



IntraLAN CEO eyes supercharged year of expansion p24

Mercer's crystal clear plans pay off in MSP push p26



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Click to open £1bn deal boost to Digital Britain

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SPECIAL REPORT

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world class digital infrastructure. The Government-owned mobile infrastructure built as part of the Emergency Services Network will also be made available to the four operators.

Digital Secretary Nicky Morgan (pictured) said the deal could be matched by a £500m investment from Government if certain conditions are met.

"Brokering an agreement for mast sharing between networks alongside new investment in mobile infrastructure will mean people get a good 4G signal no

matter where they are or which provider they're with," commented Morgan.

"I want to see industry move quickly so we can reach a final agreement early next year."

Telefonica UK CEO Mark Evans noted: "Mobile has become so much more than the phone in your hand, it's the glue that powers the UK's economy and will be a fundamental component of our national success in the years to come."

Comms Vision 2019: Accelerating Digital Britain – see p49

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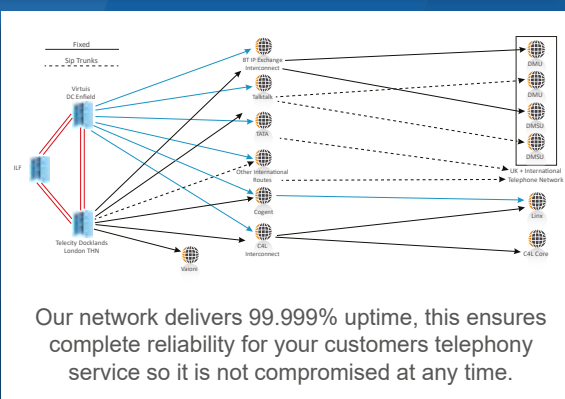


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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

SOME would argue that certain MPs voting against a general election in favour of prolonging a 'dead parliament' is like giving the thumbs up to a manifesto that aims to extend the life of the UK's legacy comms infrastructure.

They both manifestly need a shake-up and an upgrade one way or the other to avoid an ongoing stalemate.

However, it seems that Getting Digital Britain Done may be as complex as Getting Brexit Done and the key to resolving both dilemmas is for all parties with a vested interest to pull together towards the common goal simply because there is no magic wand.

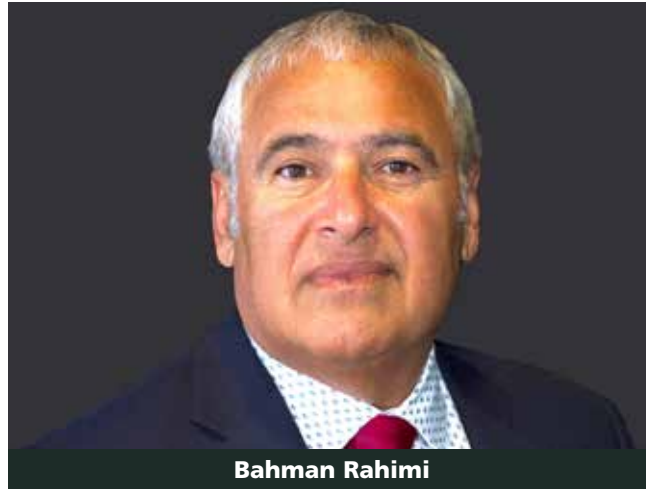
In a bid to square the comms infrastructure circle, more industry moves to accelerate the steady march of full fibre got under way last month with CityFibre launching an industry consultation (see page 5) and Openreach targeting the blocks to progress with a set of remedial measures that its CEO believes will do the trick (see page 18).

Cooperation is clearly needed. Especially when you consider the UK's mobile operators which last month outlined plans to club together with Government support and make 4G available to 95 per cent of the UK by 2025 with 5G readiness also on the agenda. It is said that this Shared Rural Network will make the UK one of the best countries for geographic mobile coverage in Europe. But it would be a sorry state of affairs if the nation's roll out of full fibre remains eclipsed by the progress of collaborating mobile networks, and hamstrung by the problems and issues that are inextricably linked to the physical nature of full fibre connections.

It must not be forgotten that the UK's infrastructure landscape is being split down the middle between 4G/5G and fibre, and users like voters will have a simple choice. To ensure the best chance of winning votes in the future, it could be argued that true competition between the UK's full fibre providers must become policy sooner rather than later.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

BDR rises on Comec scoop



Bahman Rahimi

BDR Group's £20m target this year has been revised upwards by more than a third following its acquisition of Shrivvenham-based Comec Voice & Data, adding circa £4m revenues.

The deal comes on the back of over 60% organic growth and follows the purchase of Kent-based telecoms, IT and security specialist Icom.

Comec was established 28 years ago and has long been known to BDR CEO Bahman Rahimi who welcomed friends and joint owners of Comec, Martin Rowley and Trevor Groveto, to the BDR fold.

Through acquisitions and organic growth Stratford-upon-Avon located BDR is on track

to more than triple revenues from £9m 18 months ago to £32m this year. "This was a friendly acquisition since I have known Martin and Trevor for a long time," said Rahimi. "Our approach to acquisitions appealed to them and was the basis of our meeting of minds."

Comec's clients include a number of Fortune 500 customers in the US. Rahimi considers these a 'serious platform' to expand BDR's reach.

Rowley and Grove remain at the helm of Comec with a remit to implement the Group's expansion plans.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

BEYOND Connectivity, formerly Nimans Networks Services, is hitting the road for the first time in partnership with EE and TalkTalk Business to outline its vision and strategies at three locations – BT Tower, London, 7th November; TalkTalk Business, Salford Quays, 4th December; and BT Adastral Park, Ipswich, 5th December. Beyond Connectivity Head of Sales Graham Wilkinson said: "The events provide an opportunity for resellers to learn more about our propositions and strategies." Beyond offers mobile, connectivity, hosted, M2M, support and SIP services.

IT CHANNEL organisations are displaying greater levels of engagement with emerging technologies and seeking new partnering opportunities to advance their strategies, according to research by CompTIA. Blockchain, AI, drones and the IoT were tipped by respondents as among the most relevant emerging technologies. "Most channel firms see major potential in emerging technologies," said Carolyn April, Senior Director of Industry Analysis at CompTIA. "And more than half of them say they're selling at least one category of emerging tech to customers today."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE £1.5bn comms sales milestone has been reached by Nimans which began its journey in 1985. The Manchester-based distributor was recognised for its sales growth by the Sunday Times, ranked as one of the country's top 250 growth companies with more than £130m annual turnover. Nimans also confirmed the retention of its Gold Investors in People status.

EXERTIS has given resellers a boost in the SD-WAN market with the addition of VMware SD-WAN by VeloCloud. Gareth Bray, Exertis Enterprise Commercial Director, said: "SD-WAN is rightly a hot topic in the industry. It offers a transformational approach to simplifying branch office networking and ensuring optimal application performance."

ABZORB has been named on Crown Commercial Service's Network Services 2 framework in seven categories – data access, traditional and inbound telephony, video and audio conferencing, IP telephony and contact centre. Dean Al-Sened, Head of Public Sector and Enterprise, said: "The opportunity to replace legacy systems with cloud technology is huge."

Cloud biz adds voice specialism

CLOUD services provider Telappliant has pocketed Stafford-based communications provider Voice 2 Voice for an undisclosed sum.

Voice 2 Voice began its commercial life in 2003 and its areas of expertise include civil services, local government, education, finance and health.

The deal extends Telappliant's regional influence and provides a boost to its portfolio, support and service capabilities.

Telappliant Director of M&A Tan Aksoy said: "The acquisition enables us to expand our presence in northern England, extending our capabilities in support and service while adding new solutions and expertise to our portfolio of services."

Voice 2 Voice MD Warren Stroud said: "Telappliant's technologies and customer focus complements ours and enhances the current offerings from Voice 2 Voice, which will help the expansion into new markets, emerging technologies and managed services."

The enlarged company will serve a consolidated client base of more than 6,000 SMEs.

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MSP Redsquid nets Ridgeway Telecoms

BOREHAMWOOD-based MSP Redsquid has acquired Wantage located comms provider Ridgeway Telecoms and signalled another potential acquisition in the IT space next year.

The Ridgeway transaction forms a key part of Redsquid's broader buy and build strategy and augments the purchase of 5Com in 2016.

Ridgeway was established over 20 years ago and operates as a wholesale provider of UC, connectivity, mobile and data.

The deal adds new skills, capabilities and solutions to the Redsquid portfolio and doubles its wholesale billing.

The Wantage office also strengthens Redsquid's presence in the burgeoning Thames Valley region.

Redsquid's CEO Sohni Raithatha confirmed that the Ridgeway team and office will remain in place.

"Ridgeway has a lot to bring to Redsquid, including knowledge and experience in the telecoms industry," said Raithatha.

"Having recently invested in a new CFO and Sales Director, as well as numerous other vacancies, Redsquid is now well positioned to not only continue to grow organically,



Sohni Raithatha

but aims to complete a further two acquisitions in 2020, with the next target being a managed IT service provider."

Redsquid's Sales Director Michael Ianiri said: "I'm excited by the challenge of growing the synergies."

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Mesch seeks greater clarity



Greg Mesch

ANALYST firm Assembly Research is to undertake an industry wide consultation on behalf of infrastructure builder CityFibre.

The study aims to more clearly define the role of alternative full fibre infrastructure builders in aiding the switch over of customers from legacy copper networks to fibre.

As part of the consultation CPs can identify the provisions required to support all legacy services on the new networks, what the process should be for the mass migration of customers, and what steps are needed to ensure straightforward switching for consumers.

The initiative was triggered by a key phase in CityFibre's

Gigabit City roll out in Stirling, which is due a copper to fibre switch over next summer.

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch said: "Only by collaborating as an industry, with the full support of Government and Ofcom, will we be able to switch over the UK from legacy copper networks to a future-proof full fibre platform."

"Through our consultation, we look forward to engaging with the whole industry, including Openreach and BT Retail, to help develop a national plan to efficiently and smoothly upgrade Britain."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

GIGACLEAR has become the first broadband provider to drill under the River Severn to reach two of Gloucestershire's most remote and poorly connected villages, bringing FTTP to 861 homes in Longney and Framilode. A horizontal directional drill with 133kn pullback force was imported for the project. Peter Pentecost, Regional General Manager at Gigaclear, said: "The scale of this task goes to show how passionately we believe in the importance of digital inclusion for all, no matter how rural their home or business."

A LINK UP between SAP and Microsoft aims to accelerate customer adoption of SAP S/4HANA and SAP Cloud Platform on Microsoft Azure. "This partnership is all about reducing complexity and minimising costs for customers as they move to SAP S/4HANA in the cloud," said SAP Co-CEO Jennifer Morgan. SAP also posted its financial results for the third quarter 2019 ended 30th September, stating that new cloud bookings rose 39% annually with total cloud revenues up 37%.

UK finance firms take lead in RPA roll outs, claims PwC

FINANCIAL services organisations in the UK have been shown to be world leaders in deploying robo-advisor technology, according to PwC.

The analyst company says 37% of UK firms surveyed have implemented robotics processing automation (RPA) technology compared to 28% globally.

The UK's tilt to expand its robo-advice capability is also offset against the need to maintain trust with a consumer base demanding human interaction for priority services. This is an area that ICT providers in the finance sector could address.



Rav Hayer

Rav Hayer, UK fintech leader and PwC Partner, commented: "We're seeing a growing shift towards hybrid human and robo-advice strategies, with

even some of the pure-play robo-advisers hiring humans.

"Most consumers want the reassurance of human oversight alongside access to a human adviser for key decisions. Financial services firms face a dilemma on how to balance the need for that human interaction with the digitally enhanced offerings customers also expect.

"The fact that personal human contact is globally near the bottom of the list of ways in which some executives think FinTech should be used to retain customers raises questions about the balance."



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Purple bags US business



Gavin Wheeldon

PURPLE WiFi's capabilities in maximising intelligent spaces has received a boost following the acquisition of US wayfinding business LogicJunction.

The deal brings together LogicJunction's indoor navigation technology (which uses the Earth's geomagnetic forces for greater accuracy) and Purple WiFi's data analytics.

The acquisition also provides a platform for growth in the UK and US.

Manchester-based Purple noted that LogicJunction will operate under the Purple brand.

In practice Purple's WiFi platform helps businesses to monitor peoples' shopping patterns and habits, allowing organisations to target their messaging and leverage analytics tools.

"LogicJunction enhances the Purple WiFi portfolio with

wayfinding technology, providing indoor navigation and location-based systems," stated Purple CEO Gavin Wheeldon.

"With GPS technology ineffective indoors, wayfinding is a system that guides people through a physical environment and is particularly important in complex built up environments.

"It has been identified as the future technology for navigating large urban centres such as shopping centres, supermarkets and hospitals. As architectural environments become more complicated and consumer needs shift to more personalisation, indoor positioning and location-based systems are becoming core to organisations across every industry."

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Avaya enters \$500m RingCentral venture

A CLOUD deal between Avaya and RingCentral sees the latter acquire \$125m in Avaya stock for a circa 6% position in the company. RingCentral will also pay Avaya an advance of \$375m primarily in stock for future payments and licensing rights.

On the back of the transaction Avaya will introduce the Avaya Cloud Office by RingCentral UCaaS solution, which combines RingCentral's UCaaS platform with Avaya technology and enables Avaya to more easily upgrade its traditional base to cloud-based alternative solutions.

The deal is expected to close in Q4 2019 and Avaya hopes to launch Avaya Cloud Office in Q1 2020.

"Avaya and RingCentral's joint investment and commitment to bringing Avaya Cloud Office to market creates an opportunity to accelerate the transition to the cloud with attractive economics for our customers and partners," commented Jim Chirico, President and CEO of Avaya.

"This also gives us the opportunity to unlock value from a largely unmonetised base of our business. This partnership expands the addressable market



Jim Chirico

for Avaya and creates value for both Avaya and RingCentral."

Vlad Shmunis, Chairman and CEO of RingCentral, added: "This partnership leverages the respective strengths of Avaya and RingCentral. We will bring RingCentral's UCaaS platform to Avaya's installed base of over 100 million users and over 4,700 partners, providing long-term growth opportunities for both companies."



CIRCUS themed celebrations at Brighton's Grand Hotel were the order of the day as 300 Focus Group staff celebrated the £70m revenue firm's 15th birthday last month. Joint MD Chris Goodman stated: "2019 has been a massive year for us. We've moved into new headquarters, made several successful acquisitions and have 15 years under our belts. We have all the ingredients to deliver more of the same, and then some!" Joint MD Ralph Gilbert added: "We know we are nothing without our people." Pictured: Gilbert and Goodman kicking off the celebrations. See page 28



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NEWS ROUNDUP

PANGEA has introduced an on-demand IoT knowledge base for partners, called Pangea Hub, enabling slicker on-boarding while giving partners scope to solve issues on their own. Partners also have access to the Pangea support team through a new live chat system. "The Hub's real focus is on outcomes for partners," said Ops Director Chris Romeika.

EXERTIS employees have raised over £12,600 for a variety of local charities. Events were organised by members of Exertis's trainee management programme and held by teams in Basingstoke, Harlow, Burnley and Elland. UK&I MD Paul Bryan said: "This is a fantastic achievement by our employees."

PRAGMA partners are set to boost their online presence using a new SEO guide produced by the distributor. "With over 81% of prospects performing online research before purchasing a communications platform, and over 75% never scrolling past the first page of search engines, it is of paramount importance for resellers to strengthen their visibility across search engines," said Will Morey, Sales and Marketing Director.

Craggs rocks into Onecom



Christian Craggs

ONECOM'S buy and build plan has received a mega boost following the appointment of Christian Craggs as its first Director of Mergers & Acquisitions and Strategy, reporting to CEO Ben Dowd.

In July Onecom secured a £100m funding package from mid-market private equity firm LDC, and credit funds managed by an affiliate of Ares Management corporation.

The move saw Mark Thompson become Chairman and Onecom founder Darren Ridge, who remains a significant shareholder, a Non-Exec' Director.

Craggs' appointment is a clear sign of intent as Onecom pursues ambitious growth targets through acquisitions.

He joins from Oakley Advisory where he was MD for four years with a particular

focus on mobile, fibre, B2B telecoms and managed service businesses, alongside fast growing companies in the digital and online space.

Prior to that he occupied several senior roles at O2 where he was responsible for B2B strategy and corporate development as well as the sales operations of O2's B2B business.

Dowd stated: "Christian is highly respected in his field and brings a strong track record from Oakley Advisory where he was able to make a significant impact in relatively short order.

"As part of the LDC transaction, he worked closely with Onecom over the last year so he has a good understanding of our business and team."

Onecom manages circa 100,000 business customers across 10 regional offices.

Cancom's in Belfast acquisition

MUNICH-based Cancom Group has snapped up Belfast service provider Novosco as the German acquirer seeks to expand in the UK and gain a foothold in the Irish market.

Novosco was founded by Patrick McAliskey and John Lennon and currently employs circa 300 people. It has offices in Dublin and Daresbury, near Manchester, in addition to its Belfast HQ; and counts a range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations among its customers, including several large UK NHS Trusts and housing associations.

"This is a positive and exciting development for Novosco, our people, our customers and the communities in which we operate, bringing together two companies with complementary expertise and similar cultures, ambitions and outlooks," commented McAliskey and Lennon in a joint statement.

Cancom Group employs over 3,500 people worldwide and has a strong market presence in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Slovakia, Great Britain and the USA.

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

Gamma's portfolio boosted

CUSTOMER demand for faster speeds has prompted Gamma to enlarge its data portfolio with G.Fast and FTTP connectivity to underpin its OTT services including voice, UCaaS, cloud telephony and Wi-Fi.

The launch follows Gamma's introduction of 4G Access Fast-Start and Backup to Converged Ethernet Services in September, with more product developments and promotions in the pipeline, including SD WAN, according to Senior Sales Specialist for Data Harry Singh.

"The reseller market requires a full range of access technologies and commercial offerings to account for differing end user scenarios," he stated.

"By developing our broadband and Ethernet offering we offer a strong foundation for the more margin rich services our partners deploy."



Harry Singh

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DWS and CityFibre seal deal

A LINK up between Digital Wholesale Solutions (DWS) and CityFibre gives DWS partners access to full fibre Ethernet products across the infrastructure provider's networks in 27 towns and cities.

In associated news DWS has launched its Fibre Flex service which guarantees 200Mbps up-and-down and the provision to burst up to 1Gbps without incurring additional charges or having to pre-arrange more bandwidth availability.

"Working with over 2,500 resellers DWS has tremendous channel reach," commented Andy Wilson, Head of Wholesale at CityFibre. "Together, we are igniting the growth in Britain's digital future."

Chief Digital Officer at DWS, Nathan Marke, commented: "Working with CityFibre opens doors for our partners, allowing them to branch out to new areas with new products."



Nathan Marke

Mitel brings in McDowell



Mary McDowell

FORMER Polycom head honcho Mary McDowell has been pulled in by comms vendor Mitel as Chief Executive following the departure of long-term CEO Rich McBee.

As Polycom CEO she supervised an operating model transformation against a backdrop of revenue growth and managed its sale to Plantronics last year.

Prior to Polycom, McDowell was EVP at Nokia where she was in charge of the company's \$15bn global feature phone business and oversaw its developer and app store organisation.

Previous roles also include senior positions at Compaq Computer and Hewlett Packard.

McDowell currently serves as a board member for soft-

ware company Autodesk and UK-based Informa, the events and publishing company.

"I'm excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and eager to work closely with Mitel's team and network of partners," enthused McDowell.

Outgoing McBee commented: "Mitel is well positioned to accelerate the market transition to cloud, and Mary has the technology expertise needed to lead the company."

McDowell is also a board member for the Committee of 200, which is a non-profit dedicated to the advancement of women in business.

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TalkTalk in big north advances

THE Northern Powerhouse Partner Programme has welcomed TalkTalk with open arms following the relocation of its headquarters to Salford and recruitment of 350 new hires since February, achieving a 96% offer acceptance.

CEO Tristia Harrison said: "As a major employer in the north and an infrastructure provider across the region, we look forward to working with other partners and the local community to drive growth, create new opportunities in the region and strengthen the north's position as a hub for talent, technology and business excellence."

Minister for the Northern Powerhouse, the Rt Hon Jake Berry, MP, added: "TalkTalk's recruitment drive and investment in the north of England builds upon £663m worth of Local Growth Fund support we have provided to the Greater Manchester region."



Tristia Harrison

US giant picks up Contino

US-LISTED super-integrator Cognizant's acquisition of London-based consulting firm Contino adds circa 350 employees worldwide and boosts its presence in the United States and Australia as well as the UK.

The privately-held business supports around 2,000 global clients as they seek to accelerate their digital transformations.

Contino is a global premier partner with Amazon Web Services and boasts expertise in Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud Platform.

Its customer roster includes major global brands such as Adidas, Barclays, Dow Jones, Lloyds Bank, Morgan Stanley and Vodafone.

"Joining Cognizant enables us to expand and scale our offerings globally and provide a richer portfolio of cloud strategy and engineering capabilities," said Matt Farmer, co-founder and CEO of Contino.

"Our focus has always been on supporting the enterprise and their transformation using the Squad Model.

"With this approach we support our enterprise clients at every step, from engineering through to communicating the benefits of their journey."

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M12 sets stage for biz event

HANTS-based M12 Solutions hosted its first Connected Solent business conference at the Ineos Team UK headquarters in Portsmouth, where channel players including CityFibre, Splice.com, Gamma, Jola, Wildix, Amito and Digital Wholesale Solutions convened to network and explore the future of the industry.

Andrew Skipsey, MD of M12 Solutions and its connectivity arm Giganet, commented: "We have seen strong enthusiasm in Portsmouth for great networking and useful content from the well supported LinkedIn Local events, which are geared more towards smaller businesses.

"We have gone a few steps further via our own investment and brought together a set of sponsors and speakers who provided quality information to help medium-sized businesses grow and prosper."



Andrew Skipsey

CCTV market in the frame



Camilla Kirkham

NIMANS has called on resellers to turn their attention to a £3bn security market that's set to double in five years.

The distributor claims that golden opportunities exist for resellers in the provision of AV and access control as well as traditional cameras.

Its new security and AV arm was set up to address this growing market which, says the division's Director of Sales, Camilla Kirkham, significantly eclipses the traditional PBX comms systems arena.

"There are an estimated 4.25 million CCTV cameras installed in the UK as the security sector continues to grow and diversify, based on much more than just catching criminals," she stated.

"Resellers should take advantage of the significant and lucrative opportunities available by developing this natural extension of their existing IP skills and end point sales.

"It's a diverse and dynamic sector with many different solution applications in areas such as health and safety, market analysis for retail, staff trends, heatmaps and preventative equipment monitoring."

"Today's CCTV cameras are 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."

Onecom's major bid for people

PE BACKED Onecom is banking on substantial organic growth facilitated by a circa 30% boost in staff numbers.

The Whiteley-based comms provider expects to add 125 new heads mostly in sales roles across its eight locations, with a particular focus on offices in Whiteley, Telford, Shoburyness and Cardiff.

Onecom currently employs almost 400 staff and its latest recruitment drive follows new funding of £100m, which it secured earlier this year from PE firm LDC and credit funds managed by an affiliate of Ares Management Corporation.

Onecom CEO Ben Dowd intends to grow the business threefold over the next three to five years. "We currently have 100,000 business customers and are well placed to take advantage of the new opportunities in front of us, including the roll out of 5G, adoption of fibre and the growing expenditure on telecoms from SMEs," he said.

"Increasing our headcount is key to us achieving this. It represents a significant moment of organic growth for Onecom, and we are also finalising plans for acquisitive growth in the coming months."

Ex-Mitel CEO joins Riverbed

EX-MITEL CEO and President Rich McBee is reprising these roles at network monitoring and optimisation firm Riverbed.

"Rich is a strong leader and strategist and has a solid track record of driving business execution and results," said David Murphy, Riverbed Chairman and Senior Operating Partner at PE firm Thoma Bravo which owns Mitel.

"Riverbed has experienced a strong performance recently and Rich is the right leader to continue our momentum."

McBee added: "Riverbed's current technology portfolio and strategy opens up significant market opportunities, as organisations worldwide are looking to capitalise on their digital transformation investments and enhance the digital experience of their users."

Prior to his stint at Mitel McBee served as President of the Communications and Enterprise Group of Danaher.



Rich McBee

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NGC in scale up operation Billions tipped down the pan



Dean Harrop and Nikki Guest

THE scale up of NGC Networks' growth ambitions, expressed as an upward revision of its 2022 revenue target to £10m, builds on the £7m recorded in its latest financial year, driven by organic growth with particular success witnessed in the education sector, mobile market and shift to cloud.

The Wakefield-based company employs 45 people and is run by Directors Nikki Guest and Dean Harrop.

"We are investing in our people and processes in the next year to achieve further expansion," commented Guest. "We have seen significant growth in

our NGC Mobile division which was launched three years ago and now accounts for almost 20% of our turnover.

"As the telecoms and IT markets become more converged, we are well placed to provide businesses with fully integrated solutions underpinned by customer support services."

NGC Networks is a CityFibre partner and as such provides full fibre connectivity to local businesses and companies in Huddersfield, Leeds, Bradford, York and Hull.

The organisation is also listed in the 2019 Northern Tech Top 100 companies.

THE shift to a new business model could save customer contact management operations in the UK over £2.1bn per year. Of this eye watering figure, the comms sector accounts for £284m annual wastage, according to research by NeosWave.

The study sought to investigate the levels of cost wastage arising from outdated call centre structures and insufficient integration of automated capabilities with live enquiry handling.

Based on its analysis the company reckons that modern day requirements sit at odds with outdated contact centre business models, representing a golden opportunity for the channel to upgrade legacy customer contact solutions.

Graham Ede, Director at NeosWave, said: "Digital media has caused a revolution in the

way consumers interact with the companies they buy from. Yet the contact centre industry, both outsourced and in-house, is still working with business models that have changed little in the last 20 years.

"Today, customer contact and experience management should be handled through a smart and seamless combination of automation and live super-agents. Contact processes and capabilities need to be developed on current business strategies and commercial objectives.

"These new ways of working, built from an optimum combination of technology and people and removed from any vested interests, have to be able to deal with volatile peaks of demand and focus highly skilled staff on more complex, problem solving enquiries."



Graham Ede

NEWS ROUNDUP

JOLA'S 600-plus partner base has access to a new portal and app for iOS and Android, a mobile-friendly version of the Jola Partner Portal available to download from the App Store and Play Store. "The new app is designed to make it as easy as possible to quote and order solutions on mobile devices," said CTO Adrian Sunderland. "Partners can save and return to part-built orders, add orders to existing sites and view orders in progress."

A TEAM of six runners from The Technology Group raised almost £900 for the Jane Tomlinson Appeal following their completion of the



Yorkshire Marathon Relay. Group co-founder and Acquisitions Director David Marsden said: "We have a mix of experienced and novice runners, with everyone putting the time into training and raising money for a worthy cause." During the last six years the group has donated communication services worth £11k to the Jane Tomlinson Appeal.

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A Better Life, A Better World

5 Advantages of Selling a Bespoke Phone System

For every business, a decision must be weighed up between a number of factors, such as the financial risk, the effect on customers and what the business might gain out of it. The choice between offering an off-the-shelf product and a more bespoke service is one that many businesses contemplate but when it comes to customer satisfaction, the answer is clear.

A large majority of products sold are commonly referred to as 'off-the-shelf' with many businesses prioritising bulk orders over what customers actually want, which is why when it comes to a phone system, the only way to go is with a bespoke model.

A bespoke phone system can provide a number of advantages, not just for you but also for your customers.

Increased Usability

A solution that is pre-made just won't conform to the individualities and needs of a business. Every company is different, whether it be in what they sell, the services they provide, how they operate or just the way people think. A phone system that isn't bespoke will lead to the way a company operates trying to fit around the ready-made phone system when really it should be the other way around. An off-the-shelf product will mean that you'll have to operate within its limitations, whereas with a bespoke

phone system, you'll be able to adjust it to the customers' preferred parameters. Give your customers the ability to enjoy a phone system that meets their demands and provides increased usability that a ready-made product simply can't match.

Better Customer Satisfaction

Your customers and their happiness is the key to a long and successful business. So why risk that with a service that you have little control over? Building a bespoke phone system will result in a happier client base. Customers feel most at ease with a company when their needs are being met. A phone system that is tailored to them will make them feel that their being catered to in a way that another provider simply couldn't match. After all, from a customer point of view, if you're providing them with a flexible service that they can trust, there's no reason to look for another solution.

Personalised Access and Support

While a ready-made phone system might have standard troubleshooting mechanisms in place, there's nothing like the personal touch of someone who knows what you need and how you want it to work. Bespoke products offer up avenues of a more personalised and customer-focused support that not only increases the chances of improved customer satisfaction but also opens the dialogue between you and your customer base – especially handy if you wish to explore other areas of business with them, creating the perfect opportunity for upselling and cross-selling. It gives your customers the chance to get back up and running in the way they want to, while giving you the time to ensure that they are satisfied with the service and to see if they need help in other areas.

Flexible and Customer Focused

An off-the-shelf phone



system, no matter how versatile it may appear on the surface, will never be able to replicate the flexibility and customer-first nature of a bespoke one. When a customer requires a new way of thinking, a new avenue to their offering, then with a bespoke phone system, it's as simple as discussing their requirements with you and then making it happen for them. With a non-customised phone system, it's usually impossible to alter even the most basic of features, which means that for customers who have ambitions to grow and perhaps change or adapt how they handle their day-to-day operations, an off-the-shelf phone system is not going to be enough for them.

It's Cost-Effective

While on the surface, it might seem like a bespoke phone system would be more expensive, for many businesses

the opposite is true. Being bespoke means that you can actually help customers to pinpoint specific features that they use and rule out things that they don't, which can often work out to be a better solution financially for the customer, whilst also streamlining the service that they provide. For your customers, there's nothing better than having a bespoke phone system that provides them with complete control in a cost-effective manner.

Spark Inspiration

With all of this in mind, it's time to find yourself the right partner that can help you to offer your customers with tailor-made products that they'll love. You may even find a niche customer request that can spark inspiration within your team that helps you to create something that no one has thought of before. ■

NEWS ROUNDUP

READING-based Bullitt Group, the producer of Cat and Land Rover rugged mobile phones, has appointed Eurostar Global Electronics as an official distribution partner in the UK. Steve Hankey, Head of Commercial and Vendor Management at Eurostar Global, stated: "Bullitt has a well established and diverse product portfolio that appeals to many sectors."

TWO years since the inception of a new comms solution Gradwell has launched Wave, a hosted phone system for SMEs based on Amazon Web Services. CTO and founder Peter Gradwell said: "This launch is just the beginning for Wave. We have future plans for the system and its feature set, with a number of major features due for launch over the next few months."

ELITE has extended its on-net coverage with the addition of the Sky Ethernet LLU footprint, covering over 2,800 exchanges. The move is also expected to boost Elite's provisioning and in-life service experience. "Sky Business is looking forward to being a key part of Elite's journey in providing high capacity services to the UK market," said Nick Powell, Sales Director, Sky Business Communications.

Gamma rally raises £100k



Rally winners Charterhouse Voice and Data

OVER £100k has been raised by this year's three day Gamma Ball Rally which saw 100 channel partners venture across five European countries and compete in a number of off-the-wall challenge events.

The epic fundraising effort concluded with a gala dinner and charity auction in Munich, after Charterhouse Voice and Data was crowned rally winner.

This year's total takes the amount raised overall by the annual rally to more than £600k in aid of Action Through Enterprise and SpecialEffect.

Gamma Channel MD Daryl Pile commented: "The success of the rally is a testament to the

strength of the channel community to come together and do something special for two deserving charities. I'm blown away every year by the amount of money raised."

Charterhouse Voice and Data Technical Director James Banks added: "As regular competitors it has been another amazing experience raising much needed funds for two worthy causes."

"We've had a great amount of fun taking part in the challenges, meeting the Gamma team and spending time with our peers."

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

CMS gets Avesta in French bid

CMS Distribution has strengthened its European presence with the acquisition of French hardware distributor Avesta, which specialises in mobile solutions, and is located close to Paris.

Avesta employs 32 people and will continue to run under its own brand with its leadership and management team remaining in place.

CMS Distribution founder and CEO Frank Salmon commented: "Going forward our French customers will gain access to an increased product portfolio, additional sales and marketing resources and more competitive offerings."

CMS Distribution now has over 400 employees across the group, covering the UK, Ireland, France, Benelux and Scandinavia, in addition to locations in China and USA.



Frank Salmon

NEWS ROUNDUP

FIXED desk phones for business are still the order of the day, according to research by Snom. The study found that smartphones and PCs are eclipsed by ever popular fixed office desk phones, the preferred option for 83.5% of respondents. And 42% of those questioned with a desk phone have either already migrated to VoIP or were planning to within a year.

"It's encouraging to see so many users having either made the move to VoIP or on the journey, as well as those who are asking questions about what else VoIP and new generation IP terminals can help them achieve," said Fabio Albanini, Head of International Sales at Snom.

SANGOMA has added a CPaaS offering and wholesale channel model to its existing go-to-market with the acquisition of US business VoIP Innovation, a SIP trunking wholesaler to resellers, service providers, MSPs and call centre customers across North America. "With about 90% of VoIP Innovation's revenue being recurring, it should increase Sangoma's recurring and services revenue to approximately 45% of total sales," said Bill Wignall, President and CEO of Sangoma.



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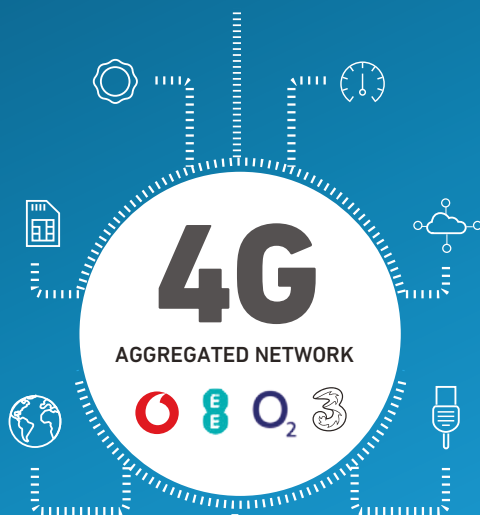
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Red tape and rates rattle fibre roll out

RED tape and punitive business rates on fibre infrastructure are undermining the investment case for full fibre and putting the brakes on its roll out, according to Openreach CEO Clive Selley, who says this scenario puts the Government's ambitious Digital Britain target under threat of not being realised.

"With the right policies and regulation we can build a better, more reliable broadband network faster than any other country in the world and unlock the benefits for the whole of the UK," he commented.

"If that doesn't happen, then many people will be locked out of a more connected future and the UK could lose its status as a global digital leader."

Selley's warning follows the release of research findings that suggest FTTP broadband by 2025 would deliver a near £60bn boost to UK productivity through smarter ways of working, better public services and greater opportunities opened up for the next generation of home grown businesses.



Clive Selley

The study by the Centre for Economics & Business Research (commissioned by Openreach) looked into the economic impacts of a fully-fibred UK. While the positive outcomes of fibre are up for grabs, Selley pointed out the practical challenges facing the industry.

In response to the report, Openreach has published proposals designed to enable Government and the industry to

accelerate the roll out. These include an exemption from business rates in order to stimulate more investment; Government action to lower costs and reduce barriers to deployment; and a call for the regulator to set the right conditions to unlock the commercial case for companies to build across most of the UK.

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

Tech whizz trio create solution to track and monitor packages

THE location and condition of packages in transit, previously an unknown quantity, is now common knowledge following the launch of a solution created by a trio of tech partners.

A collaboration between connectivity and sensor specialist TE Connectivity, IoT whizz Hanhaa and distributor Avnet has come to fruition with an upgrade of ParceLive, a 4G and cloud-enabled solution which provides dashboards and reports in real-time on various measures including location, the orientation of the shipment, temperature and humidity levels and

shock factors. Shipment breaches are triggered by light sensors when a parcel is opened.

"Billions of parcels are transported each year," said Christian Koehler, TE Connectivity Product Manager. "But today's tracking landscape is patchy, unreliable and doesn't give a holistic view of the conditions of specific shipments, or of systemic inefficiencies or risks in the global supply value chain."

ParceLive incorporates a battery driven device in which multiple antennas need to function efficiently at minimal power consumption.

Prior to the upgrade, ParceLive's antennas were not up to the job under real-live conditions. ParceLive is now equipped with seven sensors and 4G antennas.

"Hundreds of companies are adopting ParceLive tracking, particularly the automotive, pharmaceutical and luxury goods industries," added Hanhaa CEO Azhar Hussain.

"There are already a number of use cases that are transforming how the logistics industry works, and improved insight is helping to combat a range of issues from customs delays to counterfeit goods."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

UK-BASED professional services company Phoenix47's credentials in the IT security space have been significantly boosted with the acquisition of Guardian Technologies. Phoenix47 Director Ed Crane commented: "Guardian's specialists bring technical security skills, making them a strong strategic fit."

DUTCH data protection company Zivver is targeting the UK with its outbound email and file transfer security solution. CEO and co-founder Rick Goud said: "The UK is an interesting market. It's innovative tech culture mirrors that of the Netherlands, with growing volumes of sensitive information being sent digitally." The company will work exclusively via the channel and Goud expects to appoint a distributor over the coming weeks and form partnerships with several VARs by the end of the year.

SD-WAN provider flexiWAN has kicked off a MSP and VAR recruitment drive on the back of a new channel programme. According to CEO and co-founder Amir Zmora, since flexiWAN released its first beta on 31st July this year more than 460 companies have registered and over 150 installations were counted. "After on-boarding a few select partners we are now opening this opportunity globally," said Zmora.

MAINTEL is to expand its offering in the public sector after being named as a supplier on Crown Commercial Service's Network Services 2 agreement. The firm has a history in supplying comms and managed services to the sector, working with over 40 health trusts and enabling local authorities such as Greater London Authority, West Midlands Police, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, University of Bath and NHS Grampian.

Hull heralds age of programmed cities

A PIONEERING project undertaken by Connexin has been credited with kicking off the age of the 'programmable city'.

The tech company has turned its hometown Hull into what it claims to be the first smart city of its kind following the deployment of an operating system that pulls together data that sits within separate council computer systems, enabling the management of the city's public assets in real-time.

Hull City Council will leverage Connexin's CityOS platform to integrate, view, manage and respond to data from a range of council services, sensors and systems, via a single intelligent dashboard.

Information from current and future data producing deployments, such as smart lighting, parking, traffic, waste management and Wi-Fi deployments, are to be integrated into the single pane of glass software platform.

"Our platform will enable Hull to become a programmable city and move from siloed service driven technologies to a central platform to improve service delivery, reduce costs and to make the most of new technologies such as IoT, AI and ML algorithms," stated Connexin founder and CEO Furqan Alamgir.

Connexin's system is built around Cisco's Kinetic for Cities platform which aggregates data from a range of IoT sensor types into a certified set of urban service domains such as waste, lighting and parking.

Cisco Kinetic has been deployed in projects worldwide and brings over 70 out-of-the-box Cisco certified integrations.

Scot Gardner, Chief Executive, Cisco UK & Ireland, added: "When you start to think of a city as programmable there is an opportunity to not only improve individual services with technology, but use combined



Furqan Alamgir

data insight from those services to create a holistic, actionable view for local authorities."

One of the services which is to be integrated into the Smart City Platform is a recent deployment of waste management sensors.

The new software also opens the door for a number of innovation projects and developments. Much of the information brought together will become available, on an open platform, for the public to use to drive new ideas and solutions to directly benefit the local economy.

Through the use of open APIs, ISVs and city application developers, for example, are able to plug into the management infrastructure and provide public service capabilities.

Councillor Daren Hale, Deputy Leader of Hull City Council, added: "Developing Hull as a Smart City will give us the opportunity to work with public and private sector partners to deliver real benefits to communities, businesses and visitors to Hull.

"The project will involve technology solutions to enhance data sharing and decision making, which will help us to deliver more effective services, including everything from traffic management to health and social care.

"As the project develops it will create demand for a new digitally skilled workforce in the city. We will need to invest in skills and training for younger generations so they are prepared for the new types of jobs that will be created in the digital sector."

Cloud key driver for IT buyers

CLOUD considerations are the number one driver of channel engagement from customers in the UK IT sector according to a survey carried out by global interconnection company Equinix, in which 47% of those surveyed in Britain are now using channel businesses for cloud-based services.

With Gartner research indicating that 80% of enterprises plan to migrate entirely away from on-premises infrastructure to colocation and the cloud by 2025, it is clear the channel is well positioned to help customers implement critical infrastructure transformation.

Notably, 59% of UK businesses surveyed said they would choose to work with channel partners because it's more cost-effective than other routes to market; and quality of service credentials would swing the deal for ICT providers for 56% of UK respondents.

Matt Williams, Head of Telstra EMEA, said: "Organisations underestimate the value of finding the right partners in their digital journey.

"Successful partnerships not only fill gaps in expertise, they can bring long-term value. Many businesses are finding success in migrating from a purely transactional model to values-based partnerships."

Oren Yehudai, who is Senior Director, EMEA Channel Sales, Equinix, commented: "By 2021, European spend on cloud will hit £100bn. Channel players must be ready to support this.

"For many in the channel that means making significant changes, from accelerating the development of consulting and cloud-complementing services, to adapting to a monthly billing system or changing compensation plans to match the new purchasing patterns."

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A CHARITY golf day hosted by Crowborough-based Newman Business Solutions at Nevill Golf Club has raised £3,000 for Burning Nights, which supports sufferers of Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS). The charity's founder (and double amputee as a result of the condition) Victoria Abbott-Fleming said: "We are trying to reach out to more people with this condition, and as a small charity every penny donated counts. Some of the money raised will go towards the UK's first CRPS Information Centre, where patients and their families can come and speak to other patients as well as getting help and advice about living with the condition. We will also be bringing in a psychologist once a month for patients to access free of charge." Pictured: Newman MD Andrew Deadman with Victoria Abbott-Fleming.



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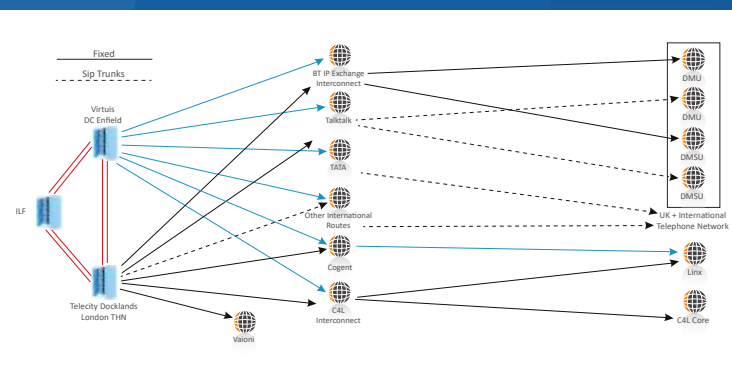
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NEWS ROUNDUP

MICROSOFT Dynamics partner K3 has issued a trading update for the second half, warning that sales will be significantly below market expectations after seeing major deals fall through. K3 said it had started confidently in H2, but a major new contract failed to materialise and a large customer entered into administration. The company now expects adjusted operating profit to be around £1.5m for the year, compared to £4.6m last year. And net debt is expected to go up to £2.2m compared to £0.6m last year.

BRITANNIC Technologies has been awarded a place on the Crown Commercial Service's Network Services 2 framework for its contact centre solutions. Director Jonathan Sharp commented: "We have much experience in the public sector supplying organisations with innovative contact centre solutions. We are seeing an increase in demand for Artificial Intelligence and Robotic Process Automation solutions in the contact centre. They vastly reduce the cost to serve and improve business processes and the customer experience." So far the framework has achieved approximately £5bn in sales over the last four years.

NFON fits MS Teams in Cloudya

NFON is targeting the UK cloud telephony market with the launch of NVoice, an integration of its Cloudya hosted platform with Microsoft Teams.

NFON has a partnership with Microsoft distributor Westcoast and plans to expand its UK footprint by recruiting IT and comms resellers keen to address customer demand for joined up cloud UC infrastructures across the private and public sectors. Hackney Borough Council in London is already a customer with 7,000 seats.

NFON also unveiled NCTI Pro, a new desktop PBX CTI solution that allows users to integrate Cloudya communications processes with existing CRM applications such as Salesforce and SAP.

Speaking at the NFON partner conference in Munich, CEO Hans Szymanski said: "We have our own platform, developed and operated by us. Our sweet spot is 20 to 50 users, but our solutions address any business with two to 10,000 seats."



Hans Szymanski

9 serves up winner with tennis champ

9 GROUP'S reseller partners experienced an unforgettable challenge last month by taking on British multi-grand slam wheelchair tennis champion Gordon Reid on the hallowed turf of the famous Queen's Club in London's West Kensington.

Whether playing the 2016 Paralympic gold medallist in wheelchairs or not, the partners learned a simple lesson – champions are champions for a reason, and with the resilience and determination to succeed you can become unbeatable.

Lee Waller, Director at Yello, said: "To experience what it is like to have an ability most of us take for granted temporarily taken away, yet still be able to play sport, was truly inspirational and enjoyable at the same time. This was the most enlightening experience I have had."

Reid, a Brand Ambassador for 9 Group, was impressed with the partners who had to quickly learn how to manoeuvre around the court in wheelchairs and try to master the unique backhand stroke used by many wheelchair tennis players.

"The enthusiasm of 9's guests and staff was infectious, and they adapted really well to playing from a chair," he said.



Gordon Reid and Lee Waller

9 Group Marketing Director Mark Saunders added: "Thankfully, no fingers were lost to rapidly spinning wheelchair spokes and it was immediately evident that the competitive spirit had been unleashed.

"Gordon re-joined the 9 party at the Hilton Park Lane Hotel for the Comms National Awards, where he presented The Nine Customer Service Awards and was interviewed on stage by host, Huw Edwards.

"The following morning, he flew to Tokyo to take part in an exhibition match with Roger Federer, no doubt benefitting

from the challenges posed by his workout with 9 at The Queens Club!"

Adam Cathcart, MD of Partners at 9, summed up the day: "Having the privilege to play tennis at the historic Queens club with three times Wimbledon Champion and Paralympic gold medallist, Gordon Reid, was a once in a lifetime experience.

"Gordon is an exceptional athlete and a fantastic ambassador for both 9 Group and the tennis community."

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Capital moves by Vodafone



Sadiq Khan and Nick Jeffery

5G COULD boost London's economy by £30bn by 2030 claims Vodafone UK, driven in the main by productivity gains.

The network operator also sealed a deal with Transport for London to bring its network to the Jubilee line, and opened its new digital hub in the capital, a multi-million investment in Southwark called The Speechmark which houses 1,000 employees.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan (who opened the facility) stated: "London is on track to become the world's leading smart city, and the move to 5G has the potential to make the capital a global trailblazer in civic innovation."

Vodafone UK CEO Nick Jeffery added: "5G will enable a

whole new generation of digital services capable of improving transportation, housing and connectivity across the capital.

"5G will transform the way we live, how and where we do business, and improve how productive we can be at work.

"From digital buildings and autonomous vehicles, to emergency response infrastructure – where cloud systems can run AI applications and power continual information sharing between onsite, office and support teams – the potential benefits of 5G's high bandwidth and low latency connectivity are limited only by our imagination."

Vodafone says it invests approximately £1m per week upgrading network capacity across London.

Inclarity answers concerns

IN ADDRESSING partner concerns over the impact of economic uncertainty on the willingness of customers to make long-term commitments Inclarity has introduced the option of a one year contract for its bundled services offering.

"By bundling together a BroadSoft license with a choice of handsets or softphones, a minutes package and call recording, end users have everything they need for a single monthly fee," said MD Enzo Viscito.

He described the shorter contract term as a 'timely response to channel needs' and believes it will enable channel partners to allay the concerns of end customers.



Enzo Viscito

"We also offer contract periods of up to five years for channels working with businesses that need that stability at a lower price point," confirmed Viscito.

Nadella reaps ripe markets

MICROSOFT'S Q1 figures to 30th September displayed a 14% uplift in revenue to \$33.1bn and an operating profit of \$12.7bn, up 27%.

CEO Satya Nadella stated: "We are accelerating our innovation across the entire tech stack to deliver new value for customers, and investing in large and growing markets with expansive opportunities."

Amy Hood, EVP and CFO, added: "It was a strong start to the fiscal year with our commercial cloud generating \$11.6bn in



Satya Nadella

revenue for the quarter, up 36% year-over-year."

Dynamics products and cloud services revenue increased 14%, driven by Dynamics 365 revenue growth of 41%.

Revenue in Intelligent Cloud business stood at \$10.8bn, up 27%, including a 30% rise in server products and cloud services revenue, driven by Azure revenue growth of 59%.

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IntraLAN CEO targets fast

IntraLAN made its first CEO change for almost a quarter of a century in August, pulling in Andy Horn whose 2020 plan has only one purpose – to double the size of the business ahead of delivering a longer-term expansion push.

In the realm of business expansion, Horn's intention to double revenues next year shows great ambition, more so when you consider that acquisitions are not the main priority, at least for the time being. In a bold bid to get this done he says that target-driven leadership, the company pulling together and velocity will lead to a coming of age for IntraLAN. "I was brought on board to take the company to the next level of growth and revenue through defined leadership, communication and collaboration," he said. "The immediate focus is on organic growth. I have set the objective to more than double the size of the business through 2020, and we need to make sure we have the momentum to make that happen. The business will scale at pace and the leadership team must ensure we do not lose the great culture and customer focus we have developed. Our strategy may eventually evolve to include inorganic growth as we go forward."

Extracting 100 per cent more revenue from the market in short time will be, predictably, a challenge for any plucky business with plenty of pep in its step. But Horn is reinforced in his view that IntraLAN's growth objectives are not only achievable, but beatable, based on his conviction that monetising new technologies, boosting the headcount



Andy Horn

I have set the objective to more than double the size of the business through 2020, and we need to make sure we have the momentum to make that happen

and getting more hands on with staff will go a long way in underpinning his plan. "I'm working closely with the sales and alliances team to make this happen," he stated. "And we'll be bringing new and emerging services to market to help transform our customers'

businesses. Early stage companies already approach us to be the driver behind their business transformation and innovation. Digital transformation continues to be a key concern for our customers and we're helping them to navigate the change in the most cost-effective and

efficient way possible. Digital transformation isn't just about technology, it's about changing business models."

Setting the pace

One illustration of Horn's modus operandi is his intention to stay ahead of the times, which he hopes

will inject the demand for innovation required of his action plan in SME territory. "This is difficult because not all new technologies are primed to succeed and many may compete with each other," he added. "As a VAR or systems integrator, it's important to align the commercial value of the tech with the business demands of customers. Typical systems integrators have been focused on the enterprise, the SME market has often been neglected. We are providing a suite of integrated services that truly support this market."

The Epsom-based Microsoft Gold Partner's market focus is primarily SMEs. It offers a broad spectrum of IT services including support, UC, business continuity, Internet, mobile and telephone services. As well as Microsoft, IntraLAN's technology partners include IBM, Cisco, BT, Splicecom, Vodafone, EE, O2, Datto and Colt. Horn noted that IntraLAN is in the process of adding new partners across its service offering including cyber security. He also said that the appointment of five new recruits last month to IntraLAN's business development team is a significant boost to its growth strategy. The new hires include Tony Fabrizio, Head of Channel Alliances and Strategic Partnerships, a move which is reflective of the advances made by IntraLAN's partner ecosystem.

st growth

Horn is aiming for IntraLAN to become the preferred supplier and innovator for the SME sector, but it's an ambition that, he says, is barely evident in the mid-market. "I'd like to see more focus and stronger support for new and emerging technology in the mid-market," commented Horn. "Stop talking about technology and start discussing business outputs. Real innovation requires us to

Stop talking about technology and start discussing business outputs

stop doing some of the tasks we do today, to enable us to do them in a different way tomorrow. True innovation is about employee engagement and valuing all staff as being creative contributors to the success of a business."

IntraLAN began its commercial life in 1995, providing support for Novell and NT3.51 networks. The following year it committed to the Microsoft platform and in 1997 was appointed a Microsoft Partner, later upgraded to Gold Partner status in 2003. The telecoms division has been in operation for nearly a decade, as has IntraLAN's Canary Wharf data centre. The firm's merger with Transglobal Telecom in 2014 doubled its size and brought in additional telecoms expertise.

The company became part of the Eli Global group of

independent entrepreneurial businesses in 2017 and Horn's appointment as CEO in August was hailed as another significant step forward. "I'm IntraLAN's first new CEO for 24 years and I'm taking the business into a new era of growth," stated Horn. "My strengths lie in strong sales leadership and the commercialisation of technology. Both of these are fundamental to supporting our customer sectors effectively."

Horn's leadership credentials have been spotlighted many times. Winning plaudits for growing outsourcing business Exodus from zero staff to exit with a \$40 million run rate was an especially bright moment. Perhaps Horn's knack for charting stellar growth stems from his time as a navigation officer in the Navy. But as the number of ships diminished Horn's Navy career sunk. "I got off my backside and after a few sales jobs ended up in telecoms," he recalled. "Some of these roles were commission only, so I had to make things happen."

"I got into the telecoms sector when the BT monopoly started to break up. It led to disruptive selling which was great for customers and businesses of all sizes. I then moved to London and worked in IT outsourcing which was another disruptive technology. Again, the business model was changing and everything we delivered to the market was beneficial to our customers. The Navy taught me about leadership and teamwork. The following sales roles built on these learnings and introduced an element of essential fun. If what you do is fun the magic just seems to happen." ■



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Clear planning pays off

Having a clear vision of the end game from the outset has proved an invaluable tactic in Vapour Cloud's progress as an evolving MSP, according to founder and CEO Tim Mercer.

Vapour Cloud grew by 51 per cent in 2018 and early this year was recognised as one of Avaya's fastest growing mid-market voice partners in the UK, achieving a net recurring revenue rate of 96 per cent. "We're really gathering pace now," stated Mercer. "We've had our eye on the long game since the beginning, and now things are getting more exciting. At board level we have a shared vision and a clear strategy on what we want to achieve. This has cascaded down to our workforce who push boundaries every day for the partners we support."

Providing voice alone would have been too easy, says Mercer. After all, where would the firm's differentiation reside? "It was always my ambition to become a MSP," he added. "I'd identified a gap in the market and sold everything I owned to make the bold vision a reality. I wanted Vapour to deliver an end-to-end solution, but it was harder than I'd anticipated, largely because in 2013 when Vapour was established the market wasn't generally ready for a cloud-first proposition. We knew we were early adopters, and many people looked at us and thought we were crazy, especially because we ploughed a significant amount of our £4 million investment into building and advancing our own network."

But the creation of this secure network was in

fact the first step towards ultimately becoming a MSP, pointed out Mercer, who bolstered his network build with the addition of SIP, tier one carrier interconnects and the appointment of what he identified as among the most high level technical resource in the industry.

"These components are crucial to a managed service proposition and they helped cement our position as a true cloud specialist," added Mercer. "Looking past any short-term wins in favour of the ultimate MSP goal has also meant we've set milestones that really matter, and we've concentrated solely on the part of the market we really want to work with – VARs."

In seeking a capability boost Mercer acquired CSP EveryCloud in 2015, a move that strengthened the enlarged company's offering and provided access to some of the most advanced cloud skill sets in the north of England. "By this stage we could deliver not just straightforward cloud voice but also call recording, back-up, storage, connectivity and so much more," explained Mercer.

"Month after month more IT companies wanted to work with us. And our proposition continued to advance with us making the decision to bring in our own SBCs for example. This is a critical part of the VoIP infrastructure stack. But it's complex, so even some of the biggest players



Tim Mercer

We knew we were early adopters, and many people looked at us and thought we were crazy

choose not to get involved. However, our techies know what they're talking about and have a hunger to own as much as they can of what we do. So, we made the move."

Voice has always been a sensitive market, says Mercer, and despite the promise of VoIP it has attracted a bad reputation among many organisations, he believes. "This is exactly why I wanted Vapour to have sight of everything from the handset to delivery," he added. "It was clear that if we could see the whole length of

the traffic we could provide a consistent, defined and trusted service level. People pay more for this specialism, and it is paying off."

Planning

Over the past few months Vapour has been busy finalising the biggest managed service deal in its history. But getting to this point has taken time and planning. "We haven't just laid the foundations," said Mercer. "In 2015, we also pivoted the business and decided to concentrate solely on partnering with VARs

rather than going after end users. As a result, we can truly collaborate rather than compete with these resellers. We don't want to offer IT support or hardware. We leave that to them, while we concentrate on what we're good at, something that is usually a gap in their proposition. Vapour therefore creates genuine partnerships, and because we have our own marketing automation engine we can sit inside these businesses and nurture opportunities within their own base. Everyone benefits, including customers."

Vapour now offers eight classes of service across two private, ultra-resilient SD WAN ready networks, spanning five data centres throughout the UK. According to Mercer, this is one of the most compelling reasons why partners want to work with Vapour, especially on larger more complex contracts. "Our network has cost us millions in terms of time, money, ongoing resource and support," he added. "Our engineering alone continues to cost hundreds of thousands per year.

"We've got to keep constantly up-to-date to maintain the resilience we want to deliver. We are powering connectivity for business critical applications, and a network that is owned, run and managed by our own engineers is what ultimately ensures optimum robustness with a single, defined SLA."



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Dynamic duo love bringi

Chris Goodman and Ralph Gilbert, joint winners of this year's Entrepreneur of the Year Award at the Comms National Awards, recently moved into a purpose-designed four storey £9.5 million office building in Shoreham, West Sussex. We met there and quizzed the duo on how they built a £70 million ICT services business from humble beginnings.

Where were you born and brought up?
GILBERT:

I was born and bred in Sussex, primarily in Uckfield, then always in or around Brighton. I get a nose bleed north of the M25.
GOODMAN: I was born and brought up in Seaford in East Sussex until I moved to Brighton to go to college. I did a spell in Berkshire until I realised how much I love being by the sea.

What is your educational background?

GILBERT: I achieved very limited GCSEs then went onto college to do sports studies. I was planning to go to University, but my Dad didn't want to pay for me to go and bribed me with a Ford Escort.
GOODMAN: I got 'A' Levels in Maths, Economics and English. I chose not to go to Uni and instead pursue a job in finance, much to my parent's displeasure. I then fell into sales by accident!

In your youth did you ever imagine you would be running a multi-pound business by your thirties?

GILBERT: No, not at all. I still pinch myself now.
GOODMAN: No, but I did have inspiration growing up hearing about my family's successful business in safety pins back in the 1930s!

If you weren't in the comms industry what would you be doing?

GILBERT: I always knew I would be in sales. I used to buy sweets and sell them to the kids that didn't have the luxury of passing the corner shop on the way to school. I also got kicked out of my junior school football team as punishment for selling conkers to the reception kids for their dinner money.
GOODMAN: I'd probably be a financial advisor. I was all about numbers until I got to college and then I found I had natural people skills, so selling people pensions and investments would have been a likely future.



Chris Goodman and Ralph Gilbert with their Comms National Awards Entrepreneur of the Year Award

We struck a deal with SCS that gave us everything we needed, including supplier relationships, a billing platform and access to provisioning and support staff. Fifteen years on we have come full circle and recently acquired SCS

So, what was the genesis of Focus?

GOODMAN: I was working at a local B2B mobile reseller (KEB) and Ralph was working at a local B2B fixed line reseller (Cavendish) and we started passing leads to each other. I then joined Cavendish in 2002 to work with Ralph in the LCR team. Having worked there for two years Ralph decided it

was time to go it alone and found backing from another fixed line reseller, SCS.

GILBERT: We struck a deal with SCS that gave us everything we needed, including supplier relationships, a billing platform and access to provisioning and support staff. Fifteen years on we have come full circle and recently acquired SCS.

What was your lucky break?

GOODMAN: Timing. We set the business up only a few months after the launch of Wholesale Line Rental. Virtually every business in the UK had the opportunity to save money and we made the most of that sales pitch. We then rode the wave of Mobile Termination Rate reductions

ng their lives into Focus

which drove margin skywards. We've spent 10 plus years selling products that have continually come down in price.

GILBERT: Tony Bruggen and Rex Knight at SCS gave us our first break, and since then we've had Gamma to thank as they've provided a great suite of products to resell and have been very supportive.

What roles do each of you perform?

GOODMAN: Ralph is M&A origination, supplier liaison and chief negotiator. I'm the yin to Ralph's yang. He's a very tough negotiator. Just ask the guys at Gamma, he's almost legendary there.

GILBERT: Chris works with the heads of sales, finance, HR, operations and legal on both day-to-day delivery of strategy and M&A execution. He's the calm one in our partnership.

What have been the highlights and lowlights of your journey to date?

GOODMAN: Our office moves in 2010 and 2019 have been a highlight, and our recent 'This is Focus' Awards ceremony which saw the whole company come together to celebrate each others' success. On the flip side, in 2005 and 2012 I suffered from nasty anxiety/panic disorders. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger and it means I am much better placed to support the mental wellbeing of my staff.

GILBERT: Seeing young adults that we've employed develop within the business, buying their first homes and watching their families grow. My worst experience was receiving legal letters from our former employer on Christmas Eve. I don't think we were on their 'nice' list!

Where do you see the big profits going forward as the market changes?

GILBERT: Anything that operates within an opex model that can be hosted and has a low service cost footprint. In particular, this would include cloud services (IT and voice) as well as IT and data security.

GOODMAN: Change creates opportunity. We embrace change and see a host of areas where margin gains are almost certain. The most notable of these is in IT cloud and IT managed services. Our customer surveys show

combined with our mission statement and our people strategy, we aim to ensure that we maintain a culture where our people are front and centre of the business.

How do you manage integrating staff and processes after an acquisition?

GOODMAN: It's probably the key to a successful acquisition. Each acquisition is different so there is no magic formula, but if you put the people at the centre of the agenda you will retain more customers

money and bought a limousine company which was a disaster.

GOODMAN: Listening to Ralph when he said that restaurants and limousines would make us millionaires!

What's the biggest risk you have taken?

GILBERT: At just 21, I decided with my girlfriend of only six weeks to have a baby. Luckily, 15 years later and now with three kids, the gamble paid off.

GOODMAN: Leaving a £45k a year job to set up Focus Group at the age of 23 only

Each acquisition is different, so there is no magic formula. But if you put the people at the centre of the agenda you will retain more customers and get a better return on your investment

that this is an area where they are most likely to be happy to shift services to us and where we already have expertise. Once we have completed development of the product suite, we expect to see notable gains here.

What are your ambitions for the business financially and culturally?

GOODMAN: Much of this is now in the public domain. From an expected run-rate of over £14 million EBITDA at the end of 2019 we aim to increase M&A activity, potentially with private equity backing, and add to our continued organic growth to achieve EBITDA of £40 million by the end of 2024.

GILBERT: We are nothing without our people, and the cultural standards we set for them. Our values are Respect, Teamwork, Ambition and Integrity and

and get a better return on your investment.

GILBERT: We have a tried and tested approach with an internal M&A team that integrates systems with minimal impact to customers.

What was the best business decision you made?

GOODMAN: Ignoring the commentators. There were plenty of people back when we launched who said that 'margin in minutes' was a thing of the past.

GILBERT: We've done lots of joint ventures, many from scratch. RTF and Focus Phones, both now part of our group, have grown to revenues of over £8 million between them.

And what was the worst?

GILBERT: We opened an Italian restaurant called Fellini's which haemorrhaged

six months after getting on the property ladder, with a 110% mortgage and almost £30k of credit card debt.

Outside of business what do you regard as your greatest achievement?

GILBERT: I ran in the same GB team as Mo Farah. I was an 800 metre runner and he was doing 3,000 metres.

GOODMAN: Organising a trek to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in 2016 with the group raising over £35k for charity.

What top tip would you offer other entrepreneurs?

GILBERT: Don't do it alone. You can't high five yourself.

GOODMAN: Consultants are consultants for a reason: They could not run their own successful business – so be wary of their advice. Remember that your own instincts are probably right. ■

FOCUS GROUP'S ACQUISITION TIMELINE

2012 – Abtec

Communications

Ralph met with the owner on the golf course – by the seventh hole the deal was done. The driver was to bring an engineering resource into the business and also adding LG to our portfolio.

2016 – Rainbow Telecom

We had worked with Rainbow for some time, helping them set up their LCR team. The acquisition brought Mitel into our proposition and added almost 1,000 customers to our client base.

2018 – Calibre Networks

Only 20 miles from our offices, Calibre represented a simple bolt-on, but we also gained an excellent engineering resource.

2019 – IT First

Our first acquisition of an IT business. Based in Sussex, IT First was a natural fit to extend our reach in IT managed services.

2019 – Crowthorne Associates

Based in Bristol, Crowthorne was a Mitel house with a strong focus on hospitality. Aside from adding to our existing Mitel capabilities this acquisition represented excellent value.

2019 – SCS

15 years after they helped us set up, Ralph finally managed to convince Tony to sell up. Local, using the same suppliers and systems, it is as simple to integrate as it gets.

Why collaboration is key

UC&C is the channel's chance to become the business community's saviour in the Age of the Millennial, according to Voicflex Sales and Marketing Director Paul Taylor.

Technology that is second nature to Millennials must be on a plate for them when they start work, according to Taylor, and for their part, resellers must display great interest in educating customers about how UC&C fits the bill. "Millennials will account for 75 per cent of the working population by 2025 and the way they communicate involves multiple channels, often with the phone being a last resort," said Taylor. "They have grown up with technology and mobile apps – Messenger, Facetime, WhatsApp and twitter etc – and will expect to bring the way they communicate into the workplace. Resellers need to adapt to this changing landscape."

How to avoid old world technology being rammed down the throats of Millennials accustomed to the opposite is the big question. "The challenge is education," added Taylor. "UC&C requires a different approach to traditional telecommunications, and just as SIP replaced ISDN, UC&C will supersede traditional telephony. In this transition education and integration is key. That will drive adoption and make customers consult with you on future projects as a trusted adviser."

Clearly, says Taylor, with trust in legacy technology non-existent among Millennials, UC&C is all. And the nation's Millennials are challenging employers

to upgrade their comms in their name. Also clear is the increasing importance of mobile. "Mobility has always been important for UC&C," added Taylor. "It is even more so now. You only have to look at a Millennial's screen time to see that. Mobile devices have become a personal choice so we should be happy to support BYOD, but we must draw the line at Bring Your Own Platform. Solutions like Circuit address this problem with intuitive and multi-channel communications."

Voicflex is Unify's only Cloud Service Provider in the UK, providing Circuit, a standalone WebRTC UC&C application with voice delivered via OpenScape Cloud. Circuit was built UC first and has a strong telecoms pedigree. It integrates seamlessly into company communications and Taylor is witnessing growth across the whole channel. "End users embrace UC&C," stated Taylor. "Customers and users expect to communicate in their preferred format be that messaging, voice, video or collaboration, and to be able to switch seamlessly between these methods."

Thus, UC&C will liberate Millennials in the workplace, and significant opportunities exist for UC&C to integrate into technology outside of the traditional telecoms domain, pointed out Taylor. "By using APIs and webhooks you can now use UC not only to communicate with people



Paul Taylor

Customers are turning to OTT for their primary means of communication and businesses need to adapt

but also with platforms," he explained. "This can all be done in minutes with a few clicks of the mouse."

Education

But for resellers to lead with UC&C education is key. The sales process is different and a more involved engagement model is required. "There's a world of tech at resellers' fingertips, encompassing bots and AI applications," commented Taylor. "It's about using the platform as the hub of communications, human or otherwise, and interfacing with the

application required to meet the customers' needs. Some of these requirements can be met with out-of-the-box integrations, some will require support from a development team. With the rich nature of UC&C it is always going to run best as an OTT service. Customers are increasingly turning to OTT for their primary means of communication and businesses need to be ready to adapt."

According to Taylor, UC has for many years been an overused term. At the

outset UC denoted an app on a mobile providing a connection to the PBX telephony application. The extent to which things have changed is seen in the rise of WebRTC. Today, collaboration is device and browser agnostic, allowing easier uptake and greater compatibility. "There are degrees of interconnectivity," added Taylor. "With Circuit the disruptive tech resides at the interconnection of apps via APIs, and middleware such as Zapier which provides point and click integrations with a world of applications. There are no limits no matter your technical skill level."

That said, a great deal of education is required. Many manufacturers are selling UC&C with a PBX hosted in AWS or Google as a single instance, with the SLA backed off against the SLA for AWS or Google. In one sense this could be described as UC&C, however there is no SBC, no back-up and no alternative routing. "I'm interested to see what resilience will be put in place for the single instance guys, or whether there will be a greater move towards full multi-tenanted hosted telephony," speculated Taylor.

Every iteration of new connectivity technology heralds a transformation in working practices – and 5G is no different. "With the rise of 5G the full facilities available in these tools can be used on a device of the user's choosing, wherever they are," added Taylor. ■

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Covering all bases in shift

The strategic reasons for billing providers to be on guard and permanently on their toes come thick and fast. Thus, and ever alert to the mood and requirements of the fast changing market, Strategic Imperatives has made a broad scope of moves to keep all developments covered.

The motive for the ongoing development and advancement of Strategic Imperatives' billing platform is clear, according to Chief Technology Officer Matt Brewster, who has been emphatic about the company's strategic intentions. "Digital Britain demands a complete overhaul of existing service provider business models," stated Brewster. "As changes to customer behaviour and spending accelerate and new digital players enter the market offering innovative OTT services, traditional approaches are no longer applicable for those looking to capitalise on the opportunities available in this era of disruption.

"Traditional billing systems have little relevance in the new world. What service providers need is an integrated and flexible service monetisation platform that sits at the heart of their business support systems so they can prosper in Digital Britain and beyond."

The requirement for next generation business support systems is one fundamental change brought about by the dawn of the 5G and connectivity revolution, observed Brewster. "Tighter integration of billing systems with core business platforms is essential to keep up with service providers' changing needs," he said. "In particular, the ongoing roll out of 5G shifts the



Matt Brewster

We are well into the transition period with innovations like smart cities and multi-layered services rapidly expanding beyond the prototype phase

demands of billing systems up to the next level.

"Network slicing is another pivotal innovation which requires complex billing architecture to seamlessly manage the multiple exchanges taking place

within the telco value chain. Through the development of multiple virtual networks based on a shared physical infrastructure, network slicing enables highly specific segmentation of traffic based on user requirements including capacity, latency

and quality of service. This means customers can therefore opt into premium, tailored services hosted on a network that is using neutral infrastructure."

The connectivity revolution and the dawn of the

subscription economy lie at the heart of today's telecoms ecosystem, and billing providers are uniquely positioned as enablers of new and future technologies, says Brewster. "To support this, billing system architecture needs greater flexibility to enable real-time rating and charging for this continually evolving set of requirements for any account, customer or subscriber," he added. "Monetisation is no longer a linear process, and as service providers identify the most appropriate strategies to defend and optimise their revenue within this intensely competitive digital environment, a one-size fits all approach is no longer a viable solution."

New technology

The specific billing requirements for Digital Britain are yet to be fully realised with new technologies beginning to transition from innovative concepts into market realities, leading service providers to redefine their monetisation strategies. "Although this early adopter phase of the market is undoubtedly challenging, billing providers who are prepared to adapt have a unique opportunity to be the enablers of digital transformation," noted Brewster. "While taking a business as usual approach may sustain legacy billing providers during the transitional period, a head in the sand approach is not sustainable and they will fall by the wayside



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ft to digital era

if they are not capable of meeting the dynamic needs of the evolving telecoms value chain."

For example, to thrive in the digital ecosystem and avoid limiting their revenue potential, service providers will need to consider partnering with technology and application specialists. These partnerships will generate a wide range of product and service combinations and new revenue streams, and the service provider's role within the value chain will vary, pointed out Brewster.

In the new telecoms landscape the idea of a monthly bill is increasingly becoming redundant

"As a result, billing and transaction data will need to be integrated across all partner systems and clear accountability for revenue flow will be critical," he said.

"These new dynamics are transforming the traditional definition of billing as primarily a rating platform that generates invoices at the end of the month. In the new telecoms landscape the idea of a monthly bill is increasingly becoming redundant. Services are consumed on an hourly, daily or weekly basis and the rapid adoption of IoT and OTT services brings fresh opportunities and challenges to the telecoms value chain.

Furthermore, competition is intensifying as more tech companies become active in overlapping domains."

Maturing innovations

The extent of industry change became clear to Strategic Imperatives when it was invited by the Department for International Trade to attend MWC19 and participate in its Innovation Pavilion, a global event inspiring leading edge technology and focusing on the connectivity revolution. "Our conclusion is that we are well into the transition period with innovations like smart cities, connected communities and multi-layered services rapidly expanding well beyond the prototype phase," said Brewster.

"Without sophisticated, agile and scalable billing systems capable of providing a seamless transition into Digital Britain, the much anticipated transformation will be cumbersome for the channel and it is only a matter of time before it starts losing revenue and market share to the multitude of start-ups and new entrants eager to capitalise on 5G, ultra-fast connectivity and the subscription economy. Our subscription and contract management module are being continuously updated to support the complex business models brought about by the advent of 5G, OTT and IoT."

Without question, billing platforms must support more sophisticated packages, dynamic promotions and micropayments as well as managing contracts and subscriptions, highlighted Brewster. The adoption of AI and predictive analytics technologies in billing

will empower service providers to offer targeted propositions that improve customer loyalty, increase profitability and reduce churn, as well as intelligently segment a customer base according to complex criteria including behaviour, preferences, geographical location and revenue potential, he believes.

"We are creating a rich engagement model between service providers and their customers using advanced predictive analytics and hyper-scalable technology," stated Brewster. "A huge amount of data is being created by the exponential rise in the number of connected devices and increasingly sophisticated customer behaviour. A key part of our roadmap is to address the critical need to translate this data into meaningful intelligence and actionable business insights that provide a strategic advantage and competitive edge."

The subscription economy and the connectivity revolution are transforming how we live, work and communicate as well as fundamentally changing the dynamics of the channel. As we have seen, the line between telecoms and technology is also blurring and creating a new ecosystem in which comms providers need to offer complex cloud services and hosted applications such as Google Apps and Office 365, in addition to traditional communications solutions often using subscriptions and flexible contracts, a revenue model that they are ill-equipped to support. "This is not the time to wait and see, but rather to evolve or die," warned Brewster. ■



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Why trust is so important



LOUISE ABBEY
9 GROUP

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?
Regular company updates enable us to share business progress with all employees. This open dialogue builds trust whilst also creating an open forum for questions and ideas.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?
We have a defined management framework which creates a solid platform for all topics to be reviewed and challenged at all levels across our business.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?
Within the ICT industry there are always going to be challenges when providing services. Our role with partners is help them engage and support their customers efficiently and ethically.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?
By not just focusing on selling products. Providing a full suite of Comms and IT services means we are an extension to our partners' businesses and not just a trusted advisor.



LAUREN MCMANUS
DWS

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?
When we joined our business units and rebranded, we made trust one of our core values as we believe it is vital for a successful channel business.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?
We resolve any issues with the partner in mind, maintaining the human touch by communicating with our partners directly and taking on board their feedback.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?
We want all our teams to embody the DWS values. We ensure they understand what we're about and how it can help build trusting, long-lasting relationships with partners.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?
We try to stay at the forefront of the industry to help our partners succeed. The PSTN switch off is a great example; we are working closely with Openreach to keep our partners informed

ICT channel businesses, whether serving reseller partners or organisations in every type of sector will regard trust as a central pillar of their customer relationship strategy.

There can be no denying that people today have trust issues regarding all major institutions because of corporate wrongdoing in the private sector and Government debacles like the long-drawn-out Brexit process.

So, on that foundation how can companies build trust and create long standing customer relationships?

Fundamentally, trust must be owned by every member of staff—from the company owner or CEO to the front-line team members who engage with customers online, by phone, and in person.

The conundrum with trust is that you cannot buy it or force customers to believe your organisation is trustworthy. You have to earn it, so every interaction should be regarded as an opportunity to build relationships and nurture trust.



ANDY WILSON
ENTANET

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?
CityFibre's new 'Chief Customer Officer' role drives the right cultures and processes to ensure every partner receives the very best customer experience, which in turn drives confidence and trust in the products and services we offer.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?
We proactively share clear and timely information and have a clear escalation process meaning we can deal with issues before they even become a conflict.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?
We take the time to fully understand our partners' business and provide them with the right products to meet the needs of their customers.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?
We maintain regular contact with our partners to keep them informed of any operational updates, new products and offers and by offering hands on support we're helping our partners to grow.



STEVE HARRINGTON
MASERGY

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?
Trust is about making everyone feel safe and looked after. Make everyone feel important and they'll deliver more than they believe is possible.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?
Conflicts arise because there is a mismatch in expectations, which arise from poor communication. Be absolutely clear on what is expected from people and get their feedback.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?
Doing the right thing is an unnegotiable ethos. Do right by the customer and they will do right by you. Walk away from prospects and customers that are not the right fit.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?
If you can truly educate customers in a non-selfish way, you can gain their trust. Be genuine in your drive to educate and you can create very long-standing relationships which repay repeatedly.



TOM MAXWELL
NIMANS

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?
Trust needs to be earned. It flows across all areas of our business, underpinned by ISO standards and our Gold Investors in People status. These breed a culture of trust to maintain the highest standards.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?
Rare internal or external conflicts that arise are resolved quickly. Competence, reliability and a caring approach stems from the boardroom down.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?
We instil in every new recruit how ethics and honesty is always best practice. A thorough training programme reinforces the importance of putting the customer first, throughout everyone's career journey.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?
This comes from the top down having built a business on the back of impartial trusted advice. There's only one way to win respect and trust and that's by your actions.



JUSTIN BLAINE
NTA

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?
Trust is earned rather than instilled. We treat people fairly, empower them to carry out their roles and reward them consistently when delivering on the business's objectives.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?
It is a very rare for conflicts to arise either within our own team or with a partner however if they do, we discuss the problem, listen and advise how these can be resolved and then execute this plan.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?
We employ likeminded people, we insist from day one that they act with honesty and integrity and we promote a team culture.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?
We are transparent; nothing is ever hidden from our resellers. This is reiterated within our conversations; our contract and we can also demonstrate this with partner testimonials.



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Business strategist David Horsager speaks internationally on the bottom-line impact of trust. He has developed a system with which he teaches leaders how to build the Eight Pillars of Trust namely **Clarity** – People trust the clear and mistrust the ambiguous

Compassion – People put faith in those who care beyond themselves

Character – People notice those who do what is right over what is easy

Competency – People have confidence in those who stay fresh, relevant, and capable

Commitment – People believe in those who stand through adversity

Connection – People want to follow, buy from, and be around friends

Contribution – People immediately respond to results

Consistency – People love to see the little things done consistently

See more at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yG5oO45a_j0



DAN MACKRELL
SHIRE LEASING

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?

Communication at all levels is vital. We embrace and act upon the voice of employees, through an Employee Forum and regular employee surveys.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?

We aim to convert conflict into learning experiences. For example, we have a Steering Committee where difficult or "red-tape" customer experiences are discussed, and solutions are agreed.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?

Our in-house legal team delivers regular training to all employees, so that we know how to treat customers fairly and comply with industry regulations.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?

We're a member of the Finance and Leasing Association and partner of the government-owned British Business Bank. Shire was established almost 30 years ago and our Executive Board holds over 190 years market experience. As a multi-award-winning funder, we know the business well.



NICK POWELL
SKY BUSINESS

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?

At Sky Business we're customer led, fair and responsible and our people live and breathe openness and collaboration.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?

Being transparent and fair and responsible is always the best approach during conflict. We have a simple rate card approach to pricing and work openly with all our partners.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?

Our purpose is to bring better content and innovation to all of our customers; better connecting them to more of what they love. We share this purpose across the business.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?

We only deal with a relatively small, but high-volume partner base. This enables us to establish trusted advisor status quickly, but the key is making sure that team members are available on the phone when your partners need you most.



MARK CURTIS-WOOD
VAIONI

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?

Our open environment is demonstrated through feedback on our recent anonymous staff engagement survey inviting feedback on our performance as a business and employer, which had over 84% participation.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?

We encourage an environment where open feedback is the norm, ensuring any conflicts are resolved through informal conversations without escalation.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?

By focusing on ethical selling and teaching our people it's OK to say no to customers if something isn't feasible. This links to 2 of our 5 golden rules: "Do your best by our customers" and "Keep your promises."

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?

We focus on recruiting high-performing people, for whom 'good' and 'great' aren't high enough standards. Our investment in internal and external training ensures our people are at the heart of our customers' businesses.



IAIN SINNOTT
VANILLA IP

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?

One way to gain trust is to remove customer risk. If the ambitions of the salesperson are not aligned with your customer, a short-term gain can soon become a churn factor.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?

By offering true cloud, on-demand, short-term agreements on individual elements, within a solution, we protect the reseller and their customer from losses through a 'misunderstanding' or 'negative business outcomes'.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?

The key is not to undermine the natural good qualities of your team. Bad targets and bad product construction are the keys to salespeople pushing the boundaries of good practice.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?

We deliver a portfolio to generate long-term revenue and an eco-system (Uboss) to manage it. Our purchasing options and support programmes de-risk sales development.



NEIL WILSON
VIRTUAL1

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?

Trust in the corporate world, like life in general, comes from simply delivering on what you say you will, when you say you will.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?

Rare conflicts boil down to a misunderstanding rather than a negligent act, so being open is often the best route for a quick and satisfactory resolution.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?

Our sales team are our ambassadors; we expect them to lead by example and set the expectations of the level of service that our partners will receive.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?

Simply by delivering on our sales and service promises. Our end-to-end automation leaves little room to hide in the case of a mistake by either party and this drives a healthy partnership with our customers.



ALAN SHRAGA
FIDELITY GROUP

HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED TRUST WITHIN YOUR FIRM?

By sticking to our word, honouring our agreements, building trust and delivering on what we promise. We have adopted L.T.D (Loyalty, Trust and Delivery) within the business to guide our interactions with customers, partners, staff and suppliers.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANY CONFLICTS THAT ARISE?

With such a diverse group of people across our regional offices we have set up processes for this with equal opportunities, anti-harassment, anti-bullying, formal complaints procedures etc.

HOW HAVE YOU INSTILLED ETHICS IN YOUR TEAM?

L.T.D has been instilled into our business from incorporation. This starts within the sales process, from honouring our commitments, building relationships with our channel partners and their clients.

HOW HAVE YOU BUILT A 'TRUSTED ADVISOR' STATUS?

We work with channel partners who already have the 'trusted advisor' status and add value by providing them with relevant knowledge, technical information, solutions and know how.

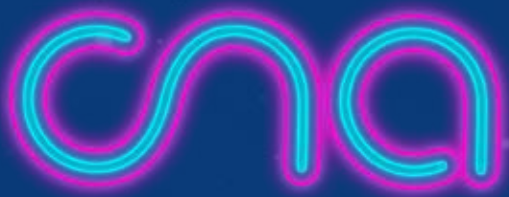
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THE COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS 2019

'You are gold' sang Tony Hadley and put the UK's ICT channel into the spotlight at the UK's top channel awards night.

The Comms National Awards held at London's Hilton on Park Lane on October 10th will live long in the memories of channel superstars who were rewarded and celebrated over the course of a spectacular evening

The event, sponsored by 9 Group for the seventh year running, was hosted by BBC newsreader Huw Edwards and featured a memorable curtain raiser from former Spandau Ballet front man Hadley, who performed a brace of classics in style to added extra sparkle to the 1980s themed event.

Focus Group founders Chris Goodman and Ralph Gilbert were jointly crowned Entrepreneur of the Year, while two new awards for achievements in Diversity and CSR were collected by Sky Business and SCC respectively.

SME Reseller of the Year went to Best 4 Business Communications and UK Enterprise Reseller of the Year was picked up by triple award winner 4net Technologies which also bagged the Best Enterprise Cloud Solution and Best Reseller Innovation gongs.

There were winning doubles too for ICA and Aerial Direct who both retained their 9 Group Customer Service Awards in the SME and Enterprise categories.

The night ended on a high with a Rockaoke extravaganza sponsored by TalkTalk Business.

Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent said: "I would like to thank everyone who entered and sponsored the awards. We had another record entry and special thanks must go to our judges who worked exceptionally hard to ensure fairness in their judgements and must be applauded for their diligence and dedication to the task.

"It truly was a night to remember and not surprisingly social media has been buzzing ever since."

PURE GOLD N



The 2019 Entrepreneur of the Year Award, sponsored by Knight Corporate Finance, went to Chris Goodman and Ralph Gilbert



Expectation builds...



...and Tony Hadley did not disappoint, setting a golden tone for the night

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NIGHT FOR CHANNEL



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We're all 'true' friends on this table



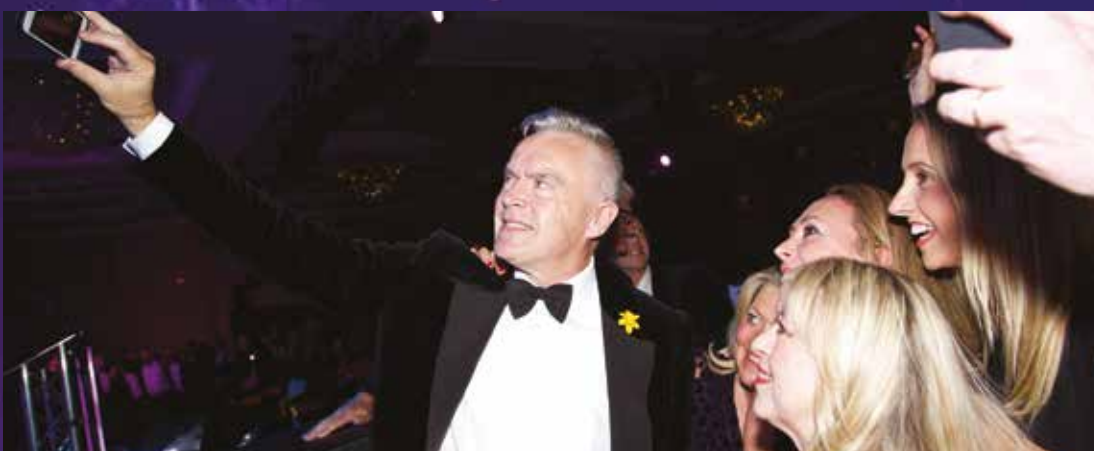
Tom O'Hagan (Virtual1) and Vincent Disneur (Union Street) belt out a tune at the Rockaoke party



Huw Edwards was the perfect host



The Premier League trophy made a guest appearance courtesy of Sky



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ROLL OF HONOUR

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NETWORK CATEGORY

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SERVICE PROVIDER CATEGORY



Best Network Award – VIRTUAL 1



Best Wholesale Service Provider up to £10m turnover – JOLA



Best Wholesale Service Provider above £10m – DIGITAL WHOLESALE SOLUTIONS

TELEPHONY CATEGORY

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Avaya Service Specialists



Best SME Telephony System – SPLICECOM



Best End Point or Device – JABRA



Best Hosted Telephony Platform – GAMMA

DISTRIBUTION CATEGORY

Sponsored by **Voiceflex**



Best Comms Distributor – NIMANS



Best Mobile Distributor – JOLA



Best IT Distributor – TECH DATA

APPLICATIONS CATEGORY



Best Call Management – TOLLRING



Best Billing Platform – INFORM BILLING

CUSTOMER SERVICE CATEGORY

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9 Group Customer Service Award up to £5m – ICA



9 Group Customer Service Award above £5m – AERIAL DIRECT

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Best Enterprise Vertical Market Solution – EVOKE TELECOM

CLOUD COMMUNICATION CATEGORY

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Best SME Cloud Solution – BEST 4 BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS



Best Enterprise Cloud Solution – 4NET TECHNOLOGIES

UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS CATEGORY

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Best SME UC Solution – CISILION



Best Enterprise UC Solution – INCOM-CNS

IOT SOLUTIONS CATEGORY

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Best SME Mobile/IOT Solution – CSL



Best Enterprise Mobile/IOT Solution – STRATOOPENCELL

INNOVATION CATEGORY

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Best Reseller Innovation – 4NET TECHNOLOGIES



Best Supplier Innovation – PRD

POSITIVE IMPACT CATEGORY

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Diversity Award – SKY BUSINESS



CSR Award – SCC

CHANNEL SUPPORT CATEGORY



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Best Channel Portal – ICUK

RESELLER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

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SME Reseller of the Year – BEST 4 BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS



Enterprise Reseller of the Year – 4NET TECHNOLOGIES

Strategists talk billing

The mechanics of the ICT sector require fundamental change as we approach Digital Britain, not least in the billing space. Here, we report on the challenges and opportunities billing vendors now face, and spotlight their efforts in taking a stand for the future success of the channel.

The last call for the UK's billing providers to drive ahead with software development surely passed long ago. Today, the channel's most progressive billing vendors have already deployed much effort and investment into helping resellers to win in Digital Britain. One of them, Inform Billing, realigned its strategy and development roadmap in 2013 and has since invested significantly in resilience and flexibility – both key requirements of the digital shift in the channel. "Full fibre, 5G and digitalisation will be easier for billing companies to accommodate if they have already made the investment to move to fully cloud-based platforms that apply the same level of flexibility and functionality to new services as applied to calls in years gone by," stated Inform Billing Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth.

"In the all-IP world, everyone wants and expects their systems to integrate and provide users with the ability to self-serve. For many the expectations for billing software to integrate with

other systems and to facilitate other capabilities, such as CRM and provisioning, will always challenge the balance of cost-effectiveness versus the cost of deployment. Resellers should focus on cost versus benefits in terms of scalability, accessibility and avoidance of task repetition. Not just integration for the sake of it."

To date Inform Billing has invested over £2 million into its platform and continues to plough 45 per cent of revenues back into developing the software, prioritising enhancements that lead to a smoother customer experience. In responding to market demands Inform Billing has also advanced its API set, enabling customers to build links between other systems and its platform in a more structured way. It follows that developing partnerships and integrations with complementary applications to offer joined up solutions is top of mind along with automation.

"With customers spanning traditional telecoms, IT, mobile and IoT as well as



Shaun Bodsworth

In the all-IP world, everyone wants and expects their systems to integrate and provide users with the ability to self-serve

utilities, waste management, banking and even hospitality all using our software for billing, we are developing partnerships in diverse markets relevant to the subscription economy, opening up future opportunities for both us and the channel," added Bodsworth.

Development

Software development is now embedded in the world views of billing providers. Why? Because Digital Britain will enable businesses to be more mobile and flexible, pointed out Nick Jarret, Head of Revenue Management and Billing at 9 Group. "We're seeing huge growth in areas such as hot desking, managed offices and remote working," he

said. "The traditional concept of charging for a line, broadband and calls for a lengthy period of time simply won't be relevant to this growing area of users who consume services on demand, in some cases changing many times throughout a day. The opportunity sits with the capability to integrate with any number of ordering systems, allowing a low-touch 'provision-to-bill' automation and insightful reporting."

As the trend towards mobile, hosted and collaboration technology continues, this presents an opportunity for creative start-ups to move into these spaces. "Change is the only constant for billing providers," added Jarret. "We'll continue to see

emerging businesses in need of a billing solution, weighing up the costs of building their own bespoke solutions or expediting routes-to-market by partnering with a trusted billing provider."

As with all modern day technology market developments, strategies evolve, new alliances are formed and new integrations are needed. "Increasingly we see requirements for billing systems to accommodate MSP services from Office 365 licencing, to back-up licencing, to IaaS as well as voice and data in all-inclusive or unlimited packages," added Bodsworth. "Inform Billing has built flexibility into the platform to adapt to the changes that digitalisation

Continued on page 42



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A F F I N I T Y

 **Aurora**

Continued from page 40 requires, to facilitate both the monetisation of subscription services and the inclusive use of consumption-led pricing models much more effectively going forward. Those who have not made the same investment may find themselves exposed.

“There has been much talk about the rise of subscription based services, and in our market there is already the need to bill subscriptions for connectivity, software licencing or just a good old-fashioned line rental – the key is having the flexibility at the core of the billing platform to not only bill and manage those services, but to manage revenue assurance and profitability.”

Why? Because it's no longer a question of whether or not a billing system can adapt to new technologies, according to Jarret. Most can, he says, but what is evident is that businesses are now spending far too much time and effort on revenue assurance. “This comes at a time when margins are being squeezed and financial performance has never been more important,” stated Jarret. “Today's billing system needs to amortise the costs and revenues from the services acquired monthly, but sell quarterly and reflect the cashflow advantage in accounts. They should be adding insight and context to the data, such as advising finance teams when to expect an invoice and for

how much, or applying intelligence to forecast seasonality trends and the impact on recurring revenues versus one-off or usage based revenues. Billing systems should be enhancing business management to get the most out of business finance.”

This is the order of the day, and in seeking to give users what they want Symbiant Technologies Director Colin Forward noted that in addition to changing market needs, resellers and their customers will demand greater and quicker access to information. “Presenting real-time data to resellers and customers, accessible via a range of devices, will become the norm,” stated Forward. “Customers are accustomed to paying in advance for recurring services, and consumer behaviour with OTT services is now more geared to paying for services for specific periods when they have access, or based upon usage. Those billing systems providers best able to import data from subscription management and usage feeds to support resellers in selling profitable new products will thrive – others may struggle.

Change programmes

“Interfaces will also need to capture information on when customers upgrade, suspend, resume and renew subscriptions. Where subscriptions include usage limits, monitoring tools will need to be in place to provide usage alerts to



Colin Forward

Presenting real-time data to resellers and customers, accessible via a range of devices, will become the norm.

customers to help them avoid overage fees. Billing systems providers are accustomed to operating in constantly changing markets, Digital Britain represents a continuation of those change programmes.”

Since 2001 Symbiant has reinvested much of its profit into systems and skills development. “As we have made the journey from desktop-based client hosted solutions to cloud-based, anywhere, multiple device type services the skills profile of our developers has changed, via both training and recruitment,” added Forward. “We expect to further refine the skills of our team to make the most of capabilities in AWS and similar solutions.”

The coming years will prove to be a ‘make or break time’ for the channel's billing vendors, according to Union Street's Head of Sales and Marketing Vincent Disneur. “Those with limited development capabilities or too reliant on technology with a shelf life, such as WLR3, could find themselves standing on a burning platform,” he stated. “On the other hand, there's huge potential for forward thinking billing vendors to develop value add solutions that will help CPs capitalise on the infrastructure improvements offered by Digital Britain. Creating an end-to-end supply chain and tightening

accurate reporting and powerful analytical tools in their billing platforms that will quickly identify loss making services and customers,” added Disneur.

“Billing systems are increasingly required to become part of a larger back office system rather than a separate item that needs manual input and output. Virtually every new installation of our platform has some degree of integration with other back office systems. Afterall, if a CP has spent a significant amount of time, money and resources creating an integrated back office, the last thing they'll want to introduce is a billing system that can't effectively integrate with everything else.”

Increasingly, it is integration that is facilitating greater levels of back-office automation with sophisticated task management and workflows, believes Disneur. Information and data can be pushed around seamlessly between software, and a human need only be involved when a decision needs to be made. “Integration of billing and provisioning systems offers exciting possibilities, particularly as time goes on and we move from WLR3 to a more diverse market for digital communications,” he commented.

“By extension, there's a growing requirement to provide customers with automation and self-service online. This might include the capability to add or remove services, run reports, manage cost centres, estate management, fault reporting, amend orders, change contact details and so on. Providing greater levels of customer control has a dual advantage for CPs – it not only improves their market offering by empowering customers, it also reduces costs associated with support calls and requests.” ■

billing and provisioning is one way in which billing vendors are well placed to assist. However, adding value in this way is very much dependant on cooperation from other third party service providers in the supply chains.”

Revenue assurance

With downward pressure on prices and an increasing move towards bundles and subscription-based service contracts, traditional methods of adding mark-up will become ever more unworkable and robust revenue assurance functionality will be far more important in a billing platform. “Billing vendors must support CPs in optimising revenue streams by providing



Vincent Disneur

Those with limited development capabilities or too reliant on technology with a shelf life, such as WLR3, could find themselves standing on a burning platform.



Nick Jarret

As the trend towards mobile, hosted and collaboration technology continues, this presents an opportunity for creative start-ups to move into these spaces.



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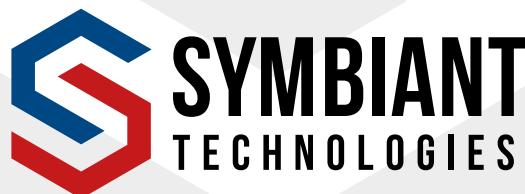
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Planning for the future

It is incumbent on the channel's billing vendors to act in concert with technological shifts in the market towards digital transformation and all that entails. According to Aurora COO Derek Watson, such moves can only strengthen the hand of resellers and their customers, but to do otherwise is the single biggest threat to their prosperity.

Aurora has long deployed its development wit and energy into reseller products built around its Affinity platform, and has embarked on a fresh £5 million software investment roadmap. In warning the channel that there is no room for complacency, Watson spelled out Aurora's busy plans. "We are developing user focused cloud-based applications, investing in technologies such as AI and chat bots which drive business automation, eliminate human error and drive down costs while speeding up processes," he commented. "We are focusing on slick integration with different reseller modules, and building self-serve software which customers can access anywhere, anytime."

Products with near boundless technical capabilities that also provide a sublime user experience will be the most important drivers of billing software platforms, believes Watson, especially when you consider that various sectors present different challenges and product selection is key. "In the mobile arena, 75 per cent of the charges are for line rentals and bundles, but for most billing providers this represents around 10 per cent of their capabilities and development focus," he said.

"Usage charges represent around 90 per cent of the

billing issues and queries, but only 25 per cent of overall margin from selling mobiles. So Affinity has more focus on product charging and helping the reseller to select the correct network product."

On the other hand, cloud computing is moving from product to usage-based charging, which presents a new challenge to a market sector that has been used to charging for hardware, connectivity and storage on an allocation basis. "Therefore, billing systems of the future need to bill for compute, power and bandwidth to compete in this area," commented Watson.

"Resellers want to buy and sell everything but owning the customer is the challenge. Hence, a billing system must keep up with the resellers' end customers' demands. There is also the challenge of billing service delivery and having a platform that can compete from the SaaS level up to the all-encompassing system that runs a large reseller or carrier grade service."

For the larger players, this is par for the course, noted Watson. "We have a large investment to keep customers up to date and enable them to grow into new and emerging markets," he added. "Our roadmap also drives resellers towards more profitable areas of the market, and allows them to



Derek Watson

Billing systems of the future need to bill for compute, power and bandwidth to compete

get more out of their staff by utilising software to replace the functions traditionally performed by employees. Smaller counterparts may struggle to keep up with the pace of change, and there could be some consolidation of billing providers.

"We have already seen the market move towards data being the most sensitive of the usage elements and the largest potential area for bill shock. Usage of data is getting ever more demanding, and we will need to be able to bill and manage data much more flexibly. Keeping end customers updated on bill shock issues, and gaining access to quicker CDR feeds is paramount to regaining control of

the usage and being able to provide appropriate protection to the end user."

Such moves would enable resellers to meet their own and end user objectives. Yet, Watson expects to witness high levels of customer inertia, meaning that innovative solutions should allow customers to continue using legacy telecoms services on new technology.

Opportunities

"This may lead to billing opportunities," he commented. "IP-based services are less supported by the networks with regards to CDR information, and charging is far more complex, with city breakouts rather than a simple

system of country-based international calling. There will be more emphasis on understanding how the supplier should be charging the reseller, and indeed, the reseller self-certifying their own bill with the carrier. Billing systems need to be capable of providing a full carrier level service, rather than a simple system of uplifting and bundling.

"The cost of supporting reseller billing platforms is also significant, and there is great emphasis on software to be simple to use and fit for purpose. However, pulling in the opposite direction is the desire of resellers to have their own USPs, which can lead to bespoke software and more complexity." ■



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Shaping the MSP model

Piers Mummery has spent 30 years turning around and launching a plethora of diverse businesses ranging from garden centres to the world's first black cab taxi-top digital advertising agency. Not one to sit on his hands, he's spent the last six years 'having a lot of fun' in Chicago helping ICT companies transition into MSPs.

Comms Dealer caught up with Mummery during a short visit to the UK where he's keen to return and act as a mentor and guide for any UK resellers looking to move in to the managed services arena, based on his experiences in the Windy City and elsewhere in the USA. The MSP model is probably two years more mature in the States than in the UK but, in many ways, the structure and current mindset of many players in the reseller channel is no different, as Mummery explained.

"The US market is fascinating in many areas," he said. "Over here everybody has been buzzing for years about becoming a Managed Service Provider and transitioning from traditional break/fix and dealer services. But if the case is as compelling as everyone suggests, then why in 2019 does the traditional dealer channel exist on the scale that it does in the States? The answer is risk management. America is a big place and the land of opportunity, and most traditional channel operators are a bi-product of their default experience and, like in the UK, many operate as lifestyle businesses.

There are also lots of small local operators who are merging with bigger players to grow the scope of services and market reach. The facts are plain to see. Reactive project and support

businesses are finding it harder to maintain margins, as pricing is always under scrutiny. There is software to support everything now. It's eating the world as it is much easier to offer on an 'as a service' basis."

Mummery suggests that the proactive management of IT/comms is a more secure opportunity to build longer-term value for clients and suppliers and believes higher margins are there to be had. His arguments for transitioning to the MSP model, based on his US experiences, are fivefold.

"Firstly, software is easier to maintain than hardware," he explained. "This is blatantly obvious, but very true and not quite as scary as it seems.

Next, the vendor community is highly competitive and most suppliers are keen to go the extra mile to secure new channel partners. Then we have the fact that comms and IT are no longer distinct. They are fully integrated, along with anything and everything on the network. Fourthly, cyber security is huge here and growing at a phenomenal pace. It's front of mind with every client. And lastly, clients like the idea of the one stop shop. Over here, I often hear the phrase 'one back to pat and one throat to choke'."

There is no doubt that the managed services model represents a fast developing



Piers Mummery

The managed services model represents a fast developing and growing opportunity

and growing opportunity for anyone in the comms and IT delivery and support industry, but Mummery urges change seekers to tread carefully and suggests two exercises ICT business owners should undertake before venturing on the path towards MSP transition.

Base facts

"The first is a market appraisal," he added. "Take a look at the clients you serve and consider what you currently offer and what you could offer in addition. Perhaps even ask them. If you have the strength of relationship with a client and your mainstay service

is supporting their telecoms infrastructure (fixed line and mobile), then look at the incremental value you can deliver with the numerous other managed services on offer, many of which are commoditised (IT, ISP, utilities, office equipment, security, health and safety, insurance etc). Consider the value in cash, the margins to be gained, what resources you'll need to support this (much of which can be bought in as and when needed) and what value this can bring to both you and your client.

"The second exercise is to undertake a SWOT analysis, which you can download via

the following link – <http://venator.tech/swot-analysis-template>. The guidance notes in each column will hopefully enable you to reach the point of making a strategic decision. On the back of this, you will need to make a judgement to ascertain if the Strengths and Opportunities are greater than the Weaknesses and Threats.

Obviously, new services can carry greater threats due to a lack of subject matter knowledge. But in any event, undertaking this exercise will enable you to dig further into the opportunity to become a MSP and highlight the further actions required if you broaden your product and service horizon."

Mummery asserts his exercise can be undertaken companywide, as the more people who contribute, the more insights you will gain and the greater chance you have of understanding the true scope of the exciting transition to becoming a full stack MSP.

"Of course, you can always just carry on as you are," he stated. "If you are happy with what you do and the current progress of your business, then that is fine and your success as a business owner/leader will always be the sum total of your thinking. If you want greater success than you already have, then think forward and beyond and start thinking about change." ■

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Vapour's key hires



Tim Mercer and Blaine Craig

ELLAND-based Vapour Cloud's appointment of Jon Pickering as Non-Executive Director is indicative of the firm's intention to hike turnover by over 20% in 2020. Pickering is the former CEO and co-founder of Block, a £25m IT company which he exited in 2017. "Jon will add a different dynamic to our leadership team," stated CEO Tim Mercer. "He constructively challenges technical strategies and his fresh perspective on our growth plans will prove valuable during this period of rapid expansion."

Vapour's cloud division has witnessed

500 per cent growth over the past two years. "We have no plans to become stagnant now," added Mercer. "We need the industry's finest talent to keep pushing forward." As part of its strategic advance Vapour Cloud also hired Blaine Craig as Customer Services Manager. He has almost 30 years industry experience under his belt and was formerly BT Channel Director. He also worked for Virgin Media, EON UK and Azzurri Communications. In another new hire, Emma Haywood takes a Channel Account Manager role. Her career experience includes a stint at Virgin Media and starting her own wealth management protection consultancy. "I foresee a couple of additional hires before the end of 2019," added Mercer.

Also on the move...

CYBER security business One Distribution has pulled in John Dams as General Manager. He brings over 30 years



John Dams

IT industry experience including a 20-plus year spell in distribution at Computerlinks, formerly Unipalm, and Arrow ECS where he was General Manager in the UK. More recently Dams was responsible for running the EMEA territory at start-up vendor QuantumSine. One Distribution MD Frank Richmond, who is moving to a Non-Executive Director role, said: "John's exceptional track record gives him the strategic, forward looking perspective, that, combined with his strong operational skills, will take One Distribution to its next phase of growth." Dams added: "During my time within distribution I have always believed in running a people-focused business."

LEEDS-based Cisco contact centre biz BrightCloud has pulled in Ian Chandler as Business Development Manager. His experience includes over 25 years working with Cisco



Ian Chandler

Gold partners with a particular focus on contact centre, unified communications and collaboration. "It's no longer acceptable that the contact centre is a silo within the business," stated Chandler. "The contact centre must integrate with all parts of the organisation to increase

effectiveness and efficiency." Chief Sales Officer Mark Adams added: "A number of the BrightCloud team have worked with Ian in previous organisations. When we found out that Ian was available, we immediately contacted him."

FOLLOWING a 13 year stint in C-level roles at Logicalis CEO Mark Rogers will assume a Non-Executive Director position next March when Bob Bailkoski will step into the driving seat. Bailkoski is currently COO and joined Logicalis four years ago as CFO. "Logicalis is well positioned to keep designing and delivering digital transformation," said Rogers. The firm is a division of Datatec, which is listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange with revenues of \$4.3 billion.

DUTCH ex-Chief of Defence Dick Berlijn has joined data intelligence business HAL24K, which has offices in London, on its supervisory board. In 2005 he became the first Commander of the Armed Forces, the highest role in the Dutch forces. Berlijn has also worked within Deloitte's Risk Services. "Knowing what will happen in the near future gives any organisation an advantage," said Berlijn. "With an ever increasing amount of data, and the right solutions, it is possible to predict future events much more accurately."

IntraLAN adds five new heads

THE addition of five new recruits to MSP IntraLAN's business development team is a significant boost to its growth strategy, according to CEO Andy Horn. "We've bolstered our team with a wide range of expertise so our customers can maximise their technology investments," he stated. "The DNA of today's small and medium businesses is unreservedly digital. Technology is no longer just a task for the IT department, it plays a vital strategic role in supporting the entire organisation."



Tony Fabrizio

The appointment of Tony Fabrizio as Head of Channel Alliances and Strategic Partnerships is reflective of the advances made by IntraLAN's partner ecosystem. Prior roles include senior positions at Lucid, Interoute, Tiscali, Lucent Technologies and Nortel. Also recruited is Steven Smith as an Account Manager, Andrew Blanchard is focused on providing technology and services, Martin Roskelly will leverage his security expertise, while Mark Hurst brings over 23 years senior telecoms experience working for BT, Colt, Telefonica Digital and Avaya.

IntraLAN Operations Director Yvonne Chivers added: "We're seeing tremendous momentum as companies embrace digital transformation, which is why we have focused on strengthening our team to help thousands of small and medium businesses navigate this transition."

Volume turned up on Voice of the Customer

EXERTIS has turned up the volume on its client service with the appointment of Phillip Turner to the newly created role of Global Head of Voice of the Customer, reporting to Neal Johnston, Global Operations Managing Director. Turner moves from IG Design Group where he spent four years, most recently as Managing Director of its licensing business. Prior to that he was Business Development Director at office supplies distributor Spicers.



Phillip Turner

"As Exertis expands on a global basis it's more critical than ever that we listen to our customers and use their feedback to influence our go-to-market strategy," said Johnston. "Voice of the Customer is all about delivering a culture of putting our customers at the heart of everything we do and ensuring that by analysing data and feedback, Exertis can take appropriate actions to improve the customer experience and deliver positive outcomes."

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Accelerating industry and in Digital Britain 2.0

Everyone agrees that the road to Digital Britain is redefining how the ICT industry thinks and acts, but there is no broad consensus on how the industry can mould and accelerate the UK's all-digital journey for the long-term advantage. Enter Comms Vision 2019, which aims to decipher the emerging themes and clarify the channel opportunities.

Britain's departure from legacy communications will split the infrastructure market down the middle in terms of pure fibre and 5G, but what happens next is unclear: The binary structure of the connectivity space is not yet fully formed nor grasped, and the question of how impactful the associated technological innovations will be has not been clearly answered – until now. This year's Comms Vision conference aims to clarify the emerging digital opportunities and what they could mean for the channel, bringing the key factors into clear focus during the opening SuperSession.

The objective of this SuperSession is to drive towards the core of what will form a successful long-term strategy in the transformational Digital Britain 2.0 phase, and help to prepare reseller businesses for the growth opportunities that lie ahead. The speakers will share their experiences in strategic planning for Digital Britain and offer insights into their own transformation journey, especially as enterprises begin to focus on the new technologies, applications and OTT services that will be underpinned by pervasive fibre and 5G infrastructures.

In his session, Gamma CEO Andrew Taylor will share his views on how the 'Essential Alloy' of mobile and UCaaS will drive new business models and achieve competitive advantage in Digital Britain. He will explore how digital transformation is fostering an epoch of mobility, and how a controlled approach to mobile will support the key driver of differentiation as we transition to an all-digital environment.

Harnessing the next phase of convergence in Digital Britain 2.0 is top of mind for Gerry McQuade, CEO of BT's Enterprise Unit, who will open up the debate on the future of technology integration, and explore how

the convergence of applications, services and networks will evolve during a complex period of digitalisation. McQuade will also discuss how BT is changing and what this means for its customers and the country, and why both a pragmatic and aspirational approach to innovation and investment will be key in shaping the next wave of products and services that will ensure the channel is well positioned for the future.

Empowering your business to make a difference in Digital Britain is the focus of former Chief Executive of BBC Ventures Group and ex-Virgin Commercial Director Roger Flynn, who will share compelling insights into why the alignment of business strategy, customer proposition and values will be key to the success of all Digital Britain change programmes.

Technologies and tactics

Which forces will ultimately reshape the future workplace? This question will be addressed by technology evangelist and author Theo Priestley, who is also a reformed visionary having lost faith in the capacity of futurism to deliver substantive foresight in strategic decision making. As an anti-futurist he re-examines how the future will look through a hypercritical lens through which he sees technology creating opportunities aplenty, but also threats beyond anything we've imagined. In his session, Priestley will examine the technologies and tactics that will matter most to delegates and their customers in Digital Britain.

It follows that executives of tech companies operating at the forefront of industry transformation must be acutely aware of the forces driving change, and chief among them is the roll out of full fibre. In his session, George Wareing, CityFibre Sales Director, outlines how the altnet is enabling the all important switchover from copper, what it means for the channel and why cross-industry

Executives of tech companies operating at the forefront of industry change must be acutely aware of the driving forces

and tech transformation



consultation is key to promoting sustained infrastructure investment as we advance towards Digital Britain.

Smart moves with full fibre

Why every ICT provider needs a full fibre strategy will be a key point of discussion in the following on-stage interview, in which Wareing and a key channel partner consider opportunities in smart cities as we plan for the end of legacy connectivity. They will assess the technologies that are proving most disruptive to businesses and show how CityFibre is planning to underpin this transformation with a fibre exchange strategy, enabling full fibre unbundling, and the launch of FTTP business broadband. The ultimate goal? 'Everyday fibre' – and this interview will spotlight what investments into building Britain's digital future mean to delegates.

Also in transformation mode are the evolving services economies in Digital Britain, a subject close to the heart of BT Wholesale's Head of Professional Services Steve Blackshaw. He will put a spotlight on the future of global and UK networks, and how the all-IP network will enable resellers to create new services in the digital economy. Specifically, he will detail the global, economic and social factors driving the move to all-IP and new service economies, and explore the business opportunities this creates for resellers in Digital Britain.

According to TalkTalk Business, the Digital Britain 2.0 dilemma is balancing the business case for FTTP and Ethernet. The drive towards Digital Britain is disrupting every corner of the comms sector and no existing business model is immune. Thus, the channel could find itself in the grip of a FTTP versus Ethernet quandary, with fears of FTTP cannibalising existing Ethernet business taking an ever greater hold. In his session, Guy Miller, Director of Fibre For Everyone at TalkTalk, will explain the strategic

relevance of a balanced approach to Ethernet and FTTP, and why an equilibrium is key for all stakeholders. He will also share learnings from TalkTalk's FTTP roll out in York and its collaborative work with partners to jointly design and build the products of the future. Yet the transition to Digital Britain is not just about infrastructure deployment, it's about understanding the practicalities that drive digital transformation within UK businesses. To win, channel partners must embrace disruption, grasp opportunities, gain confidence and elevate industry performance. During his on-stage interview, Miller will further crystallise these imperatives and the reasons why channel partners must rethink connectivity now.

Why we need to rethink value creation in customer solutions in Digital Britain is another priority matter. Therefore Gamma Managing Director Daryl Pile and Chief Marketing Officer Alan Mackie assess the impact of technology on the customer relationship model in Digital Britain 2.0, and discuss what partners need to know about value creation in a world where evermore ICT services are consumed digitally and new entrants emerge almost by the day. They will explore practical strategies that see change as an opportunity and discuss why these evolving market conditions serve as a stark reminder that the customer experience is increasingly vital.

Winning culture

Just as crucial is building a winning culture in an era of perpetual change. Amid the maelstrom of industry transformation you must ask yourself a cardinal question: Where do you want your business to be in Digital Britain, and how will you get there? In his session, Zen Internet CEO Paul Stobart – who was instrumental in scaling Sage's revenues from £120 million to £1.3 billion – will address the key strategic questions you must ask yourself: Where to focus on the future? How to nurture culture, skills and diversity in your business? How to gain confidence in new markets, face threats and develop the resilience to keep pace with unequalled industry transformation?

Comms Vision is also joined by Colonel Tim Collins OBE, who brings military precision to teamwork, leadership and motivation, on which he is a pre-eminent authority. In his session, Collins will show how the parallels that exist between business leadership and military problem solving can be honed to improve your strategic planning. His words are as inspiring as they are thought provoking, so much so that a copy of his speech to British troops of the 1st Royal Irish Battle Group in Iraq on the eve of battle in 2003 hangs in the White House Oval Office. For this historic rallying call he is known worldwide, and the strength of his address to Comms Vision delegates will help them to lead, plan and achieve their own transformational business objectives in Digital Britain. ■

In the following pages Comms Vision sponsors discuss their market views and strategies.

COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. www.commsvision.com

The drive towards Digital Britain is disrupting every corner of the comms sector and no existing business model is immune

BT charts channel vision

Paul Beacham, Senior Manager of Data Networking at BT Wholesale, reveals BT's IT evolution programme and what it means for the channel.



Paul Beacham

BT Wholesale's Data Connectivity portfolio solutions support the widest range of access capabilities and resilience options, all offered through a self-service portal and API customer experience. We enable the channel to build their own solutions through a building block of capabilities offering flexible and scalable bandwidth choices, which can be provided with managed and professional services to drive operational efficiencies and reduce the total cost of ownership of connectivity services – all underpinned by future proofed 21CN network infrastructure, resilience and capacity investments.

A key strategy of our Ethernet portfolio specific for the wholesale channel is that it is offered in a flexible building block model, allowing the range of customers we support to be able to build and consume directly against their own requirements. Furthermore, we are transforming and accelerating our underlying IT systems stack to enable an agile development and launch approach, bringing new features and capabilities

to the channel quicker and in more flexible ways.

We understand what's important to you and we're listening to your feedback. Our roadmap now is built from the outside in and we are evolving our portfolio constantly to better serve the channel. These include ever increasing bandwidth demands. We are proactively investing in high bandwidth capacity solutions within the wholesale portfolio with 10G bandwidths and scalable bandwidth services already being rolled out, and the launch of 100Gb access capabilities into key locations in the UK.

Evolution

All IP is transforming our access solutions, driving a key strategic evolution moving from copper to fibre-based services including SoGEA and FTTP. A key priority over the next six months is launching into the channel the full range of next generation fibre access solutions supporting the move to all IP and fibre.

We have already started this evolution with the launch of SoGEA into our

access portfolio which removes the need for an underlying PSTN line – and early in the new year we will be fully launching FTTP access into the portfolio.

Our portfolio will continue to evolve with Openreach consulting on business FTTP and a range of players in the market rolling out fibre access. Over the next three to five years we will have transformed not only our network and access solutions to that of all IP and fibre but also our IT systems to revolutionise the way that we build and take solutions to the wholesale market.

The growth in SDN deployment and SD-WAN solutions within the Enterprise space is also driving a change in focus for the connectivity market. Flexibility at the IP layer needs to be complemented in the network underlay with an increasing importance of always on availability and resilience plus the access to those services through API integration. In addition, the ability to support bandwidth flexibility and migration of traffic between L2 and L3 and the Internet

at the underlying Ethernet access layer will underpin SD-WAN strategies.

BT has already launched SD-WAN solutions into the global and UK Enterprise markets and we are actively working with the channel on how we both 'SD-WAN enable' the underlying connectivity solutions we support in the channel, and how we develop SD-WAN propositions including virtualisation to address wholesale requirements.

Digitalisation is key to flexibility and scalability, and we are supporting the channel through self-serve portals and increasing API integration. While cloud service enablement means we can empower the channel through a self-serve customer experience and the ability to support the flexibility of service configuration – and control between layer 2 and layer 3 Internet solutions will become increasingly important.

Easier to work with

With our API first strategy we will bring portfolios and converged solutions to market far quicker than today and in a customer centric way where customer configuration and digital interaction mean we have never had a closer and more impactful relationship with our wholesale channel partners.

We are already making this commitment through the network investments that will underpin this strategy, and our IT evolution programme that will deliver the transformation of our IT systems and processes is in the advanced stages of mobilisation.

Customer experience resides right at the heart of our strategies and we continue to empower the channel with access to flexible bandwidth solutions directly under their control via portal and API integration. This includes near real-time bandwidth on demand, access to bandwidth utilisation reporting capabilities and digitisation of key areas of the portfolio such as real-time order tracking access via direct API integration.

Leading edge

BT recognises that the adoption of future technology will require cutting edge skills and capabilities that simplify the journey, reduce the cost of adoption and speed up the return on investment. This is why BT is investing not only in the best technologies, but also creating a comprehensive services organisation that underpins the design, delivery, integration and managed services that can be leveraged by our customers.

Our Wholesale Professional Services business has quadrupled the number of delivered projects in 2019, and will continue to be a growing, integral element in the BT story. As new technologies evolve and deploy, our range of skills extend from the network to the cloud, across IoT, drone detection, small cells, 5G and beyond to new emerging technologies such as block chain and AI.

The future for our industry is exciting, and only through the convergence of the best platforms and the greatest skills can we enable our customers to maximise the benefits of both convergence and technology adoption. ■



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Igniting channel growth

The UK desperately needs an upgraded digital infrastructure. Our predominantly service-based economy relies on the Internet to prosper and, with organisations and consumers ferociously consuming bandwidth, the Internet needs to run on full fibre – not copper, not part fibre, but full fibre infrastructure, writes CityFibre Head of Wholesale Andrew Wilson.

We believe that where full fibre is deployed in a city at the right cost, it can spark one per cent GDP growth across that city. But, until recently the UK has been left with one of the poorest infrastructures in Europe with copper-based connections that are challenged in only 50 per cent of the country, meaning we essentially had just one and a half networks across the whole of the UK. Without suitable altnets to challenge the incumbent, we were left with a market defined by lack of choice, poor quality of service, high prices, lack of investment and lack of innovation.

At CityFibre, we knew the only way to solve this dilemma was with future proof full fibre across our country's towns and cities. In just a few years we've become the largest and most serious alternative infrastructure builder capable of challenging the incumbent to shake up the industry – the 'spark' that ignited the UK's digital revolution.

The digital revolution is now well under way but we still have a long way to go! The UK economy and our connectivity channel needs true competition at the network and wholesale level. Competition is critical to shake up the industry and encourage choice, innovation, faster speeds and



Andrew Wilson

The UK economy and our connectivity channel needs true competition at the network and wholesale level. Competition is critical to shake up the industry and encourage choice, innovation, faster speeds and lower prices

lower prices, enabling UK businesses to work faster and more efficiently at lower cost – improving our economy.

Today, CityFibre's full fibre rollout is progressing at speed, with £1.12 billion of our announced £2.5 billion investment plan already expanding the availability of full fibre in 26 of our 51 towns and cities to pass every premise and deliver an infrastructure for all – from residential consumers, businesses, public sector organisations and to enable 5G to become a reality for millions.

The channel is critical to the future of our country's economy, and this is where CityFibre stands tall in addressing the requirements of the whole market, from carriers and wholesalers to IT resellers. Whatever your position in the channel, we're providing an open access network that empowers you to differentiate your proposition and add your own unique value.

Engagement

Our existing network footprint and daily evolving rollout of full fibre is generating an incredibly

detailed engagement across our cities and creating a unique opportunity for channel partners, as the CityFibre 'machine' acts as the catalyst to businesses choosing to switch over to full fibre.

And as the only infrastructure provider building at scale that's not competing with you (we have no direct sales arm), every penny you spend with us drives your opportunity for further growth. We are building this network for the channel, investing in a truly wholesale-only proposition.

The vision to deliver Digital Britain has well and truly begun. We've seen a dramatic change in mindset from both the Government and Ofcom, who are both now fully committed to full fibre and have set ambitious rollout targets and agree that reliance on the incumbent must be reduced through competition.

As a challenger and disruptor, we're undertaking an industry-wide consultation on the role of alternative full fibre infrastructure builders in helping to switch-over customers from legacy copper networks – to determine what provisions are required to support all legacy services on the new networks, the process for customer migrations, and the steps needed to ensure an easy and hassle-free switch. This consultation will feed directly into our support for channel partners.

The UK is experiencing the third biggest rollout of full fibre in the European Union, building on the current seven per cent fibre penetration. With the emergence in strength of CityFibre, our market has moved away from 'monopoly and neglect' and is heading in the right direction of 'competition and choice'. Join the revolution and embrace choice, innovation, investment and at higher service quality and lower pricing, for a truly digital future. ■

Be the spark

Ignite your full fibre growth

Whether you're a carrier, wholesaler or reseller in the UK comms channel, CityFibre is the infrastructure provider to capitalise on to ignite your full fibre business growth. We're the largest and only alternative network provider building at scale that doesn't compete with partners through a direct sales team.

We're investing £2.5 Billion to roll out Gigabit full fibre as the enabler of Britain's exciting digital future. And as businesses across the land look to switch from performance-limiting copper to success-enhancing full fibre, we're already helping partners accelerate their growth in full fibre connectivity.

Use Comms Vision to ignite your own full fibre success. Book a 1-to-1 meeting or boardroom session and learn how to make the most of our investment. Or, call the wholesale team on 0330 100 3550.

www.cityfibre.com

CityFibre

Customer-centric value

As the channel evolves and customers continue their consumption of ICT services digitally, the question remains for the channel – where does my value lie? Gamma's Managing Director for Channel Daryl Pile provides the answers.

The next five years will be a defining period for the channel and key to a successful reseller business is having a solid understanding of the value they bring to customers, and an ability to differentiate against newer entrants and the larger US players as they move into the market. While change can create disruption and fear, it can also lead to an abundance of opportunities. At the heart of these opportunities though, whether it be launching a UCaaS proposition or moving your ISDN base to IP telephony, is a customer centric strategy.

As many channel partners devote much time and effort on expanding their customer base, it's essential that this doesn't distract focus from providing a superior service to your customers and continuing the conversation by upselling and cross-selling. While it's rare to celebrate a customer re-sign, these deals can prove integral to the longevity of your business.

Happy customers are more likely to review and recommend favourably and provide material for case studies and testimonials. With BT's plans to stop taking new ISDN orders from businesses in 2020, and switch off the service completely by 2025, there is no longer a choice but to engage with your base of ISDN customers and move to next generation telephony. We would urge



Daryl Pile

While change can create disruption and fear, it can also lead to an abundance of opportunities

channel partners to act quickly as these customers are ripe for other providers to secure as their own.

By eliminating complexity and embracing all things digital, channel partners can build a customer-centric approach, removing complex legacy processes and systems. The much lauded phrase, Digital Transformation, and its infiltration into business strategy has only come about because of customer demand. These demands have come in the form of wanting to communicate with suppliers at any time of the day, via a medium that they desire, expecting an almost instant response. If these demands are not met, well, to put simply they'll find someone else.

Customers are all-consumed with the experience they have with ICT solutions and it's essential for the channel to understand and define how these solutions can and will improve experience. The advent of UCaaS has opened up new opportunities in the channel, particularly in the mid-market sector. While these opportunities may appear more complicated than your typical SME deal, mid-market buyers tend to be better educated in the tech they are purchasing.

Strategic focus

Successful channel partners in the mid-market space have been so by bringing a greater focus to their strategy. This may be in the form of verticalising their proposition or building expertise in

a particularly relevant adjacent technology area.

When building value we'd urge partners to look beyond selling products in silos and focus on a solution sell. Businesses don't care about a product's feature set, they care about how those features are going to help boost productivity, increase employee engagement and improve customer satisfaction. The channel must contextualise their offering to solve real business issues. Instead of selling just a business phone system, look to bundle in collaboration tools such as, instant messaging, voice and video conferencing, whilst plugging it into the organisations wider eco system, for example their CRM or website.

Differentiation and a strong value proposition are key components to warding off the current threats that face the channel. It's never been more complicated to run a business and the technology to support it. For the channel though, the opportunity is there to remove this complexity for the customer and supply simple bundled solutions with a superior service wrap.

Gamma is committed to helping our channel partners navigate through these changing times successfully by providing innovative and disruptive solutions that meet the requirements of the ever-evolving end customer. Through our keynote and boardroom sessions at Gleneagles this year, we will be focusing on the key drivers to accelerate your business.

Gamma CEO, Andrew Taylor will be sharing his views on how a strong and cohesive mobile and UCaaS proposition will help channel partners drive new business models and achieve competitive advantage. While Managing Director, Daryl Pile and Chief Marketing Officer, Alan Mackie, will focus on how partners can build their value, as new entrants emerge and customers continue to consume services digitally. Additionally, we will be running a boardroom session on how the channel can accelerate enterprise value by selling UCaaS. ■



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Visit [Gamma.co.uk/collaborate](https://gamma.co.uk/collaborate) to find out more.



Full Fibre for Everyone

After years of suffering from legacy copper infrastructure, Britain is accelerating towards a full fibre future and TalkTalk Business is proud to be at the heart of the conversation, writes Guy Miller, Fibre for Everyone Programme Director, TalkTalk.

The UK is extremely behind the rest of the world when it comes to full fibre coverage. We have a take up of around two per cent on FTTP services, compared to the EU average of 14 per cent, while countries such as Spain, Sweden and Latvia are on more than 40 per cent. Not only will the UK's full fibre rollout bring us up to speed with the rest of the world, it will close the digital divide which has left millions of businesses and homes behind.

FTTP will empower every small, medium and large business, providing them with the same access to higher bandwidth, faster speeds, increased customer satisfaction and a lower cost to serve. For far too long, wealthy companies have benefitted from point to point fibre connections, while less fortunate businesses were left to cope with slow, unreliable copper. Fibre will breathe the life back into the digital economy, helping start-ups and small businesses grow, while allowing remote workers to collaborate as effectively as their on-site colleagues do. It will attract greater investment in the UK and put us back into a position of power.

TalkTalk couldn't be more serious about our fibre first future. As the Director of the Fibre for Everyone Programme, I am on a mission to bring full fibre to every home and business



Guy Miller

The channel must leverage the full fibre opportunity beyond consumer products. There is a fantastic opportunity to work with access providers to develop business grade FTTP variants

in the UK and close the digital divide once and for all. We're investing millions into our Fibre for Everyone Programme and have a dedicated team of experts working round the clock to make fibre a reality for everyone in a simple and ubiquitous way. This is one of the biggest projects we have ever seen, and investment in the programme is only second to the investment into our network, highlighting our drive and ambition to make UK wide FTTP a reality.

We learnt a huge amount from successfully building a full fibre network in York, which is on target to reach up to 55,000 premises by 2020. While

we learnt valuable lessons about the engineering of the network, building throughout the country is only one part of the puzzle.

Adoption matters

The second part is the adoption of FTTP and how we will get customers to move from their copper services to fibre services. Through our test case in York, we learned a great deal about marketing and selling full fibre services and we want to share these invaluable insights with our partners to help them succeed.

Here are some of the key insights I'm going to talk about in more detail in my

session at Comms Vision:

- Education is everything: Believe it or not, some customers think they already have full fibre. It's vital you help them understand the differences between FTTP and FTTC.
- Disruption: How to turn the disruptive nature of the fibre build into a benefit, such as raising awareness of what you're doing.
- Building trust: Word of mouth is the most powerful form of marketing. We created a community and utilised hyperlocal marketing to target the right areas.
- Go all in: We truly believe that FTTP is a superior product, you must demonstrate this by fully committing to the rollout.

There is no doubt that full fibre is a huge opportunity for the channel, but of course opportunities as ground-breaking as these are always served with a side of complexity. Imagine the UK's full fibre network as a patchwork quilt consisting of multiple access providers, selling multiple products. As there are no industry standards for full fibre networks, it will be complex with a variety of KCI journeys, SLAs, pricing and more. However, TalkTalk Business will enable the access revolution by removing the complexities of consuming FTTP. As one single supplier, we'll offer a simple way to consume FTTP through one portal/API/Checker leveraging TalkTalk's scale network. We'll help our Partners deliver excellent products to your customers with one single customer experience.

The channel must leverage the full fibre opportunity beyond consumer products. There is a fantastic opportunity to work with access providers to develop business grade FTTP variants. We are committed to working shoulder-to-shoulder with our partners to shape the products of the future based on their business' needs. We're on a mission to make Digital Britain a reality for all. As a customer champion, we're focused on disrupting the market and acting as a voice for our Partners, working together to build a fibre first future. ■

TalkTalk
Business

BUILDING A FIBRE FIRST FUTURE, TOGETHER



Partner focused, like-minded and
motivated to grow our business together

www.talktalkbusiness.co.uk/partners

Don't be a laggard

Justin Fielder, Chief Technology Officer at Zen Internet, takes a frank look at where the channel and wholesale market is headed, saying it as he sees it, and challenging channel and wholesale providers to think differently in order to survive in this rapidly changing marketplace.

Everyone knows that there has been an explosion in growth in the use of bandwidth, but is this just old news or is there something very important that people involved in telecommunications need to understand? The answer is if you think you have seen this before, then you really haven't seen anything yet, and I am calling for the industry to fully understand that this growth will far outstrip anything any of us can ever imagine.

Let us just consider a simple fact: A child born today will have more data created about that one person in their life time than the human race has ever created up to this point. Just take a moment to think about that. A single person will create more digital data than has ever been created up to this point in the next 70 to 80 years. How on earth can that be? And more importantly, what does that mean for us all and are you confident your business is ready to ride that wave? At Zen we absolutely are, and we are investing to ensure that not only can we keep up, but actually we can drive the market forward and challenge the norms about how people perceive bandwidth.

We aren't just keeping up by offering Superfast, instead we are building infrastructure that is not only Ultrafast-ready, but has the capability to expand 20



Justin Fielder

If your channel or wholesale business is predominantly based around voice it might be a good time to rethink that business model

to 50 times in capacity in just the next five years. But this is slightly illogical – not only do we have over 50 per cent of the local exchanges directly connected to our network, but we also have an investment plan to take that to cover over 90 per cent of homes in the UK. This is something a company of our size wouldn't normally do.

So, why are we doing it? Are we mad? No, because at Zen we have spoken to both end users and our partners and deeply understand that broadband connectivity isn't the norm, that Superfast, Ultrafast and 1Gbps+ Ethernet are going to be the norm now and for the future.

But why are more of our wholesale and channel

partners' networks now being connected to that local infrastructure? Put simply, it enables Zen to not only control the quality and performance on an end-to-end basis but it gives our partners a better price point. That's called win-win and when not only the price point, but also the quality of the bandwidth is so critical, as people's working and daily lives rely more on that very bandwidth, we believe this is a vital differentiator into your marketplace.

What about voice?

So while there is all this hype about the move to Ultrafast in broadband, surely voice, the mainstay of so many channel businesses, is fine. After all, that saying 'it's good to talk', still applies.

Maybe. But we don't believe so. Let us just look at some facts. If you are in voice, Ofcom's Telecoms Market Research if you read it should give you a big wake up call, because a simple trend of the data of UK telephone calls shows that it is pretty clear that by 2025 pretty much no one's going to be making a phone call!

But why is this happening? Well, the move from voice calls to text, and then onto things like WhatsApp and Facetime is part of it, but also the rise of things like web/application chat for customer service are all undermining the times that you need to use a phone line, and if you have a mobile phone when was the last time that you actually got up and walked over to your landline and made a call?

But even the switch to mobile doesn't mean the phone calls are moving with it. Ofcom's most recent Mobile Matters report revealed that a quarter of mobile phone users make less than five calls a month. Previous Ofcom research revealed that younger people prefer to use messaging services such as WhatsApp than pick up the phone, and while the recent figures still show a moderate increase in the number of minutes people spend on mobile calls, there is no comparison to the average amount of mobile data people use, which we know from the mobile operators, is booming. BT Group recently said that they

expect mobile data to grow tenfold in just a few years. On home phone lines the trends are even more telling with the average number of minutes having practically halved in a five year period.

Ignore the trends at your peril. If your channel or wholesale business is predominantly based around voice it might be a good time to rethink that business model. And fast. There's a paradigm shift about the underlying technology society is using, but for many in the channel and wholesale business, we are not seeing the right behaviour change to address this.

Some channel and wholesale providers won't notice the facts staring them in the face, perhaps because voice still remains a big market for them today and decline might seem minimal in the grand scheme of things. But make no bones about it, as much as it may be a significant market today, it will very soon be a rapidly diminishing one.

What voice solutions will you have available when the big switch off happens? What measures do you have in place to mitigate the associated risk factors? Are you diversifying? Have you understood what you need to be doing today to ensure your business remains relevant tomorrow? Whatever path you go down fast, reliable connectivity will be essential to success. ■

Zen. Greater than you think.

What if growing your business didn't mean following the crowd? What if incredible connectivity came with award-winning customer service?

If you think Zen is just about broadband, think again.

- Ethernet and MPLS IPVPN solutions
- Voice services
- Cloud and data centre services

But if it's broadband you're after, then we've got FTTP and G.fast as standard. All delivered over our network, the largest independent one in the UK.

zen.co.uk/partnerwithus



The vital question: Why?

Developing great products is one thing, making them fly is another. That's why we must always go back to what end users want and ask why, writes NFON UK Managing Director Myles Leach.

Here at NFON we are relentlessly committed to the end user market. We were one of the first companies to spot the business requirement for telephony as a SaaS service, which could be changed monthly on demand – before the phrase 'cloud telephony' was even born. The world of work continues to evolve. We want to talk about the amazing features of our product and changes that are taking place in our industry.

But ultimately, we must always go back to what end users want and why. Last month, we commissioned a survey of 1,000 office workers to get some topical insight into how business communications requirements are changing. The upshot was that office workers are increasingly working in different locations and younger workers especially, who have grown up in a digital world, want and expect to be able to work flexibly.

Five years ago, 57.74 per cent of office workers were working over seven hours a day from the office - this has now reduced to less than half (45.83 per cent). Fixed telecoms doesn't work when your staff aren't working from one place. The average office worker is now working 6.21 hours a day in the office, but are also spending 1.15 hours a day working on the move and then devoting a further 2.54 hours at home to checking emails and having calls with colleagues.



Myles Leach

Without the right tools and environment for effective collaboration, teams can suffer losses in creativity, productivity and morale

It's not just about making communications easier and more efficient. It's also about attracting and retaining workers. Nearly half of UK office workers (48.5 per cent) polled said that they would leave a job if there were no flexible working options. A staggering 70.23 per cent would consider moving jobs to a company that had better flexible working options, and this increases to 76.20 per cent for GenZ employees (16-24 year olds). It's by far one of the biggest staff bugbears and most sought-after benefits. No wonder nearly half (48.55 per cent) of UK office workers said that they would consider taking a pay cut if the company offered remote working options.

It's not just today's employees who expect flexibility and

the seamless multi-channel way they communicate on a personal level to also be replicated at work. Customers do too. They want and expect to be able to contact businesses at a time and in the way that suits them best. These new employee and customer demands create clear communication challenges. Without the right tools and environment for effective collaboration, teams can suffer losses in creativity, productivity and morale. And failure to provide an always on, omnichannel experience for customers or staff is a one-way street to lost business.

This is why we invested so heavily in Cloudya, our scalable carrier-grade cloud telephone system. We have

spent ten years developing it, followed by a year of fine-tuning by a team of 40-plus product managers, developers, programmers and experts. Cloudya gives staff over 150 intelligent features, all through an integrated user interface via one single login. However, we wanted to go further. We wanted to go beyond seamless communications and look at collaboration. Working efficiently means employees being able to access whoever they need to work with, whenever they need to get together, from anywhere in the world and via whatever their preferred platforms. We wanted to enable efficient teamwork.

Nvoice for Teams

That's why we are launching Nvoice for Microsoft Teams, the workspace solution that brings people together easily to enable natural team working. With Nvoice for Microsoft Teams, businesses can extract significantly more value from Microsoft Teams. It leverages the enterprise PBX features of Cloudya, NFON's best ever cloud telephone system, to create a complete UC solution.

Microsoft Teams is used by 500,000 organisations across 181 markets and will be included as standard within the Office 365 suite in 2021. No wonder the number of companies using Microsoft Teams is expected to nearly double in two years. However, whereas Microsoft Teams can make calls via Microsoft Phone System, it has a number

of limitations. Building on our experience with Nvoice for Skype for Business, NFON have overcome these drawbacks with Nvoice for Microsoft Teams.

Utilising Microsoft's direct routing solution, Nvoice for Microsoft Teams gives users PSTN connectivity within Microsoft Phone System – enabling PSTN services from within Microsoft Teams – so they can access the service from any location and any device. This means with Nvoice for Microsoft Teams, businesses can gain a true enterprise voice solution within the familiar Microsoft environment. It's a win-win. Purchasing a Cloudya licence alongside an Office 365 licence is a more cost-effective solution for businesses than paying for a separate phone line in addition to Microsoft Teams. And because Nvoice for Microsoft Teams is a fully cloud-based solution, businesses don't need to buy any additional system hardware – they can also choose to have a hybrid environment where some users utilise Microsoft Teams and others utilise Cloudya, depending on their needs – so they only pay for what they need.

So, we are providing flexibility and cost savings, with a technology that is set to grow apace and become standard in the coming years. By keeping up to speed with the changing world of work we are able to give partners an opportunity to differentiate and create new revenues. ■



'The new telephone system? It'll be up and running tomorrow. That's a promise.'

cloudya The cloud-based telephone system with plug-and-play installation. Whenever and wherever.

The new freedom in business communications.

Wave goodbye to complexity. With Cloudya, the intuitive and fail-safe cloud-based telephone system from NFON. Communicate using the same number across all devices and benefit from great prices, as you are only charged for the extensions you actually use. More than 15,000 companies across Europe are already on board. So, what are you waiting for? nfon.com



SolunoBC drives cloud

SolunoBC strives to be a key part of industry change and inherently recognise our role as pioneers in Sweden for more than 10 years. The market is however still fairly new to the cloud concept and has historically relied on the traditional on-site PBX. But as cloud penetrates the telecom market, it marks a big change for how communication can be delivered. This positive change brings innovation as well as a range of benefits such as lower running costs, less problems related to managing and maintaining on-premise systems, and systems that are automatically up to date and scalable to your needs.

Our wholesale concept was founded in order to reach and push the international market in becoming a part of the cloud PBX movement. With a steady expansion in Europe, we now have over 15 wholesale partners that operate in five different countries. Together this constitutes over 165,000 users located in 30 different countries. We strive to drive the future of business communications and want to bring the rest of the telecom field on this exciting journey in providing top of the line solutions in the cloud. Our range of services in addition to our core feature, the cloud PBX, are developed to optimise communication, enhance creativity and efficiency both in regard to customer service and sales.

The next step in venturing forth in the European cloud market lies in helping partners and resellers mature and grow with and within the movement. And we believe our unique experience as pioneers in Sweden is



Martin Norling

Exciting times lie ahead as the European market increasingly adopts the ever-growing cloud communication concept, writes Martin Norling, Head of New Markets at SolunoBC.

the key in providing resellers with what they need to enter and excel. Our wholesale concept is designed to help partners and resellers take the next step by providing scalability, expert assistance, flexibility, time to market strategy as well as white label branding. Consistent collaboration and assistance with partners are of essence in providing a service that is well thought-out and understood, rather than a service that is just to be sold.

From start to finish, we recognise our role in getting partners onboard. We have extensive experience in introducing cloud telephony to a new market and understand both the opportunities

and obstacles that come with. Our six month go to market programme allows us to guarantee a controlled and effective roll out with guidelines and support in everything from pricing, packaging, contract sales, strategies, branding etc. In addition, we offer white label branding in order to help strengthen your brand on the products and thus increasing prospects of having loyal customers and consolidating your position on the market.

Strong pedigree

Our wholesale journey began in 2008 with our first partner in Sweden and shortly thereafter came to include Finland, Denmark and Norway in our wholesale partner channel. The work

continued in building our brand on the international market, and in October 2018 we joined Dutch CallHosted to strengthen their international wholesale concept. The next step was entering the German market together with HFO Telecom, a collaboration that enables a complete service that is launched to both retailers and wholesale partners. The service essentially combines our UCaaS offer with HFO's first-class operator and billing services.

After the first two successful wholesale milestones, we entered the UK market together with Trust Distribution and Marley Comms. The collaborations allow a complete and market-led service that was both launched to resellers and wholesale partners in January 2019. The service combines our offer with partner's first-class services and distribution for a reliable, safe and problem free experience for both end-users and partners.

We believe it's essentially important to collaborate with companies that offer exciting value services that complement our sustainable Mitel infrastructure. We have developed a range of qualified services that both enhance the product and more importantly, offer resellers and wholesale the ability to differentiate their product and increase marginal sales.

Our cloud communication solution is based on Mitel's latest technology, which is one of the world's leading platforms within UCaaS. On top of that we offer several add-on services connected to the PBX, including services produced by our

own R&D department as well as third-party services. We also continuously work to integrate the latest applications, CRM systems and third party services and already integrate with a range of popular systems such as Microsoft Teams, Exchange, HubSpot, Freshdesk and Zendesk. The differentiating factor in how successful a cloud communication service essentially comes down to what practical applications and services are integrated. This also includes tailored integrations for specific needs. In a wholesale concept embarking on an international market, it's crucial to be open minded when integrating new solutions for the different and specific market needs.

Being leaders in the mobile first concept is our goal, a concept that supports the idea that the solution should suit the way you work, not the other way around. Since most today have a smartphone, why not turn it into a business line. End users will increase their availability with a more user friendly experience and be able to provide better service. This makes your mobile a powerful collaboration tool, right in the palm of your hand. In addition we work with a solution that has the ability to access any mobile carrier and we keep adding new carriers to our repertoire all the time. In some countries we can access all existing carriers while others only show open or two major ones. This allows our wholesale partners to add services on top of existing traffic contracts which enables your customers to continue to make calls just the way they're used to. ■



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Become our partner and provide
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customers



R O
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The market's most advanced cloud
PBX solutions that work on all units
and can be integrated with a range of
systems including Microsoft Teams.

9: Your winning number

Why do our Partners favour 9 as their service provider when larger organisations can pitch all the potential attractions of scale and familiarity? The answer is devastatingly simple, reveals **Adam Cathcart, Managing Director, Partner Division at 9 Group**. At 9, we are committed and equipped to go way beyond the simple provision of products at a compelling price. We recognise that our Partners sit one place away from the end business customer, so by investing in bespoke services and support that can directly help them to position and sell their own products and services effectively, we can all win.

Our 'Free to Perform' mantra perfectly describes this approach and how we bring it to life. By allowing our Partners to focus on the job in hand, namely driving their own business forwards, we can transform

the rate at which they can achieve their objectives. For example, we recognise that business customers are increasingly well informed and demanding. Changes in regulation and compliance such as GDPR and e-privacy abound. In addition, making the correct choices around communications infrastructure has become critical as business processes become ever more digitally based and integrated. We are energetically proactive in helping our Partners to understand these market dynamics and how best to respond advantageously to them.

Breaking into new market areas is not straightforward, but 9 can share the practical tools and tips that our Partners require to succeed. We are neither prescriptive nor formulaic and prefer to work individually with each Partner to identify what specifically we can do to help them succeed. Maybe it is by offering a



Adam Cathcart

managed billing solution to ensure that the nuances of a new product area do not handicap their ability to invoice and collect payments on time. Perhaps it will be award winning marketing support to help them construct campaigns that actually make a difference to lead generation. Alternatively, they may adopt our Virtual Office solution which removes the burden of provisioning and customer support, allowing our Partners to spend

more time on business growth.

We take care to understand why a Partner may want to expand their product portfolio, or realign their sales approach. For example, everyone in our sector is championing the need to respond to the demise of BT's copper-based line rental products in 2025. However, we believe that simply saying 'stop selling that and sell this instead' is no way to succeed. Our range of Mitel based, eve hosted voice and SIP trunk services present a welcome alternative to the me-too BroadSoft or other unproven solutions, but it is the advice, collateral and support that we provide to help our Partners to sell eve that is our differentiator.

Our track record at 9 makes us a compelling choice for our current Partners, but we are equally keen to engage with new organisations who have the desire to win. ■

FREE TO

PERFORM

Push the limits and achieve your goals with help from 9.

Meet 9 at Comms Vision to discover how we can support you to break through your boundaries and be Free to Perform.

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FREE TO PERFORM

Customer-led approach

As Head of Customer for Dixons Carphone B2B it is my job to ensure we focus on a customer-led growth strategy, **writes Lisa Chapman-Smith**. Linking our customers strategy to our own company proposition goes beyond just lining up the right process, products and marketing. It means aligning the emotional elements of the customer requirements. This includes pricing, service and support that allows our partners to deliver the very same standard to their customers, maximising repeat business.



Lisa Chapman-Smith

Dixons Carphone join Comms Vision for the first time this year. Why? With the best entrepreneurial businesses in the industry under one roof the answer to the question is a very simple. Why wouldn't we?

The customer journey is fundamental. Our partner portal launch was

testament to this. Having been scoped through the eyes of the partner it needed to be innovative, functional but above all else it needed to be easy. It allows you to calculate and create a proposal sending both the contract and compliant PO for e-signature. The portal allows you to use your own branding and terms and conditions.

We have specialised in distribution for many years winning multiple awards. We offer market leading commercials, advanced commission up to 36 months and weekly payments. Both O2 and EE have network programmes offering additional benefits. Our dedicated teams take the pain away, ensuring you get the best solution to win business.

Mobile hardware has been a big growth area. We now have direct supplier relationships with all the major manufacturers. We offer both DEP and 24hr swap out. Sharing logistics with CPW and Currys PC World stores enables us to offer ordering up to 8pm which is unique in distribution. We have recently launched refurb into channel which has become an instant success due to the quality and price of the units.

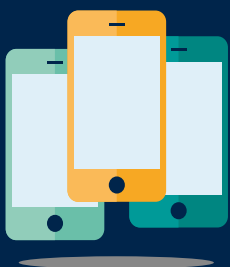
Moving of our teams into Poole opened up opportunities to add a

full range of electrics from our sister company Currys PC World. Partners are able to offer tech through to white goods for their own use or that of their customer – whether this be a single unit requirement up to a tender opportunity that allows you to set up a complete call centre. All of this meets our partners' request for additional revenue streams.

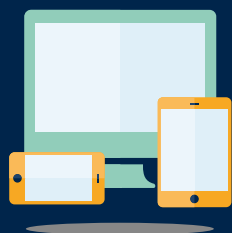
Lastly, Energy proved to be hugely successful this year. In 2018 we sent out a partner survey, Energy was in the top two requests. We launched Business Energy Saver in partnership with Fidelity Energy signing up 120 partners in 12 months, something that has amazed both parties. The process is made simple by the intuitive Ambolt portal which makes this an easy addition to capitalise on existing bases.

So, what's next? Come and talk to us to find out. ■

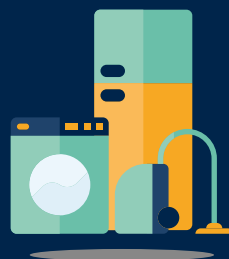
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Contact: Lisa Chapman-Smith
 Email: lisa.chapman-smith@dixonscarphone.com
 Office: 01202 755470
 Mobile: 07725 660725



Absolute partner focus

In April 2019, Daisy Wholesale, Daisy Distribution and Daisy Worldwide combined to create Digital Wholesale Solutions, and what an incredible six months we have had, writes **CEO Terry O'Brien**. With a product portfolio covering Connectivity, Mobile, Voice, IP Communications, Cloud and Product Supply, Digital Wholesale Solutions has become the one place for the channel's digital infrastructure needs. We do everything on a digital platform that operates at massive scale and is highly resilient, with partners accessing portals, wizards or APIs.

We cater for partners of all shapes and sizes and are 100 per cent channel-focused. The smallest start up, with a couple of people can join us as a dealer, sell amazing products and earn a commission. As their business grows, partners can move to wholesale models while they



Terry O'Brien

build out their services and annuity revenue streams, and broaden their portfolio of offerings to their customers. So we really do offer businesses complete flexibility with what best suits their organisation.

A Net Promoter Score of 50.5 means our partners benefit from the highest levels of support, customer service and choice, enabling them to drive efficiencies and improve productivity and profitability within their business.

This flexible approach, constant innovation and our new product development programmes have placed Digital Wholesale Solutions at the forefront of our field and made us the natural choice for the channel.

At DWS, we are constantly refreshing and adding products to our portfolio. We recently debuted our One and Only Webstore. A simple, Amazon-like website which enables partners to purchase hardware from market-leading manufacturers, at competitive prices and available on a subscription finance basis.

Security is often thought of as difficult to sell, but we have introduced two new Cloud-based security products: Guardian Web for real-time protection and enforcement of web usage policies, and Guardian Email to protect inbound email users from malware, phishing and ransomware attacks.

In partnership with Aurora, we now also offer two new billing solutions. Affinity Lite is an entry-point option for smaller resellers, providing simple customer management and tariff plans, enabling partners to provision and bill a wide range of telecoms and data products. Affinity Enterprise is the feature-rich version, aimed at experienced resellers able to take more control of billing operations and enable them to report on how their business is doing, anytime, anywhere.

We provide training, both face-to-face and online; collateral; white labelled materials and specialist support whenever and wherever needed. Our Hosted Voice Partner Days have been a huge success. Held nationally, partners are able to speak with our IP specialists and learn all about the platform, as well as the convergence of telecoms and IT. Digital Wholesale Solutions is a true partner. ■

 digital
wholesale
solutions

Power in Partnership

INNOVATION

**AMAZON-LIKE
HARDWARE
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Leading from the front

Evolve IP knows more than most that change is a constant, and that a solution provider must lead from the front by being agile in innovation and development, offering an open platform that is carrier grade and brandable, **writes Managing Director Paul Harrison.**

Evolve IP aim to be the leading hosted UC solution for Teams. We are fully integrated into Cisco Webex Teams with Microsoft Teams live early in 2020. We provide the carrier grade dial-tone to Teams allowing our partners to offer Intelligent IVR, Call Centre and Call Recording with a carrier grade telephony solution. The solution also benefits from open end point integration offering the full collaborative benefits of Teams.

Evolve IP's average seat size is 100+. We specialise in Verticals by delivering the most advanced solutions to fully meet and exceed the business requirements of the larger enterprise.

To be successful in the mid to large enterprise market you must have a domestic and international offering, and deliver advanced Hosted UC solutions such as, Omni Call Centre, Collaboration, PCI Call Recording, Intelligent IVR, Analytics and FMC.

Evolve IP is a Fully Featured, Carrier Grade, 99.999% available, 100% Indirect, White-labelled, Hosted Telephony / Unified Comms in the Cloud Service Provider with an Open Eco System of fully tested and integrated market leading solution partners. Our market leading Collaborate 2.0 offering provides Instant Messaging, Presence, Application/Screenshare, Audio and Video Conferencing (30 video participants), Webex integration, Mobile Platform Support and is Microsoft and Webex Teams ready.

Founded in 2010 and Headquartered in Cardiff, Evolve IP UK is live in 38



Paul Harrison

countries and has international reach into 72 countries with redundant BroadSoft platforms deployed in two UK and two US datacentres. Evolve IP is the global market leading hosted telephony supplier into the hospitality sector with numerous contracts secured with market leading hotel chains including Marriott & Hilton. We now have over 450 hotels and over

60,000 hotel rooms deployed in the UK, USA and across Europe including the largest single Hosted Telephony Hotel deployed worldwide with over 5,500 telephones. We added over 30,000 hotel rooms in the previous 12 months.

Evolve IP UK also has over 50% market share in the UK automotive sector with 51 car dealership groups and over 400 sites deployed. All businesses and all verticals are ready for Hosted UC but struggle to find the right solution or partner that can understand their requirements. If you're selling a one size fits all solution from one of the large UK providers, you will be restricted by the lack of flexibility, resulting in no differentiator between you and your competition. Our flexibility, vertical and international focus enables EVIP partners to differentiate, add value and move up the value chain into mid-markets and above. ■

Find out more about a 21st Century Omni Channel Call Centre with channels including **AUDIO, CHAT, EMAIL & TWITTER** ... (telegraph optional)

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Opportunities in energy

This year Fidelity Energy celebrated five years of working with channel partners, helping their customers procure and manage their energy, writes **Managing Director John Haw** and **Sales Director Sean Dixon**. At Comms Vision we will be adding two new offerings to our portfolio – branded Electric Vehicle (EV) charging solutions and the ‘Switch Once, Switch Forever’ service. Over the next 10 years analysts predict that nearly all businesses will add EV charging points to their infrastructure.

Fidelity Energy can now offer branded EV charging solutions to partners. This, coupled with the Government backed Workplace Charging Scheme (WCS) of up to £500 per EV point, means there is a perfect storm of opportunity that the channel can monetise within their customer base. The largest proportion of UK CO2 emissions come from vehicles

burning fossil fuels. By introducing EV charging points, businesses can reduce emissions, meet environmental goals whilst offering workplace charging to their staff and customers. There’s the opportunity to commercialise EV charging points, allowing businesses to rent them to the public creating an additional revenue stream. The world is becoming environmentally conscious and statistics predict almost all new cars registered in the UK by 2030 will be electric. Evolving now enables you to create another customer base from the ever-growing number of EV drivers, while increasing business footfall and revenue.

The second offering is a long-awaited solution for channel partners to turn energy into a recurring revenue stream. ‘Switch Once, Switch Forever’ is an opt-in service which utilises the Fidelity Energy portal to automatically find the best available tariff when



Dixon and Haw

contracts are up for renewal. In telecoms, customers will come to the channel partner looking for the latest upgrade. They don’t forget their renewal as they’ll always want a new mobile. However, there isn’t anything similar to remind you to renew your energy. At times this can be missed which results in the customer falling onto high ‘out-of-contract’ rates.

Once the customer has signed up, at renewal we do all the work, from contract admin to supplier negotiations. Partners can secure

additional upfront commission and customers save time and money without having to lift a finger. Perhaps, most importantly, it turns energy into an annuity revenue, which is a model the channel is very comfortable with. Customers are switched forever, or until they cancel. The process includes choosing from a selection of preferences you wish Fidelity Energy to follow, such as contract length and suppliers you don’t want to work with. Customers are kept updated throughout with the option to opt-out at any time.

The main goal of ‘Switch Once, Switch Forever’ is to benefit the customer. By grouping contracts that are expiring within a few months together, we can use this as leverage when going to the market. It allows us to negotiate with suppliers and obtain bespoke rates that wouldn’t be available to the customer when procuring alone.

Fidelity Energy
Energising Our Partners

SecuriCharge: EV Wall Unit

WallPod: EV

BasicCharge: EV Pedestal

Quantum: EV Pedestal

AutoCharge: EV Pedestal

WE PROVIDE EV CHARGING SOLUTIONS THAT WE CAN WHITE LABEL TO YOUR OWN BRANDING

Contact us today for more information 08000 48 48 00 | partners@fidelity-energy.co.uk

FluidOne drives change

The potential impact and what needs to be done by UK businesses towards delivering on their digital strategy remains high on the agenda, writes **FluidOne Channel Sales Director Henry West**. As deadlines loom, businesses are encouraged to take advantage of operational efficiencies and find new ways to engage with customers and suppliers. For many businesses digitalisation is still a big challenge and with multiple technologies and platforms to choose from, it can be a daunting task. However, this is where the opportunity lies for channel partners.

Trusted providers can help develop and deliver IT strategies that address these challenges, enabling businesses to be more competitive, agile and efficient, at the same time forging long-lasting and profitable relationships with a continued opportunity to cross-sell new services.



Henry West

The technology partners choose has to be flexible, highly resilient and

based on a platform that scales in line with their customer's growth. The products have to offer real value to the customer while still giving them the control to manage services in-life as well as cross-sell and upsell new services. Partners need all the tools at their fingertips offering the best choice backed up with the best quality to ensure their customer experience is of the highest standard.

With this in mind, FluidOne has been passionately developing Dash, our customer portal, and set a strategy to help partners not only maximise on these opportunities but ensure they have the tools with which they can build their business.

We're experts in delivering connectivity solutions offering the widest choice of any network aggregator. From our 19 Data centre PoPs around the UK, we blend the services of 30 different asset-

owning communications providers that can be tailored via our online portal Dash. Your technology stack is reliant on a strong connectivity foundation, so choose the most reliable and far-reaching with FluidOne. Our innovation and continuous product development will delight your customers and enable you to enter new growth markets.

We have the highest Net Promoter Score of any connectivity provider and work hard to maintain and drive the best customer experience. Our customer satisfaction is yours to leverage, allowing you to build your reputation on FluidOne.

FluidOne remains at the forefront in supporting Partners through their digital transformation, enabling them to address all aspects of the market, creating a better environment for business growth and success in the future. ■

F

Build your business on FluidOne

- **Best choice** - most connected network in the country
- **Your profitability** - a solid and reliable platform to build on
- **Your service** - our Net Promoter Score is yours to leverage

FluidOne



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<https://info.fluidone.com/request-a-call-back>

Your technology stack is reliant on a strong foundation of connectivity, so choose the most reliable and far-reaching with FluidOne. Our innovation and quality will delight your customers.

Gliding towards growth

Since we launched into the channel market last September we have seen growth in the sector go from strength to strength, **writes Head of Channel Daniel Alvarez**. The key to this success is our in-house built and owned ultrafast fibre network, deployed throughout the UK in some of the harder to reach commercial areas that have previously been neglected by other suppliers. Not only is this a huge USP for us as a business, it extends to our channel partners and their existing customers and prospect database.

Our mission statement and motivation has always been about liberating businesses from poor connectivity, and we're doing that in ways and in places no-one has done before. By specifically targeting areas of fibre 'not spots' we're able to reach those businesses in the greatest need of fast and reliable



Daniel Alvarez

connectivity, and for our channel partners this unlocks huge areas of customer opportunity that wasn't previously available to them.

We sell a range of services that include FTTC, FTTP and leased lines, all of which allow our partners the flexibility to offer their customers

the right solution. And because all of this is delivered from our own managed network, we can ensure the speed and reliability that comes with the Glide name. And with on average two cabinets going live each week, we're expanding our partners' reach every day.

It's an exciting time at Glide and the results speak for themselves: Over 220 new partners signed up in the last year alone; over 600 ultrafast fibre enabled Glide cabinets across the UK; and an expanding channel account management team. And with our in-house built and supported portal, we're making it even easier for our partners to do business with us with the ability to check availability and pricing, and place orders at the click of a button. With a dedicated development team and plan, we're always making improvements and adding functionality to make the business of doing business, easier. ■



New Pricing

- ✓ 25% reduction on leased lines
- ✓ Reduced pricing on our FTTC and FTTP products
- ✓ No installation costs
- ✓ Competitive pricing to help you win more business

glidegroup.co.uk/channel
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Inform's winning formula

Inform Billing will be back at Comms Vision straight off the back of being crowned 'BEST BILLING SOLUTION' for the second time in the past three years, writes **Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth**. The business has had a busy year, harnessing its experience and expertise to launch four major enhancements to its Next Generation billing platform – improving ease of integration, end-customer support, reporting and training.



The Inform Billing team

In response to the ever-increasing demand for meaningful integration to benefit scalability, accessibility and avoidance of task repetition, Inform Billing has developed a new API set. Providing read/write integration to key areas of its software, the API enables customers to build links between other systems and Eclipse NG in a more structured way. Along with greater flexibility in reporting from the platform, we

have developed an extensive online help centre with video tutorials and bite-sized user guides.

Also new is a brand new version of Enlighten, the complementary white labelled web portal enabling end customers to self-serve, set bill limits, monitor daily usage and receive alerts for potential fraud. With all this focus on product development, it's important to remember it is Inform Billing's

specialist knowledge and expertise, amassed within the team over decades, that drives the development roadmap and provides enviable value to resellers. One of the things that makes Inform Billing stand out from the crowd is our ability to demonstrate significant market knowledge and our proven track-record in dealing with the complexities of billing including bundling and complex CDR processing. This is paramount when it comes to understanding, solving and often pre-empting problems that the reseller may not yet even know exist.

We have always had a consultative approach, advising those new to resale as well as supporting clients with complex projects. To complement this our training is all-inclusive, we are always at the forefront of regulatory changes and we pride ourselves on our outstanding support service.

The telecoms landscape is changing fast, and as an experienced billing specialist with significant flexibility within our software applications, we can support new technological areas where billing systems are vital. These include cloud and subscription services and more inclusive package style propositions, where multiple products and services are essentially bundled into a total solution and billed in that way. Eclipse NG has a great deal of flexibility to enable accurate billing for the dynamic nature of many of these services. While the bill to the customer is kept simple, we provide the critical detail for revenue assurance and supplier invoice validation.

Our focus on development is continual: Every year we invest around 45 per cent of turnover into improving our products and services. Resellers can be assured of our commitment to their future. ■



Knowledge is power

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



InformBilling.co.uk

Supporting the channel

Cloud computing is no longer a market disrupter or differentiator, writes **Dave Hawkins, Head of Channel Sales, KCOM**. What was once a strategic decision to move to the cloud is now widely accepted as the normal evolution of computing. For those who haven't already made the transition, it is not a case of 'if', but 'when?', and 'how much?'. End customers understand that the move to cloud is essential to stay competitive, which begs the question: Why are so many businesses still struggling to reap the benefits? As businesses seek to evolve their IT infrastructure, there's a growing opportunity for the channel to make use of its insight into customers, and the relationships they hold with partners, to provide the right solution – both for today and for the future.

In theory, setting up the cloud is a relatively easy process but end

customers soon realise that it's all too easy for it to go wrong. Without a strategic and thorough assessment of how the cloud is going to work for their business, end customers will find themselves falling at the first hurdle. And here lies the opportunity for the channel to adopt a consultative role and draw on its expertise and experience.

Channel partners are in a prime position to offer invaluable strategic support at the project design and implementation stage. Using their knowledge, understanding of individual requirements and trusted relationships they're ideally placed to deliver a solution that capitalises on the cloud's capabilities and innovation for customers.

An essential part of an end customer's cloud strategy should be understanding how their infrastructure will meet their future



Dave Hawkins

needs. With the rise of the multi-cloud environment, there's an array of options for end customers. As edge

solutions begin to gain traction and new technology continues to feed into cloud optimisation strategies, it is often difficult for end customers to know how or where to find a managed services provider that can provide the right level of support as well as being able to adapt to future changes in business requirements.

An essential part of any business's cloud strategy should be understanding how their infrastructure will meet their future needs. With the rise of the multi-cloud environment, there's an array of options for end customers. As edge solutions begin to gain traction and new technology continues to feed into cloud optimisation strategies, it is often difficult to know how or where to find a managed services provider that can provide the right level of support as well as being able to adapt to future changes in business requirements. ■

KCOM

Let's chat about your immediate growth and future development.

We're excited about our future and at Comms Vision we'll share how our approach will help promote growth and development in the Channel. We're bringing the whole breadth and depth of our technology expertise together into one compelling proposition and, as your trusted advisor, we'll work with you to solve your customers' real world challenges.

Join us at Comms Vision for dedicated 1-2-1s with **Dave Hawkins, Head of Channel Sales** and **Luke Coleman, Product Lead**.



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Ongoing drivers of M&A

Despite obvious concerns around Brexit, the M&A landscape in the ICT sector looks as vibrant as ever, with unprecedented levels of private equity investment driving transactions, ensuring that there has been growing pool of trade buyers for ICT resellers, **write Knight Corporate Finance Directors Adam Zoldan and Paul Billingham.** In addition to the increase in the number of 'buy & build' resellers, there are four other areas driving competition and value for the most strategic assets – convergence, expertise, digital transformation, and internationalisation.

There have been numerous deals between traditionally telecoms focused resellers acquiring IT and managed services providers (including serial acquirers Daisy, Chess and Adept), and IT and managed service providers acquiring traditional telecoms resellers. As convergence



Zoldan and Billingham

grows across a wider range of solutions, it adds to the diversity of the buyer pool. A good example is the number of deals involving managed print providers, many with private equity investment, who want to acquire ICT expertise, opening up a new convergence horizon between these two industry sectors.

Currently we are seeing far less focus on cost synergies from buyers, as most are looking to acquire expertise

(either in the form of people or technology assets). There have been numerous deals driven by acquiring expertise that can deliver long term strategic growth to a previously asset lite telecoms resellers, with examples including Southern Communications acquiring MyPhones, and Vodat acquiring Axonex.

Another area that is driving sector M&A is digital transformation, with Sabio being a prime example of a traditionally ICT focused reseller building on opportunities in digitisation with the acquisitions of Rapport, flexAnswer and Callware.

Finally, it is a barometer of the health of the UK ICT sector that despite Brexit there is still no shortage of overseas buyers for even relatively small ICT resellers. We recently completed a transaction for a client, Network Telecom, who was acquired by a German private equity backed

Dutch unified communications provider (Enreach), who felt that having a UK platform was essential for any pan-European provider. German owned Cancom continue to acquire UK assets, most recently Novosco, and US buyers continue to look for UK targets (Vonage acquiring New Voice Media, and EvolveIP acquiring the Voice Factory being two examples).

As we said back in 2011, 'we continue to get more calls from prospective buyers than sellers, and there are a number of new entrants buying into the sector and the cycle of consolidation rolls on'.

With the current appetite for investment in the sector, the options open to you are broader than at any time in the past 10 years. With the right planning and preparation we have great conditions to realise your ambitions for your business. ■



**REALISE
YOUR
AMBITION**



What we've made possible



Trade sale to Enreach



Trade sale to Southern Communications



Funding from Santander



Trade sale to Southern Communications



Trade sale to Excel IT



Trade sale to Evolve IP



Trade sale to Chess ICT



Trade sale to Daisy

From day one we make it our business to understand yours. This means we can unlock hidden value and opportunities helping you realise your ambition faster.

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Masergy's rising channel

Masergy is the secure software-defined network and cloud platform for the digital enterprise, writes **Emily Nerland, Channel Director EMEA**. Recognised as the pioneer in software-defined networking, Masergy enables unrivalled, secure application performance across the network and the cloud with Managed SD-WAN, UCaaS, CCaaS and Managed Security solutions. Industry leading SLAs coupled with an unparalleled customer experience enable global enterprises to achieve business outcomes with certainty.



Emily Nerland

Masergy's business model is driven by partners – over 80 per cent of our bookings and revenue comes from the channel. Our award winning Global Partner Programme continues to outperform competitive channel programmes with a sustained year-over-year channel growth. In the UK alone, we have

partnered with more than 100 new resellers in the last year and our UK Channel account management team has doubled its headcount.

One of the strongest value propositions of Masergy's Global Partner Programme is how well our team works with different

business models including value-added resellers (VARs), master and subagents, system integrators, solution providers, and consultants. We provide our global partners with joint business plans and account mapping, market development funds, comprehensive pre/post-sales support, competitive monthly residual compensation structure, key joint marketing programs and training with product and technology-specific certification programs.

Masergy has strong strategic partnerships with industry leaders such as Cisco for its business communications, cognitive collaboration and Webex Contact Center Solutions and Fortinet for leading secure Managed SD-WAN solution. Our technology partner ecosystems enable our partners to leverage our combined expertise to service global customers with simple, scalable and secure solutions.

In the past few months, Masergy has continued to lead our innovation roadmap. We launched AIOps, the first integrated AI-based, digital assistant for network, security and application optimisation. We also created easy to sell bundled solutions for Managed SD WAN, Threat Monitoring and Response, and Managed Security. Masergy leads the industry in customer satisfaction with a Net Promoter Score of 71 compared to the industry average of 24 and enjoys a 99 per cent customer retention rate. This translates to long term customers with low churn for our partners.

Our innovative solutions coupled with our superior customer experience deliver increased value for our partners and their end clients. Whether you're an agent, a value-added reseller, system integrator or consultant, Masergy has the right partner program for you. ■



Global partner programme

Partnering with us means:
International reach. Innovative solutions.



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SD-WAN**



**Unified
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**Contact
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MyPhones on call for you

MyPhones has been at the leading edge of Internet telephony for over a decade, specialising in robust and reliable hosted services packed full of features, **writes MyPhones Managing Director Andrew Robinson**. Committed to cutting-edge technology and continuous development, MyPhones offers partners a white label hosted telephony platform (Altos). Developed, tested, hosted and supported in the UK, free from the restrictions of using a global platform, our systems and services are constantly monitored and regularly updated. We have designed and developed the services we provide ourselves, meaning we know them inside out.



Andrew Robinson

Altos is our white label cloud telephony solution, with a rich feature set and simple pricing structure, making it easy to adopt and add

to your communications offering. Switching is easy as we host, manage and support the platform. Simply point your SIP trunk to Altos, connect your handsets, mobile or softphone

client and it just works and will continue to work. The Integrity of the Altos platform is core to our business. Our 99.99 per cent uptime is the result of careful design, planning and attention to detail. Recent investment has resulted in significant platform scalability, enhanced features and an exciting roadmap.

Altos allows our partners to create a truly unique solution for their customers with an advanced feature set including Phone Buddy desktop call management software, mobile applications, out of the box CRM integration, night service overrides, unlimited on hold music/messaging and includes a user and administration portal which can be custom branded.

Designed specifically for the channel, Altos enables you to maximise margins and benefit from the best deals, using your preferred

connectivity, SIP and handset providers. It is cost-effective with no minimum contract periods, minimum volumes, setup or termination charges and is easily scalable up and down.

Completely carrier-agnostic and designed to suit businesses of all sizes, Altos is a simple plug 'n' play service, that links fixed and mobile telephony, easily and efficiently. It is built on industry leading patented technology which comes with a reputation for fast, friendly, accurate support and an outstanding track record for reliability, stability and availability uptime. MyPhones extensive training and onboarding process, ensures you can maximise every hosted opportunity you discover.

MyPhones is dedicated to listening to partners' needs and the continual investment of our platform, people and partners.

MYPHONES

Cutting edge hosted communications

It's easy to put Altos from MyPhones at the heart of your unified communications packages.

Altos delivers everything you need from a premium hosted telephony platform.

Except the premium price...

MyPhones has been at the cutting edge of internet telephony for more than a decade, quietly developing and delivering super reliable technologies, applications and features, through Altos, our flagship hosted telephony platform.



SIP Trunk Agnostic



White Label



Freedom to Choose



For more information about Altos hosted telephony, please contact MyPhones today.

T: 01494 410000 E: partners@myphones.com W: www.myphones.com

NTA charts busy period

NTA is proud to once again be a sponsor at what is undoubtedly the leading ICT event in the yearly calendar, **writes Channel Sales Manager Justin Blaine**. This year we will be showcasing our disruptive models to market with our feature rich Hosted Telephony platform and also demonstrating how our partners continue to avoid the 'race to the bottom' and buck the trend in making 80 per cent-plus gross profit!

The development team have had a busy year building new functionality and features, however the biggest impact from our partners' perspective was when we launched a brand new range of handsets in the spring. This range of handsets can be completely white labelled for our resellers, further protecting their margins at the point of sale. They also have an advanced feature set when connected to the NTA platform



Justin Blaine

– these include the provisioning and programming of the BLF keys via the portal, Hot Desking and a Cloud Phonebook to name a few.

We have also introduced a range of POE switches, Door Entry phones and will shortly be adding a new

reception console which can also display a wallboard upon it, this could be utilised by a Managing Director or Team Manager to keep an eye on what is going on in the organisation at a glance – all of these can also be white labelled with no minimum order quantity. We have also added

some enhanced functionality on the platform this year these advancements include video conferencing, call analytics, new mobile apps and a high level DR facility, there is more to come and we will be showing some even more exciting and industry leading developments on our platform at the Comms Vision conference.

The NTA team are once again excited to be a part of this amazing event and we, like you, want to learn more about the ICT industry in particular where it is heading and how we can all embrace transformation and in turn educate our colleagues and customers. We also would like to meet with you, discuss your business in a relaxed environment and show you our plethora of products and services. We really believe we can make a difference to your portfolio, your margins and make it easier for you to sell Hosted Telephony solutions. ■

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Hear the power of voice

Alongside emerging technology, our ability to capture conversations remains key to customer engagement, **writes James Emm, Chairman and Director of Strategic Partnerships, Oak Innovation.** Voice is back in the spotlight. While many interactions take place online, the adoption of speech technology and AI in the home is causing organisations to refocus on speech as the most human, instantaneous and effective way to communicate.



James Emm

Conversations provide important opportunities to build relationships, maintain customer loyalty and provide a better understanding of needs and sentiment. In an online world, businesses need to focus on the quality of conversations wherever customer interaction occurs. This recognition goes hand in glove with the trend to assess and improve the quality of interaction across all

touchpoints in an organisation, not limited to traditional call centre silos.

As a long-term player, Oak can capture voice from almost any environment. We are well positioned to support transformation with a range of recording, analytics and integration capabilities. In an age of hyper-connectivity, where security

is paramount and news travels fast, our applications help businesses to manage compliance, protect reputation, improve workflow and enhance customer experience.

The latest version of our flagship call recorder, Clarify, delivers improved support for mid-market and hosted telephony users. Using our own SIP technology we provide cost-effective, high quality voice capture and quality management to support compliance, training and service improvement. Clarify also offers multi-site and resiliency to meet business-critical needs.

Over recent years, improvements to face-to-face and online credit card transaction technology have caused fraudsters to turn their attention to payments over the phone. Oak's cloud-based payment service, PaymentAssist, reduces this risk by offering agent-assisted and self-

assisted payment options. Our latest release also includes Click to Pay, ideal for managing secure payments on or off site. A unique payment link is sent allowing the customer to complete payment on their own device.

In September, we launched ContactAssist, an all new application focused on supporting digital transformation through CRM telephony integration. ContactAssist helps organisations to structure caller verification, identify and capture new contact information and automate access to customer information. In its first release, ContactAssist is focusing on the primary healthcare market.

All Oak applications are underpinned by SupportX to offer a choice of service levels and options that provide assurance and investment protection. Access to expertise extends to project management, data analysis, training and custom development.

record | report | integrate

oak innovation
oakinnovate.com

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More flexibility & faster deployment
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Mission-critical call capture
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Retain control for compliance

Call Recording
Delivered your way

ideas that change everything

Pragma on growth path

While continuing to build on the sustained and profitable growth recorded over the past seven years, Pragma, Ericsson-LG's sole distributor in the UK, is set to drive the continued growth of channel partners by offering its unique 'cupboard to cloud' proposition that enables the deployment of iPECS products across On-premise, cloud and hybrid environments, **writes Pragma's Sales and Marketing Director, Will Morey.**

With significant investments in R&D, Pragma and Ericsson-LG will deliver a series of new products and solutions designed to increase revenue opportunities for channel partners across the UK. This includes a new range of handsets and continuous enhancements to Ericsson-LG's cloud platform. Pragma will also focus its efforts on growing its partner base across the UK by offering unique

value propositions to channel partners who've demonstrated significant growth in the comms industry.

More recently, Pragma strengthened its longstanding partnership with SO Connect and built on the success of its SO WiFi and SO Review solutions by launching Web Listings to the UK channel. Web Listings is an online listing solution that has been designed to help comms resellers increase their monthly billing revenue while providing greater value to their end customers by helping them leverage the benefits of localised listings.

For the channel community, Web Listings comes as an easy-to-deploy solution with bulk onboarding capabilities that's designed to help increase billing revenues at a time when resellers are seeing a decline in revenues due to the switch from ISDN to SIP.

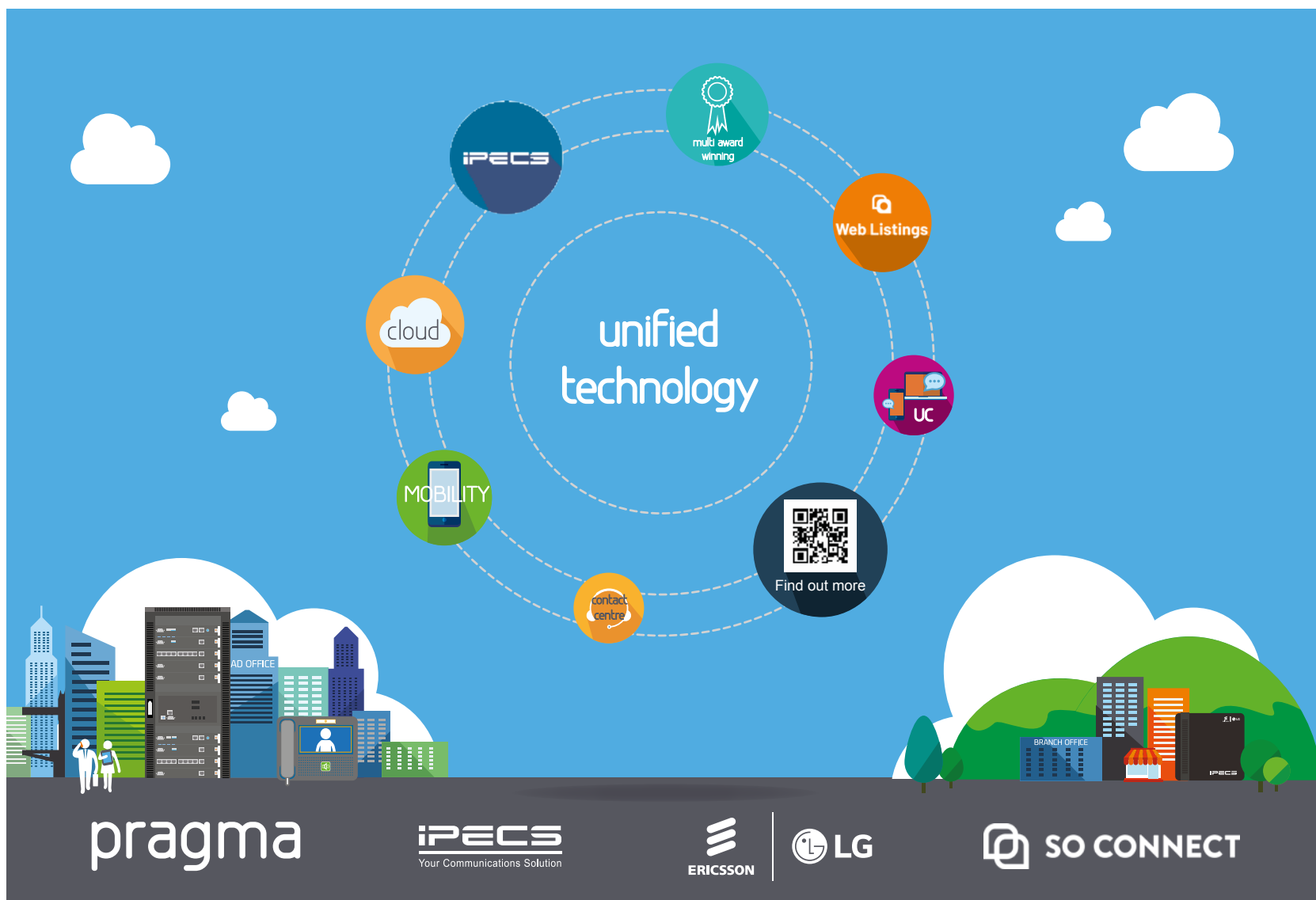


Will Morey

With a 900 per cent increase of local searches for businesses over the past two years, it has become crucial for businesses to ensure the accuracy of information on web directories, sat nav systems and social

media platforms to remain visible to prospective customers. Web Listings is designed to enable users to update information ranging from store opening times and preferred payment methods to contact information on over 50 platforms through a single user interface. By using Web Listings, customers will be able to ensure the information available is complete, consistent and accurate across all platforms with minimal effort.

By adding Web Listings to their portfolio, comms resellers can expect to add up to £5 margin per customer location, per month. Thanks to its ease of onboarding and overall simplicity, partners can roll this service out to thousands of customers with little to no effort from their teams. And to make life even easier, Pragma and SO Connect will handle the end-to-end management of Web Listings from deployment through the provision of ongoing support. ■



pragma

iPECS
Your Communications Solution

ERICSSON

LG

SO CONNECT

Empowered by ProVu

Established in 1999, ProVu has been a specialist VoIP distributor for 20 years, writes **Managing Director Darren Garland**. Over the years, we've developed our service to add value to every step of the customer journey, easing the delivery of CPE for ITSPs and resellers throughout the UK ICT channel. This was recognised at last month's Comms National Awards when we won the Best Channel Support Service (up to £10 million turnover) award. By offering the right product set at a competitive price with a range of support services which complement our partners' objectives, we enable them to focus on their core business, empowering them to offer an enriched service to the end user.

We work closely and hold strong relationships with some of the world's leading manufacturers. This positions us to be able to actively



Darren Garland

respond to the needs and requests of our partners. We stock over 1,000 VoIP products including IP desk and DECT phones, access control units, routers, switches, headsets and gateways, many of which are available for next day delivery.

ProVu is and always will be committed to the channel. As

the first UK distributor to offer automatic provisioning, our team are experts in the development of such services and continue to push the boundaries with new advancements continuously being implemented.

Through our award-winning portal, ProSys, we give our partners the tools to take control of their orders both pre and post-deployment. Consisting of four main tools, ProSys offers – online ordering, automatic provisioning, remote device management, and API integration. With a flexible, modular approach, our partners are able to select the services they require. We've always worked closely with our partners and responded to their requests. We want to work with partners to know how we can support them further in their business goals and help them to differentiate themselves in the market. Some examples of work we have done

include the creation and sourcing of bespoke packaging, incorporating personalised marketing inserts in shipments and the development of individual API features.

ProVu thrives in offering the services and support that other distributors would shy away from. We spend a lot of time supporting our partners and getting to know how we can help them win more business. Whether its the development of a custom multi-vendor solution, securing project pricing or creating bespoke API features to streamline processes, ProVu is equipped to support its partners.

The Comms Vision Convention has become a key event in our diary. We look forward to meeting with fellow sponsors and delegates and discovering how we can support each others' business through mutually beneficial opportunities.

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Celebrating 20 years of success in VoIP hardware distribution!

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- ✓ Industry-leading technical team
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- ✓ Next day branded delivery

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WINNER
BEST CHANNEL SUPPORT SERVICE BELOW £10M

Can leasing really evolve?

The finance sector has been labelled as being nervous of technology in the past, partly because of the risks to data security, and partly because of the fear of the obsolete, writes **Dan MacKrell, National Sales Manager at Shire Leasing**. But things are changing and Shire Leasing, as an independent lessor, are most definitely evolving the way we operate to ensure that we can support the future of the ICT channel.

Since our inception in 1990, Shire Leasing has seen the channel progress dramatically. Mobile phones were just beginning to appear in the hands of average consumers and as they progressed throughout the 90s decade, if your competitor had a mobile phone that made calls, received texts but also sent emails, they could have been considered as a serious business threat. Although those core functions of the mobile

phone have remained, advancements in technology and additional features have allowed manufacturers to add value in other ways and continue to change the way the ICT channel operates. Clear developments are evident in the channel, such as hosted telephony beginning to replace on-premise systems. But how far can leasing and finance models really develop alongside the shift?

Our core goal remains the same – to support manufacturers, distributors and equipment resellers in enabling their customers to access the latest technology, while spreading the cost over an affordable period of hire. A key focus is on British SMEs, the lifeblood of the UK economy.

Shire Leasing strives to provide a market-leading service through innovation. Like the ICT channel, our award-winning team is always developing solutions to differentiate



Dan MacKrell

our offering, so that we too can continually add value to the resellers that work with us. Although Shire originated as a finance broker, over time we have developed our own book lending capability.

Our position as a hybrid funder, with an Own Book that exceeds £115 million as well as credit lines with more than 30 other funders, gives us the flexibility to embrace change and ability to deploy finance

solutions seamlessly into existing sales processes. It's crucial that our services and support matches the expectations of an evolving market. As a result, our award-winning FinTech solutions have become a key differentiator when choosing a lessor to offer finance solutions with. We have acknowledged that not only has technology evolved, working environments have too, so we equip approved resellers and VARs with a portfolio of leading-edge tools to streamline finance sales.

Our Shire Online proposal management tool allows sales teams to quote, propose, complete the sale with e-signatory in minutes and manage deals on the go. When bolstered with the developed ability to provide a finance decision for customers in as little as six seconds, offering finance suddenly becomes an evolved proposition to maximise sales opportunities in the channel. ■

Good things come in small packages...



Combine your hardware, software and service solutions into a single, manageable payment for your customers.

Shire Leasing are business finance specialists in the telecoms sector, having supported the channel for almost 30 years.

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Finance for business use customers only - Shire Leasing PLC is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority for certain types of consumer credit lending and credit related activities that are regulated under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.

Sky pushes the horizons

The last 12 months has flown by and it feels like only yesterday that we launched into the channel, writes **Mike Greening, Strategy and Commercial Director for Sky Business Communications**. It's been a great experience working with our new partners and building out our Sky Ethernet proposition. However, we're not looking through rose tinted glasses – we know there are still challenges in the channel that we are working to solve.

As a new supplier in the market, we had to prove ourselves. We take time to fully on board our partners and make their lives as easy as possible, with a digital first API and partner portal supported by an ongoing development roadmap. By taking key learnings from the residential side of our business, and building on our reputation of excellent customer service, we have focused on service



Mike Greening

improvements and are proud that our mean time to provide is quicker than the current industry average.

Our partners have helped us to extend our message throughout the market and their feedback has

been invaluable. We strive to be as easy to work with as possible through the entire partner journey – from quotation and ordering to consistent install times and high quality in-life assurance.

There is healthy price competition in the market and while we believe in value for money, we also understand there is far more to a connectivity service than just price and conveying that message in a way our partners can explain to their customers is a key priority going forward.

Our two main priorities for the next 12 months are bolstering our Sky Ethernet Partner Programme and scaling our 10Gb proposition. Our Ethernet Partner Programme has been an essential part of our current success and we intend to develop it even further. We want to ensure we forge new paths for our partners, driving competitive edge

with an arsenal of tools allowing them to provide the best service possible to their customers. We are expanding our capability to offer up to 10Gbps across our network, up to 3Gbps services readily available across more than one third of our 2,800 exchanges, with the remaining supplying 1Gb throughout the UK.

We have the investment to build a 10Gb service nationwide and this year has been step-one on that journey. We're future proofing our network and getting ahead of the competition by launching our 10Gb EAD bearer service and enabling 100G NNIs. While we install the infrastructure required for our next-generation network, our partners are vital to our continued success. We look forward to announcing more in the coming months and working closely with them all to develop the way the wholesale connectivity market takes shape. ■



'It is better to inspire change than to enforce it'

Our ambition is to power the future with the upcoming launch of our 10Gb Ethernet service.

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Sky Ethernet
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Monetise the future

The connectivity revolution, cloud services and the subscription economy are creating a new ecosystem and blurring the line between telecoms and technology, writes **Wail Sabbagh, Managing Director at Strategic Imperatives**. This is fundamentally challenging the channel's business model and its billing requirements. Legacy billing systems have no role to play in the new digital ecosystem, they are a barrier to innovation and an obstacle to business transformation.

Service providers must revisit their service monetisation strategy before they start losing revenue and market share to the multitude of start-ups and new entrants eager to capitalise on 5G, ultra-fast connectivity and the subscription economy. Without sophisticated, agile and scalable billing systems there can be no seamless transition into Digital



Wail Sabbagh

Britain. This is not the time to wait and see but rather to evolve or die.

Strategic Imperatives' focus is to meet the critical need in the channel for a modern billing solution that seamlessly powers service providers' growth and enables them to monetise the new telco value chain. Elevate, our award-winning billing solution, was created from the ground up for the modern telecoms market. It challenges how the channel perceives billing and transforms service monetisation into a modern,

blazing fast, fully integrated, and extremely flexible cloud-native SaaS solution that is generations ahead.

Elevate enables service providers to seamlessly offer complex cloud services and hosted applications such as Google Apps and Office 365 using sophisticated packages, bundles and promotions. Its subscription and contract management capabilities are continuously updated to support new business models brought about by the advent of 5G, OTT and IoT, while its API-first implementation is enabling our customers to deploy best-of-breed BSS solutions.

Elevate is also redefining and challenging many of the outdated processes and legacy implementations that have plagued the channel. It addresses pain points the channel has long accepted as unavoidable such as resolving 'the first bill shock', providing best in class user

experience and streamlining the bill run process so that it can be completed in a matter of minutes rather than hours or even days.

Through our investment in AI and predictive analytics technologies, Elevate will empower service providers to offer targeted propositions that improve customer loyalty, increase profitability and reduce churn, as well as intelligently segment a customer base according to complex criteria including behaviour, preferences, geographical location and revenue potential.

Elevate has completely transformed monetisation for our customers and empowered them to capitalise on the rapid advances in the industry. With its clear focus on innovation, intelligent analytics, performance, reliability and usability, Elevate has completely disrupted a complacent billing landscape. ■



Delivering standout solutions, insight and expertise for telecoms' emerging stars and global brands...

It's what we do

With **Elevate** we are transforming billing and service monetisation into a modern, blazing fast, fully integrated, and extremely flexible **cloud-native SaaS solution** that is generations ahead.

Transforming Telecoms



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Time to add a new Layer

At Layer Systems, we've created a unique SaaS CRM platform that has been exclusively developed for the telecoms and IT industry, writes **Managing Director Michelle Livingstone**. With extensive technology and telecoms experience, our customer-focused team have built The Layer – an innovative, multi-faceted software system that solves the complex business requirements faced by resellers, while enabling the simplification and evolution of our clients' operations. We already support some of the UK's top resellers, focusing on organisations with 25 to 1,000-plus end users.

Our innovative web platform provides a 360 degree overview of marketing, pre-sales, sales, ordering, service, as well as billing and reporting. With a customer-driven roadmap, we focus on adapting to changes in the market with frequent updates



Michelle Livingstone

and a continually increasing feature set. Therefore, partnering with Layer Systems ensures that your solution remains practical in an ever-increasingly complex market.

The Layer enables you to make faster and better informed business decisions that result in increased revenue and profitability, while reducing operational costs and errors. All while delivering a superior experience for your customers and employees.



Nick Kewney

We've worked with key industry suppliers, including billing and finance providers, to develop core integrations which streamline business processes through automation, writes Technical Director Nick Kewney. As standard, you'll have access to tailored inventory and pricing management including hardware funds, authorisation rules, variable discounts, call plans, mobile bill limits and GDPR compliance, to name just a few. Thanks to our development team's constant innovation, our

dedicated API, webhooks and integrations for third party suppliers, all make it easy to develop your own apps and integrations as well.

Simply put, The Layer simplifies the process of managing leads, opportunities, electronic quote signing, sales order processing, assets and contract details, customer ticketing and reporting. However, we deliver more than just innovative software!

We appreciate how difficult change can be and guarantee to be there each step of the way, providing the expertise, training and support for your team, in order to make the transition to The Layer seamless and transformative. That's why our experienced project team are constantly identifying and translating our clients' existing business processes and systems, to ensure that a final design meets their specific operational requirements. ■



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Union Street ramps up

Billing is unquestionably one of the most vital areas of operations for any communications provider (CP), writes **Vincent Disneur, Head of Sales and Marketing for Union Street Technologies**. After all, if you can't get billing right, what's the point? As a provider of billing and provisioning software for over 600 CPs, billing is obviously something we take quite seriously and since our last visit to Comms Vision we have been working on several initiatives to enhance our market offering.

During 2019 we've invested millions into R&D to keep our applications ahead of competitors and enable us to adapt to market changes. Led by Technical Director, Alper Kazaca, our Development Team do nothing but work on new enhancements to our aBILLity™ billing platform and on the development of new solutions for the channel. Working

alongside them is a Product Team that possess extensive knowledge and experience in delivering SaaS solutions. Based on consultations with our customers, they ensure our solutions provide everything needed in terms of user experience, functionality, security and more.

A great example of their efforts can be found in the launch of the latest version of aBILLity. Our team have worked tirelessly to transition the powerful functionality available in aBILLity's classic desktop client into a fantastic new web-based client that has been built from the ground up. The result is a billing system that looks incredible, is highly intuitive and offers the unrivalled capabilities our customers have come to expect.

Coupled with investment in R&D, Union Street has invested heavily into its support offering to enhance service delivery and customer



Vincent Disneur

satisfaction. We've introduced a dedicated Customer Experience Team, become a member of the Institute of Customer Service and launched a dedicated service portal which features training videos, a knowledgebase, ticket

management and live chat with technical support contacts.

We've also ramped up our headcount with the appointment of skilled industry professionals. This includes consultants in Union Street's Bureau Team who provide a managed billing service for our customers, and two new Account Managers who provide onsite engagement with our customers to ensure they're getting the most from our solutions.

Our products are backed up by a customer service team that can respond effectively to the needs of our customers. In addition to software, we offer a range of consultancy services, including a revenue assurance service, that can help you to reach your full potential. So, if you're not already working with Union Street Technologies, perhaps it's time you took a fresh look at what we have to offer. ■

Telecom billing and provisioning market leaders

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Deal a knockout blow to the competition. Get the provisioning solution that draws all your suppliers together in one place and allows your orders to flow in the most delightful way. The Mosaix portal offers total supplier federation, seamless back-of-office integration and dynamic process flow from order to delivery. Choose the market leaders for billing and provisioning solutions that work like a charm.



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Maximise the digital era

Whether it's a move to a SaaS applications to improve operational efficiencies, creating business and contact centres that make the most of the work-from-home culture or a transition from traditional retail to e-commerce, more and more of your business customers are investing in digital transformation, **writes Sachin Vaish, Managing Director of Vaioni Wholesale.** And at Vaioni Wholesale, we've been investing to enable you to leverage these opportunities and drive growth within your own business.

Vaioni Wholesale will be investing over £1 million into our network to ensure that it is among the fastest and most secure networks in the country, leveraging software-defined networking technology to guarantee data delivery for a superior customer experience. The Vaioni Ethernet Network (V.E.N.) currently



connects over 250,000 postcodes throughout 100 UK cities and towns, providing superfast speeds between 100Mbps and 10Gbps – numbers that are set to increase over the coming year as we invest further in our network rollout. While we increase our network reach, we'll continue to maintain 100 per cent core network uptime – something that we've achieved for the last four years – to ensure that your customers continue to have a connectivity service that just works.

Our investment into the future of our business - and yours - can also be seen through our ever-expanding product set. Our newly launched hosted voice product brings together the best of Unified Communications (combining hosted voice with mobile PBX), Software-as-a-Service and deep analytics through one pane of glass to power businesses of all sizes.

In times of digital transformation, a people-first approach is even more important. We pride ourselves on

putting our people at the heart of your business. As a partner of Vaioni Wholesale, not only will you benefit from your own Account Manager to ensure that you're getting the very best out of your partnership with us, you'll also get a Prince2 qualified service delivery manager to ensure that every order you and your customers place with us is delivered in a timely, hassle-free, manner. Our accreditation programme also offers a multitude of additional benefits, including bespoke project management, marketing support and strategic peering to maximise our relationship.

For that added peace of mind, our SLA is the best in the industry – we'll give you one day's credit for every hour of downtime. What's more, we round up to the nearest hour, so even if your customer only experiences one minute of downtime, we'll still credit for the full hour. ■

[an extraordinary investment in you]



network

Reaching further with Vaioni Ethernet Network (V.E.N)



automation

Driving efficiencies for quicker results



people

Putting our people at the heart of your business



product

Customer-led innovation

Meet with our MD Sachin Vaish and Sales & Marketing Director, Mark Curtis-Wood in the Clynelish suite



#beextraordinary

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0161 672 9900

VanillaIP on pure cloud

VanillaIP has embraced the full and true principles of cloud service delivery and management, creating a reseller proposition that enables partners to control the entire customer experience, **writes Iain Sinnott, Sales & Marketing Director.** Partners benefit from an expansive product portfolio which includes a fully exploited Broadworks platform, but with the added ability to blend in enhanced reporting, call recording, call and UC inbound and outbound communication applications, conference and collaboration tools, fraud security, customer self-service and integrated invoicing, all behind a single pane of glass.

However, the customer experience is not simply about the sales and deployment elements. Resellers need to own the day-to-day service delivery, issue resolution, solution evolution and technical/diagnostic



Iain Sinnott

processes. While VanillaIP's support teams back up the partners, Uboss delivers a range of technical tools to support the triage of customer concerns and an SLA driven ticket system, engaging the UK based support team.

Our industry marches faster than most, so product development, integration and flexibility are paramount. With over 100 people

in the development team, VanillaIP encourages feature requests from resellers and their customers, meaning we are constantly evolving the product to meet the needs of businesses across the spectrum. There is no doubt that cloud solutions will own the market for SMB, mid-market and enterprise, but with so many productivity tools available and fighting for market share, resellers need to be able to integrate, as

well as innovate, in order to meet the demands of their base.

Transitioning from the old world is hard, and often expensive, so VanillaIP has specific support programmes for resellers who are either exiting the traditional PBX space or cross selling an existing revenue product base, such as mobile or connectivity. We are into the early majority, but customers still need an incentive to move.

VanillaIP resellers are mixing commercial incentives with beneficial business outcomes to make the transition irresistible to their customers. We are also investing heavily in the training of our sales and onboarding teams to ensure the service is absolutely right for each customer and delivered perfectly. No two VanillaIP resellers are the same – so come and join an exclusive club of unique cloud professionals. ■

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Virtual1 builds on success

This year has seen Virtual1 build on its highly successful network expansion, cementing its position as the UK's most advanced carrier network, **writes CEO Tom O'Hagan**. With a 20 per cent growth of our partner base (198 new partners) and delivering our fifth consecutive year of 25-plus per cent growth. We also announced a significant programme of works to expand the capacity of our network, and are already 6 months into delivering a network ready for the demands of 2022 and beyond.

We have continued to develop our network proposition, with our Cellular Ethernet product the first fully private, multi network cellular proposition capable of supporting multiple network services such as MPLS and SIP. Our portfolio enhancements are ongoing, with the imminent a new cost effective contended FTTC product. The perfect



Tom O'Hagan

first step on the journey from copper to a full fibre future for smaller businesses and satellite offices.

At the start of 2020, we are introducing our SDWAN proposition to complement our Software Defined Network. Demand for the enhanced visibility and control that these solutions deliver to an enterprise is high, and we want to enable the channel to make the most of this

rapidly growing market. Working with our strategic network partner Juniper Networks, our solution removes the need for additional CPE which makes for lighter touch deployment, while also providing a simple upsell opportunity to much of our partners' existing estates.

Our 1Cloud platform has also gone from strength to strength, gaining recognition as the ideal home for

cloud UC solutions, picking up the Best Comms/UC MSP Project at the 2019 Managed Services Awards. This is just one of the channel solutions cases that our straightforward cloud proposition complements. We continue to invest heavily in our 1Portal and suite of APIs – delivering even more control of our SDN, as well as clear visibility of all existing infrastructure during quoting.

Our Partners continue to enjoy real-time control of their customers' solutions, more than anyone else in the marketplace. We have continued to improve our supply chain processes, which means we are now delivering services up to 10 working days quicker to the channel than the market average. Such is the significance of this, our COO David Simpson will be at CVC this year to bring an operational angle to the conversations, and discuss this in greater detail. ■



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Our state-of-the-art, software defined network is also privately connected to market-leading UC, SIP, and cloud solutions. This provides you with **top-notch security and guaranteed levels of performance for your customers.**



Voiceflex hails true UCaaS

Voiceflex is delighted to be attending the Comms Vision Convention, a highlight event that has been running for 14 years, a year less than Voiceflex, writes **Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director**. The market and the players have dramatically changed over that period: Millennials were still at school and the iPhone hadn't hit the market.

Voiceflex is first and foremost a telecoms carrier and has been providing services within the cloud for 15 years. Technology has transformed the way we live, work and communicate. SIP and hosted telephony are playing increasingly important roles, and SIP sales continue to grow month on month. Over the last 15 years, we've continued to enhance our range of SIP products and services to address the changing requirements of the market. But



Paul Taylor

not all SIP service providers are the same. It's always worth finding out what's new and how we can tailor our SIP products and services to meet your requirements.

This year's theme is Digital Britain 2.0. ADSL was launched in 2002 with speeds of 2MG, now we're looking at 5G with speeds of 50Gbit and latency of 1ms – mind-blowing! It's clear to

see why applications are hosted in the cloud and that trend is increasing.

Last year Voiceflex became Unify (Atos) UK's first CSP for Circuit, a standalone WebRTC UC&C application with voice provided by the award-winning OpenScape Cloud providing a powerful, fully rounded communication application. Circuit differs from other UCaaS platforms as

it was built UC first and comes with a fantastic telecoms pedigree. Rather than the UC option being bolted on as an afterthought it is intuitive, polished and integrates seamlessly into company communications. Circuit is the new breed of UC&C integrating with apps via APIs and middleware such as Zapier, Bots, Raspberry Pi, and AI can be added.

UC&C is becoming the de facto application for communications with voice as an additional extra. The way we communicate is continually changing – users now expect to be able to communicate in their preferred format be that messaging, voice, video or collab and to be able to switch seamlessly between these as required – and we as a channel need to adapt our product sets to meet the needs of an ever-changing marketplace. Our SIP offering and Circuit are like no others. Come and have a chat with us at CVC 2019. ■

Voiceflex

Digital Transformation

The Workplace is Changing.
Communications is Changing.
Be Ready.
Don't Get Left Behind.

Find Out More
#CommsVision2019

Wildix in expansion mode

Wildix produces a UC&C PBX that is innovative, simplistic in its delivery and simple to use, **writes Channel Managers Ian Rowan and Rob Loakes.** The solution harnesses the power of WebRTC to allow not only users but also their customers to talk, video call, chat and even screen share without the need to install any software, not even an add-on.



Ian Rowan



Rob Loakes

The full solution is delivered directly within a web browser and not a proprietary application. This simplistic approach and the fact that people are familiar with using web applications means that the user adoption of the solution is exceedingly high. Wildix is recognised as leading the way within the WebRTC community, having worked directly with Google and Citrix to help enhance the protocol. This use of WebRTC to offer a simplistic and fully-featured

collaboration solution is innovation at its finest. This shows how Wildix and their solution is leading not only collaboration but also UC&C.

Unlike most hosted solutions on the market, our platform is not a shared resource, each customer gets their own instance hosted by Wildix within AWS, this means that our platform does not suffer the pitfalls of downtime that effect 100 per cent of our

partners and connected customers. Furthermore, Wildix offers a complete range of hardware products and Unified Communications & Collaboration features.

Since arriving in the UK late in 2017, Wildix has been successful in building an ecosystem of partners that are using, selling and increasing margins with our solution. Wildix' solution is aimed at small and medium businesses, between 50 and

1,000 users, that need to provide their employees and collaborators with efficient yet simple to use communication tools. Wildix system is a complete and scalable solution for companies that need to upgrade their communication tools by introducing such features as video conference, chat and users presence, and at the same time, reduce operating costs. The system was also designed to be easy to install and to manage with low maintenance costs.

Wildix is a multi-national company that develops browser-based Unified Communications solutions and VoIP products. The company relies on the network of Certified Business Partners who install Wildix systems in Europe and in the United States. In 2005 Wildix opened its Research & Development centre, and in the following years, the company opened sales offices across Europe and in the United States. ■



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