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THE HEARTBEAT OF THE UK ICT INDUSTRY

Comms Dealer

December 2019

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Industry rocked in run up to vote

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SPECIAL REPORT

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"This policy would cause immense damage to a vibrant, complex, competitive, innovative and strategically important telecoms sector that, based on the Megabuyte company database, is investing £8.3bn, contributes almost £4bn in tax and

dividends and employs over 200,000 staff," said Megabuyte. com Analyst Philip Carse.

"Giving away a product that currently generates revenues of circa £10bn would wipe out two thirds of industry EBITDA profits of £16bn and remove the cashflow that pays for investments. Also, the policy would likely stall the current momentum behind FTTP builds."

BT told Comms Dealer: "It should be a top political priority to supercharge the roll out of full fibre broadband and 5G

right across the UK. Whatever the result of the election, we'd encourage the next Government to work with all parts of the industry to achieve that. It's a national mission that's bigger than any one company."

Marcus Allchurch, Partner at Acuity Advisors, added: "With billions of pounds of private investment going into delivering regionally relevant ultrafast solutions, this pledge shows deep naivety and an irresponsible approach to policy setting."
More reaction on pages 30-37

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EDITOR'S COMMENT

Stuart Gilroy

IF LABOUR wins the election on December 12th the comms sector will be plunged into a full scale emergency. In truth, the UK's full fibre and 5G infrastructure is far too complex to be delivered and managed by means of a state owned entity. And Labour's broadband hijack is not just a sign of its polar opposition to commercial models for fibre, it is more a case of Labour versus reality. Corbyn's broadband pledge is so glaringly short of wisdom it lacks all logical substance. That is its Achilles heel.

Even so, if Labour loses the election the comms industry will have experienced a seismic wake up call and breathe a temporary sigh of relief. Temporary because, so long as Labour holds onto this manifesto pledge, fears of a potential crisis will always hang over the sector as future elections will carry the same threat.

Should Boris Johnson retain the keys to Number 10, the comms sector's survival instincts must spark a supercharged period of fibre proliferation to ring fence the sector from future Labour fancies to nationalise Openreach and other elements of BT, making the idea even more stark raving bonkers and blatantly untenable.

A Conservative win must also spur a return to confidence and crank up the sector to go full throttle on investment, coopetition and collaboration which will become ever more critical. Just as pivotal are ICT service providers who have the power in their hands to prioritise full fibre, create demand and help secure the future of the industry as we know it. Whatever the election decides, it is time to scramble in the Battle of Digital Britain.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Aura-Amicus deal forms £10m Group

IT PROVIDERS Aura Technology and Amicus ITS have joined forces as sister companies to create a £10m-plus turnover organisation. The two businesses, both with HQs in Southampton, will operate under the Aura Technology Group but retain their identities.

The Group will be led by Aura MD Tim Walker who becomes Group MD, while Steve Jackson, MD at Amicus ITS, continues in a Non-Executive board role. The senior team of directors at both businesses remain unchanged.

The deal reflects additional opportunities based on shared capabilities and mutual access to complementary portfolios.

The move precedes a broader and accelerated push into private and public sector markets.

Walker said Aura Technology will continue to work with private sector organisations mainly in the mid-market of over 50 IT users; while Amicus ITS retains its focus on public sector customers, with a particular emphasis on healthcare.

The deal follows two years of growth for Aura Technology since the company was launched in 2017 by co-founders Tim Walker and Pete Hughes.

Earlier this year the firm appointed Sir Clive Woodward to the board as a Non-Exec'.

Walker said: "Amicus ITS is established in the public sector and shares Aura Technology's values. It is unusual to find such a mid-market and enterprise-focused business in the sector."

Woodward added: "The integration with Amicus ITS creates a group of two companies with synergy and shared values."

Amicus ITS was established in 1988 as an in IT solutions provider for the healthcare sector and regulated markets and is an accredited Crown Commercial Supplier.

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Steve Jackson (left) and Tim Walker

NEWS ROUNDUP

TECH Data is to be acquired by fund manager Apollo Global Management in a deal worth circa $5.4bn. Rich Hume, CEO, Tech Data, said: "This investment will give us additional resources to accelerate our ability to bring to market the technology products and solutions the world needs to connect, grow and advance."

VOIP desktop phone developer and IP device manufacturer Fanvil continues to make significant inroads into the UK market reporting a 100% hike in year-on-year sales volumes, spurred in particular by the launch of its X series phones in 2016 and the growing popularity of its door access devices. Also fuelling demand is the new XU phone range rolled out in September. The Chinese vendor began life in 2012 with a view to disrupt established markets and its UK campaign is gathering pace with distributors Yellowgrid, Corptel and Nuvola signed up, and other significant channel partnership agreements poised for fruition. "All the main PBX vendors in the UK are fully supported and interop testing is being done with other emerging PBX vendors," stated Fanvil UK MD Craig Graham.

MSP sets zero goal for landfill

EDINBURGH-based Commsworld has secured a new accreditation as part of its mission to send zero waste to landfill.

The introduction of green measures throughout the business has secured the environmental accreditation ISO:14001.

These initiatives include monitoring how the aggregate waste created by suppliers is treated, and a policy that sees Commsworld recycle all of its computer hardware, often through donations to charity.

John McDermott, COO, said: "To become deeply environmentally focused and see real change we had to set ourselves lofty targets, and zero landfill is exactly that.

"Our success here has been down to us getting granular with our approach to recycling and upcycling. It's worth it, and is the right thing to do."

John McDermott

PTG rides wave of pure people power

PEOPLE power has rocket boosted Pure Technology Group's (PTG) revenues to record heights, according to CEO Stephen O'Brien.

"The development and retention of our people is the key component in our strategic growth," he stated.

In the last 12 months the company increased its workforce by 30% and now employs over 130 people across the organisation's three locations.

The Leeds-based business closed FY19 on £33m, its growth also driven by increases in cloud and managed services and the introduction of technologies including hyper convergence, VR and the IoT.

"Staying ahead of the curve is crucial in the tech sector, so there will be continued development of our service catalogue and a sustained focus on service to our growing customer base," added O'Brien.

This year also saw the technology provider secure entry to the cloud and hardware frameworks developed by the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation, which supplies to over 19,000 customers.

The frameworks are designed to service all public

Stephen O'Brien

sector organisations and have a combined value of circa £600m.

O'Brien said PTG's three year strategy, launched in April this year, is targeting £50m revenue at the close of FY21, and he expects to employ 200 staff over more locations.

FluidOne's on a revenue roll

Russell Horton

LIVINGBRIDGE-backed FluidOne is on a roll, witnessing organic revenue up 11% year-on-year from £26m to £28.8m and underlying EBITDA up by 33% from £2.4m to £3.2m.

Its year end results to 1st March 2019 also showed an annual customer retention of 96% and coincided with news that FluidOne has agreed a new debt facility with an unnamed bank to drive acquisitions.

FluidOne CEO Russell Horton observed: "Livingbridge's decision to invest in FluidOne alongside the management team has had a transformative impact on our ability to build market share in a fast growing market. We are in pole position to scale up the company as the market for network connectivity across fibre, copper, IoT, cloud and mobile continues to expand."

Matthew Caffrey, Partner at Livingbridge, commented: "The new debt facility, coupled with our financial support, provides FluidOne with the acquisition funding required to support its growth plans.

"The company is positioned to take a leading role in consolidating a highly fragmented market that is rich in opportunity as companies accelerate their digital transformation journeys."

NEWS ROUNDUP

BUILDING on its long time link up with Vodafone UK, Olive Communications has inked a fresh five year partnership with the operator that aims to deliver £125m-plus revenues over the term. The deal gives Olive access to a broader range of Vodafone services including integrated mobile, 5G, IoT, fixed line and SD WAN. Olive CEO Martin Flick commented: "We recognise that our customers want end-to-end digital solutions and Vodafone joins Google, Microsoft, Mitel and V1 in delivering the key building blocks of our service."

INTEC Business has expanded its group of companies with the addition of Titan Networks. inTec's acquisition model sees it acquire a controlling interest, but the partners' identity and management remain the same. inTec Chairman Simon Howitt said: "Our objective is to bring together a network of telecoms and IT support providers that need to broaden their portfolios but do not have the resources. Partners see sense in leveraging inTec's technical capabilities."

Leversedge snapped up by long time friend Welcomm

O2'S TWO-TIME Direct Partner of the Year Welcomm Communications has bagged fellow Leicestershire comms provider Leversedge Telecom Services.

The company directors have known each other for a number of years and decided that with the emergence of new technologies, working more closely and sharing skill sets would provide a boost to their respective solutions and propositions.

"This acquisition provides an opportunity to benefit both businesses and our customers," said Aidan Piper, CEO at Welcomm Communications.

Aidan Piper

Leversedge Telecom Services MD Tony Lowes commented: "We will continue to trade as normal without impact to existing clients. Instead, in partnership with Welcomm, we'll be able to support our customers like never before."

Welcomm Communications services circa 3,500 customers nationwide. Leversedge Telecom Services specialises in commercial two-way radios, fleet vehicle solutions, IoT and 'cash and valuables in transit' products and services.

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Ingram talks up MS voice

Tech trio join forces to spur cloud uptake

INGRAM Micro has marched into comms territory with the roll out of Microsoft 365 Business Voice to channel partners.

Ingram Micro is one of the few distributors to be launching this service.

Microsoft 365 Business Voice is a cloud-based phone system and collaboration solution for the SMB market. It also offers enhanced capabilities to drive engagement and productivity through integration with Microsoft Teams.

Colin McGregor, GM of Modern Workplace at Ingram Micro UK&I, stated: "Ingram Micro is in a prime position to support partners with this multi-billion-pound opportunity.

"The modern workforce needs providers who understand

Colin McGregor

their challenges and offer solutions to suit their needs."

Ingram Micro has partnered with certain UC&C device manufacturers to bring pre-certified bundles for the meeting room and workspace.

"Business Voice opens opportunities for partners who wish to expand their cloud portfolio and boost end user collaboration," added McGregor.

A TECHNOLOGY partnership between 8x8, Poly (formerly Plantronics and Polycom) and ScanSource aims to grease the wheels of cloud comms, UC and CC adoption.

The trio have launched a joint global programme, named CloudFuel, to drive hardware replacement and cloud migration based on 8x8's UCaaS and CCaaS solutions and equipment from Poly, supported by incentives for ScanSource resellers.

The CloudFuel programme will be offered through the ScanSource network of more than 35,000 resellers and include the full range of 8x8 X Series and standalone solutions.

Vik Verma, CEO at 8x8, said: "This takes our relationships with ScanSource and Poly to a new level to deliver packaged programmes that will enable countless organisations to easily and quickly take advantage of the cloud."

Mike Baur, Chairman and CEO at ScanSource, commented: "This programme will allow our VARs to manage customer billings for the 8x8 and Poly solution, while giving VARs the ability to add services."

Joe Burton, President and Chief Executive Officer at

Vik Verma

Poly, noted: "With partners like 8x8 and ScanSource, along with these new incentive pro-

grammes, we will make the migration process to UCaaS as seamless as possible."

A TEAM of 13 employees from 9 Group plunged from the skies in aid of individually chosen charities during an adrenaline fuelled skydive adventure. "For those who aren't thrill seekers the idea can seem daunting, but that didn't stop them," said Paul Buckle, Head of Customer Data at 9 Group. Tyra Forbes, Senior Customer Service Advisor at 9 Retail, added: "The skydive was a great experience, the views were breathtaking seeing only blue skies. I tackled the clouds and glided down into a landing with the feeling of a great achievement. Firstly, because I completed the jump and secondly because I'm still alive to tell the tale." Tom Phyall, Credit Controller at 9 Group, enthused: "I was nervous beforehand as I'm petrified of heights. The view on top of the clouds and the speed we were going was insane."

RIDGEWALL Group has acquired hospitality sector specialist QDOSsbl with back-to-back investment from Inflexion Private Equity to support its M&A ambitions. QDOSsbl CEO Simon Catterick said: "I now have the firepower to develop the business at home and abroad, potentially with another bite of the cherry in due course." Technology and telecoms adviser Knight Corporate Finance advised on the deal. Its Associate Director Tom Jones added: "Ridgewall saw off strong competition to anchor itself in the hospitality sector. Our Vendor Assist product ensured that the business was well prepared for the transaction and reduced the due diligence workload." Knight has completed over 100 deals in the technology and telecoms industry from its London and Warrington offices.

NEWS ROUNDUP

CSP GIACOM has launched its newest product, Cloud Server, an out-of-the-box replacement for an on-premises end of life server. Steve Law, CTO at Giacom, said: "While cloud adoption is increasing at an impressive rate, the pricing structures and technical configurations can present significant challenges for IT resellers – but that needn't be the case."

MLL TELECOM is set to embark on an upsell campaign and target larger prospects in the public sector with 8x8's X Series platform following a link up between the two companies. Graham Kedzlie, Director, Business Development, 8x8, said: "MLL Telecom is a key strategic partner in the public sector space."

MASERGY'S new brand messaging, visual identity, website and digital ad campaign is reflective of a ramping up of its channel activities, according to CEO James Parker. He said: "This branding strategy and incremental investment in marketing reflects the growth we're experiencing and the market opportunity that stands before us." Masergy is also investing in digital marketing to drive demand for partners.

Vodafone in fibre link up
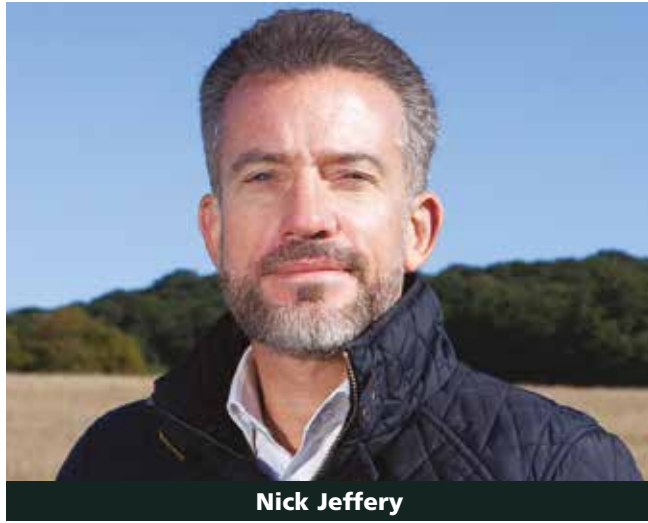
Nick Jeffery

VODAFONE is expanding its Gigafast broadband roll out to bring full fibre services to more consumers and small businesses in the UK after striking a fresh commercial arrangement with infrastructure firm Openreach.

From spring 2020, Vodafone will start making Vodafone Gigafast Broadband available to customers in Birmingham, Bristol and Liverpool on Openreach's FTTP network – meaning that Vodafone Gigafast Broadband will be live or planned in 15 cities or towns.

Vodafone UK CEO Nick Jeffery said: "This initiative with Openreach builds on our existing commitments with CityFibre and underlines our belief in the power of digital technology to connect people for a better future and unlock economic growth for the UK."

In addition to full fibre, Vodafone has already introduced 5G in Birmingham, Bristol and Liverpool as part of its broader nationwide roll out programme of the next generation mobile technology.

"Full fibre and 5G form the foundation on which local and central government plan to create digital super-towns across the UK," added Jeffery.

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4net bags key Avaya gong win

UPTAKE of 4net's Antenna cloud service, designed in partnership with the Prime Minister's Office, secured the comms firm Avaya's 2019 International Enterprise Cloud Partner of the Year gong.

Antenna is based on Avaya technology and has over 25,000 users, including cabinet ministers and senior civil servants.

Steve Joyner, Avaya UK & Ireland MD, said: "This award illustrates the spectacular contribution that the business partner has made to Avaya during the past 12 months and beyond.

"You only have to look at the tremendous growth 4net has experienced in terms of revenue and cloud seats, which underlines the significance of our ever expanding partnership."

Richard Pennington, MD at 4net, added: "Antenna is just the beginning of our journey in delivering secure cloud services across the public sector."

Richard Pennington

NEWS ROUNDUP

A **LINK-UP** between Pragma and marketing management consultancy Think Beyond sees channel partners benefit from extended marketing support including analysis of their marketing activities, strategies and systems. Pragma Sales and Marketing Director Will Morey said: "This collaboration will broaden Pragma's marketing support capabilities, in addition to the assistance we provide with collateral, webinars, events and digital marketing." The partnership will also see Pragma co-developing a series of guides to help comms resellers overcome the marketing challenges identified through its recent market survey.

ALCATEL Mobile has appointed Eurostar Global Electronics as a distribution partner in the UK. Alcatel Mobile designs, manufactures and markets mobile and Internet products and services worldwide, currently sold in over 160 countries. Eurostar Global MD Peter Carnall commented: "The future growth of Eurostar is in working with partners that have a strength in not just mobile, but in wearables and connected devices." Alcatel handsets will be available from Eurostar Global in early December.

NEWS ROUNDUP

DUTCH data protection platform provider Zivver has signed its first UK value added resellers – RnD Systems Integration and C-STEM. It has also linked up with distributor Progress Technology Services to market the company's outbound email security solution in the UK. Darren Parker, EMEA Channel Manager at Zivver, commented: "We are looking to sign several VARs by the end of this year, partners with the appropriate integration skills and specialisations across public and private sector end user organisations."

COMMS provider 8X8 has rolled out a free standalone version of its Video Meetings, enabling users to schedule and start meetings across video, voice, chat, contact sharing and face-to-face video. The solution requires no registration, no downloading of plugins or software applications for most users, and no time limits, said the company. "Since our inception 8x8 has championed unlimited global connections from one 8x8 customer to another at no cost, and now we bring this same capability into the video communications space," commented Dejan Deklich, 8x8's Chief Product Officer.

SCC goes big on HQ do up

James Rigby

IT SERVICES and solutions provider SCC has embarked on a £7m refurbishment programme of its UK headquarters.

The commercial premises, located in Birmingham, is being remodelled and upgraded as the latest part of a long-term regional investment strategy.

SCC has been based in Birmingham since it began life in 1975 and is now a £2.2bn turnover international company.

SCC has employed 50,000-plus people in the region during its 45 years of operation.

The Rigby Group owned company has also invested over £100m in the local community, offered hundreds of apprenticeships and donated more than £1.5m to charitable projects.

In this latest £7m boost to its HQ, both the existing 1980s single storey and two storey office blocks will be stripped back to their original structures, with each building undergoing a complete internal remodel.

A new link building will complete the project and provide a walkway, reception area and entrance. The upgrade is expected to complete in the summer next year.

SCC Chief Executive James Rigby commented: "This project has been planned meticulously and I'm thrilled that it is finally underway."

DWS sees the Lite in bill launch

DIGITAL Wholesale Solutions (DWS) customers are now able to provision and bill from one platform within its portal following the introduction of Affinity Billing Lite, an entry level web-based billing solution developed by Aurora.

"Affinity Billing Lite is designed specifically for Digital Wholesale start-ups and entrepreneurial resellers who want to easily bill their customers, manage their provisioning, tariff plans and charges within the Digital Wholesale Portal," said Danielle Price, Aurora's Product and Channel Director.

"This brings a range of benefits for the reseller including quicker bill run times and resolving common mistakes by removing the need for re-keying information between systems.

"Affinity Billing Lite also gives smaller reseller the ability to uncover insights and trends through revenue reporting."

The product is currently only available to Digital Wholesale Solutions Partners, but Aurora said it is working on developing a suite of reseller products suitable for enterprise customers.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

CISCO reported sales up 2% to $13.2bn for the first quarter, although its guidance for the second quarter is a sales slump of between 3% and 5% year-over-year. For the period ended 26th October 2019, GAAP net income tumbled 18% to $2.9bn. "We delivered a solid quarter against a challenging macro environment," said Chuck Robbins, Chairman and CEO.

INSIGHT saw Q3 sales up 9%, driven mainly by the acquired PCM business. Net sales were $1.9bn with gross profit jumping 18% to $276m. Sales across EMEA were up 9% to $356m. The PCM acquisition was completed at the end of August and contributed to one month of the quarter. Full year 2019 guidance is for sales to grow between 9% and 11%.

NEXTGENACCESS has sealed a carrier agreement with SSE Enterprise Telecoms, which has ordered a new fibre route to connect its 12,000km UK-wide network to the NGD (Next Generation Data) data centre in Wales. Nextgenaccess secured £22m of investment from the National Digital Infrastructure Fund in 2018 and has built a network across the UK with PoPs in ten local authority areas.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

TO HELP its 600-plus partners compete with new retail tariffs from the main mobile networks, Jola has launched a number of unlimited wholesale products on 30-day contracts, some available on 5G. Lee Broxson, Jola's Sales Director, said: "The partner enjoys an uplift in revenue and margin and their end users never have to worry about usage."

ANTICIPATING a shift to cloud Avaya has launched its new IX Subscription programme to the international market. "We expect customers to shift from on-premise deployment to a private or public cloud architecture over the next two to three years," said Yaser Al Zubaidi, Senior Director – Engagement Solutions.

XELION UK has released version 7.2 of its platform. A new Office 365 Integrator is included as standard which synchronises calendars and contacts. Also included is a bulk editing tool which allows partners to change settings across departments. Dave Reynolds, UK MD, said: "Xelion's open RESTful API allows third party apps such as MS Exchange and Office 365 to be integrated. This gives our partners the freedom to design bespoke solutions."

Atos to offer Google Cloud

Eric Grall

A GOOGLE Cloud supported Workplace as a Service proposition has been launched by Atos following a link up with the tech giant.

Atos is offering (on a subscription-based model) an integrated package that includes the supply and support of Chromebooks with Atos' Circuit software, along with Google's G Suite and setup, migration and management services.

G Suite is made up of a set of apps including Gmail, Docs, Drive, Calendar, Hangouts, and incorporates real-time collaboration and machine intelligence.

"The cloud can transform the way people collaborate and get work done," said Kevin Ichhpurani, Corporate Vice President, Global Ecosystem at Google Cloud.

"This new service from Atos provides customers with a streamlined path to adopt a cloud native approach to collaboration and productivity with G Suite and Chromebooks."

Commenting on the launch, Eric Grall, who is the Senior Executive Vice President and Head of Global Operations and Infrastructure and Data Management at Atos, said: "Our new Workplace as a Service offering provides enterprise customers with greater choice, an optimal employee experience and enhanced productivity."

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Virgin set to go with Vodafone

VIRGIN Media has agreed a five year deal with Vodafone UK to bring new services, including 5G, to more than three million mobile customers.

The MVNO deal, which runs until 2026, will see Vodafone supply wholesale mobile network services, including voice and data, to Virgin Mobile and Virgin Media Business.

Virgin Media will have full access to Vodafone's existing services and future technologies. Virgin Media's current MVNO agreement with BT Enterprise, which has been in place since January 2017, will come to an end in late 2021.

Virgin Mobile 5G services are set to launch on the Vodafone network before this transition takes place.

A complementary wholesale agreement has also been struck between both parties in relation to the supply of network services by Virgin Media Business to Vodafone.

Commenting on the deal, Virgin Media CEO Lutz Schüler said: "This agreement will open up a new world of opportunity for Virgin Media as we bring our mobile and broadband connectivity closer together in one package for one price."

Fibre biz ramps up ambition

ESSEX-based County Broadband has witnessed a five-fold increase in its workforce so far this year, up from 16 to 60 since the start of 2019 with expectations of a 79-strong team by the end of December.

New roles in technology, finance and community engagement have been created as part of its expansion.

The move follows a £46m investment from Aviva Investors in 2018 to support the firm's roll out of full fibre broadband to rural areas in East Anglia.

Lewis Simington, Human Resources Manager, said: "We have just launched a seven year business plan and 2020 will be the year when we start coming into our own. The ambition is to become a major player, both in the region and in the national technology sector."

County Broadband aims to provide connection access to around 40,000 premises by the end of 2020.

Lewis Simington

Power in Partnership

It's been the best ever year to be in the channel.
We couldn't have done it without our partners, who
have achieved some phenomenal growth.

We're looking forward to 2020 where the future
looks even bigger and brighter.

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Ireland enterprise market in full flow

DOUBLE digit growth in the server, storage and networking segments in Ireland have bucked the Western Europe trend, chalking up large year-on-year revenue increases during Q2 2019 (+34.8%) and Q3 2019 (+26%).

Figures from IT market analyst Context also show that the UK enterprise market declined by -14% in Q3 2019, the second worst performance of any Western European country.

But in Ireland, server systems and server upgrades made strong inroads. In particular, data centre categories such as Blade and high end rack servers which shined.

The storage market is also on a sharp rise with backups and disk array systems especially driving revenues.

The star of the show however is SD storage upgrades which saw a +67.3% year-on-year increase in units with +92% more total addressable capacity sold in Q3 2019 than in the same term last year.

The growth theme continues with enterprise networking displaying the fourth highest growth in Western Europe over both quarters.

"These figures suggest that, with the Brexit deadline looming, companies have started to get real about the need to have

back-up on EU soil to avoid data compliance issues if the UK leaves the EU on a no-deal basis or with a light deal," commented Gurvan Meyer, Market and Business Enterprise Analyst at Context.

"There is little doubt that the current delays in Westminster are working in Ireland's favour.

"But the country does have an advantageous business digital tax environment and state-of-the-art off-island fibre connectivity that make it an attractive place to settle for digital companies looking for a European home."

There are 55 active data centres in Ireland, another 35 in the pipeline with eight under construction. Big investments by Google, Amazon, SAP and others are also propelling the Irish market.

"It will be interesting to follow the evolution of the enterprise market until the end of the proposed transition period in December 2020, as it will help us to understand how much of the growth observed in Ireland over the two last quarters is Brexit related," added Gurvan.

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ZEST4, winner of the Best Channel Support gong at the Comms National Awards, staged its inaugural partner awards at its fifth partner event held at the Ham Yard Hotel in central London. With sessions from O2, 8x8 and Arkessa, delegates were given a deeper understanding of the impact 5G will have on collaborative working, mobility at work and how transitioning to the cloud will reap benefits in the long-term. The headline winner at the awards event was Partner of the Year Focus Group. "Focus has achieved so much this year and is going from strength to strength," said Mandy Fazelynia, Zest4 Operations and Business Development Director.

Old billers poised for disruption

TOO many resellers are being held back by inflexible legacy billing systems, claimed Tekton MD Terry McKeever, who said the traditional billing market is 'ripe for disruption'.

"Billing platforms need to be adaptable and, unlike the legacy systems of the past, good at billing all types of products," he stated. "In the current market and with the roll out of 5G, resellers must cater for and bill a whole range of telephony solutions with great variation.

"A cloud platform therefore needs to be securely hosted, GDPR compliant, flexible, and most importantly offer partners convergent billing of multiple services and networks."

According to McKeever there is evidence of misplaced 'integration for the sake of integration' in the marketplace, which he says is to the detriment of desired outcomes.

"The goal of integration is to enhance the efficiency and productivity of operations, which must be at the forefront of our minds," he added. "Any billing provider must ensure that the development of its integration capabilities fulfils this criterion, supporting the end user through its design and implementation."

NEWS ROUNDUP

NIMANS has bagged Jabra's Distributor of the Year gong having collected the same award from the headset and conferencing vendor last year. Jabra presented the prize at its annual UK & Ireland partner conference at the Red Bull racing complex in Milton Keynes. Nigel Dunn, Jabra's MD, EMEA North, said: "In our industry, we talk about 'solutions' rather than products, but our success depends on our partners being committed to solving real-life business pain points."

CHESS has been named Datto's UK & Ireland Business Management Partner of The Year at DattoCon19, its fifth annual European partner conference. Chess MD Stephen Dracup said: "With Datto we can help protect our customers' most valuable asset – their data."

TELEPERFORMANCE is to manage Huawei's UK customer services and technical support through a Bristol located contact centre. Huawei is increasing its presence in the UK business services and consumer products markets where it employs 1,500 people. Last year it pledged a further £3bn investment in the UK market as part of a five year commitment.

Abzorb seals MVNO offer

Matt Dykes

YORKSHIRE-based Abzorb's new MVNO partnership with Transatel – BT Wholesale's MVNO partner – is reflective of its escalating ambition in the mobile space as it seeks to provide close to real-time network and customer monitoring to reseller partners.

Operating under the abZ moniker the deal means that Abzorb will enable businesses to brand the MVNO service as their own while using EE's UK mobile network infrastructure.

Matt Dykes, Abzorb COO, stated: "abZ offers a service that provides companies with total control by giving them flexibility to move between network providers while leaving them in charge of mobile utilisation and network settings. Mobile telephone usage and data via CDRs will be on hand for partners through the Abzorb channel partner portal in minutes, as well as other services across three network operators.

"This will keep the channel partner in complete control, eliminating protracted account reconciliation problems, providing near real-time accurate data to customers such as CDRs, usage information, tariff utilisation and setting caps and bars."

Dykes joined Abzorb in April 2019 following a 20 year stint in the wholesale comms sector at Vodafone and O2.

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

Onecom partners Highlight

ONECOM customers can now make their own call on any broadband issues following a partnership between the Hampshire comms provider and Highlight, which gives users visibility into network performance and application services.

Highlight is available for use on Onecom's basic broadband and Ethernet network monitoring and reporting, with an advanced Ethernet-plus service for application level visibility.

Marcus Alves, Head of Service Operations, commented: "We have many customers who are keen to have visibility of their estates.

"Currently, if they struggle for bandwidth they have no way of knowing if they are maxing it out or if a specific application is causing an issue. Highlight will open their eyes and allow for full diagnostic capabilities."

Onecom has a number of regional offices, 400 staff and more than 100,000 customers.

Marcus Alves

Mitel set to Chime with AWS

Mary McDowell

MITEL is the first vendor to leverage Amazon Chime SDK to boost the capabilities of its UC and collaboration portfolio.

The SDK extends audio calling, video calling and screen sharing capabilities to applications. AWS currently hosts Mitel's CloudLink architecture and microservices.

Mary McDowell, President and CEO, Mitel, commented: "Effective collaboration is more essential than ever given the increasingly global and dispersed nature of our working relationships. Piecemeal solutions fall short of enabling customers to work seamlessly across devices and applications.

"With AWS, we're able to bring its resources and scale to bear and combine the elements businesses need for a seamless collaboration experience."

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Telsis swoop aids Gamma

Andrew Taylor

GAMMA'S acquisition of Fareham-based Telsis bolsters its capabilities in the largely untapped UCaaS market, said to be worth between £2bn and £3bn, and signals its intention to be a lead UCaaS campaigner.

Telsis is a developer of UCaaS solutions for SMEs and employs 25 staff.

The transaction follows a MVNO deal between Gamma and Three which includes 5G services that Gamma said would make its UCaaS proposition far more media rich.

In pocketing Telsis, Gamma has added capabilities that will speed its time to market as well as offer a springboard for bouncing its UCaaS services into European territory.

Gamma CEO Andrew Taylor said: "Telsis' development skills are core to Gamma's UCaaS strategy and we plan to enhance our engineering teams to provide more resource to accelerate our existing roadmap."

Telsis CEO Bhavesh Parmar added: "Telsis has a reputation for designing technologies that put human interaction first, and through this relationship we will extend our reach."

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

Hi-tech audio solutions set for accelerated period of adoption

HI-TECH audio solutions will become ever more vital in the coming years and chief among them are voice assistants which are set to triple in usage, especially in the workplace.

"Being stuck to your keyboard and looking at a screen will soon become a thing of the past," stated Jesper Kock, Vice President of Research & Development, Sennheiser.

"This scenario is changing to a world where you can work anywhere and accomplish tasks with just the sound of your voice. Moving beyond voice assistants, the wider

Jesper Kock

trend is how audio solutions use Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to learn about the world around us, responding to environmental changes and learning to omit interruptive and distracting sounds."

By 2020 millennials and Gen Z are expected to be the largest segment of the global workforce, demanding a flexible way of working and technology that fits in with their lifestyles.

"Technology solutions will be required to enable flexibility, functionality and remote working," commented Kock.

"New biometric technology will help to maintain that vital work-life balance.

"Biometric technology solutions will be brought to market enabling employees to intervene and react before stress influences quality of life."

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AFFINITY

Λurora

Sky Business urges partners to go big on bandwidth upgrades

SKY Business believes resellers can steal a march on competitors by offering customers competitively priced high capacity Ethernet services in advance of a surge in bandwidth demands.

Speaking at a partner round table event held in London, Sales Director Nick Powell said the channel should take advantage of high bandwidth options and large backhaul capabilities without delay.

"The dynamics of bandwidth utilisation demand are going up and it isn't going to stop," he said. "If a business customer is growing and upgrading connectivity requirements regularly or wants no constraints, partners can provide a future-proof solution at a good price today, giving them a sticky customer who has an upgrade path in place.

"And I would ask partners to question whether their current carrier has got the backhaul capability to support growth."

Powell's comments were predicated on research commissioned by Sky Business and carried out by telecoms consultant Cartesian, based on hour long interviews with c-level directors in the channel. Questions were focused on business data connectivity trends, the last mile wholesale market and the support channel partners need from a network provider.

The report was discussed at the round table attended by senior representatives from channel heavyweights including Digital Wholesale Solutions, Exponential-e, Marstons Telecoms, CityFibre and Openreach. With the cost of much demanded 1Gbps lines decreasing, it was established that price was not a key issue for channel partners. More important was a national footprint, a robust last mile infrastructure, good network design, backhaul capacity, network resilience, service delivery, a strong commercial partnership and a product roadmap.

'Ease of doing business' and 'keeping things simple' were quoted as key elements, with APIs and portals crucial to the delivery of a quality service. The need for Openreach to use consistent terminology when communicating with customers was also flagged up as a major industry requirement.

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

Nick Powell

Time to strategise fibre

The statistics and trends imply ultimate finality to Ethernet business as they do traditional fixed and mobile voice. At this point – today – all roads lead to FTTP, argues Zen CTO Justin Fielder.

Dynamic industries are open to change, perhaps none more so than the tech-driven comms sector which must always act in the interest of customers wherever they sit in the value chain. Therein lies the CTO's challenge, noted Fielder in his address to delegates at Zen's Partner Conference staged at Manchester's Comedy Store on November 28th. His job is to assess market and technology trends, and strategise based on the facts.

Banking long-term on value creation from Ethernet may not deliver on expectations, believes Fielder. And in a period of 'revolution' in the sector, other things are more important to end users, he stated. The future will be all about ultrafast, and channel partners would do well to recognise that trend sooner rather than later. "Ethernet feels like it's on the rise with massive demand in the market now," said Fielder. "Not surprising when you can get 10 Gig services at a crazy price. But are we going to see the same pattern that's happening in voice? Sales are definitely on a downward trend, crossing zero at approximately 2025.

"Yes you can get 100 Meg or a Gig using Ethernet, and yes there is an intellectual discussion to be had about service levels and quality, but in layman's terms, is there really a difference between Ethernet and FTTP? If the connectivity doesn't go wrong in the first place you don't need a SLA; and if it does go wrong but gets fixed reasonably well, and you have another way of communicating in the interim, does it really matter if you've got a four or five hour SLA, with no guarantee?"

It is a fact that most Ethernet circuits are bought with a back-up, and it's just a matter of time before 10 Gig becomes the same price as one Gig. "The price of EAD will continue as between £1,500 to £2,000 for the foreseeable future, for a Gig, when you can get a Gig-ish full fibre connection for £60," added Fielder. "In layman's terms there is no difference, and fibre rarely goes wrong, it's not like copper. These layman mindsets about such product lines will affect your business."

In an attempt to provide an understanding of the evolving market, Fielder showed that Ethernet will in all probability have an ever less bearing on future revenues. On the other side, the rise of FTTP is already vividly seen in Zen's order book, which is a sign of what is to come in ever more spadefuls over time. "Our user base is currently 97 per cent FTTC, three per cent FTTP, but our order intake is 81 per cent FTTC and 19 per cent FTTP," explained Fielder.

"There are fundamental changes happening among end users. They are the ones that instigate the value chain we sit in. There

Justin Fielder

There is a revolution starting to happen and ultrafast is the game changer

is a revolution starting to happen and ultrafast is the game changer."

Fresh approach
Therefore the channel would do well to think now about jettisoning traditional models if they are to appeal to a different breed of customer with a new persuasion. But to clearly see the writing on the wall old habits in strategic planning must be overturned. "Our industry can be too forward looking, focused on questions like, when is FTTP going to be available everywhere?" commented Fielder. "The industry can also navel gaze and be too immersed in 'today', not what will happen in five years time. We need to consider the next five years, and more particularly, the changing role of voice and Ethernet during that period."

Ofcom data shows how quickly businesses are stopping paying for channels of voice communication, as greater numbers prefer to communicate via other channels than a phone call. "And many partners now communicate with us in a different way," added Fielder. "There is a distinct change and if this trend continues there will only be around two million business lines left by the time Openreach stops supplying them, and less than 500,000 by the time it turns them off, compared to the five to six million lines today."

This is all part of an ongoing process of natural equilibrium from which comms industry players cannot escape. "When was the last time you made a call to Amazon? Never," stated Fielder. "There is a different type of thought leadership within companies regarding how they communicate with customers. Amazon does the basics right, which stops you wanting to communicate with them. This is the direction of change, and all calls are trending towards the same 2022/2023 point – there is a big transformation happening."

As you would expect, for Zen there will be no reversion to a familiar past, rather a leap into a FTTP future with a mindset of everything to play for. Zen's game plan so far? A £20 million investment with 450 exchanges and a 350 Gigabit national network. "We will have 150 exchanges ready for ultrafast and follow fibre cities, which will lead to a series of upgrades on our systems and 700 exchanges that puts us towards 90 per cent coverage with a five terabyte core and national network," said Fielder. "All will be ultrafast ready and with the systems that give channel partners the visibility to monetise the network." ∎

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COMPATIBILITY

IT Lab chiefs talk growth

With their sights set on becoming a £100 million business IT Lab's CEO Peter Sweetbaum and Group Managing Director Geoff Kneen share insights into their growth strategy, including acquisitions and overcoming specific challenges, and shine a light on where to focus to create greater value in customer solutions.

ECI-backed IT Lab's summer acquisition of Milton Keynes-based MSP Mirus IT created a £75 million business and builds on the purchases of Content and Code in September 2018 and Perspective Risk in May 2017. Mirus IT was established in 2002 as a provider of IT support for local SMEs and secured a presence in the managed print sector with the acquisition of Leighton Buzzard business 2r Systems in June 2017. According to Kneen more purchases are on the cards as IT Lab seeks to become a £100 million business over the short-term. "We will get there by completing more acquisitions to finalise our strategy as we continue with our underlying growth rate which remains strong," he said.

Sweetbaum reaffirmed that buy and build has long been a crucial component in IT Lab's growth objectives, and offered some caveats to like-minded but budding MSP leaders. "M&A is not a proxy for a poor sales and marketing strategy," he commented. "If you cannot grow organically and don't have a sales and marketing strategy that fuels growth – you need to rethink.

"M&A is additive, not a solution. We've seen buy and builds in this space that have been crushed by the weight of debt. There was

Peter Sweetbaum

Geoff Kneen

M&A is additive, not a solution. We've seen buy and builds in this space that have been crushed by the weight of debt. There was no vision and they paid the price

no vision and they paid the price. We want to get to the top of the plateau so needed to move up market, become more relevant to clients and more strategic. Signing contracts with SMEs for a few hundreds of pounds a month is not going to get you to £100 million. The final piece is value add delivered though capabilities and experience, through intellectual property and doing something different. It is a combination of these elements, along with timing, that will get you to the top."

IT lab was established in 2001 by Sebastian Grey to deliver technology support and solutions to SMEs in London. In 2016 an MBO was completed and the business became backed by ECI. The company now delivers 24/7 IT managed services, cloud solutions and cyber security services, as well as technical advisory, transition and transformational services across the Microsoft 3 Clouds. As IT Lab sets about creating the conditions for 60 per cent growth it

n science

inevitably has new hurdles to overleap. "The biggest current challenges we face are bringing together the companies we have acquired and taking on larger and more complex clients," explained Kneen. "We have been successful in all aspects of the business but significant changes like this are always going to be a challenge to businesses and people."

IT Lab is now a 750 person organisation serving 890-plus managed service clients including a number of globally recognisable brands such as McLaren, BP and

Signing contracts with SMEs for a few hundreds of pounds a month is not going to get you to £100 million

Crest Nicholson. Outside of the London HQ, IT Lab has two other UK offices in Manchester and Luton, and another office in Cape Town. Its typical customers are mid-market firms that are at a crucial growth stage and aware of technology and how it can help them. "For these businesses we would typically provide strategic guidance strongly aligned to the Microsoft 3 Clouds," added Kneen.

Sweetbaum warned that the costs of providing such support should not be underestimated, particularly in the context of vendors

'changing the model'. "We have to stay tightly aligned with Azure, Dynamics and Office365," noted Sweetbaum. "Our clients do not have the skills and capacity to keep pace with the likes of Microsoft and its monthly, weekly, sometimes daily release cycles. It is a challenge for us and we have to invest to keep up."

Capabilities
IT Lab is a Microsoft Gold Partner in several competencies and needs to be on a permanent lookout to deepen its skills and offerings around the Microsoft stack. "This is particularly true of our work in helping clients benefit fully from the Microsoft 3 Clouds and the transformational capabilities of Dynamics, SharePoint, Teams and Power Apps alongside Office 365 and Azure," added Kneen. "AI and RPA are also key technologies that we are bringing into our wider portfolio."

IT Lab typically has five core service lines into larger customers. "This makes it hard to dislodge us, so it is important to have that breadth of capability," emphasised Sweetbaum. "Of course, we have to evolve and change. Then there is innovation around how you serve, what you serve, how you engage with customers, the systems and tools you use.

"In terms of your value, the more bleeding edge you get the valuation can vary greatly. Your value depends on what you do and how progressive you are. But the fundamentals always apply – do you have customers? Do you have cashflow? Do you have profits?" ∎

Masergy on UK ascent

Masergy has targeted a greater presence in the UK channel as it seeks to take partners global, innovate the network and remove complexity from SD WAN deployment – and according to EMEA Channel Director Emily Nerland the US business is on track in all areas.

International service providers that want to join the vitality of the UK's channel community and become known for all the right reasons must do so by deeds. Especially as the sector goes through a transformation, with lots of disruption and noise, which makes it harder for them to be heard and noticed. But deeds speak louder than noise, and US-based Masergy's strong advance in the UK is testament to this. The same applies to Canadian born Nerland who, with great fortitude, rose to prominence.

Nerland completed an MBA in the United States before moving to England and starting a career in the ICT sector. She was previously a sports journalist before deciding to write her own narrative in comms. "To be effective in either role comes down to being endlessly curious and an ability to connect with people and learn what drives them," she stated.

The former TalkTalk Business International Carriers Account Manager joined Masergy in May this year. She is focused mainly on supporting partners' portfolios in security, international networks and SD WAN. Previous roles include stints at tIPicall UK as Account Manager and Channel Sales and Marketing Manager at Zamir Telecom. Her achievements are indicative of a strength of character that was on display long before she set foot on the comms sector career ladder. "I moved to London with three suitcases but no friends, no family and no job," added Nerland. "I stayed in a hostel and applied for work, then landed a content writing gig for a telecoms company and worked my way up."

The rise of Nerland's and Masergy's influence in the UK channel is a reflection of their approach to partners. But more work needs to be done to further raise the company's profile. "Masergy is relatively unknown in the UK so our message needs to be clearly understood," added Nerland. "In the UK, around 90 per cent of a reseller's business is domestic with perhaps a few international customers. Sometimes resellers aren't aware of their customers' global presence. International relevance can be hard to achieve for partners, with a high cost of admission and far more complexity. Masergy takes those complications off the table. We offer technology on a global scale and need to solidify our place in the UK market as we have in the US."

More than 80 per cent (and rising) of Masergy's bookings and revenues come from the channel across VARs, master and sub-agents, system integrators, solution providers and consultants. The biggest growth area is its global SD WAN which has received a boost from the recently launched AI-based network, security

Emily Nerland

Sometimes resellers aren't even aware of their customers' global presence

and application optimisation solution called AIOps.

Ambitious plans
"Automation is an area that Masergy has been investing in for some time, but our plans are larger," added Nerland. "Masergy wants to be the first to create a fully autonomous network that requires hardly any maintenance throughout the lifecycle. In terms of security, network performance and provisioning, these can all be optimised by integrated AI far better and quicker than a human engineer.

"With the UK's investment in fibre we're getting faster, bigger pipes than ever before that need to be managed, even more so because of the higher levels of traffic and the applications running over them. Network automation

technology is one of the most exciting aspects of our industry right now. Whether you want to call it AI or ML, the benefits of a network that intelligently runs itself are obvious and needed. I believe Masergy will be delivering fully autonomous networking to global enterprises in the next few years, and we will work side by side with partners to take it to market."

As solutions become more complex businesses require higher levels of simplification, and they look to the channel to make technology more accessible. On this, partners must respond before rivals step in, warned Nerland. "I expect there will be fewer but bigger pure resale players," she added. "With businesses opting to find all-encompassing solutions

from a single supplier we will see more mergers of channel players. This will usher in a rebirth of the channel that is far more specialised and application focused."

Another ICT industry genesis must come from equalising the imbalance of males and females in the sector, observed Nerland. A greater focus on the inclusion of women in IT and a push for their representation in technical and senior leadership is 'desperately needed', she said. "Diversity at every level not only fosters innovation, it's a necessity for the future of any company to remain competitive," she stated. "Organisations should care about their employees and recognise that representation matters."

Nerland faced a 'whole array of challenges' that stem from being a woman in a male dominated space. "The biggest challenges are the unconscious biases you face every day, as they are invisible and, by nature, unintentional," she said. "For example, instances of being mistaken as the PA, getting talked over, having my own comments or ideas re-explained back to me. I try to address these on the spot as they arise with varying degrees of success. But I have confidence in who I am and what I'm doing, so I've learned not to take things too personally and just get on with it, and do my best to look into my own biases that may affect others." ∎

3CX

Future Proof Your Business
4 reasons 3CX will boost your bottom line in 2020

If you're an MSP or technology reseller, you've probably spent a large chunk of your career working as a VAR, with revenue traditionally reaching your pocket in large but irregular doses. These days, it's all changed and thankfully for the better, as with the right communications partner, it's easier than ever to build a business model that delivers consistent, yet ambitious growth year on year.

3CX enables just that, by giving its partners the flexibility, support, and value engineering opportunities needed to thrive in today's market. It's no surprise then, that this approach is yielding results for both the company and its partners. 3CX is already reporting double-digit growth for 2019, whilst new partners are regularly reporting up to 50% increases in sales volumes within just a year of introducing 3CX to their portfolio.

Sound too good to be true? Read on to discover how partnering with 3CX can increase your profits:

1: Simple Subscriptions
Subscriptions unlock a myriad of benefits for resellers. Not only does the recurring revenue make it easy to predict cash flows and secure investment but it will also actually increase the value of your business, leaving you with a foolproof exit strategy. Buyers love certainty, so providing it in the form of recurring revenue will result in a higher selling price and a greater % of that price upfront upon closure.

3CX enables resellers to build up a recurring revenue base by providing three simple, editions for its market-leading PBX. Licences are offered annually so there's no upfront payment and rather than paying per extension, customers pay for the number of simultaneous calls they require. Consequently, resellers are able to deliver savings of up to 80% to customers, alongside increasing the value of their own business. With such competitive pricing, you are guaranteed to close more deals than ever before.

2: Complete Solutions
Time-poor customers don't want to be bogged down with servers, hardware and hosting arrangements; they want to outsource this work to their MSP who is expected to deliver the end-to-end solution. This is brilliant news for resellers who can increase their recurring revenue by offering support packages, leasing devices and earning commission from trunks and hosting, but it can also be daunting if you're suddenly expected to add a new kit into your portfolio.

3CX removes this barrier, by providing partners with a wide range of supported SIP trunks, hosting options and compatible hardware. Resellers can offer complete solutions to clients without needing to invest heavily internally and as all supported devices have been approved by 3CX, partners receive free technical support to assist with issues, should any arise.

3: Bespoke Systems
Customers are increasingly looking to consolidate their in-house systems in order to streamline tools, teams, data and processes. Consequently, as an MSP, knowing how to successfully integrate 3rd party platforms with your communications solution can dramatically increase your earning potential, by enabling you to meet these demands and deliver bespoke systems for each client.

Bespoke systems typically demand higher prices, yet historically, only companies with in-house integrators have only been able to offer such services. 3CX has changed this with the introduction of its CRM template generator, which connects restful CRMs to 3CX with only basic programming proficiency needed to get started. Experienced integrators can benefit further and take advantage of 3CX's open APIs to connect virtually any platform to the system.

4: Active Lead Generation
In today's market, growing your business requires a multi-faceted approach; door knocking just isn't going to make the cut! As more and more of the sales process takes place in a digitised environment, it can be difficult for MSPs to break through the online noise. This isn't an issue for 3CX partners, however, as 3CX markets their businesses for them by providing free web listings and commercial case studies that make it easy to attract attention.

What's more, as one of the only channel-focused vendors remaining in the UK, 3CX doesn't sell solutions directly to end-users. Partners are relied on for consultation and deployment, so all product inquiries are referred directly to resellers. It's no wonder, then, that 3CX has the busiest website within the industry as well as the largest lead distribution programme. With fully qualified leads topping up your existing sales pipeline, you're guaranteed continuous growth with 3CX.

Deliberately disruptive and designed with resellers in mind, it's easy to grow your business with 3CX. You can find out more about the 3CX Partner Programme and get your hands on a free trial at www.3cx.com

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PBXact Cloud
Modernizing the Way Businesses Communicate

We sat down with our Director of Sales in Europe, Mr. Simon Horton, to see what he had to say about the UK market and how hosted business phone systems are revolutionizing the industry.

In your years of experience in the telecom industry, have you ever seen a sudden shift in needs and expectations from customers?

Simon: "Yes, customer needs and phone system requirements change all the time, but the shift of business moving to the cloud is proving to be more than just a trend. Customers are looking for an easy to use phone system that is reliable and scalable with their future needs and growth. PBXact Cloud can easily meet those needs while providing the popular UC features that customers are requiring in this technology age. Providing an affordable, hosted UC solution is certainly the most common request we hear from our partners and customers. The other big change we see is that customers want to spread the cost rather than pay upfront. With PBXact cloud and Sangoma phone rental that is completely possible."

What are some of the biggest concerns customers have about moving to the "Cloud"?

Simon: "We hear all the time: "Can I trust something that is not in my direct control?" "Does the hosting vendor properly maintain their data centre?" "Being dependent on an ISP, should I be worried?" The list goes on and on. It is a fact that moving to a hosted business phone system is now safer than ever. Data centres are taking extra precautions to have multiple underlying carriers and redundancy procedures in place to ensure uptime for their customers. Rest assured knowing that with proper network readiness, moving your phone system to the cloud is perfectly safe and reliable."

Last question, Sangoma is offering one full year of PBXact Cloud service for free when you sign a 3yr contract. Has Sangoma ever attempted like this before?

Simon: "This is unprecedented, we have never done anything like this before. Sangoma is confident PBXact Cloud is a perfect phone system for businesses of all sizes. We wanted to make sure that if you have thought about moving from your current provider to a hosted phone system or trying PBXact Cloud, this is an offer you cannot refuse."

About Sangoma

Founded in 1984, Sangoma is a leading voice and Unified Communications (UC) solution provider and the primary sponsor and developer of Asterisk, the world's most widely used open-source communications solutions. The company has cultivated over 1.5 million deployments in support of 35 million endpoints globally. Sangoma believes organizations can achieve greater levels of success by having access to powerful, affordable communications solutions from a reliable partner and that building tomorrow's solutions will help the world to connect and collaborate in new ways.

Fury over Labour's pie in the sky broadband plan

Labour's policy on free fibre broadband must rank the most senseless in political history. It would lead to the near demolition of one of the UK's most invested in and thriving entrepreneurial sectors.

The significance of this atom bomb of a proposal transcends politics by an unmeasurable stretch, yet Ofcom, despite the unprecedented nature of this explosive assault, told Comms Dealer: "We cannot comment on party political pledges during an election period." What Ofcom thinks about Labour's free broadband proposal and pledge to nationalise Openreach will probably not be known for many more days, as it is under a convenient gagging order until after the election. It will be days or weeks until we find out if

it was consulted for expert advice on this blinder of an idea. For now, the action Ofcom will take, if any, to offset the impact of Labour's devastating gem on the UK's comms provider sector will also be a mystery, along with its view on whether Labour is right to blame the private sector for Britain's lack of full fibre roll out – when the opposite is true.

To say that the panacea to the UK's fibre deficit – namely the trail blazing private tech sector – is the cause of the problem is nonsensical, edging towards madness some might say.

This crass populism could pull the rug from under our sector and hand the fibre market to the monopoly – which is overwhelmingly blamed as the root cause of our digital infrastructure predicament – but now a knight in shining armour.

Our evolved industry ecosystem, which supports end users, would be rocked to the core. Many ICT provider businesses may go under, jobs would be at risk, UK plc and vital public sector organisations and their critical functions could be left stranded as a central component of their

ICT support mechanism is fatally weakened. This is a house of cards.

Should warped political thinking be allowed to shove a thriving sector out of sync, bulldozed by interventionism with no hesitancy for strategic thought? And with all this wisdom on display barely a mention of 5G, a potential fibre replacement. When that penny drops, what next? Nationalise the operators and dole out 5G gratis?

Common sense dictates that this farce can only end with Labour in a red-faced

backtracking exercise to save its face. But we cannot ignore that the industry could face its greatest ever battle should the conditions arise that enable this fancy to go ahead, even when the numbers don't add up. BT has conceded that the roll out would cost double the estimate coming in at circa £40bn.

In reality-check mode however, we all must see that this rabid pledge will most certainly end up biting its architects on the rear end. Let us hope these bums won't be on seats in Parliament come Christmas. ∎

Demolition job would kibosh FTIR

Government figures indicate that the UK has up to 10 per cent full fibre connections and lags behind many of our key competitors such as Spain (71 per cent), Portugal (89 per cent) and France (28 per cent). The Conservative Government's view is that without change full fibre broadband networks will at best only ever reach three quarters of the country, and it would take more than 20 years to do so. So the Government launched its Future Telecoms Infrastructure

Review (FTIR) published on July 23rd 2018 (which forms part of its Modern Industrial Strategy). The Review details measures and proposals designed to catalyse the demise of copper while broadening access to spectrum for 5G services, slashing the cost of rolling out fibre broadband and prioritising remote rural areas for funding.

The DCMS Secretary of State at the time, Jeremy Wright, commented: "We want everyone in the UK to benefit

from world class connectivity no matter where they live, work or travel. This radical new blueprint for the future of telecommunications in this country will increase competition and investment in full fibre broadband, create more commercial opportunities and make it easier and cheaper to roll out infrastructure for 5G."

The Government said that running copper and fibre networks in parallel is both 'costly and inefficient' and a fibre switchover

strategy will be necessary to stimulate demand for fibre and enable new networks to achieve scale quicker.

Industry-led
The Government also said that the switchover should be industry-led with competition between private organisations driving growth, with an expectation to cover the majority of the country by 2030. It also said the timing will ultimately be dependent on the pace of fibre roll out and on the subsequent take-up of fibre products.

The crux of the matter is that the FTIR is designed to drive competition and commercial investment in full fibre networks across as much of the UK as possible. But Labour's free broadband pledge flies in the face of Conservative strategy and could not be more different, putting the full fibre task into public hands in the belief that private infrastructure organisations and a competitive market are not up to the job of delivering world class connectivity across the country. ∎

Analysis: Simplistic vision does not stand scrutiny

Why Labour's 'like it or lump it' broadband dream is doomed simplicitism blinded by political ambition.

That the Government would be a key influencer in delivering fibre and 5G is a given, but who could have predicted Labour's proposed interventionism? It did not take long for the revelation of Labour's plan to nationalise Openreach – along with BT's technology arm and other elements of the Group – to morph into an unprecedented farce in which there will be no commercial model for broadband.

When he spilled the beans on Labour's intention to own the UK's broadband sector, should it come to power, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell declared the establishment of a system of smash and grab on three counts – it would rapaciously grasp the full fibre sector, pocket chunks of BT, and hijack altnets that do not fall into line – all under the 'British Broadband' slogan.

The predicament of altnets is thus: Virgin, Sky, TalkTalk, CityFibre and the many other full fibre trail blazers will be forced into an access arrangement, or they will be strong armed to work alongside the Government, or if minded not to cooperate they will become part of British Broadband, because, says McDonnell, 'they have failed'. "The private sector has not delivered on the

scale that we need, nor fast enough," he added. He seems oblivious as to why the UK has a paucity of fibre, and equally ignorant about the inroads and achievements delivered by the private sector in response to a leaden footed incumbent that until recently habitually protected past investments.

The Conservative Government has so far invested £5 billion in support of full fibre, which McDonnell says is not enough. So Labour has pledged to add £15 billion, an amount that would give it an automatic right to own the broadband industry and bring part of BT into public ownership, said McDonnell. Like it or not, Government bonds will take the place of shares and pensions. But the impact of a state owned entity on BT's pension scheme undercuts the grand project's rationale alone. If those paying into a BT pension do not gleefully embrace a two per cent Government Bond dividend instead of a BT one that offers seven per cent, for example, perhaps they too will be nationalised.

McDonnell says this fiasco is all about 'hard nosed economics', but Labour has underestimated the cost of its proposed venture by multiple factors. The only sensible response

John McDonnell

to Labour's aspiration in broadband is to view it through a lens of George Orwell's 'doublethink'. Having said that the existing commercial model has not worked, Labour wants to replace it with another one, but less invigorated, less entrepreneurial and state owned, where lower exec salaries would no doubt lead to a leadership and innovation brain drain – all dumbing down British Broadband.

Uncompromising
In two BBC interviews McDonnell's strident, contemptuous and uncompromising tone has left many in the industry shocked and puzzled. But what is more surprising is the simplistic nature of his and Labour's thinking following their light bulb and damascene moment. According to Labour's plan

the day-to-day running of the British Broadband network will be financed by hefty taxes levied on multinationals, especially the tech giants like Apple, Facebook, Google and Amazon. And its figures are overly reliant on a hoped-for £59 billion increase in fibre related productivity.

Nothing seems to strike McDonnell as too difficult to achieve, because he is blinded by political ambition, knows nothing about the task in hand and cares not a jot about the people who will be affected by Labour's dismissal of the nation's connectivity providers. There has not been a word about the devastating impact of these flawed plans on the UK service provider sector, where successful companies will go to the wall and many fine people put out of work through no fault

of their own. Crucially, a commercial model does not coexist with Labour's vision for British Broadband.

It is therefore inevitable that ICT provider customer bases could in time be raided by Government. There is also no question that the channel's thriving businesses will be devalued and investors will run to the hills. It does not take a wild stretch of the imagination to envisage how more elements of the ICT value chain could be brought under the Government's wing. Notably, there has been little clarification on who will own and support the end customer. It is likely that end users will not want to be British Broadband customers. But they will have no choice.

McDonnell's idealistic vision is also for free broadband to promote a more equal and inclusive society, in which those yet to be born are a far greater priority than people working in today's thriving ICT service provider industry . "If we do not do this, future generations will not forgive us," he said.

Brace yourself, John, should Labour win the election – because in your world there is no logical thinking nor equality of consideration, and the ICT sector is not in a forgiving mood. ∎
Report continues overleaf

The high cost of Labour's
A crushed sector, lost jobs

The stakes could not be higher for the comms sector as the country goes to the polls on December 12th. Here, Megabuyte.com Analyst Philip Carse provides a doomsday assessment of a Labour win and free broadband.

The Labour Party's newly published manifesto has confirmed its proposed policy of providing free broadband to all UK homes and business by 2030, facilitated by the nationalisation of BT Openreach and gaining access rights to existing infrastructure, with operating costs funded by a levy on multinationals, including tech giants. This radical, Marxist proposal has attracted much negative comment from the UK telecoms industry and elsewhere but, leaving aside the politics, what is its likely impact financially and is it actually achievable?

We believe that this policy would cause immense damage to a vibrant, innovative, complex and strategically important telecoms sector that (based on the Megabuyte company database) is investing £8.3 billion annually, contributes almost £4 billion in tax and dividends and employs over 200,000 staff. In fact, giving away a product that currently generates estimated revenues of £10 billion would wipe out two thirds of industry EBITDA and remove the cash flow that pays for investments. In addition, we believe that the policy would lead to a slower roll out of full fibre than under the current primarily private market system supplemented with public subsidy. As with anything given away for free, someone has to pay.

Current state of fibre play
While we believe that the proposed policy will actually result in worse outcomes, there is no denying that the UK lags many countries in terms of full fibre broadband (FTTP), with commonly quoted figures of around eight per cent penetration (of 30 million premises).

Contributory factors include, in more fibred countries, a higher proportion of cheaper and easier to upgrade multiple dwelling units and/or the availability of sharing of the incumbent telco's ducts and poles, while UK-specific factors include BT's decision several years ago to focus on expanding fibre only to the cabinet (FTTC) rather than to the premise. The flip side of that decision is a very high penetration (over 95 per cent) of superfast broadband services of 30Mbps and above, which for most uses are more than sufficient.

However, there is now clear and increasing momentum behind FTTP builds. BT Openreach is upgrading the equivalent of 1.2 million premises a year to fibre, a run rate up 15 per cent just in
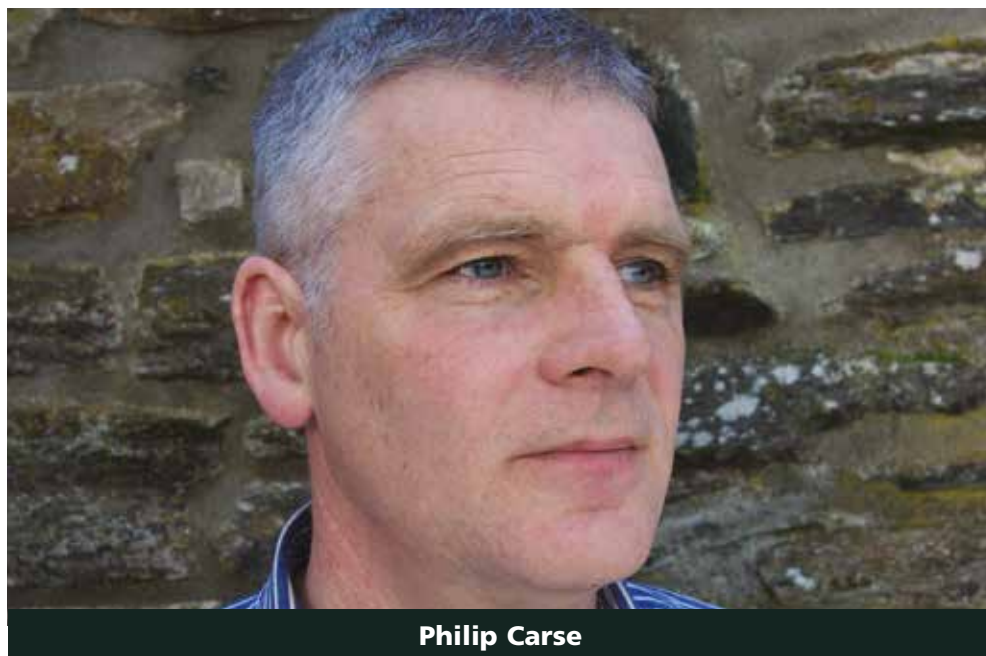
Philip Carse

This policy would cause immense damage to a vibrant, innovative, complex and strategically important telecoms sector

the last quarter, while Virgin Media's Project Lightning network expansion is running at 480,000 premises a year.

CityFibre is targeting five million premises by 2025, with funding for the first two million in place. TalkTalk is targeting three million premises with its FibreNation business (for which it was securing a buyer/funding partner) and there are a multitude of smaller businesses building out FTTP or wireless equivalents to

homes and/or businesses, including KCOM, Gigaclear, Glide, Community Fibre, Toob and Truespeed.

Investor-driven
Many of these builds are being funded by investors taking a very long-term view, particularly in rural areas where typical build costs per home passed of £1,000-plus (or £3,000-plus per initial customer at a 33 per cent penetration) will take well over a decade to recoup. Companies such as

CityFibre and KCOM have been taken private primarily to be able to borrow more than institutional investors would tolerate, to speed up their network builds. Meanwhile, existing public subsidies are helping. For example, Glide told us that broadband vouchers justify using new fibre to business park premises rather than existing BT copper (via sub loop unbundling), while BT pole and duct sharing is now considered a proper option, reducing build costs

free broadband proposal:
s and slower fibre roll out

by a third or more and speeding up roll outs.

Turning to Labour's proposals, and a simplistic view would be that they are very similar to the proposed nationalisation of other utilities such as water, railways and electricity, but with free services added. However, whereas the other utilities have a limited range of fairly basic and well defined services (water, sewage, electricity, a train journey) delivered over fairly uniform and common infrastructure, the UK telecoms market is a highly complex value chain of hundreds if not thousands of products delivered by thousands of companies ranging from deep infrastructure owners, to product and service developers, to resellers whose role is to mix products from multiple providers to meet their end customers' needs.

Complex scenarios
Within this, even broadband comes in many shapes and sizes, varying according to networks (fixed, wireless, satellite), up and down speeds, latency, contention, usage restrictions, Quality of Service commitments etc. In addition, broadband is just one, albeit very large, part of the market, with any proposal to make it free likely to have very significant consequences for the industry.

Let's put some numbers around this. Megabuyte's Telecoms Services peer group contains some 200 companies that publish

detailed accounts (out of 432 on the database, and well over 2,000 that resell telecoms services). These generate estimated aggregate revenues of £58.3 billion and EBITDA of £16.1 billion while investing £8.3 billion (to support balance sheet fixed assets of £90.1 billion).

The companies collectively also pay £0.8 billion in profit related taxes and £2.9 billion in dividends. We estimate that almost three quarters of revenues are generated by public listed companies – particularly BT, Vodafone, Virgin Media (Liberty Global), O2 (Telefonica), 3UK (Hutchison)

To give away broadband would wipe out two thirds of UK telecoms industry EBITDA profits of £16 billion

and TalkTalk). Hence, most of these dividends go to institutional investors, much of which goes into our pensions and savings. The industry employs around 200,000 staff at an average salary of £46k, about a third higher than the UK average full time wage, highlighting the inherently skilled nature of telecoms engineers.

Note that the £58.3 billion revenues are somewhat larger than the £34 billion number published by Ofcom for the UK telecoms market for 2018. The difference includes wholesale revenues not captured by Ofcom, international revenues (especially for BT) as well

as related services such as TV, IT and satellite services, telecoms equipment, consulting and support and so on. As such, it represents four to five per cent of UK GDP. But its impact is far more substantial given the importance of communications in today's digital economy.

Revenue wipe out
Looking at broadband a bit closer, Ofcom data shows that UK consumers spend around £12.7 billion annually (£40.60 per month per line) on fixed line services, of which broadband probably accounts for around a half. Back in the day when

Ofcom published estimates of business telecoms spend, this accounted for a quarter of the market, so it would not be unreasonable to come to a back of the envelope estimate that broadband accounts for perhaps £10 billion of market revenues (or looked at another way, an average of just £29 per month for each of the UK's 30 million premises). In a free broadband world, this would come straight off the top line, wiping out almost two thirds of industry EBITDA and effectively removing the cash flow that pays for current capex levels.

Whichever way one looks at it, taking away the circa

£10 billion revenues of a core product would blow a big hole in the industry, not just the mainly fixed line players such as BT, Virgin and TalkTalk but also the mobile players such as Vodafone and O2 that would suffer from substitution of free fibre broadband for mobile data services.

Aside from completely upsetting a complex value chain, our view is that Labour's proposal would result in fibre broadband roll out ending up much slower than under the current environment. Consider what would happen on the 13th December if a majority Labour Government was elected. It is unlikely that fibre roll outs would stop immediately given ongoing contractual commitments with the likes of civil engineering contractors.

BT and to an extent Virgin Media may decide to continue at their current roll out rates to avoid immediately antagonising a new Government. However, TalkTalk would almost certainly give up on FibreNation, and the likes of CityFibre (which has reportedly already put on hold an enhanced roll out depending clarity) and Gigaclear would probably quickly scale back their builds given the now much lower valuations of those networks.

Meanwhile, the nationalisation of BT Openreach would not happen overnight, not least if a new Government proposed a low price. Assuming it happened

eventually (taking years rather than months with many legal and other issues), Labour proposes that new network build/upgrades should be focused initially on harder to reach rural areas, where build costs and therefore time to build are two to three times those in urban areas.

Hence, this would shift what is a reasonably balanced current build across urban and rural areas to a more rural-focused, and slower one. In addition, the fact that BT believes that Labour has massively under estimated the revenues and ongoing operating costs adds to the impression that the plan has not been fully thought through or understood by the policymakers. Indeed, for such a dramatic policy proposal, the Labour Party manifesto is alarmingly bereft of detail.

Bleak prospect
In conclusion, we estimate that the plan to give away broadband (which currently attracts estimated revenues of £10 billion) would basically wipe out two thirds of UK telecoms industry EBITDA profits of £16 billion (and hence the funding for current capex of around £8 billion) as well as cause untold disruption to a very competitive, innovative industry that provides a crucial underpinning to the emerging digital economy, endangering many thousands of the estimated 200,000 jobs in the industry. Also, the policy would likely stall the current momentum behind FTTP builds. ■
Report continues overleaf

Crazed full fibre pledge denounced as 'crackpot'

Labour's desperate and populist vote-clincher would devastate the UK's vibrant ICT service provider sector. So no surprise that the industry's blood pressure shot up as opponents to the madcap free broadband venture let rip.

P rime Minister Boris Johnson's reaction to Labour's proposed nationalisation of Openreach, to create a new entity called British Broadband as a vehicle to deliver free fibre broadband to every premises in Britain by 2030 as a basic citizen right, was to describe the pledge as 'crackpot'. Likewise, the announcement has not been greeted in the comms sector as the gold standard in political thinking, and even BT has put some distance between itself and Labour's potential and exclusive partnership with the incumbent.

In a statement BT told Comms Dealer: "It should be a top political priority to supercharge the roll out of full fibre broadband and 5G right across the UK, so we can build the digital economy of the future. Whatever the result of the election, we'd encourage the next Government to work with all parts of the industry to achieve that. It's a national mission that's bigger than any one company."

Another danger is that the public's addiction to broadband is far stronger than its knowledge of the sector that provides it, which is perhaps as much misunderstood as it is, sometimes, maligned. When confronted by Labour's plans to offer free bandwidth, swathes of the population will think it's a good idea, despite it being based on not even a modicum of rational thinking. All future education on the matter must show in bold type that the answer does not lie in nationalising Openreach nor its rival altnets. "It is competition between network builders that is unlocking significant private investment from companies like CityFibre which in turn is sparking other network builders to increase their own full fibre footprint investment," stated a CityFibre spokesperson.

Alarming
Lloyd Felton, CEO of County Broadband, which is rolling out full fibre networks across rural East Anglia, noted: "This announcement shows an alarming lack of understanding about the complex nature of full fibre

Tom O'Hagan

This smacks of desperation and is clearly not thought through. It would kill innovation in the sector, give consumers and businesses zero choice and potentially put tens of thousands of people in the industry out of work.

roll outs, and the fact that, unlike by comparison the rail industry that operates rail franchises, the comms sector has already invested billions of pounds into building its own infrastructure over which the service is delivered, in direct competition to BT. The proposal would almost

Paul Billingham

Free broadband would result in millions of lost revenue across the industry and have a negative impact on valuations if it was to ever be imposed.

certainly lead to delays, or at worst, derailment of existing full fibre investment and new network roll outs. There is no mention of how customers would be served and supported and no recognition of what has been achieved by the many alternative network providers who are currently active in providing a competitive full fibre solution."

Knight Corporate Finance Director Paul Billingham said Labour's proposal 'would take us back to the 70s'. "The ICT sector arose as a result of deregulation and has seen a transformation in service quality, choice and competition," he stated. "It has resulted in an unprecedented level of

job and wealth creation that benefits the UK economy. Clearly, free broadband would result in millions of lost revenue across the industry and this would undoubtedly have a negative impact on valuations if it was to ever be imposed."

According to Virtual1 CEO Tom O'Hagan, Labour winning the election and nationalising BT with free fibre broadband for all is 'terrifying'. "This smacks of desperation and is clearly not thought through," he said. "It would kill innovation in the sector, give consumers and businesses zero choice and potentially put tens of thousands of people in the industry out of work.

"What happens to the companies that have invested and committed billions so far? They will all cease building and potentially trading if Labour get into power. The break up will take years with all the legal cases, and fibre builds will grind to a halt, putting us in reverse."

Marcus Allchurch, Partner at Acuity Advisors, added: "With billions of pounds of private investment going into delivering regionally relevant ultrafast solutions, this announcement shows deep naivety and an irresponsible approach to policy setting." ∎

When the chips are down, who has your back?

Have the comms sector's guardians reacted adequately to Labour's big threat?

Hats off to the Chair of ITSPA Eli Katz for his unequivocal and fired-up retort to Labour's British Broadband proposal. In a statement he did not mix words in expressing profound concern over the impact of Labour's plan on the industry and customers, warning that it would 'wreak havoc', 'threaten the competitive telecoms market' and bring 'huge upheaval' to the sector and service providers. ISPA too hit the nail on the head, albeit with a slightly smaller hammer.

This is what you would expect from any comms sector trade body, to go near apoplectic over Labour's proposed nationalisation of broadband provision, but others have shown themselves meek and mild in the face of provocation. There is a sense they are treading on egg shells. You would be forgiven for thinking that over polite responses to Labour's broadband-grenade suggest just another day-to-day concern, rather than the potential destruction of the comms provider sector.

In sparing their blushes they shall remain anonymous,

Eli Katz

away from the spotlight as they wait in the wings, until the day they too take centre stage and blast full blown condemnation on this rotten ruse.

Lacking mettle

One industry body's official statement softened its opposing stance to Labour's proposal with plaudits for its sentiment regarding the need for more full fibre in the ground, as though the grenade was lobbed from a sensible and charitable place. That labour's proposal would not be a good move for the service provider sector appeared as a side thought rather than a primary point of contention.

Key industry bodies did not even issue an official response to the press. And

the hottest comms sector talking point for decades is a taboo subject for Ofcom until some time after the election.

The hope must be that the Conservatives win the election. But as long as Labour pledges to spawn Broadband Britain, even if it loses the vote, the current uncertainty will continue for years to come. Future elections will see the comms sector wracked by anxiety, fearful of a Labour win. So now is the time to prepare for the worst and ask: When the chips are down, who's got our back?

To be heard and heeded in times of crisis, the industry requires a united alliance that speaks with one voice, led by a comms provider champion – sooner rather than later. ∎

Labour's plans threaten th

For the wider channel these proposals are obviously a worry. My first reaction was 'how on earth is Mr Corbyn going to be able to do this'. The numbers don't stack up and there would be so many obstacles to overcome. He must make part of BT want to be nationalised again, be able to buy it and then agree to it with the shareholders etc. The value of BT is so great that he is never going to be able to do it for £20bn. It's not just buying it but sustaining the service. It's pie in the sky in my opinion. He's throwing big numbers at big things with no substance or planning, hoping to appeal to a certain sector of the electorate, such as millennials in this case. But there's pretty much free Wi-Fi outside of people's homes anyway now so the benefits will be limited.

GRAHAM WILKINSON
BEYOND

Labour's pledge on free broadband is absurd. Without a competitive market there will be nobody to deliver full fibre! UK coverage of NGA style broadband networks (FTTC etc.) is 95% this year (only 83% across the EU). It's a different story for modern 'ultrafast broadband' (100Mbps+) and 'full fibre' (FTTP) networks. The main reason? Until recently, Openreach was laser focused on deploying cheaper and slower hybrid-fibre (FTTC). By comparison FTTP is much faster, but also very expensive and slow to deploy. Lack of competition in infrastructure has meant that Openreach has prioritised the roll-out of connectivity that preserved the revenues generated through its legacy copper network. Now, CityFibre is rolling out £2.5bn of fibre infrastructure and TalkTalk is rolling out its 'Fibre Nation' at a further £1.5bn. The TMT/ICT sectors are prime examples of where market economics drive R&D, delivering innovative solutions for consumers and businesses alike.

CHRIS GOODMAN
FOCUS

The entire telecoms sector has repeatedly raised strong concerns about the deep flaws in Labour's proposal. The proposal is expected to disrupt current rollout plans, prevent families and businesses from accessing gigabit broadband for years on end and threaten thousands of ISPs who sell products and services through UK broadband infrastructure and the tens of thousands of people they employ. Broadband is fundamentally different to rail, electricity and water. Rollout is largely privately funded, and we have a vibrant and innovative market with hundreds of SMEs competing with each other, offering real choice to consumers. There is a real risk that Labour's plans jeopardise thousands of jobs and the future of small and medium sized businesses in the sector. Any plan to fundamentally change the telecoms sector should be based on a proper understanding of the market and through constructive discussions with the industry.

ANDREW GLOVER
ISPA

When I started in telecommunications in 1984, BT was pretty much the only show in town. A 60-minute call to my mother 30 miles away cost £5 (£15 in today's money) and a person could wait months, sometimes years, to get a new service installed. Today, the same call costs practically nothing and there are over 400,000 UK SMEs in the ICT sector, employing nearly 2m people. One of the main reasons cited for liberalising telecommunications was BT's inability to meet the demand from a deregulated finance sector. However, allowing Openreach to maintain its virtual monopoly over the local loop was a mistake. Costs and lead times stayed high and service levels low. In June 2019, Ofcom forced Openreach to rent its ducts and poles to third parties, capping prices. Along with the launch of 5G, the UK population is about to enjoy a revolution in broadband speeds.

ANDREW DICKINSON
JOLA

I stopped paying my dues to Labour in September 2017 after Jeremy Corbyn patronised a closed audience in Glasgow telling us that Dudley was in fact in the West Midlands and the utopia of communities coming together would create jobs and boost the economy. His latest hair brained scheme trumps that: free full fibre broadband for all through the part nationalisation of Openreach. Let's be clear it's re-nationalisation and blowing apart the market economy. Granted, due to massive challenges and lack of competition, the Openreach fibre rollout has been painfully slow. This is changing with challengers including CityFibre and TTB, with huge capital investment, making great strides. Now Mr Corbyn is advocating we monopolise again and nationalise challengers. Let's be clear, whether he comes to power or not, the message is damaging to our industry and has created public expectation and needless debate, spooked the markets and PE. Total madness.

FRASER FERGUSON
KUBENET

Whilst true that improvements could be made to current internet connectivity in the UK, nationalisation is not the best option to solve the problem. The main cause of the poor connectivity to date was due to a lack of competition against Openreach, which meant they could focus on deploying slower, hybrid-fibre solutions that didn't deliver the best service but protected their revenues. Change has now come with the likes of TalkTalk and CityFibre rolling out a combined fibre infrastructure of £4bn. Industry is now transforming the connectivity landscape and providing better option for all involved. Labour's suggestion to nationalise the Openreach service shows a commercial naivety; it would have a major effect on the business economy as hundreds of businesses would be negatively affected - both those who make a living from providing connectivity services to other businesses and also those who will be taxed to pay for it.

CHRIS MORRISEY
LILY COMMS

I n its long history, Comms Dealer has never taken a stance on a political issue, but we felt we had to declare a position on Labour's policy to provide free broadband and nationalise Openreach. This is an existential threat to our amazing industry, thousands of livelihoods and will inevitably lead to an investment vacuum across the ICT sector.

A Labour win on election day and subsequent implementation of the party's plans would put hundreds of service providers and resellers into a tailspin and many would ultimately crash and burn.

Putting some numbers onto this statement, analyst Megabuyte says our industry is investing £8.3bn annually, contributes almost £4bn in tax and dividends and employs over 200,000 staff. "Giving away a product that currently generates estimated revenues of £10bn would wipe out

e industry we have built

two thirds of industry EBITDA and remove the cash flow that pays for investments," says Chief Analyst Philip Carse.

Undeniably, Britain is lagging behind other countries with fibre rollout due to the legacy copper network in place and everyone feels for businesses in rural areas that lack decent broadband as they are literally out of the digital loop.

Nevertheless, private sector companies such as TalkTalk and CityFibre, alongside a more flexible Openreach, are addressing these issues and we believe will fix them much faster than the time it will take for Openreach to reconfigure its operations as a nationalised entity. Surprisingly, some industry leaders are sitting on the fence on Labour's proposals, not wishing to enter a political debate. The majority however have no qualms. Our Kaleidoscope this month testifies to that.

Like many others in our dynamic industry, I was truly shocked to hear the breaking news of a Labour pledge of free broadband for all by 2030. We are all aware of the many organisations responsible for building networks to deliver the connectivity to homes and businesses across the whole of the UK. Some are household names and others channel focused companies. Lots of these bear the cost of building these networks. Billions have been spent so far and we know this will take decades to see the return on the investment already made. Free always sounds great, however it comes at a much higher cost to our channel of which there can only be one outcome if this absurd plan came to fruition: companies going out of business overnight, loss of jobs, lack of expertise moving forward and the large incumbent provider once again leading a very slow charge.

JUSTIN BLAINE
NTA

At a time when we are finally starting to see some good movement on the pace of full fibre rollout, surely now is not the time to renationalise parts of the industry and potentially slow-down that investment. I do agree however we have some way to go in the UK. We remain woefully behind the rest of the world with fibre penetration at just 9%. But regardless of personal politics, it's good to see that better connectivity for this country is high on the political agenda. Full fibre needs to be available as quickly as possible, at an affordable price, for all businesses and consumers. TalkTalk Business will work closely and constructively with any future government that shares this ambition. However, we firmly believe that competition and both private investment and targeted public subsidy is the most effective way to accelerate the investment in connectivity that Britain needs.

RICHARD THOMPSON
TALKTALK

This pledge is impractical based on cost alone. Labour's projections claim it will cost circa £250m per annum to run and maintain a full fibre network. This seems absurd considering that BT's current annual operating costs exceed £2bn! Then there's the pension deficit nationalisation would create, plus the inevitable and costly legal battle brought by BT's shareholders and other private investors. Putting cost aside, surely our society will benefit more from a competitive market that encourages value, choice and service as differentiators. One national provider, directly controlled by government, is a scary thought. The closest real-world example is Australia where, despite being massively overdue and overbudget, the speeds and technology delivered are nothing like what was promised. Nationalising a buoyant market isn't sensible. Investing into education so that we can close the skills gap and become an even more attractive hub for tech would be a far better use of funds.

VINCENT DISNEUR
UNION STREET

It would seem that the Labour Party has been living in a time warp for the last 40 years, highlighted by their focus on fixed line internet, totally ignoring the mobile networks which many use for their primary internet access service today, something that will be further accelerated by 5G. They would be much better off focusing on areas of increasing concern around how we are going to deal with the monopoly that the big USA companies namely Google, Amazon, Microsoft and Facebook have across all areas of both our business and social lives, including of course data ownership. If we all wake up on December 13th and Labour are in power, as The Sun newspaper once famously said, "would the last one out please switch off the lights?"

DAVID DADDS
VANILLA IP

The idea of nationalising BT with free fibre broadband for all is terrifying. It would kill innovation in our vibrant sector, give consumers and business zero choice and potentially put tens of thousands of people in the industry out of work. We are actually in a really exciting period with fibre builds. Openreach and many alternative fibre operators are actively building networks across the UK. Yes, it takes time, but there is lots of investment coming into the sector and creating jobs while providing a highly competitive landscape for consumers and businesses alike. What happens to the companies that have invested and committed billions so far? They will all cease building and potentially trading if this policy was to come to fruition. The break up will take years, notwithstanding all of the legal cases whilst the fibre builds grind to a halt putting us all into reverse.

TOM O'HAGAN
VIRTUAL1

Labour's bombshell, which I'm not sure everyone in Corbyn's camp was expecting, could cost nearer to £83bn than the £20bn claimed. It makes me wonder if this is achievable or simply another glib, ill-conceived, un-costed vote-catcher. It is also important to remember that despite privatisation resulting in better services and increased investment, the UK is still struggling to get broadband, particularly in rural areas. But Labour's plan would be a massive step backwards. It would be catastrophic to a healthy, opportunity-rich and thriving industry which provides the foundations for an emerging digital economy. Giving away broadband to homes and businesses clearly demonstrates Labour's complete and utter misunderstanding of where a large portion of the nation's prosperity, jobs, security and wealth comes from. Three words spring to mind….out of touch. To quote Margaret Thatcher: 'The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people's money'.

PADDY COPPINGER
WHITE HORSE TELECOM

Building Digital Britain

Everyone agrees that the road to Digital Britain is redefining how the ICT channel 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...

To form a solid relationship between full fibre, 5G, the evolving network architecture and emerging digital services economies – and assess their impact on the future success of ICT providers – we need a bigger vision to identify real next generation market opportunities. Therefore Comms Vision sought to clarify the output of pure fibre and 5G beyond pointing to infrastructure, faster speeds and greater capacity. Why? Because it's time to fully decipher the technologies, services and market opportunities that will be delivered over a modern network – and ultimately come to underpin channel businesses in Digital Britain.

Comms Vision also explored the role of industry collaboration in building a coherent strategy for the all-digital future, and how coopetition could accelerate the drive to Digital Britain and reshape how the wholesale channel operates. We asked what more can be done to speed up progress and channel growth in this key mobilisation phase of Digital Britain. Moreover, we assessed how the channel's ICT resellers can make sense of these seismic industry changes and look ahead with a holistic strategic vision.

5G, like full fibre, merits meticulous attention. Given the frequency with which 5G launches are likely to occur in the coming months and years, Comms Vision was a timely platform for ICT providers to receive an update on 5G right now. It is expected that 5G will create a wireless connectivity network that opens the gates for an unprecedented wave of innovation as a platform for the future, providing a boost to technologies such as AI, Machine Learning, the IoT and smart cities. But questions needed to be answered: What will be the true impact of 5G on the channel? Do the underlying economics work? What does 5G mean for businesses? Should resellers plot a 5G roadmap now?

Strategic issues

Comms Vision addressed these key strategic issues, shining a light on how next generation connectivity will reshape our approach to all markets, exploring how 5G advances the ultimate goal of seamless converged connectivity, connecting customers to a network that intelligently links 4G, 5G, Wi-Fi and full fibre. For the ICT channel, 5G, like any new technology, can only be defined by the business case and proposition that makes it real and substantive, and Comms Vision provided clarity on this.

For the channel to prevail in Digital Britain, common sense dictates a joint consideration of 5G and full fibre, the evolving network, OTT services, new digital economies and the rise of managed services. How they all interlock to drive the development of a digital channel fit to deliver connected Britain is now a priority matter.

As you will see in the following pages, Comms Vision provided delegates with an understanding of these pressing matters, and enabled them to take the strategic action required to prepare their organisations to thrive in Digital Britain. ∎
Special report – pages 40-53

SWITCH ONCE
SWITCH F∞REVER

Energy used to be just a one-off payment and Fidelity Energy's partners historically have a 93% renewal rate. Now it can be automatic, securing your margin time and time again whilst obtaining the best deal available we have when your customers' contract is up for renewal.

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SuperSession maps strat

build Digital Britain

Comms Vision's opening SuperSession drove towards the core of what will form a successful long-term strategy in Digital Britain, and helped delegates to prepare their business for the growth opportunities that lie ahead, especially as enterprises begin to focus on the new technologies, applications and OTT services that will be underpinned by fibre and 5G.

Sooner rather than later, the pressure of Digital Britain's accelerating development will force traditional channel partners to choose between embarking on a journey of transformation or risk becoming irrelevant. According to Alex Tempest, Managing Director of BT Wholesale, there are plenty of reasons for the first option to be taken. "Digital Britain equates to opportunity," she stated. "It crystallises the fact that customers are moving at pace as they seek new opportunities in their own environment in terms of how they reach customers in a broader, slicker, more agile and disruptive way. The channel can take them on that journey and elevate the customer experience as agile and disruptive players in the market."

Perhaps more than any determining influence on UK plc, technology has become a code for organisations to unlock growth faster than they previously imagined. "The key driver is that customers are seeing the art of the possible, recognising their ability to rapidly accelerate their business – and in this the channel can play a crucial role," added Tempest. "The comms industry has long known this art of the possible, but we haven't seen it coming quickly enough. Rapid uptake will be a destabilising factor so the industry must drive the adoption of convergence."

In all this we must define what Digital Britain truly means and identify the factors at play in the market, from the dug out fibre trenches to the rise of coopetition in the channel. "We see, especially among the altnets, a tapestry of capabilities emerging across the UK footprint," stated Gary Steen, Managing Director of Technology, Change & Security for TalkTalk. "Therefore, the customer has far more choice, but with that choice comes the complexity of putting it all together.

We're moving away from a single party approach towards an ecosystem based on collaboration."

At no other time has the industry been minded to work together in mutual collaboration, but it's an emerging model that may come to define the current era as it ticks the Digital Britain box. "We sit in an incredibly complex market and having coopetition – and knowing that you can pull together the customer solutions whatever they may be – is important," observed Tempest. "As Digital Britain is about packing together new and disruptive technologies, it is critically important to work with trusted partners with a clear level of engagement."

Meeting challenges
We can all see benefits in Digital Britain. We can also see the challenges facing the ICT channel. In the past, challenges have served the channel well, and it's no different today. "The market's getting more complex," noted Justin Fielder, CTO at Zen Internet. "Therefore the channel must truly understand what matters in the digital economy rather than where they perceive they can build value systems. This is the challenge and the opportunity, because if you understand that reliability, speed and capability is what's driving the consumption of products, then you can deliver that to your customers."

The oft-repeated claim that simplification of the comms industry is an unquestionable boon was brought into question by Daryl Pile, Managing Director at Gamma. "As things get simpler, broadening the portfolio sounds like the right thing to do, but the traditional model of having two or three vendors per discipline will put you under stress," he said. "Is it fair to ask your sales, operations and provisioning teams to be experts in

> We need to operate in a highly collaborative environment with greater coopetition and collaboration between competitors

tegic journey on road to

various disciplines? That's not going to scale. So you have to think about one partner per discipline or multiple disciplines. You can't be an expert in everything as you try to maintain the value that you create."

Professional services
The rise of Digital Britain is a blessing to all except stick in the mud traditional comms resellers, not least because the industry is transitioning towards professional services, which poses a challenge to them, believes Fielder. "They need to go on the same transformation journey as the infrastructure providers," he stated. "It follows that in Digital Britain channel partners need to think about how they can use digital tech to transform their own business. The ability to pick and choose and build an ecosystem based on standards and integration factors enables partners to get inputs from providers with similar ecosystems that, for example, provide knowledge on what is happening in the customers' network."

At present, organisations are wanting to solve a number of challenges and in response the channel can take to the marketplace value creating solutions that are innovative and encompass IoT among other emerging technologies, says Elsa Chen, Chief Customer Officer at CityFibre. "We must leverage machine learning across the whole customer journey to provide the best experience and free up investment in innovation and creativity," she said. "We need to be experts and leverage our partnerships with competitors to deliver complete solutions. We need to operate in a highly collaborative environment with greater coopetition and collaboration between competitors."

That works on one level, but, observed Pile, in Digital Britain there are over 100 hosted UCaaS providers able to meet more customer segments than ever before and competition is at boiling point. "The barriers to entry are lower and digitalisation is driving greater choice," he stated. "The channel has important choices to make. There will always be somebody cheaper on a specific product, but it's about how you bundle and integrate solutions that work. Gamma surveyed 400

IT decision makers and 73 per cent said they value the integration of products more highly than the products themselves. The value that the channel creates, and sells, will come out of how they integrate, the advice they give, the connectivity and the applications – and making sure it all works for the customer."

For end users price is important, but just as key is speed and reliability which taken together are bigger than price, noted Fielder. "The dash to the bottom for price has played its game," he said. "Connectivity is not a commodity that supports the ecosystems built around it – it's driving people, their purchasing habits and businesses."

Charting the journey
"The move to transform a traditional IT based business into one where people can work one day at home is a big journey for a lot of people, and it's the channel's magic to sit down and understand what that journey is, get the right inputs and suppliers to provide the right solutions and then build a business based on that approach. It seems straightforward so long as you are prepared to look forward rather than backwards."

Now, channel partners have a golden opportunity to take command of delivering Digital Britain, and act in their own and the country's interest. Never has there been a more transformational time in the history of the UK's comms industry. "Digital Britain enables organisations and people to work as they choose, consume products and services as they wish, engage more effectively with people and deliver a service that allows them to go out and drive their business," noted Tempest. "It's ultimately about flexibility.

"In the next ten years, 60 per cent of school children won't know the job they want to do because it hasn't been created yet. This notion encapsulates Digital Britain – its about agility, transformation, being able to decide where you want to take and manage your business in a way that suits you. What sits behind this is an ecosystem of providers which can help to deliver that seamless experience, and improve on it time and time again." ■

The comms industry has long known the art of the possible, but we haven't seen it coming quickly enough. Rapid uptake will be a destabilising factor

Harnessing 5G and the ne

in an era of disruption

Look into every corner of the comms industry and we see a new dawn. No wonder customers are crying out for guidance as legacy technology continues to be swept aside. With this in mind, said BT Enterprise Unit CEO Gerry McQuade in his Comms Vision keynote, we must explore the future of technology integration and how the convergence of applications, services and networks will evolve during a complex period of digitalisation.

For now, the industry is rooted in change, disruption and uncertainty, so radical action is required by all involved, urged McQuade. "What we are going through as an industry and as businesses is significant," he stated. "The disruption and digitisation happening in every organisation is driving change for our customers, a shift they don't understand – and 5G will alter everything. It's not going to be about 5G on its own. It's part of an ecosystem and will transform everything about how businesses operate."

For the next two to three years we can expect a hybrid position, observed McQuade, then we will see the full power of 5G. "However, don't be fooled into thinking 5G is not important today," he added. "We are already live, and we are seeing significant change. 5G is a completely different model, designed for billions of devices, which changes the nature of how a network is run."

A number of elements must be considered to make 5G come to life, explained McQuade. Chief among these is user scenarios. "Just over a year ago we put a live network in Canary Wharf and invited almost 100 businesses to talk about 5G," he said. "What stunned us was that almost all had ideas about what 5G could do for them. Their use cases prompted us to think differently about how we should work with businesses. We changed the model of our innovation and R&D around 5G, knowing what it means to customers wanting to create self-designed use cases."

BT's advances in rolling out 5G include a live broadcast with the BBC, and two versions of live ultrasound from an ambulance. BT has 20 cities already covered by 5G, and by the end of the year another 20 will be 5G'd. "We need to think about where 5G goes next," commented McQuade. "It's easy to think about the technology as extra speed on a mobile, but most of the customers we spoke to talked about how they could use 5G in a saturated way for wireless offices.

"That said, it's never going to be just about 5G. We will need a lot more computing power at the edge of the network. It's going to be about WiFi 6 and Ethernet, with software wrapping it all together driven by a capability to look across the networks, including in the customer environment – the whole spectrum from small to large organisations. In this model where multiple devices and multiple networks need to be dealt with in real time, managed services becomes an important factor."

Think differently

Two, three or four years out there will be many other new capabilities. "To manage, secure and make these available easily to customers means that we need to do things differently," added McQuade. "At every level we as businesses need to think about how we present ourselves, and rethink the nature of what we are presenting to customers. It's less about products as individual silos, and more about how you converge products and add value to customers. It's not just about

> At every level we as businesses need to think about how we present ourselves, and rethink the nature of what we are presenting to customers

ext phase of convergence

Telcos and the Channel must reinvent themselves to get better positioned fo

how we go to market, it's about how you do business, the organisational model and how we run our networks."

How customers consume connectivity in the coming years will also change. "Over the next two to three years we are looking at a completely different way to manage, control and secure the network," commented McQuade. "We are rethinking SD WAN, Ethernet and broadband services to supercharge them in the core network environment. We are building towards our mobile, fixed and WiFi networks becoming completely seamless, reconsidering where we target our customer usage so we can move them between whatever node we want within those network environments. It's seamless, it's consistent, secure and agile. That creates change for our customers.

"When talking to business customers I see fear. They really do not understand the journey that they are going on. So professional services is growing at 400 per cent per annum because people are struggling with this move towards more fragmentation and more digitalisation."

That digital skills are lacking in the SME market is not news, but the deficit will be felt far more acutely in the time to come. Already, the CBI estimates an £86 billion productivity gap between what could be delivered against actual figures, due to a dearth of digital skills to

utilise existing tech capabilities that enable organisations to trade better. "We need to take businesses on that journey, support them and make those converged products become a reality," stated McQuade. "We have a number of dynamics at play in the fixed and mobile market, and various dynamics around AI, robotics and machine learning – all are driving a different operating model that will happen within customers, the channel and the networks – and we all need to respond to it."

Change factors

The key change factors identified by McQuade are 5G, SD WAN and managed services. "Ultimately, we need to think five years ahead, think about the environment we will be working in, the services we will be providing, and how much change we need to make collectively to be successful. We will be under threat from a number of external players, and while it is unlikely we will have our lunch stolen, we must change the paradigm of how we operate.

"Furthermore, the SME market is mostly driven by ease of doing business. They want to be led, taken by the hand on the journey of the sales process and the service environment. They are not overly interested in what we do nor the technology. They want support, which is the role of the channel." ■

We will be under threat from a number of external players, and we must change the paradigm of how we operate

Miller reveals what the c

York's full fibre roll out

More than most countries in Europe, the UK has maintained its archaic comms infrastructure. However, no more is our copper legacy resistant to change, and the channel ignores the roll out of modernising full fibre at its peril, warned Guy Miller, Director of Fibre For Everyone at TalkTalk.

Disruption brings change and uncertainty, but the channel must be ready for this to stay relevant and ahead of the curve

The drive towards Digital Britain is disrupting every corner of the comms sector and the pace of change is remarkable for its rapid speed and transformation. What is also remarkable is fibre's capacity to be the 'next big thing', emphasised Miller, albeit a slow burn compared to other fast rising technologies. Until now. The transition to Digital Britain is not just about the likes of cloud, AI and new 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, believes Miller. And to that end, he shared insights into TalkTalk's own full fibre work in York. "We've put our money where our mouth is and we are doing it for ourselves, initially working with CityFibre and Sky before creating altnet FibreNation," said Miller.

FibreNation was launched by TalkTalk in November 2018 as a wholesale FTTP operator led by CEO Neil McArthur. It has tested and trialled full fibre in York which is now hailed by TalkTalk as one of Britain's first true Gigabit cities. TalkTalk knew the move was the right course of action. Less certain was whether there would be an appetite for full fibre from consumers. Thus, the roll out was very much a learning curve. What TalkTalk learned from the experience can be broken down into four areas. First, education. "This was needed to clear up misconceptions, but educating the market proved a challenge," stated Miller. "So we gave customers 500 megabytes for the price of a copper line to prove to them the superiority of the product."

The second lesson learned was that causing disruption was both a blessing and a curse. Disruption to road traffic during trenching was an annoyance to locals caught in jams, as you'd expect, but the blessing was that TalkTalk got noticed. In these parts, the company experienced four to five times the input volumes compared to areas where ducts and poles were used. "Being first in the area and making yourself known is critical," said Miller.

Just as important is raising awareness via word of mouth and tactical engagement with the locals, far better than relying on PR and leaflets. Therein lies TalkTalk's third big lesson. "It's key to avoid being perceived as just another telco so we worked with the local community, offering supportive sponsorships for example," explained Miller. "Consumers then more readily tried out the service, and loved it, with uptake spurred by word of mouth communication, driving up to 50 per cent penetration in early build areas."

Mastering the art

Fourthly, TalkTalk decided to go all in with fibre and not sell copper products at all. "Consequently, our NPS in York is in the 40s and we are experiencing less than four per cent churn," noted Miller. Having mastered the art of promoting full fibre adoption in York, TalkTalk is translating its experience to create an all encompassing professional practice for the channel. "We will work with other access providers," said Miller. "We are not going to create a world of pain for the channel. We'll work with providers to bring the same set of standards, APIs, billing etc, and be transparent, meaning that partners can choose their preferred access provider."

Miller further crystallised these imperatives and the reasons why channel partners must rethink connectivity now, as no existing business model is immune to

channel can learn from

change and the impact of Digital Britain on how we work is without question. "Disruption brings change and uncertainty, but the channel must be ready for this transformation to stay relevant and ahead of the curve," he commented. "Yes, a partner may lose 10 per cent to 20 per cent of their Ethernet base, but they can smash their FTTC base with FTTP. This is a disruptive and exciting time in the connectivity space and it's not yet clear who is going to win the build wars."

But what is certain is that it is time for channel partners to form their full fibre strategy now, emphasised Miller. "Disrupters usually win, and those who work with disrupters also win," he added.

Fundamental change

That's not all: People are starting to realise the looming demise of WLR3 and copper, and as these services reach the cliff edge a whole raft of new products is required, observed Miller. "Everything must fundamentally change in seven years," added Miller. "This is a challenge for the comms channel which is accustomed to acquiring fully packaged and polished products from suppliers. That's

not yet the case with full fibre, but this is the biggest land grab the comms industry has ever seen and whoever sells first to the customer will be in there for years. Act now – this is a land grab opportunity – first in will win."

Miller also noted that TalkTalk is planning to launch an OTT IP voice service that is technology and CP agnostic, along with Ethernet products, and introduce a set of technological, operational and commercial criteria – standards that will make life easier for partners – along with all important APIs.

He also said that it is critical for the Government and regulator to understand that infrastructure build is one thing, driving adoption is another. There has to be a market opportunity for the channel. "It is critical for the Government and regulator to support investment – how else can we move to a digital economy?" he asked. "We have seen years of little intervention from Ofcom and Government. We have spent much time dwelling on the lack of performance from Openreach – and after years of lamenting it would be illogical for the channel not to take the opportunity in front of us." ■

Disrupters usually win, and those who work with disrupters also win

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Why you need to rethink

plans with 5G in mind

Digital transformation is fostering an epoch of mobility catalysed by 5G, according to Gamma CEO Andrew Taylor in his Comms Vision TED Talk. Meanwhile, UCaaS will drive new business models, differentiation and competitive advantage as we transition to an all-digital environment.

That Gamma has secured a channel friendly MVNO deal with Three which includes 5G services is good news. The partnership is significant, and suggests that 5G must be a chief consideration among the channel's strategists. So much so that Taylor is on his way to defining a new 5G channel proposition that frees itself from the traditional baggage of doing business with a mobile operator, he claims. "We thought long and hard about what we've been doing in mobile during the past six years, and decided on a commercially flexible MVNO as a Service proposition," explained Taylor. "With 5G, data will explode. We don't know what it's going to look like but the traditional business model based on price and usage is not appropriate based on our view of the future."

Taylor reacted to what could be the catalyst of unprecedented industry change, namely 5G, in terms the channel understands, with a familiar string of commercial must-haves that put the partner first. "We wanted a commercial relationship with an MNO based on risk and reward," added Taylor. "We also wanted network equivalence to make sure that when the MNO launches new services we get them at the same time to service the channel, such as voice over WiFi and 5G which will be important in the coming years. We also wanted a partnership that would be focused on the channel with no conflict. This is not about the next 12 months, it's about the coming years, so we sought a first class citizenship relationship and stayed with Three.

"It means true operational control through the Gamma portal, and flexibility as partners will decide the tariffs and what the price bundling looks like for customers. And as a MVNO we provide partners with full ownership of the customer. This way we will enable them to disrupt the market."

We thought long and hard about what we've been doing in mobile during the past six years

What Taylor's commitment to Three means to the channel is crystal clear. Also plain to see are the implications and opportunities contained in market analysis undertaken by Gamma. Whatever the topics of industry conversation that will be sparked by the research findings, it is likely that they will involve a running stream of market opportunities. "The UK market for voice, data and mobile has flatlined during the past two to three years, and it's going to flatline for the foreseeable future," observed Taylor. "There is disruption and substitution

k your mobile and UCaaS

in the market, which is moving from traditional voice to IP voice, with a respective decline of around 10 per cent and growth of 10 per cent over the next five years. That's where the opportunity and the money is."

The UK is in a strong position, with the channel driving much growth in SIP and cloud adoption. Right now, the SIP market is 65 per cent penetrated, with between one million and 1.4 million SIP trunks still to go. On cloud telephony the penetration levels are much lower at circa 25 per cent, amounting to 4 to 4.5 million seats in the UK. "We are at the early growth stage around cloud," stated Taylor.

Key analysis

He expects approximately 4.5 million seats to go live over the coming years spread evenly across the micro, SME and enterprise sectors, with around 1.4 to 1.7 million seats in each of the segments. In the micro segment (one to ten users), the penetration is 18 per cent, quite low with 1.2 million seats in the cloud and a potential market for 5.2 million. Business customers with between 10 and 50 employees have experienced almost 50 per cent penetration. They are the subject of much competition. Low barriers to entry equate to new entrants, even though this is a relatively small market, its total size being around two million seats, with one million still to go. "If partners are feeling competition in this space that's the reason why," said Taylor. "The channel has done a brilliant job over recent years in driving cloud into that marketplace."

Turning to medium size customers, with 50 to 250 seats, penetration sits at around 18 per cent, with 2.3 million seats in total and 400,000 already moved, so 1.9 million to go. The enterprise level has achieved 20 per cent penetration, and offers 5.6 million seats to go after. "The key question to ask is: How are you going to make sure you get the biggest opportunity within each of those areas?" stated Taylor. "The channel needs to consider what it can do with products and services to stretch them and provide new capabilities as more competition comes into the UK market."

What will be at the heart of the new entrepreneurialism that will sweep through the UK's comms sector? Enter UCaaS, a service that Taylor believes will enable the channel to differentiate and compete against the OTT and software players, comprising VoIP, basic bundling, hosted PBX replacement, collaboration, conferencing and omnichannel contact centre in the cloud, which Taylor rates as a 'massive opportunity' for the channel. "Taking all of this and integrating it within an office environment while providing the network enablement is something the channel can do and competitors can't," emphasised Taylor. "Software players won't be able to do this and offer quality of service."

Gamma's magic ingredient in the mobile and UCaaS mix will prove influential in the market, but we must not ignore what will be a great strategic challenge, observed Gamma's Managing Director for Channel Daryl Pile in his Comms Vision TED Talk. "Since launch in March Gamma has witnessed nine per cent of hosted roll outs attach a UCaaS component, but take away in-house solutions and demos and we arrive at five per cent, which in a £2 billion to £3 billion market is surprisingly low," commented Pile. "We need to drive towards 30 per cent and get better collectively at selling UCaaS."

Pile hopes the channel will bring a rush of new business in the UCaaS space, displaying the same verve that helped it land swathes of the SIP market. "Think SIP: The channel smashed the market – we need to do that with UCaaS," he added. "But the circumstances are not the same. With the likes of Microsoft Teams gaining traction – worlds are colliding."

Perhaps market competition is nowhere fiercer than in the UCaaS space. Here, the channel must contend with upstarts and industry giants, but great comms entrepreneurs are true to their moment in time, and 5G could be their secret weapon. "We have UCaaS on the desktop and handset, and it's been an app on the mobile for some time, but UCaaS needs to become far more media rich and 5G will enable that," noted Pile. "So we are working closely with Three. 5G is going to displace some fixed lines, and resellers need to think about how close they are to one of the four operators. Partners need to ask whether they will get what they want from their mobile data provider over the next five years." ∎

> With 5G, data will explode, and the traditional business model based on price and usage is not appropriate

Chen urges channel to 'g

decision time looms

Calls to deliver digital transformation have long run through the industry like a Mexican Wave, yet when it comes to full fibre barely a ripple has been felt on the ground. Enter CityFibre, a disrupter which is making waves, and when the enormity of what is at stake for the channel is fully realised partners will show themselves eager to champion the unfettered role out of fibre, according to CityFibre Chief Customer Officer Elsa Chen.

In her Comms Vision TED Talk Chen emphasised that digital transformation is ultimately about choices, and the time for the UK to pull its infrastructure socks up is now. Infrastructure is critical to the UK but we are currently languishing far behind other countries in rolling out full fibre. It says something when the world's fifth largest economy ranks 30th out of 35 nations in terms of comms infrastructure, noted Chen. "Competition is key," she added. "We are in this position because of a lack of competition.

Now, it's about making the right choice to build an infrastructure that underpins the digital economy."

Economic boom

It is a fact that the positive economic impact of a fully fibered Britain will run to many billions realised in short time. And Chen put the onus squarely on delegates and their counterparts across the UK as potential agents of change with the inherent power to bring about these propitious conditions for future

Now, it's about making the right choice to build an infrastructure that underpins the digital economy

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get its act together' as

business growth. "Don't underestimate your power of influence," she said. "The channel can anchor a continuation of the monopoly or seek an alternative. It's time for the industry to get its act together."

In exercising its own power of choice to spark a transformation CityFibre has committed to not less than 20 per cent full fibre coverage. "We must understand that the decisions we take now have an impact on what the digital infrastructure will look like in ten years time," commented Chen. "The choices must be made today."

In a business update Comms Vision delegates learned that CityFibre's integration of Entanet, acquired in July 2017, is gathering pace with the wholesale arm's livery soon to be retired as the Group continues to centralise and retain its disruptive entrepreneurial spirit, which is a key ingredient in achieving its ultimate purpose to disrupt the status quo. To accelerate its vision CityFibre kicked off an industry consultation in October aiming to more clearly define the role of alternative full fibre infrastructure builders in aiding the switchover of customers from legacy copper networks to fibre.

Important consultation

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 will be ready for a copper to fibre switch over next summer. In his Comms Vision interview, Andy Wilson, CityFibre's Head of Wholesale, said: "We all have a responsibility. The more organisations driving this the better."

As it turns up the volume on its demand for greater competition CityFibre continues to work with Ofcom and Government as well as peers to sidestep barriers to growth, including areas such as wayleaves and the scope for full fibre providers to engage in overbuild, a scenario which could mean that full fibre would appear across just 30 per cent of the UK. "There is more momentum at local and central level," said Wilson. "This will start to accelerate over the coming year."

That is not all. It is increasingly obvious that business growth moves fast once full fibre has been embraced, according to Paul Anslow, Managing Director of Triangle Networks, a CityFibre regional partner. It had become clear to Anslow that CityFibre's whole city approach – based on a build once build well rulebook – comprising one network ecosystem provided an opportunity not to be missed. "We needed to do something different," he said. "With full fibre, we had a new product and as CityFibre's profile gained traction we grew alongside the greater awareness. We are focused wholly on full fibre services now, and have not installed ISDN30 for two years nor a phone system for four years. Although still a small business we do have a role to play, and have found our niche in the ecosystem. We plan to be in 10 locations with CityFibre across the country and provide services to more smaller companies."

CityFibre's opening gambit in the market hinged on working with a set of local partners, such as Triangle, wanting to grasp the potency of full fibre, on an exclusive basis. In a bid to advance further towards the UK's digital golden age the company has now adopted a full channel approach, with no exclusivity and with a carrier interconnect route to market. "We are seeking highly motivated regional partners," added Wilson.

We must understand that the decisions we take now have an impact on what the digital infrastructure will look like in ten years time. The choices must be made today

New network and digital

for managed services

The spread of digitalisation has plunged conventional business models into strategic revamp mode, and for the channel, the network revolution has become a moment of truth, according to BT Wholesale's Head of Professional Services Steve Blackshaw who showed further proof that long-term business planning needs to be considered and actioned right now.

We are starting to contextualise data and workflows, and enable automation at a time when the rates of technological change and adoption are accelerating

Blackshaw used his Comms Vision TED Talk to focus on the future of global and UK networks, and explore how the all-IP network will enable resellers to create new services in the digital economy. He detailed the factors driving the move to all-IP and new service economies, and discussed the business opportunities these create for ICT resellers in Digital Britain. The good news is that there are macro trends to suggest network development is settling down to a predictable equilibrium. For the ICT channel, 5G, like any new technology, can only be defined by the business case and proposition that makes it real and substantive, and Blackshaw provided clarity on this. 5G is coming to life, and there are clear signs that Ultra-Reliable Low Latency Communications (URLLC) will catalyse the IoT.

Like 5G, new digital economies that will arise from Big Data merit meticulous attention. Also, Blackshaw showed how global telco consolidation – those OTT players with no interest in delivering local service provision – will create a boom in demand for managed services at a regional level. Networks are exploding, so it should come as no surprise that traditional methods of building them, based on a traffic laden core and associated metro networks, will need to be reconsidered, along with a rethink of the future business opportunities for ICT providers. Chief among the action points is latency.

"We are digitising everything in the workplace and at home," commented Blackshaw. "We are starting to contextualise data and workflows, and enable automation at a time when the rates of technological change and adoption are accelerating. Most of the data that has ever run over the Internet has happened in the past five years.

We are in an era of ultra HD streaming, and developments are accelerating incredibly. In all this, latency matters."

Realising new use cases

For example, take the cloud assisted car. This is the concept of a car talking to the vehicle behind using on board compute. In the future the compute is likely to be removed from the car and put into the cloud, among the benefits is that less can go wrong in the car. Crucially, when using a 4G network connected to a metro network the data transfer could take 90 milliseconds, which is not good enough when travelling at 80mph. On the other hand, deploying a 5G network would reduce the latency to around nine milliseconds, thus rendering the scenario far more realistic as a use case. "Low latency must be built into the architecture and the compute moved towards the edge of the network," added Blackshaw. "We've started to do that, moving content distribution and caching, for example, closer to the edge."

For the comms channel, all innovation will eventually be judged by the use cases that deliver margin. Therefore a key industry challenge is to discern true dawns from false ones – a dilemma that has long hung over the business case for the IoT. But with strong advances made, a bright outlook is now in view for all to see. IoT solutions at their most basic level are constructed using inanimate monitoring devices. For example, BT is working with a utility company in the water sector that has thousands of dumb devices. The set-up is expensive to run and power must be delivered to the devices. "However, the advent of low latency 5G with low power and high battery capabilities that last up to ten years means we can go much wider in terms of the coverage

economies drive demand

of devices," commented Blackshaw. "You don't have to physically maintain them, therefore the cost model comes down and these solutions become far more feasible."

It is forecast that there will be 20 billion IP devices connected to the Internet and rising, because use cases such as the one cited by Blackshaw are far more feasible – hence the explosion of device numbers and associated data. Nor is that all: The data must be moved in a secure way across the network, quickly and with a full complement of latency requirements. That data must be stored and analysed, which will give rise to new service industries and new digital economies. "Ultimately, there is money to be made in these new services," explained Blackshaw. "Customers will need your skills, not only in fulfilling the technology but the integration, support and the maintenance at the top of the stack. The managed services will include the integration of software – so embrace that change."

Managed services

It is truly a time of network revolution, and direct action is being taken by the telco giants to secure as much of the future market for their OTT services as possible. The channel at large now faces a new dynamic, but the genesis for future success lies in ICT providers' hands today if they act on Blackshaw's exposure that managed services is a realisable opportunity that must be readily welcomed by all regional partners.

Such pragmatism must be shown as big telcos around the world continue to converge. Why? Because their platforms and services are all about scale. "The larger your reach the more ubiquitous the service on a global scale, so telco companies are starting to acquire each other to gain as much geographic coverage as possible," commented Blackshaw. "But their services have to be localised and unique to individual customers. This is where the channel steps in because global players are not interested in localising services unless they can automate them. They want to provide a ubiquitous service globally, and have regional partners to make the change. Our job is to give the highest performance for the lowest cost per bit. That way we make the most margin. But we also want to personalise services – therein lies the value add."

The future flourishing of local ICT providers may be near limitless, if they explore value add beyond the scope of current imagination, all underpinned by the next generation network, according to Blackshaw. "This dynamic means that we are heading towards a network architecture that has a central regional cloud, with a metro core and CPU compute at the edge of the network to promote latency requirements," he explained. "Whole new digital economies will emerge off the top of that, including security, automated intelligence, operations support systems development and digital asset exchange – and the channel can charge for these services – if you embrace them."

> **Customers will need your skills, not only in fulfilling the technology but the integration, support and the maintenance at the top of the stack**

Zen chief on embracing
leadership opportunity

Against the backdrop of unprecedented industry change 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 – addressed the key leadership questions delegates must ask of themselves in an era of perpetual change – and top of the agenda is a people first strategy and culture. Stobart has a long held and deep interest in the nuances of leadership following a moment of self realisation that occurred during a leadership programme some years ago. "I realised I was rubbish at leadership," he stated. "I thought I was good, but in truth I was doing it all wrong."

He'd discovered that true leaders deftly switch between two modes of leadership – Manager mode and Leader mode, both of which, when leveraged appropriately, can have a profound impact on individuals and companies. Manager mode is about control. It's a good policy in a crisis but if relentless can be demotivating and negatively impact how a business performs. The other aspect is Leader mode, where responsibilities are passed to others who are thus empowered. "That starts from me choosing to inspire people to do things for themselves," noted Stobart.

True leaders also listen with intent and presence as any level of feedback may spark a great idea. "Listen to colleagues, be attuned to the feel of the business, the market and customers," added Stobart, who also put forward arguments in favour of staff appreciation. "A simple thank you for doing a good job and being who you are can be a magic moment of opportunity that inspires people – but all too often these moments are lost," he said.

"And ask questions. The best questions are incisive and designed to overturn limiting assumptions that exist in the heads of staff. It is important to encourage people to change deep set beliefs that may limit their performance. Ask what they would do differently if they were to achieve more than they think is possible. Their initial answers may be banal, but persist with questions, delve deeper, and the gem of an idea may be unearthed."

Untapped potential

Thus, staff are accepted by Stobart as having untapped potential, that through acts of leadership that inspire also get people to more readily think for themselves. "Great leaders balance Leader and Manage modes, and switch between them instinctively," said Stobart. "Leadership matters, so does appreciation."

Stobart intends to educate Zen people on the power and intricacies of leadership and instil an understanding of leadership at a granular level. "We talk about technology and Digital Britain, but it's people who are going to deliver it," added Stobart. "So for me, it's people first. If they are engaged and inspired the customer feels a different type of experience. It's about doing the basics well."

Zen founder and Chairman Richard Tang takes a ferocious pride in having happy staff. For Zen, achievement is measured not in finance nor customer numbers, but the delivery of happiness to people, customers and suppliers. "We do this through leadership development," commented Stobart. "We are rolling out a programme to our 550 Zen staff, to engage as many people as deeply as possible via workshops and asking loads of questions to get people fired up and enthused."

> **I thought I was good, but in truth I was doing it all wrong**

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The collaboration factor

Resellers must target a full set of collaboration and delivery goals if they are to catch the eye of ICT buyers in the future, says Atos Global Director for Solution Management Darren Gallagher.

In UCaaS, like all other areas of the ICT market, channel partners face certain change as technology reaches yet another inflection point, a juncture at which tech has become a true enabler of agility and competitive advantage. "We are at a point where machines can learn how to offload some of the day-to-day burden from their users and provide rich insights into what we should be focused on and why," stated Gallagher. "Analytics can provide organisational wide cues on what the hot topics are, surfacing trends from customer conversations. Continued integration and automation of business workflows and processes, and how virtual assistants, AI and bots can boost the overall experience are trends of interest in this space."

From a long-term strategy and planning perspective, vendors, providers and partner resellers that understand how these new use cases are realised will be highly sought after, believes Gallagher. "Those who can exploit the low latency and speed of 5G, those who know how to humanise and automate interactions between people and machines, and those who crack how to seamlessly integrate these advancements inside business workflows will flourish," he said.

This is not a time to dither: Team collaboration is requested more than ever, especially in those countries that experienced early iterations of UCaaS, noted Gallagher." The native functionalities of modern team collaboration such as audio and video conferencing, file and screen sharing, white boarding and recording are now seen as critical and differentiating versus those early UCaaS offerings," he added. "Service providers are also looking at how they can differentiate and improve their customer loyalty and intimacy. Team collaboration offerings with persistent file and messaging embedded with conversation data can ensure strong retention rates in this space."

Market dynamics
A closer look at the UCaaS and team collaboration markets reveals differing functional demands, adoption rates and pricing tolerance characteristics at regional and even local country levels, noted Gallagher. "Some countries in Europe are price sensitive when it comes to UCaaS services, often because they were early adopters of the first iterations and therefore have limited expectations of UCaaS, using bundled services that fill the capability gaps, such as triple play offers," he explained.

"Some countries demonstrate strong loyalty to their local telecom providers and so vendors need to factor in those routes to market to meet that expectation. North America is a huge market but has an equally enormous cost of customer

Darren Gallagher

Continued integration and automation of business workflows and processes, and how virtual assistants, AI and bots can boost the overall experience are trends of interest in this space

acquisition due to the sheer number of competitive vendors – more than 120 at the last count – despite the recent consolidation over the last few years."

The one thing that cuts across these differences in market dynamics is that collaboration centricity is universally key, providing access to people, data and things through social, IoT and other data sources, while commercial flexibility is offered via a variety of different models from perpetual licensing to subscriptions and usage-based models and beyond, observed Gallagher.

Joint leadership
"From a global perspective, customers are challenging and encouraging system integrator partners to take more responsibility and offer innovation that demonstrates joint leadership positions in partnership with the customer," he added. "This often includes commercial investments and shared risk-reward agreements where both parties are invested in success, often targeting the acquisition of new revenue streams together."

Building differentiated or truly vertical solutions to provide a complete package that blends partner expertise with customer data and collaborative workflows will increase loyalty and mitigate against churn, noted Gallagher. Atos is also enabling new conversations about video and adding a specialist service engineering offering. "We are refining how Circuit, our SaaS-based team collaboration platform, builds and grows communities and how it integrates with other applications through upgrading our provisioning, automation and management for partners," added Gallagher.

He also noted that it's no longer about buying 'the thing' but about buying the experience. Therefore Atos is currently focused on evolving its technology – the platforms and technology stacks – to ensure integration, interoperability and migration fluidity. "CPaaS and API consumption is becoming less complex through low and no-code tooling and is one of the areas where partners can demonstrate they are a vital part of the customer value chain," said Gallagher. "If partners are not already investigating how they can embed collaborative technologies and combine their speciality in their customers' workflow then I would suggest this deserves deep consideration." ∎

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Sales unit expands

Oliver Rupp, Beverley Ronson and Ben Morgan

LEEDS-based The Technology Group has boosted its sales operations with three new hires – Oliver Rupp and Ben Morgan join as Solution Sales Executives with Beverley Ronson taking the role of Business Development Executive. Nick Deacon-Elliot, Sales Director, said: "The company is ambitious and working towards our Vision 2022 goals that we set out in 2018, to grow from £4 million turnover, 36 staff and 450 customers to £15 million turnover, 65 staff and 2,000 customers by 2022. To achieve this, we need to recruit well and give people the opportunity to grow. This involves investing time and training within the team, something that we are passionate about doing. This is the start of an exciting journey, not only for Oliver, Ben and Beverly, but for The Technology Group as a whole."

Also on the move...

CITYFIBRE has pulled in Judith Felton as Head of Service for the wholesale business, Entanet, leading the Service Specialists and Customer Service team. She joins from Cadent Gas where she gained

Judith Felton

experience managing various IT transformation projects. Felton also worked for Vodafone in various customer service related roles, including Service Architect and Service Delivery Consultant. She said: "I'm joining CityFibre at an exciting time as it continues to merge business operations. As an employee who has been through a similar merger process in the past, my key objective is to utilise my previous experience to deliver a seamless transition for both our customers and staff."

COLT has promoted Gary Carr to the CFO role, reporting to CEO Carl Grivner. He has 23 years leadership experience across the telecoms, IT and financial services sectors; and joined Colt five years ago as Group Financial Controller before taking up the Deputy CFO role. Prior to joining Colt he held several roles across BT Global Services, including

Gary Carr

Vice President, Finance Control. He also held various leadership roles at Siemens, including Finance Director and Acting Managing Director. Grivner said: "Gary has shown strong financial leadership and the team has already started to transform into one of the most agile functions within the company." Carr added: "The industry is more fast moving and dynamic than ever before. From a finance perspective, this rapid rate of change means that this function needs to be as innovative and agile as the rest of the business."

FORMER Mitel-er Rob Hutton has joined the Trust Distribution Board as a Non-Executive Director. His previous experience includes stints at Philips Communications, Cable&Wireless (Mercury) and Mitel Networks. "I've known Robbie for many years and worked with him as a distribution partner as far back as his time at Phillips," stated Trust MD Vincent Leahy. "He's respected in the channel and we are excited to keep on building Trust Distribution and TruSIP with Robbie now in our team."

NYCOMM has appointed Samantha Kay as Business Development Manager for Videoconferencing in its Yealink business unit. She brings eight years comms industry experience and reports to Warren Bone who heads up the sales operation. "We've seen huge growth in all areas this year," he said. "SIP is well established and Microsoft is gaining traction, especially the transition from Skype to Teams. Next year is going to be even bigger and better."

SSE welcomes high level hires

A TRIO of new hires made by SSE Enterprise Telecoms form part of a wider management restructure and brings total employee growth to 98 per cent over the past five years.

Revenue has increased 40 per cent, while capital expenditure growth of 282 per cent reflects the increased investment in the network over the same time period.

Colin Sempill

Alexandra Gartrell joins as Counsel and Company Secretary; Vicky Bori takes the new HR Director role; while Jonathan Rowan gets the Business Development Director job.

SSE Enterprise Telecoms is also engaged in a search for an Enterprise Sector Director. Colin Sempill, CEO, commented: "The UK is embarking on the next stage of its digital transformation journey and with that comes new challenges. The emergence of technologies such as 5G and IoT are set to reshape our cities, transportation, public services and businesses, and have a wider impact on the economy. It's important that we have the right people in place to align our business with this future vision."

AUSTRALIA-based VoipCloud Wholesale has bolstered its UK operation with the appointment of Mark Whitehead as MD. Whitehead is credited with bringing GCI Channel Solutions to market and building a £6m turnover business. He aims to repeat his growth trick as he drives VoipCloud UK's channel ambitions.

M247 elevates digital whizz to top position

IN A BID to accelerate its international digital presence and online search visibility M247 has appointed Musa Aykac as Head of Digital. Currently, M247's global outreach extends to over 20 countries. The role was created to ensure that this development will continue

Musa Aykac

through digital acquisitions both in the UK and internationally.

Prior to his appointment, Aykac worked with M247 for two years as a contractor. He said: "The first interaction a potential customer will have with any company will be the website and digital acquisition engine. It is at this crucial point where you can win or lose business without even speaking to a single person."

Jenny Davies, CEO, said: "Developing our global acquisition engine will ensure that we are increasing our customer reach, while also effectively communicating about the services we can deliver when they interact with our website."

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