on page 40**






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**Continued from page 39**  
data is key. Analysing voice conversations supports a true 360 degree view of the customer, extracting rich sentiment, intent and clear articulation of a customer's views and wants."

**Major driver**

The requirement to record interactions for regulatory purposes has been a major driver in the past with financial organisations purchasing voice capture technology for compliance, dispute resolution and agent training in the main. "These use cases remain," added Stevenson. "However, the transition from legacy to IP and cloud architectures, the rise of UC and cloud contact centre solutions and new compliance investment are driving technology purchasing decisions."

Meeting compliance and regulation across every transaction has not been realistically available until the advent of machine learning and AI across voice conversations, noted Stevenson. "Organisations are now able to go beyond what the regulations

stipulate, automating and targeting all transactions with great depth and accuracy," he said. "This largely removes manual effort while increasing detection and reducing overall risk. There are also increased demands to perform this analysis in real-time, with surveillance software fast catching up to enable the requisite real-time action against the transcribed audio."

Financial organisations are investing in automation and AI technology that processes huge volumes of transactions at scale and with acceptable accuracy. But while there is no shortage of AI and analytics tools on the market, finance sector ICT buyers are met with two key challenges, believes Stevenson. "Firstly, there are issues surrounding the quality of the voice data that fuels the AI and analytics tools they're looking to implement," he stated. "Secondly, ICT buyers are sometimes locked into one provider who adopts a monolithic approach, not allowing for flexibility when it comes to picking and choosing the right solutions for their respective needs." ■



**Richard Stevenson**

## Analysing voice conversations supports a true 360 degree view of the customer

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# Chen urges City Champions for the gigabit age

Comms Vision Platinum sponsor CityFibre and its wholesale business Entanet say their magic ingredient in the Digital Britain mix – full fibre – resides at the core of digitalisation and holds the appeal of an ever greater opportunity for the channel’s smart thinking City Champions. Elsa Chen, Entanet CEO and CityFibre Group Chief Customer Officer, explains...

**S**mart technology lies at the heart of almost everything we do, powering every corner of our economy and society, which is why the Government is so invested in moving the UK to a full fibre future by 2025 and why CityFibre is equally at the heart of this ambitious programme by investing £2.5 billion to build the UK’s most intelligent software-defined full fibre access network to over five million homes and businesses in the same timescale.

The potential rewards of this investment are huge. The impact of full fibre infrastructure in 100 towns and cities over 15 years is an estimated £120 billion in gross value added to the economy, as highlighted in the Regeneris report ‘The economic Impact of full fibre infrastructure in 100 towns and cities’ commissioned by CityFibre.

As the applications, devices and services we use become smarter, the role this technology plays in all of our lives becomes more essential, from consumers seeking to enrich and digitise their lives to businesses pursuing absolute competitiveness; and from mobile communications operators engineering a 5G reality to public sector organisations striving to serve society effectively. Smart technology is there when we’re learning, meeting new people and sharing new experiences – it is driving better housing, health care and business innovation.

In this time of exciting digital development, the need to share more data at faster speeds grows ever higher and network performance and reliability becomes ever more critical. That’s why CityFibre is investing

so heavily in building an intelligent software-defined full fibre access network. We’re also addressing key industry issues head on. For example, in the face of a full fibre construction skills shortage we’re committed to working closely with local authorities and recruitment partners to attract, develop and retain the most talented people available as we grow and push forward with our full fibre vision for Britain.

#### Whole city enablement

CityFibre’s strategy is about much more than just laying fibre, it’s about delivering a network designed and built not only to serve gigabit speeds to over five million homes and businesses but one that’s capable of 100 gigabits per second and beyond, powering 5G, connecting everything from hospitals, schools and stadiums to the myriad of IoT services that will realise smart city visions.

5G in particular is a powerful use case for full fibre coverage across whole cities, and supporting it is very much an evolution of what we already do. 5G will underpin decades of innovation to come, supporting new mobile-dependent technologies and applications across all sectors of the economy. We see it as complementary though – significantly enhancing the mobile experience when people are on the move, while a fantastic FTTP experience awaits them in their homes and offices when they return – each backing up the other to keep our nation connected.

Our focus is also about creating a network that’s always on, that can be upgraded at the click of a mouse and where problems can be fixed before they are noticed. A

**5G will underpin decades of innovation to come, supporting new mobile-dependent technologies and applications**

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# ons to deliver a network



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network that allows those using it to define and control their own services and deliver a superior customer experience at the lowest cost per bit, per mile, per service.

### Be a City Champion!

The role our channel partners play in this rollout and the opportunities that come with it are enormous. Through our wholesale business teams at Entanet we're actively supporting our reseller, aggregator and wholesale customers to be City Champions. Being a City Champion means putting our CityFibre full fibre products at the heart of your proposition, focusing on sales and marketing in towns and cities where our infrastructure is ready to be utilised and reaching out to targeted businesses. We're supporting these champions through dedicated account management, a focused city strategy, ready-made marketing materials and campaign funding to help get the full fibre message out there to customers.

By adopting a business strategy that actively promotes the adoption of full fibre, City Champions are also crucially driving further investment in and growth of a future-proof network. As our build accelerates across multiple cities and our services catch the attention of more and more consumers and communities, awareness is echoing through the business world – enabling fresh conversations with thousands of businesses and opening up an even greater scale of opportunity – success driving success!

### Full fibre ahead!

Much has advanced since last year's Comms Vision. 2018 was very much about mobilising our construction machine, but it was a significant year for us in other ways too. Having been taken private by two of the most prestigious infrastructure funds in the world, we committed to a £2.5 billion investment plan to reach at least 20 per cent of the UK. We're already investing £1 billion in the first 26 whole city full fibre network builds, which represents just two million of our target to connect at least five million premises – a clear indication of how many more towns and cities are still to be named.

As we accelerate our builds and add more cities, we continue to enable channel partners to serve the business market with game-changing products and systems that boast simplicity and ease of adoption. At a time when business leaders expect connectivity to work for them as a utility, we've introduced new products that directly support customers with minimum speed guarantees and the extra bandwidth they need, when they need it, in a cost-effective and easily managed package. We are investing, we are building, and we are connecting customers to the networks of the future. At this year's Comms Vision boardroom sessions we're keen to share the strategy that is already putting our City Champion partners at the heart of the digital revolution.

**Platinum sponsor viewpoints continue on page 44**

**We are investing, we are building, and we are connecting customers to the networks of the future**



# Digital Britain 2.0 transition strategic planning

As Britain's legacy infrastructure continues to release its stranglehold on business communications it's time to start planning for what will be a 'defining period' in the transitory Digital Britain 2.0 era, writes Gamma's Managing Director for Channel Daryl Pile (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor).

**W**ith an ever increasing number of new entrants to the market and customer demand for joined up ICT environments ever growing, it is important for channel partners to explore how to differentiate themselves and maintain their value for the long-term as we advance towards Digital Britain. In a digital world where customers can buy many services online, long-term success in the channel will depend on more than product alone. An abundance of digital channels means customers are always in contact and expect businesses to follow suit by being contactable 24/7, 365 days a year. For these businesses to thrive their technology needs to be up to scratch. Whether that's the channels they utilise for improved customer experience, the internal platforms for staff to communicate or the connectivity that underpins it all. Experience is everything, and for the channel this means understanding and defining how ICT solutions will improve the experience at each point – for the user, the team, businesses and customers.

### Uncertainty leads to opportunity

As we progress towards Digital Britain today's businesses face a bewildering array of uncertainties as their environments change at an increasing rate. It is without doubt more complex than ever to run a business. Of course, all businesses are inevitably subject to uncertainty, whether that's from internal or external threats arising from technical, management, operational or commercial issues. For the channel, this uncertainty can lead to opportunities that can be exploited if recognised early enough. Within the next five years there will be key opportunities for the channel to unlock in the SME and mid-market space.

UCaaS has become a key component in the digital journeys organisations have embarked upon as they seek to gain competitive advantage in their markets; and the channel, which has largely secured the SIP market, is primed to lead the UCaaS charge. Despite the strong appeal of UC services to many businesses, penetration into the SME market is low with only 10 per cent of organisations embracing the technology as of 2017. For the channel (already the trusted providers) 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. They are looking to grow their business and compete with mid-market and large enterprise organisations, and UC is vital in helping them achieve this.

Beyond targeting SME organisations, the channel has a clear opportunity to go after the more established mid-market businesses with a UCaaS proposition. Legacy technology is a key burden, as is the dynamics of their workforce who may feel they are not ready for a business communication overhaul. By adopting a consultative approach for mid-market businesses and recognising the challenges they are facing, channel partners can provide a tailored solution, relieving their pain points – whether that be attracting a new millennial generation or needing to boost overall business productivity.

While offering the latest and greatest in technology is important, it's also vital for the channel to keep an eye on the opportunities within their existing base. With BT's plans to stop taking new ISDN orders from businesses in 2020, and switch off the service completely by 2025,

**Within the next five years there will be key opportunities for the channel to unlock in the SME and mid-market space**

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# tion calls for immediate



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there is no longer a choice. UK businesses still using this legacy service must consider alternative options now. A survey of Gamma's channel partner base in January 2019 found that 90 per cent of respondents are still maintaining an ISDN base. While it also showed that four in five partners have started migrating their existing ISDN base to hosted voice or SIP, there is still much work to be done. Channel partners need to act quickly as ISDN customers are ripe for other providers to secure as their own. The race is on!

### Plotting the right course

With new entrants into the market it is essential for channel resellers to be shrewd when choosing who to partner with. We would suggest that partners look at all elements of the service that a technology partner can provide. The functionality of the service is important, but it is key to ensure that the model that they provide suits the long-term aspirations of the channel partner's business. The bedrock of Gamma's channel offering will always be that the customer relationship and contract is wholly owned by the partner. As a wholesale provider this has served us well, and as the true channel community has become smaller we would encourage partners to remain vigilant to entrants that offer outside this model.

The channel must plot a course to ensure their business model permits long-term success. Beyond partnerships, Gamma believes the channel can establish their value in

the solutions they offer to businesses, while providing an unrivalled customer service wrap. Adopting digital sales and marketing strategies to keep ahead of the curve, the channel needs to contextualise their offering to solve real business issues. Instead of selling just a business phone system, look to bundle the offering with collaboration tools, instant messaging, voice and video communication – all are available to users in the office or on the move.

### Strength and agility

The success that the channel has seen in the SIP market over the past five years is proof of their influence and power when competing for a customer. The channel continues to outperform and remain highly competitive, even when selling products that have a homogeneous feature set, regardless of the provider. Ethernet, mobile and broadband – all products where the buyer's purchasing decision is heavily influenced on price – are still seeing exceptional sales numbers from the channel.

For many channel businesses the next five years will be a defining period and key to their success will be adopting a flexible approach. Furthermore, as technology becomes more complicated there is an opportunity for ICT providers to remove complexity for the customer and supply simple bundled solutions with a superior service wrap. This is key to differentiating and remaining competitive against the larger players.

Platinum sponsor viewpoints continue on page 46

**In a digital world where customers can buy many services online, long-term success in the channel will depend on more than product alone**

# Full fibre and 5G may be not the whole story...

The road to Digital Britain represents a high-speed opportunity for the channel to grasp unprecedented levels of technological innovation, but the project is the subject of hype galore, according to David Barber, Head of Product at Comms Vision Platinum sponsor Zen Internet, who explains why we should not yet be dazzled by the nation's transition to a digital comms infrastructure, and why the customer experience matters most.

**T**he broadband industry is on the verge of a technological revolution – and can sometimes seem forever on the edge of the next game-changing breakthrough. As a business operating in the channel you've probably heard that before. This time round, 5G and full fibre are the technologies to sweep through the industry like wildfire, burning off the old scrub and clearing the way for a new generation of ultrafast applications to bloom. At least that's what the hype would have us believe. In reality, broadband doesn't really work like that. It prefers evolution to revolution.

End users want reliable connectivity and a smooth customer experience, and they won't be hurried into adopting technology they don't currently see value in. At the end of 2018 nine million premises were still connected using 'ancient' ADSL. And for all its very real promise, FTTP had only connected just over half a million homes and businesses by the start of this year. Which isn't to say that these new technologies aren't important. They truly are, and usage will steadily grow. FTTP and G.fast will eventually reach a tipping point, and 5G will follow.

The new Prime Minister has announced ambitious targets for full fibre coverage that he may or may not be able to meet. But with broadband, change tends to be gradual. There is no doubt that a continual cycle of technological innovation is essential to the industry, allowing channel businesses to provide end users with new and better ways of connecting, communicating and working. But for the time being many of those users (business and home) will continue to want a first rate experience with the technology they already have.

Yes, they will consider transitioning to FTTP and 5G eventually, but it's worth remembering that most people – and most businesses – are not early adopters. Many are happy with the speeds they get now. They need other reasons to trust a broadband supplier. In a switcher's market, that trust is key. When you look back across ADSL, SDSL, LLU and GEA FTTC, has partner success ever really been about the technology? Technology is an enabler. The application of the technology to meet customers' needs is the most important thing.

#### Innovation needs infrastructure

At Zen, we certainly keep up with technology. We were one of the first ISPs in the country to offer FTTP and G.fast. Our channel partners are already supplying ultrafast broadband to their customers wherever it is currently available. But when it comes to broadband technology, what you do behind the scenes is just as important as the headline news. Our partners rely on us to have the infrastructure in place to service our ultrafast offer and its ever-increasing demands, while ensuring that end users on ADSL and FTTC connections suffer no ill effects.

It's a challenge that ISPs approach in different ways. While some rely entirely on the infrastructure of their supplier, Zen has taken a different path. We operate by far the largest independent data network in the UK, and aim to have 700 unbundled BT exchanges by 2021 (up from 450 today). That investment allows us to bring the vast majority of end users onto our highly reliable and scalable on-net network. Why do we bother, when so few of our competitors are unbundling

**End users won't be hurried into adopting technology they don't currently see value in**

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# the future, but they're



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BT exchanges? We do it because we believe that, as resource-hungry FTTP and G.fast gain traction, partners need an even more robust supply chain on which to build a new generation of valuable cloud-driven services.

### Broadband market flattens – but opportunities remain

That's especially true when you consider that the broadband market is flattening. To grow, a channel business needs to take customers off someone else. That's a challenge, but the opportunities are there. For

### Customer experience in the ultrafast era

**Price transparency:** Being clear and transparent in service pricing is refreshing for customers.

**Easy provisioning:** A smooth and predictable provisioning experience can make all the difference.

**Consistency of speed:** Full fibre access is only part of an end-to-end service. Delivering a consistent speed even at peak times takes significant investment and a unique approach to network management.

**Service diversity:** Full fibre improves the speed and last mile consistency of available bandwidth, but in the short-to medium-term FTTP coverage will remain a postcode lottery. 5G, meanwhile, will be patchy at best. Resellers will continue to need a kitbag of different access technologies.

**Access to help:** Partners need access to knowledgeable and available support services.

**Fix times:** Broadband technologies are being used to connect services that are more business critical. Getting problems fixed against realistic and agreed SLAs is of ever-greater importance.

example, we're already starting to see FTTP and GPON-based services start to cannibalise EAD-based Leased Line services. XGS-PON services are soon to enter trials and are designed to support up to 10Gbps symmetrical access, further moving broadband access technologies into the space currently held by dedicated EAD type services.

This technological change presents a real opportunity for resellers to disrupt larger incumbent providers which have legacy revenue lines to protect. But to fully exploit the opportunity partners need a reliable, responsive and technologically sophisticated supply chain behind them.

### New kids on the block

A new wave of altnets has emerged to help provide that support. The question is, how many of them are in it for the long-term? How many will be there to support resellers and their customers through their digital transformation journeys and beyond? How many are building backhaul networks to support the unprecedented growth in utilisation? And just as crucially, will these new arrivals be able to provide the quality of customer experience end users expect? As we've said, it's a switcher's market, and resellers who utilise several altnet providers to service their customer base will have to ensure that customer experience remains consistent across that dispersed supply chain. After all, it is their reputation at stake.

At the moment we don't know how all this will pan out, but one thing is clear – customer experience will remain as important in the new technological age as it was in the last, and the one before that. ■

**Customer experience will remain as important in the new technological age as it was in the last, and the one before that**

# Channel research: Bridging



Businesses are displaying an ever greater commitment to workplace diversity, but does the ICT channel understand the real value of a diverse workforce?

**T**he goals of this research are to assess the current state of diversity in ICT channel businesses and establish key demographics, identify where diversity programmes are most and least successful, develop a thesis for progression and encourage leadership in executing strategies that diversify and cohere the workplace.

The research data is derived from phone interviews with over 160 channel businesses, the vast majority of which are comms resellers and MSPs of all sizes. What emerges from

the report is a kaleidoscope of insights that strengthen our understanding of dimensions of diversity – how they are related, why they are important to business success and why certain diversity strategies aren't delivering. The study also spotlights what more needs to be done to bridge strategic gaps and optimise existing diversity programmes and cultures.

The survey results indicate a complex relationship between certain elements of diversity, presenting challenges that must be overcome to make progress. The obstacles mainly derive from a lack of

leadership, vision, focus and no situational awareness of where businesses think they are on their diversity journey, despite setting out with clear intentions. This paper offers guidelines for business leaders who need to rethink their approach to diversity; and provides food for thought for boardroom executives with no diversity agenda.

The report also offers insights into the role of technology-driven diversity as an opportunity to nurture inclusion across diverse teams, thereby overcoming occupational segregation

and promoting workgroup performance and cohesion. Furthermore, the study yields compelling results that show how diversity is emerging as a determining factor within the dynamics of business partnerships, and adds real business value to channel firms, most apparent when seeking to exit. There is no argument about the multiple benefits of developing an effective approach to workplace diversity. But this study shows that more needs to be done.

For the purposes of this channel survey companies are categorised based on revenue

size: Up to £5 million, £5-20 million and £20 million-plus.

## **Making diversity work**

It is accepted as fact that workplace diversity can improve the bottom line, boost leadership, help attract and retain skills, foster loyalty, improve team performance, knowledge sharing, productivity, creativity and innovation – and more – so to what extent is diversity embedded into channel businesses?

The case for diversity and inclusion is only partially understood in the channel, with just over 25 per cent of

# ng the diversity divide

survey respondents having implemented a diversity programme. They feature mostly among the sub-£5 million revenue segment, suggesting that growing companies, led by a younger generation, consider diversity as fundamental to future success. With the rising population of start-ups it is likely that the number of diversity programmes among sub-£5 million revenue companies will increase. Nearly one third of respondents in the £20 million-plus category have a diversity programme, ahead of the £5-£20 million segment.

In what will be a recurring theme in this report, £20 million-plus businesses are more likely to look hard at their diversity as they seek further expansion. This theory is supported by our research figures that point to diversity being a priority for nearly 27 per cent of £20 million-plus firms.

### Gauging strategic priorities

The survey sought to grade the importance of diversity in channel businesses by measuring its status as a strategic priority. Overall, more than 70 per cent of the respondents rate diversity as a priority for their business, but nearly 30 per cent don't, even though they have established a diversity programme. It is unlikely that this 30 per cent merely pay lip service to their diversity agenda – more probable that it is not seen as fundamentally strategic and reflects a lack of ambition in this area, a deduction supported by research figures that show over 70 per cent of channel businesses with a diversity strategy do not publicly communicate

their diversity ambitions. Diversity is rated a priority most in the £20 million-plus segment at nearly 27 per cent, followed by sub-£5 million businesses. Less than 20 per cent in the £5-20 million category rate diversity as a priority.

### Three key dimensions of diversity

In terms of their current diversity status three dimensions dominate. Over 80 per cent of the channel businesses surveyed rate themselves as ethnically diverse, 81.5 per cent say they are gender diverse, and 79 per cent have diversity in age groups. These encouraging statistics suggest that some channel businesses are more diverse

than they think, with actual diversity standing at circa 80 per cent in the key metrics of gender, ethnicity and age, despite 70 per cent rating diversity as a strategic priority, pointing to a 10 per cent diversity dividend.

### Where's the leadership?

Almost 93 per cent of channel firms surveyed have a multi-tasking diversity leader with responsibilities shared across a number of functions. Just seven per cent have a dedicated leader – five per cent of them in the £20 million-plus revenue segment. Multi-tasking leaders appear most in the sub-£5 million revenue category at circa 30 per cent, followed by 27 per cent in £20 million-plus businesses with the £5-20

million segment trailing. Overall, more than 68 per cent of these leaders have the full spectrum of diversity on their agenda. Nearly 27 per cent of full-scopers reside in the £20 million-plus revenue segment, the highest portion. A more selective approach to diversity is adopted by 32 per cent of all leaders (both dedicated and multitasking), which suggests a targeted strategy, probably aimed at the three prominent groups already highlighted by this survey – ethnicity, gender and age.

### Communication matters

Over 75 per cent of channel businesses surveyed communicate their diversity goals across their business – 24 per cent do not.

Businesses in the sub-£5 million and £20 million-plus segments communicate most. Least communicative are £5-20 million companies, meaning that workers in this segment are more unlikely to be informed about their employer's diversity ambitions and goals, which suggests a diversity starved culture.

### The comms sector's best kept secret

While more than 75 per cent of channel businesses communicate their diversity goals across their business, over 70 per cent keep them a secret from the outside world and do not publicly communicate their diversity ambitions. This is hardly a proactive approach to attracting diverse candidates, especially as more than 70 per cent of the companies surveyed rate diversity as a priority for their business. The least likely to publicly communicate their commitment to diversity are sub-£5 million revenue firms, many of which keep their diversity agenda within four walls. In the £20 million-plus bracket 22 per cent don't publicly communicate their diversity ambitions; with £5-20 million channel firms the least likely to blow their own trumpet. More positively, 29 per cent of channel businesses surveyed do publicly communicate their diversity ambitions.

### Crunching the numbers

Of the channel companies surveyed nearly 44 per cent gather and analyse employee data and demographics to assess what is working and what is not, and to measure the progress of their diversity leaders. But 56 per cent don't apply any kind of analysis to their

Continued on page 50



**Among the channel businesses taking part in this survey 20 per cent have no women in leadership positions, and just three per cent have more females than males in management roles**

**Continued from page 49**  
diversity programme nor its output. Without quantifiable results it is near impossible to know whether a scheme is working or otherwise, and where it can be evolved and improved. Given that almost 93 per cent of channel businesses surveyed have a multi-tasking diversity leader and just seven per cent a dedicated head, it is no surprise that more attention is not applied to analysing diversity programmes.

**Matching results to stated intent**

Although over 70 per cent of respondents rate diversity as a priority for their business, 56 per cent have no clue about the output of their diversity programmes. This lack of attention to detail and dearth of insight reveals a big gap between stated intent and practical commitment to managing and optimising the strategy/culture. This could be indicative of businesses paying lip service to a high profile social and industrial cause, but the research proffers a more likely reason.

The main responsibility and accountability for diversity within channel organisations sits at board level (over 68 per cent) and mid-management (24.5 per cent). It is probable that time-pressured boardroom executives simply lack the scope to give diversity the attention it needs, nor the time to be hands-on with middle managers tasked with driving diversity, let alone having the resources to train diversity leaders. Bridging this gap could simply be a matter of raising awareness of the issue and bringing diversity front of mind.

**Get on track with diversity training**

Just 44 per cent of all channel businesses surveyed provide diversity training, mainly in the £20 million-plus segment where 22 per cent of these firms focus on educating staff



**68 per cent of respondents consider diversity to add value to their business. Yet only 22 per cent expect to increase investment in supporting diversity, and 78 per cent intend to maintain existing levels of investment**

about the dimensions of diversity. Of the businesses that do not pursue formal procedures for training staff on diversity matters, just 2.4 per cent plan to do so in the foreseeable future. These figures suggest a clear split between more diversity aware businesses and those that are less educated, and therefore less prepared to benefit from the many boons associated with a diverse workforce. It's a trend which could also impact the real value of

a business, which we will explore later in this report.

**HR: Resolving the people dilemma**

Over 58 per cent of respondents have a policy to recruit diverse candidates. The most active are £20 million-plus organisations of which nearly 27 per cent have a formalised approach to recruiting diverse employees. Conversely, 39 per cent of respondents do not currently have

such a policy, and only 2.4 per cent of these plan to introduce one.

What also emerges from the research is that 39 per cent do not deploy techniques to encourage diversity in their recruitment process (for example, name-blind recruitment, which takes some bias out of the recruitment process). Among the 58.5 per cent of respondents that inculcate diversity into their recruitment

strategy, 36.5 per cent deploy 'techniques', 22 per cent don't, and 41.5 per cent did not know how to answer the question – suggesting that recruitment techniques are an unknown quantity to them, and that the 'policy' exists in writing only.

These figures indicate a strong intent and commitment to recruit diverse candidates, but a lack of practical knowhow and experience which will ultimately stop them from achieving their diversity objectives and prolong lingering biases, thereby contributing to inequality rather than diversifying to the max.

It comes as no surprise to learn that employment techniques are deployed most in the £20 million-plus revenue segment, where almost 27 per cent have a policy to recruit diverse candidates and 17 per cent of them leverage specific techniques for the purpose. This segment is likely to become more diverse faster, followed by sub-£5 million businesses where over 12 per cent deploy techniques to encourage diversity in their recruitment process.

**Partnering for a more diverse channel**

When selecting channel service providers/vendors to partner with almost 27 per cent of all respondents consider their diversity status – 68 per cent currently do not, of which 46 per cent say they intend to consider the diversity of potential partners in the future. Clearly, service providers/vendors need to up their diversity credentials. The most diversity conscious businesses are those in the 20 million-plus segment of which over 12 per cent already consider the diversity of potential partners – a number that is certain to rise.

**Diversity boosts exit values**

That channel firms project the value they place on

diversity (if not always acted on within their own business) onto external organisations they might work with (service providers/vendors) is also reflected in the fact that 63 per cent, when looking to exit, would consider a potential buyer's diversity as a factor in the sale. For buyers, elevating their diversity strategy/culture could be key to hitting acquisition targets – and those acquisitive businesses in the £20 million plus revenue segment will be most attractive to the potential 63 per cent of diversity alert vendors.

Furthermore, 68 per cent of respondents consider diversity to add value to their business. Yet their recognition of real business value derived from a diverse workforce is not reflected in the attention given to diversity on their own turf, nor financial commitments. Only 22 per cent of respondents expect to increase investment in supporting diversity, and 78 per cent intend to maintain existing levels of investment.

### Harnessing tech-driven diversity

Greater levels of diversity and differences in teams may stop people working together effectively. Fostering cultural homogeneity from teams made up of diverse people may pose a challenge, which the survey goes some way in resolving by highlighting the role of collaboration technology as an enabler of diversity and cultural inclusion in teams.

The survey asked respondents whether they recognise collaboration technology (such as Unified Communications and enterprise social media) as a unifying force that enables diverse teams to work as one effective entity, and with other working groups to share knowledge and ideas. The endorsement of this thesis was emphatic, with 80 per cent of respondents agreeing that collaboration technology is an optimiser of diverse teams. Companies in the £20 million-plus segment accounted for

29 per cent of tech-driven diversity proponents, with the sub-£5 million segment also registering 29 per cent, and nearly 20 per cent in £5-20 million businesses.

### Collaboration cultivates inclusion

Of the 80 per cent who agree that collaboration technology is a unifying force and optimiser of diverse teams, 68 per cent have deployed technology within their own business to optimise diversity, mostly in the £20 million-plus segment (26.8 per cent) and the sub-£5 million category. Overall, among those that have not yet deployed diversity-friendly technology, 2.4 per cent plan to. The survey results suggest that technology implementations that promote a culture of diversity will quickly pay off in terms of RoI, given the added business value that comes hand-in-hand with diversity.

Therefore the role of ICT providers to help customers develop a diversity strategy from a technology support

The goals of current diversity schemes ranked by importance are: To improve the bottom line (76 per cent); to attract skills (10.5 per cent); to boost team performance, knowledge sharing, productivity, creativity and innovation (10.5 per cent); and to diversify leadership (3 per cent).

How well a company performs is directly linked to the proportion of females occupying senior management roles (McKinsey), yet our survey reveals that diversifying leadership is the lowest priority in current diversity programmes. Respondents value the output of greater skills and productivity gains through diverse teams above a more diverse leadership profile.

perspective is significant, and accepted as fact by 61 per cent of respondents (17 per cent think there 'might be' a role, while 22 per cent say there is no role). Notably, 41.5 per cent of respondents are already ambassadors for tech-enabled diversity in their customer base. The £20 million-plus channel firms have the highest faith in technology's ability to optimise teams, with 19.5 per cent of this segment believing there is a role for ICT providers.

help. More positively, with nearly 30 per cent expressing a commitment to making diversity a priority, combined with the potential of almost 20 per cent 'might dos', this points to a possible conversion of 50 per cent of those without a programme over the long-term, which is great news for the channel. ■

**Bridging the Diversity Divide round table debate – page 52**



**Channel leaders want to see more diversity in their partners, but this requirement may not be reflected in their own business**

### New wave of diversity set to emerge

Among those businesses without a diversity programme, 84 per cent do fully recognise the benefits of a more diverse and inclusive workforce, and 29 per cent say diversity will become a priority area for their business, yet only 17.4 per cent of organisations with no diversity programme plan to introduce one, with most commitment in the sub-£5 million segment – 19 per cent overall 'might' focus more on diversity.

Among all of the diversity novices, just 12 per cent say they would benefit from expert guidance to help put them on the road to becoming a more diverse organisation, while 87.5 per cent would not seek outside

### KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Do you truly prioritise diversity?
- Does your diversity strategy work?
- Do you provide diversity training?
- Who owns your diversity programme?
- How well do you understand diversity?
- Do you know the value of gender diversity?
- Do you have a policy to hire diverse staff?
- Are you investing enough in diversity?
- Do you understand the link between technology, team diversity and cohesion?
- Do your initiatives maximise value?

This survey report is available as a download on the Comms Dealer website

# Diversity and inclusion key



As round table delegates got to grips with the findings of Comms Dealer's Bridging the Divide diversity and inclusion channel survey (produced in association with BT Wholesale), they zigzagged from the root causes of gender imbalance, to embracing neurodiversity, to addressing unconscious bias, to breaking entrenched moulds. But all of this points to an industry in need of soul-searching and corrective action.

**S**ome industry people think the channel's greatest challenge is the impending switch to an all-digital Britain. They are wrong. The industry's greatest challenge is to keep pace and compete with the spread of diversity and inclusion across UK plc. According to Entanet CEO Elsa Chen the comms sector will never flourish if diversity and inclusion is not treated as an immediate priority. "I've become aware during the past six months how other industries have moved forward faster,

such as Google and other digital organisations," she stated. "We must recognise the urgency of diversity and inclusion and see it as important to the survival of our sector."

The relentlessness of the comms industry's diversity-lite heritage has ultimately sapped the channel of a fluid supply of talent. The industry's failings over diversity and inclusion are presented in the main as those of leadership – but that is not to say that the desire to become more

diverse and inclusive is not evident. "I have been asked by a number of owner operators what they need to do to change their business," commented BT Wholesale Managing Director Alex Tempest. "My finger is not on a magic button just because I'm female, but there was a total willingness to want to have that conversation and embrace it."

#### Full commitment

The issue of diversity and inclusion in the comms sector has suddenly got more serious, and tokenism and

posturing, which offer no advantage, will be quickly found out. It requires full attention and commitment, and to do otherwise is to impose a sanction on your own business, according to Sky Business Communications Marketing Manager Rohita Kopf, who noted that these matters should be at the discretion of many people, not just individual leaders.

"Diversity and inclusion is built into Sky's culture and is therefore part of the recruitment and onboarding process, and part of every

team and quarterly meeting," she said. "You need to build a diversity culture top-down. It should be business as usual, not an initiative or a programme, but part of everyday life. And you need more than one diversity ambassador. We have males and females at all levels leading the diversity message."

The industry in general needs to flesh out broadbrush plans to deliver diversity, and Daisy Corporate Services CEO Stefni Oliver proposes that from the outset diversification

# y to channel development

should also extend to the wider community at large. "If you don't have a pool of potential recruits you can't choose diversity, so we work with an organisation called Stemettes as well as local social outreach companies," she explained. "Our office is in a culturally diverse area but these cultures are insular, so we help people to integrate and get jobs. For example, we offer roles where English as a first language is not important. This gets people through the door. We also go out to local schools and colleges to encourage people, otherwise you're never going to get them."

Progress does not mean passing through any Damascene conversion to diversity awareness. But there may be deep seated prejudices to realise and neutralise, because nothing illustrates the partiality in all of us like unconscious bias, so we must reach deep into our psyche to find answers to personal questions and adapt accordingly. "I have a challenge between changing policy versus creating the right culture and behaviour," commented Tempest. "Consider unconscious bias and ask whether that can be addressed by changing a policy. I don't think it can. This is something that people have to take on personally, especially when trying to create a more diverse culture."

"When I first heard the term 'unconscious bias' I had to clarify its true definition, then I challenged myself on what I thought my bias was – it's unconscious so you don't necessarily know – and asked the questions that enabled me to challenge stereotypes. We offer training in this area alongside other initiatives

that address culture and behaviour. If you do it in isolation you won't make much of a difference. If you do it as part of a holistic dynamic programme it changes everything."

We revisit the issue of unconscious bias and personal awareness of it later in this report, and also reflect that change can come from only one quarter, leadership, which may be in dire need of a reality check. According to Chen, it's time for a realist's vision of why diversity goes beyond gender. "As an industry we have accepted that there is one model of success which is male dominated," she said. "This makes minorities and people from diverse backgrounds uncomfortable. It's about breaking the mould. Businesses with more women experience greater success because they bring different opinions and a culture that understands how diversity will lead to success. We need women to speak up instead of holding back opinions because they are different from the boss."

For years, the comms industry has been starved of cultural



## You need to build a diversity culture top-down. It should be business as usual

diversity and inclusion. The resulting imbalance of males versus females in top level leadership positions is matched by the scale of the challenge in creating greater gender parity through a change in mindset. "I started in the industry in a junior position and shied away from the established behaviour and success model," commented Chen. "I did not see myself as naturally fitting this template and presumed that I would not be successful. When I became more mature and confident in myself I understood that being different can be a

good thing. There are many people in the industry that lack confidence and don't see what an alternative success model could look like."

### Experience counts

Yet to be seen as embracing diversity does not always imply the capacity to drive it in an environment where personal experience may be limited, noted BT Wholesale Sales Director for Fixed Sales Michala Hart. "The comms industry can be 'samey'," she said. "People operate in the channel for long periods of time and move from one £20 million organisation to

another, for example, but businesses of all sizes are very different. People almost get trapped into their size and scale and lack an opportunity to broaden their horizons."

The recruitment policies of GCHQ are a telltale sign of what can happen in the comms sector if blinkered outlooks are broadened to also embrace neurodiversity and atypical patterns of thought or behaviour. The National Autistic Society suggests that fewer than two in ten autistic people are in full-time paid work. Astro Communications founder and CTO Steve Smith believes these statistics point to a serious waste of autistic talent.

"I've worked with some amazing people on the spectrum, but their personality and the way they live their lives doesn't fit with neurotypical people," he stated. "I know an amazing technologist but he had issues around personal hygiene. The company accommodated these issues for a while until he hacked the managers' accounts – not maliciously, but to show he had the technical capability. He was sacked. The company should have spent more time finding out what made him tick and accommodate his way of living. I'm mentoring people with complex issues like this. It's a real challenge and talented people don't get a look in on interviews or careers. Yet the National Cybersecurity Centre and GCHQ recruit people on the autistic spectrum."

This is just one indication that shows how the comms industry is not a modern construct and in varying  
**Continued on page 54**



## We must recognise the urgency of diversity and inclusion and see it as important to the survival of our sector

Continued from page 53  
degrees stands opposed to diversity and inclusion by virtue of its heritage. Nonetheless, business leaders should recognise that they are in large part responsible for turning the comms sector into a magnetic attractor of young female talent. "In years six and seven at school girls are equal to, or surpassing boys in technology, but come year 12 the majority of girls are looking for careers in areas like accounting, medicine or law," stated Smith.

Not surprisingly, the comms industry remains a stranger to these girls and according to Hart this is one of the sector's most pressing issues, on which it is found lacking. "Girls choose to go into science or medicine because they think it makes a difference," she explained. "They don't know that technology makes more of a difference. My whole career has been about what technology does for businesses and how do monetise it. The question is, how do we make school girls realise that our industry is shaping the world. Science and medicine is important, but the technology industry takes the practical application of these to another level. There is no passion, enthusiasm or funding to underpin what school girls can do for our industry."

Indeed, the drive for greater diversity offers a series of pedagogic opportunities to bridge the gender gap. "We need to get into schools and instil in young people what technology does for society and what it can do for them," stated BT Wholesale Client Director, Channel Partner, Noreen Hallbery. "For kids in deprived parts of London, for example, it shows them a way out of a situation where they are judged culturally and unfairly."

The cardinal reason for the industry's diversity debate is



## We need to get into schools and instil in young people what technology does for society and what it can do for them

that in some shape or form minority groups may be disenfranchised and out of the loop. This is a complex matter that cannot always be made simple even by the strongest impulse of duty to society and industry. "I also work with ex-offenders, transitioning people from a place they didn't want to be in," added Smith. "They may not have received enough attention at school – people with ADHD, bipolar disorder, Asperger's, those on the autistic spectrum, to name a few, all miss out on their education and fall out of the other side. They may end up on the wrong side of the law and it can happen to anyone. We need

to invest more in those early years and be ambassadors for our industry."

### Think outside the box

Addressing the diversity imbalance also involves approaches that may be loaded with value assumptions and an element of risk in seeking greater equality, pointed out Virtual1 Head of People and Culture Kate Brunning. "It's partly about encouraging leaders to take a risk outside of recruiting people with channel experience," she stated. "There are lots of other people that are experienced in different ways. It is about starting small and being consistent

in everything you do. Think about your values and make sure they are culturally diverse – especially when you are recruiting on values and behaviours."

Such initiatives serve to boost comms sector diversity but do not on their own lead to higher populations of females in boardrooms. "There is a reason why women are in the middle management piece," commented Tempest. "We are able to get there, but there is a barrier in our minds that hinders the realisation of what females can actually do and achieve. You don't have to follow the rules you abide by at school, and you can break into something if

you want to. You also have to give yourself permission."

In advancing the spirit of self-liberation the channel's focus on diversity should be cultural, not policy, and not confined to a single group, explained co-founder of Engage Your People (and former Director of Culture at Chess) Kate Wood. "Chess's diversity culture started from not trying to empower women but empowering everybody, recruiting on attitude and energy, and recruiting the right people for the right job which enables them to thrive and be themselves," she stated. "My skills, energy and resilience have been great

for the business. You don't need to be technical to work in technology; and you need to see those senior women and think 'I can do that'."

It is hard to imagine a better route to greater gender diversity than to increase the number of female role models and make it easier for women to work in the comms sector, which will go some way in making up the shortfall due to maternity and the early career decisions of girls when they leave education. On school leavers, BT Wholesale Commercial Director Daria Sokolova said: "It's very important to give women an opportunity to switch career later in life. I have seen girls pursue a certain job but realise later that they are interested in technology. Part of the overall industry debate should be to create an environment that accepts people who want to change career and pursue something different."

This vision of greater flexibility in approaches to recruitment must accept that since the dawn of time women ultimately keep the world populated. "A fact of biology is that females have children, but forcing women to choose between progressing their career or bringing up children is not fair," observed KCOM Marketing Manager Sarah Bailey. "Women are talented and

experienced and businesses should work around the needs of the industry and society. There are very few part-time job share roles at management level or above. This is a fundamental issue for all businesses."

One classic example of individual discretion leading to change is Jola's all-encompassing recruitment policy. "When I'm recruiting I ask for the same pot of money but spend it in a different way to get the best person for the job," said Jola Marketing Director Cherie Howlett. "Many of the women who choose their children over a career are brilliant, trained people. Why not bring them back on flexible hours? We have the technology and can work from home flexibly. There should be no barriers for anybody and we have a naturally developed diverse team. Therefore challenge what you've always done and ask whether there is a better way."

#### Opening doors

The comms sector is reasonably mature but for diverse groups it's not always open for business. This is a predicament that will be resolved only by a change of tact at company and individual level, and tackling unconscious bias is a key element of reaching a 'better way', believes Hart, who provided an insight into



## Embrace and acknowledge unconscious bias and recruit what you need, not what you think you want

her own change experience. She noted that BT has a graduate programme, an apprentice programme and a large population of people who are 35 to 40 years into their career. Her team spans this workforce profile, and when recruiting for jobs the considerations of tenure, length of service, organisation fatigue and 'freshness' were assumed as key criteria, which in hindsight placed the older candidates at a clear disadvantage.

"One candidate had been with BT for 38 years and I

was biased when I walked into the interview," stated Hart. "I had in mind that I wanted someone younger and external, but he was the best I've interviewed and did the most preparation. I hired him and he has been phenomenal. In stark contrast, the attitudes of some digitally competent apprentices are dreadful. So embrace and acknowledge unconscious bias and recruit what you need, not what you think you want."

The desire to engineer both a diverse and inclusive workplace is a step towards common sense, and diversity could become your secret weapon, but bridging the gap remains a challenge for many. "I genuinely believe that we are an industry of game changers because of the technology we provide," stated Tempest. "The entrepreneurs in our sector didn't become entrepreneurs because they were afraid, they made their businesses successful because they were prepared to take risks. They just don't know, in certain circumstances, how to change their dynamic." ■

### FROM THE TABLE

**Unconscious bias is in the fabric of how you grew up, your experience, who you engage with and how you operate. Being conscious of all this changes the landscape.**

Michala Hart, Sales Director, Fixed Sales, BT Wholesale

**Businesses that want to develop cultural diversity should ask whether they are doing it because they think they have to or because they are passionate about diversity.**

Stefni Oliver, CEO, Daisy Corporate Services

**Recruit on competencies. It doesn't matter if candidates have three heads, are male or female, or part of the lesbian gay community for example. It makes no difference.**

Sue Kempton, Managing Director, Windsor Telecom

**We must do more in terms of mentoring across the industry. Everyone has a story to tell and we all have different experiences.**

**Maybe the channel community can help each other.**

Karen Heaven, Head of Marketing, BT Wholesale

**BT hosts school trips to Adastral Park, bringing to life what technology can do. If they spark one child's imagination that's a success.**

Noreen Hallbery, Client Director, Channel Partner, BT Wholesale

**Start by picking a couple of small initiatives such as appointing Parent Champions when people return to work after maternity or paternity leave. Then it will grow.**

Kate Wood, co-founder of Engage Your People



## Challenge what you've always done and ask whether there is a better way

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Creating a more diverse channel

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# Hubs that create value

AI and machine-assisted customer communication is the channel's chance to help organisations combat agent and client dissatisfaction, turning contact centres into hubs of value creation, according to Content Guru Deputy CEO Martin Taylor.

**S**ome verticals, especially B2C focused ones like retail, are spearheading a revolution towards omni-channel machine-assisted customer engagement, observes Taylor. Customer experience has become the brand differentiator, he says, and organisations that leverage AI to get into the top quartile for customer satisfaction (CSAT) can increase their profits significantly. "The difference this makes should not be underestimated," he stated.

Consumers have adopted omni-channel technology far quicker than businesses, and customers expect instant gratification, shifting channels depending on the nature and urgency of their enquiry. "Being able to combine a range of different contacts over various channels to give a contact centre advisor a coherent picture of the customer journey is essential," commented Taylor. "It's also about integrating with underlying information systems, including CRM, and systems such as those used for hotel bookings."

Workload is the number one source of agent

dissatisfaction and churn, and a single portal for all channels is vital for reducing the pressure they experience. "Intelligent automation which combines human agents with machine agents is key," stated Taylor. "The most effective AI implementations work alongside and augment people, rather than replace them. AI takes away the mundane enquiries and allows agents to become specialists, increasing their value and job satisfaction."

AI can assist all areas of the contact centre, and provides more efficient data management from a CRM to enhance personalisation. "In workforce management, AI can result in intelligent forecasting and scheduling through self-learning algorithms and more accurate agent productivity and reporting," said Taylor. "AI can present information to an agent during an interaction, rather than requiring a person to search for it, and can automatically fill out forms during the conversation. It can also boost the accuracy of QM programmes and streamline contact routing processes."

Content Guru is seeking to reduce the 15-20 per



Martin Taylor

## Intelligent automation which combines human agents with machine agents is key

cent of agents' time spent on looking things up, by ensuring that constant information is presented to them. "This makes agents happier, reduces training time and lowers the resulting cost," said Taylor.

### Chat speaks volumes

Chat often emerges as the number one preferred method of contact for under 35s, which make up the majority of the population in many parts of the world. "Data gathered from the customer's journey on a website should dictate when a web-chat is offered to a customer, with a view to how it can help them," said Taylor. "We are working with one of Asia-Pac's biggest e-commerce platforms to support chat contacts and subsequent agent routing."

It goes without saying that customers will not put up with endless transfers and data capture. They expect the company to know who they are and they expect a swift resolution within one interaction. However, age demographics, to a large degree, set channel expectations. "Older consumers favour voice, while younger people focus on web-chat and social media," added Taylor.

"We also expect young people to enjoy using voice with a machine when the quality of responsiveness delivers on expectations, which NLP now does. Indeed, in regions like Hong Kong and Taiwan most SMS is dictated rather than typed. As such, the ability to handle all channels on

a single system becomes increasingly important."

The next big shift is unification rather than integration, according to Taylor. "Vendors like Content Guru are branching into complementary technologies," he said. "We see unified CRM as the most important evolution. The next big trend is analysing this data to provide proactive and personalised interactions and customer lifecycle management, with greater overlaps into marketing. We are also providing QM monitoring within the CRM thanks to our recent acquisition of Weston Digital Technologies. This allows us to apply AI to QM, utilising screen recording and allowing agent performance to be monitored in real-time."

Content Guru is currently doing research with the UK Contact Centre Forum on the future of customer service. Early results suggest that more interactions will be handled online, with many of these automated by chatbots and web self-service. "An omni-channel contact centre with AI working hand-in-hand with human agents is going to be vital for any organisation that doesn't want to be in the bottom quartile for customer engagement," said Taylor.

"Companies in the top quartile see 87 per cent less churn from their employees, and are 44 per cent more profitable. And addressing customer engagement is easier for CEOs looking to transform their business compared to making changes to products and services. It's all about taking customer contact from cost centre to value centre." ■

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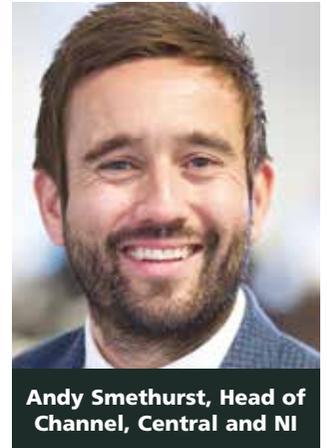
As an occasional feature, we thought it would be interesting to separately quiz channel sales people on their likes, experiences and motivations. This month, we put Gamma's top sales guns Andy Smethurst, Matt Worboys and Roan Pratt in the spotlight ...



**Matt Worboys,**  
Business Development  
Director - Channel



**Roan Pratt, Head of  
Product Sales**



**Andy Smethurst, Head of  
Channel, Central and NI**

## What satisfies you most in your dealings with channel customers?

**Andy:** Knowing that the work we are doing together is having a positive impact on their growth, whilst also being a company that's easy to do business with.

**Matt:** Being part of winning the end user deal – as a salesperson there is nothing quite like that buzz when that deal closes.

**Roan:** Having a positive impact on their business and their end users by helping them to grow and providing the right solutions. Their success makes me smile.

## What motivates you personally?

**Andy:** I take great pleasure and pride in putting individuals in my team at the forefront of everything I do. I get a great buzz off their successes and their career progressions.

**Matt:** It's got to be the team I work with and of course my wife and two kids – making sure together we have done the absolute best job we could have done.

**Roan:** Achieving targets and making sure my team are developing and continue to be successful. In management, you are only as good as the team you have around you.

## Are you a morning or night person?

**Andy:** As much as I would love to say I am a morning person, I'm not. I'm a proper night owl. Let's just say I've seen every episode of Family Guy about ten times.

**Matt:** Night and that's not just being out with customers!

**Roan:** Morning, but I need a large bucket of tea to get me going.

## What really annoys you in your business life?

**Andy:** Repetition without decision. Einstein said the first sign of insanity is repeating something over and over and expecting a different result. In the workplace, if you don't like the outcome of something, you must make a change, even if you get it wrong.

**Matt:** Laziness. Even if you don't quite hit the mark there is no excuse for not giving it a go.

**Roan:** People who don't do what they say they are going to do.

## What was the best piece of advice you ever had?

**Andy:** My Dad (who worked 40 years in horse racing). In reply to me asking "do you have any tips?" the first time I went racing, he said "the

only tip I have for you son is don't bet". I didn't listen to him and I won that race.

**Matt:** Empower the team and encourage them to come with their own answers to the problem, then talk it through – it gives others the feel-good factor that they have solved the issue.

**Roan:** You only regret the things you don't do! Advice from my wife... we shouldn't spend too long looking back.

## What are your key strengths?

**Andy:** I'm a loyal individual and (I hope) very personable. I also don't mind a bit of attention to detail.

**Matt:** Loyalty and hard work.

**Roan:** Listening, dependability. Building good relationships and doing what I say I am going to do.

## Who has inspired you most in your career?

**Andy:** Anyone who puts it all on the line to start-up a business. My wife Kat has done just that, and so too have many of our channel partners. There are so many great, inspirational, stories out there in our industry.

**Matt:** Alan Sugar, but that might be his Tottenham colours shining through.

**Roan:** A veteran of the industry, Marc Thompson

who was my Sales Director at Avant.

## How do you deal with stress?

**Andy:** Not very well. But seriously, by going for a walk with the dog. A long one.

**Matt:** Can't beat a long walk to clear the head.

**Roan:** Spend time with the kids. It's amazing what perspective they give you, but only if they let me win on FIFA!

## What was your biggest/most embarrassing mistake?

**Andy:** About 500 miles into the Gamma Ball Rally, without having driven once, I took the wheel with about 20 miles to go and promptly blew the engine of our 7 metres long crocodile car.

**Matt:** Selling my Gamma shares at £2.80. But it was amazing to take the family to Lapland.

**Roan:** Some of the outfits I have worn. A cloud suit at Comms Vision at Gleneagles for one! You cannot get rid of some of the photos...

## How would your colleagues describe you?

**Andy:** Loyal, fun... and maybe a bit moany.

**Matt:** Hard working,

dedicated and always up for a laugh.

**Roan:** A robot! Dependable, hard-working and gets things done.

## What talent do you wish you had?

**Andy:** Anything musical. My tiny hands just can't get to grips with anything!

**Matt:** Dancing, no one likes the dad dancing look.

**Roan:** Footballer, my dream job and still dreaming!

## What advice would you give to a salesperson starting in the comms industry today?

**Andy:** Be yourself, act with integrity, and be honest. With that you will build relationships that can last your entire career. Also don't rush it, enjoy your formative working years!

**Matt:** Work on building your business network. In an industry that has seen a huge amount of change, with new companies emerging weekly, building out relationships is key.

**Roan:** Working with a company that has a clear progression path and has the right products to allow you to be successful. ■



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**Music on Hold**

# Kirkham leads AV



**Camilla Kirkham**

A NEW CCTV and AV division launched by Nimans will be headed up by incoming Director of Sales Camilla Kirkham. She brings 29 years experience and joins from distributor Norbain where she was Divisional Director of Sales. "For the majority of resellers CCTV should be a natural extension of their business," stated Kirkham. "The market opportunities lie far beyond traditional security-based solutions, with retail analytics a growing area of note. Today's CCTV cameras offer more than

just catching criminals. It's about improving and speeding up the shopping experience, developing marketing opportunities, enhancing health and safety and improving the overall footfall through analytics. With the latest AV technologies it's a powerful combination."

## Also on the move...

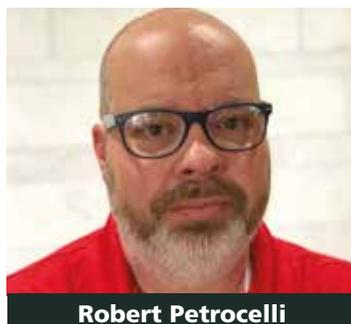
SNOM'S incoming Channel Manager for the UK and Ireland Lee Fletcher will work alongside Lee Underwood (who holds the same job title and remit) as the phone maker's point of contact for distributors, carriers, ITSPs and partners. Fletcher brings 15 years telecoms sector experience and was previously Channel Development Manager for Yealink and a Lenovo Sales Specialist. Head of International Sales and MD of Snom Italy Fabio Albanini said: "Lee's channel experience will be a great asset in helping us reach the ambitious targets we have set ourselves in the region."



**Lee Fletcher**

CLOUD and connectivity services provider M247 has confirmed the double appointments of Cloud Overlay Specialist Mark Allen and Sales Director for the south region Steve Briant. The new roles follow a restructure of the business that brought sales and operations under UK MD Kelly Simkiss. Briant brings 17 years industry experience including spells at Alternative Networks and Rackspace. Allen has 15 years sector experience working as a consultant.

ROBERT Petrocelli brings over 30 years tech experience to Datto following his hire as CTO. He joins from Oracle where he was a Senior Software Architect. Petrocelli also founded GreenBytes where he was CTO.



**Robert Petrocelli**

The company provided inline deduplication data storage applications and cloud-scale IO-Offload systems. Oracle purchased GreenBytes in 2014. Petrocelli began his career as co-founder and CEO of Heartlab, a cardiac image and information management company that was purchased by AGFA in 2005. Datto currently services more than 500,000 SMBs in over 130 countries through partnerships with more than 15,000 MSPs.

SECURITY vendor Malwarebytes has named Mike LaPeters as Vice President of Worldwide MSP and Channel Operations, with a remit to drive global growth. He joins from AlienVault where he operated as Vice President of Global Channels, leading resale and MSSP channel programmes, and growing AlienVault's worldwide MSP business to nearly \$100m annually. "My passion is helping growth-stage companies achieve their full potential by tapping into key opportunities in MSP and channel sales," said LaPeters.

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**Business Sales Manager**  
Location: **Wolverhampton**  
Company: **TIC (The Independent Choice) Ltd**

**About the Company:**  
TIC is an established telecoms business in the West Midlands, set up in 2002 and is introducing a new role within our organisation. We specialise in design and delivery of bespoke telecom solutions to a wide range of businesses throughout the Midlands. Offices are based within 5 minutes of the M54 and easily accessible from both the M5 and M6 motorways.

**About the Job:**  
We are seeking an energetic, ambitious and goal orientated Business Sales Manager who will manage a small team of sales professionals who deal with new and existing business, along with a telemarketing department. TIC would also like to expand both divisions, of which the Business Sales Manager will be responsible for. The full-time role will also include attending new and existing appointments when possible.

**Key Responsibilities:**

- Achieve combined sales targets in all agreed areas
- Perform 1:1 meetings with the sales team including monitoring Key Performance Indicators
- Monitor, measure and manage the day to day activity, including call numbers and gross margin achievement
- Be able to sell the full range of products and services keeping informed of any changes to products and services portfolio and pricing
- Expand both the sales and telemarketing divisions

**Skills/Experience Required:**

- This is a player/manager role where the individual will be expected to lead by example displaying ambition, resilience and interpersonal/presentation skills
- Proven track record of building new business in the telecoms industry
- Excellent communication skills both written and verbal
- Self-motivated, driven and result focussed team player
- Strong time management, organisational and prioritisation skills

**The Package:**  
Salary dependent on experience, OTE uncapped and achievable, Envious working environment, Car Allowance and fuel card, Regular Company/Team events, Free parking & Promotion opportunities to Board level.

**Contact:**  
Mr Sean Pearson  
seanpearson@ticcomms.co.uk



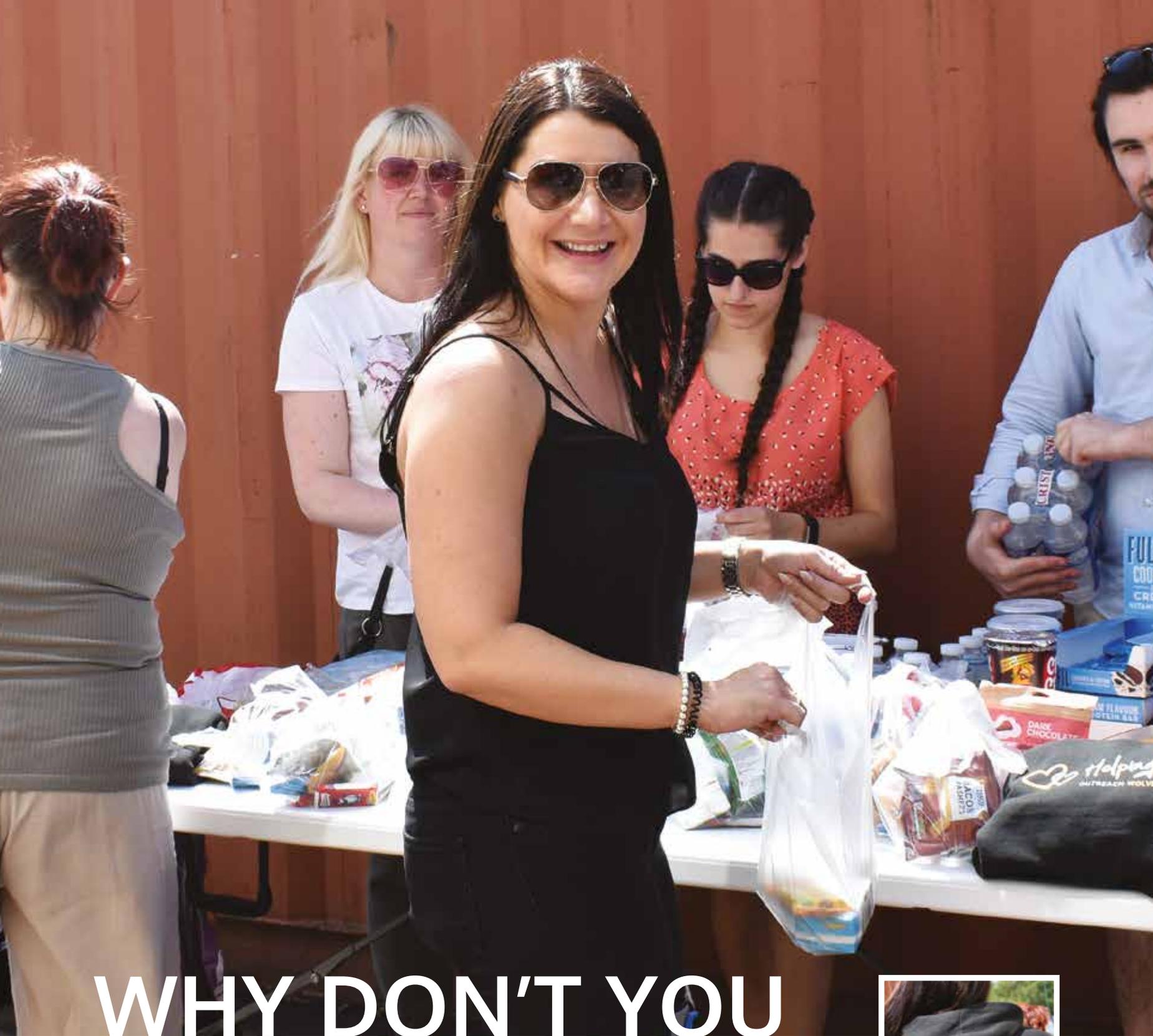


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**Here's Amy.** She's the mastermind behind TinCan Comms.

When Amy isn't busy building her business, she's helping others. Volunteering almost every week with Helping Hearts Wolverhampton, a charity supporting the homeless.

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Read more about Amy's story here – [9group.co.uk/HelpLikeAmy](https://9group.co.uk/HelpLikeAmy)



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