



Resurgent KCOM
restructures for new
partner campaign p22

Daisy's architecture
chief paves way for
women in IT p30



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3-21

Industry News

Catch up with
events in comms

24

Interview

Wavenet CEO eyes
bigger acquisitions

26

Business Profile

Xelion's UK cloud
adventure flourishes

34

Interview

Distributor Nimans
sticks to Plan A

48

Awards

Channel's sales
heroes hailed

50

Comms People

This month's movers
and shakers

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June 2018

Click to open TalkTalk Business goes all channel

TALKTALK is to sell its direct business customers to strategic partner Daisy for £175m as it seeks to capitalise on growth in wholesale and partner markets.

SPECIAL REPORT

The 80,000 SoHo, SME and enterprise clients represent less than 20% of TalkTalk's B2B revenues and continue to be served by the operator's network, providing ongoing revenue.

According to TalkTalk Business Commercial Director Pete Tomlinson (pictured) the divestiture is a statement of certitude and intent against a backdrop of market change and enables the company to focus on growing its core strategic partner

and wholesale business, offering services through 800-plus channel relationships.

"The sale speaks volumes about our channel market focus, longevity and confidence," he commented. "It is a common sense move that was endorsed by a 10% share price rise on the news breaking.

"We are crystal clear about our proposition and using our scale to support partners. All resources including personnel are now 100% focused on the partner and wholesale market."

TalkTalk Business was previously 80% channel, growing at 11% CAGR over the past two years. Key growth areas are IP connectivity, Ethernet and FTTP services with IP voice sales also on the up.

"This momentum will continue to build," said Tomlinson. "We have prioritised our partner strategy with no potential for channel conflict in the B2B market. This is a huge commitment and we are determined to be successful."

Continued on page 12

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

JUST when you think the comms industry is settling into a gentle evolution towards Digital Britain, with the drivers of change such as the shift to VoIP and the cloud well past their disruptive period and edging towards mainstream – up jumps another ground shaking catalyst – the race to full fibre.

We all know that whoever owns the pipe owns the customer, and the connectivity marketplace could be up for grabs as pure fibre providers arrive at millions of doorsteps, both household and business, with a tempting new connection. No wonder there is significant investment in the deployment of fibre, with new joint ventures forming as the race gathers pace.

The term 'full fibre' is now in common usage in the comms lexicon. It suggests an 'end' rather than a process, therefore the rise of fibre-rich Digital Britain is written on the wall, a realisation that may have suddenly hit home. Big news last month was BT's restructure to focus on ultrafast networks. The move was drastic and decisive, designed to make the company more agile and responsive to competition, and sees the addition of thousands of people tasked with network deployment. Perhaps BT, due to its legacy, had been caught standing in a cloud of dust as the more nimble fibre racers burst out of the blocks.

We also hear the language of full fibre from Openreach. It was a term that, not so long ago, was synonymous with the pure fibre front runners only, such as CityFibre and Gigaclear. But its rapid rise into common usage is a signpost to the future. And as full fibre gains dominance, another industry term, 'legacy', will soon disappear. If ever competition between rivals was the catalyst to an industry-wide revolution – will anything beat the race to full fibre?

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• Alive with innovation the billing sector remains in perpetual step with the march of the market. Here's how... (p42).

Martin opts for PE move

GCI Chairman Wayne Martin has sold his majority stake to Mayfair Equity Partners and stepped down in a deal that also delivers a £60m acquisition fund and sees the appointment of Patrick De Smedt as Non-Executive Chairman. Martin remains on the GCI board.

The minority stake held by BGF which backed the business since 2012 has also been acquired by Mayfair.

GCI's beefed up acquisition strategy builds on a two year shopping spree including the purchases of Packet Media, Fusion Media Networks, Outsourcery, Freedom Communications and Blue Chip Data Systems, taking the firm's revenues to £100m.

The business has also witnessed organic growth across its 4,000 customer base.

GCI CEO Adrian Thirkill said: "Our immediate objective is to continue to fully integrate what we have. In the coming months we will see all GCI group companies operating under one brand with common systems and processes. The £60m-plus fund will enable us to make strategic acquisitions."

According to Mayfair Partner Waqqas Ahmad the UK IT services sector is becoming



Wayne Martin

increasingly attractive as businesses continue to outsource systems and IT infrastructure.

"With our support and capital we see GCI quickly becoming one of the largest ICT suppliers in the UK," said Ahmad.

Philip Carse, Principal Analyst at Megabyte, stated: "The fact that GCI has ended up with a new private equity backer rather than a trade buyer comes as no surprise given the wall of PE money chasing assets. We estimate a valuation of around 10x run rate EBITDA, suggesting £180-190m."

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FluidOne ramps up in channel

INCOMING FluidOne CEO Russell Horton has outlined his five-year business plan with channel growth at its core.

The former Elite Group COO joined FluidOne in April and immediately identified an under representation in the channel and that FluidOne's own integrated Platform One could be a springboard to recruit at least five new partners per month.

In revealing his channel strategy Horton also launched the first phase of the software defined connectivity platform, targeting integrators, managed service and UC providers.

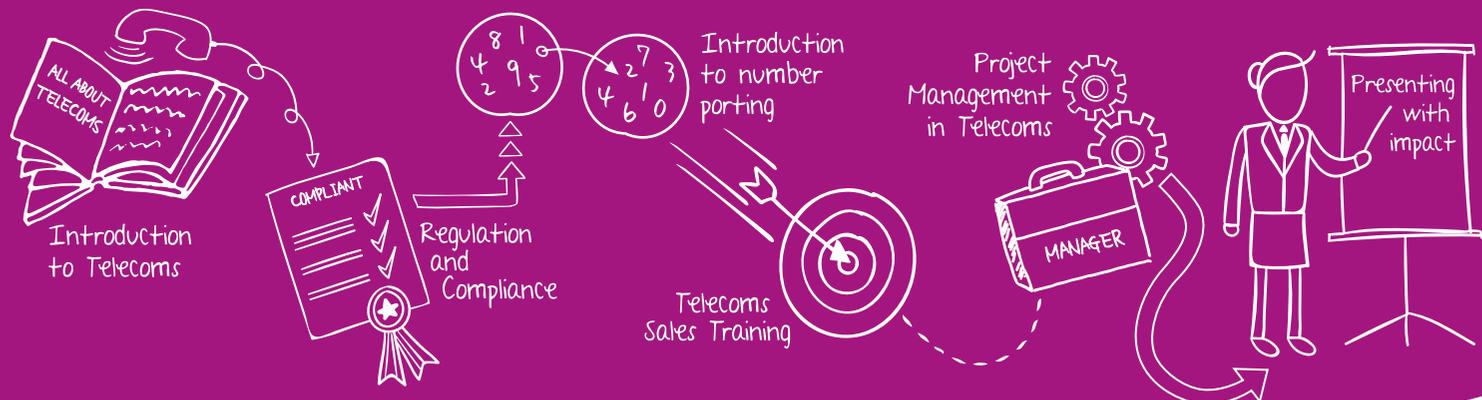
He expects FluidOne to outperform the sector in the medium term with plans to triple annuity revenues over the next five years.

"My priority is to utilise the service automation technologies we have developed to increase our presence in the channel and achieve growth targets through a combination of organic growth, strategic alliances and acquisition," stated Horton.

FluidOne's Head of Partners Mike Ridley commented: "We are already seeing real traction for the proposition. My goal is to recruit another 50-70 resellers in the next 18 months."

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COMMENT: PARTNERSHIP MATTERS



Richard Carter

COLLABORATION and consolidation remain two of the biggest factors in the evolution of the comms industry; and choosing the right partner in an increasingly consolidated world isn't always easy with shrinking choice matched by a desire to team-up with the suppliers best equipped to propel your business.

These conundrums apply to distributors as well as resellers and can often make a real difference to the bottom line of company performance.

I've been out on the road recently with our Network Services team to engage face-to-face with resellers and forge more productive working relationships – kicking off with EE at the top of BT Tower. On the back of this we have just announced a partnership with Union Street as two big industry names join forces to offer resellers 'next generation' billing services. Teaming up with Union Street is a natural progression as we continue to evolve our network services proposition in an increasingly complex and sophisticated communications arena, where event type billing for SIP, hosted and connectivity requires different software platforms and billing solutions.

With the switch-off of analogue connections getting ever closer it's imperative that resellers are equipped to compete in a fully digital world. Last month Openreach launched a consultation about the move from analogue telephony to digital voice services. This will help to prepare the industry for the upgrade to VoIP technology and the withdrawal of wholesale products and services that run over the traditional analogue telephone network – which is due to close in 2025. The clock is ticking as times continue to change.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

• Resurgent KCOM has pledged to give partners the flexibility and agility they need to underpin their value added services (p22).

Boucher leads MBO as Excalibur grows

SWINDON-based Excalibur Communications is under new ownership following a MBO led by CEO Peter Boucher and supported with funding from Santander Corporate & Commercial. Former owner and CEO James Phipps retains a minority shareholding in the firm as Executive Chairman.

The management team aims take full ownership of the business within five years and is seeking to increase investments and acquisitions in new technology.

Excalibur provides managed IT and telecoms services to more than 4,000 SMEs in the south and south west and is one of Vodafone's top five distribution channel partners in the UK.

Boucher commented: "This backing by Santander is an endorsement of our ambition to scale up the business. We have achieved our targets for the first year through sustainable growth and productivity gains.

"The funding, alongside a team of motivated employees and strong senior management, places us in a strong position to build and grow Excalibur in the long-term."

Chris Mears, Relationship Director at Santander, added:



Peter Boucher

"We have been impressed by the management team and their growth ambitions."

The MBO builds on Excalibur's acquisition of Ntegra

IT Support Services in April last year, which strengthened its technical support team and added customers in the education and charitable sectors.

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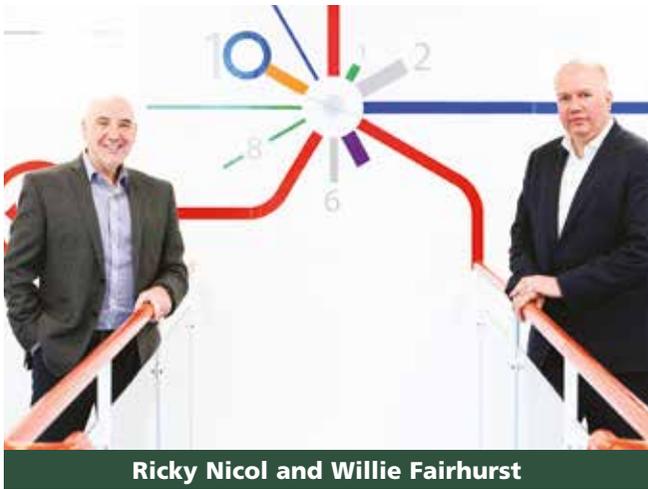
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Commsworld snaps up ECS



Ricky Nicol and Willie Fairhurst

COMMSWORLD has acquired Edinburgh Computer Services (ECS) and renamed the business Essential Cloud Solutions, retaining the ECS brand. Commsworld confirmed that all 19 staff will be retained.

The deal increases Commsworld's headcount to more than 100 and is expected to boost revenues to over £20m this year as the company leads with an augmented set of cloud and connectivity solutions including cyber security, Wi-Fi and IT.

Commsworld CEO Ricky Nicol commented: "The acquisition follows constant demand

from clients for fully integrated digital solutions and enhances our partner channel offering by expanding the range of services we provide."

ECS MD Willie Fairhurst stated: "The deal means our accreditations are transferred across to Commsworld, and our existing customers will be introduced to the services it offers."

ECS started out in 1991 and its clients include household names particularly in the recruitment and hospitality sectors.

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Salesforce plug-in

STRATEGIC Imperatives has launched an off-the-shelf Salesforce plug-in for its Elevate cloud billing service.

According to Head of Business Development Tim Sayer this is the first of several integrations with third party software systems that all promise to speed up project delivery and bring an enterprise software stack to CSPs of all sizes and technical capabilities.

"In providing a seamless link with the Salesforce CRM platform CSPs gain full process automation and a unified multi-channel customer view," commented Sayer.



Tim Sayer

"Businesses of all types are looking to streamline and automate, but not all have the time or in-house capability to take advantage of a more joined up approach to software.

"The creation of plug-ins and the opportunity to work with Imperatives API development partners levels the playing field for our customers." See p38

NEWS ROUNDUP

GAMMA'S Connect fixed-mobile solution first introduced to channel partners last November has been joined by companion app MyConnect which is available to iOS and Android users. "MyConnect gives mobile workers additional features such as visual voicemail, number presentation options and company directory," said Domenico Idone, Product Manager. "By integrating the customers' mobile phone with their Horizon service, Connect solves many of their mobile working issues."

NEW 100G routes between the UK and Europe have been brought to life by Interoute, enabling service providers and large enterprises to transport traffic from the UK midlands to Europe without going through the London area. "This addresses key demands of network operators such as improved cyber resilience, increased efficiency, lower costs and greater speed of deployment through improved diversity and route resilience," said Jonathan Wright, VP of Commercial Operations at Interoute.

BT IS poised to axe 13,000 jobs in a three year cost cutting exercise that includes the vacation of its central London headquarters. The job losses will be mainly back office and middle management roles. BT also announced plans to hire 6,000 new employees to support network deployment and customer service. The company is aiming to simplify its operating model including fewer, bigger, more accountable leadership roles while de-layering its management structures. The firm also outlined plans to accelerate the restructuring of its Global Services operation by introducing new digital products with a greater focus on its top global customers.



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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Richard Thompson

HISTORICALLY, when companies use the word 'restructure' or 'reset' it generally tends to throw people into a mad frenzy. But it doesn't have to mean the worst. Sometimes, resetting or restructuring is down to finding a better way of giving your customers a quality service. Customer satisfaction and collaboration should be at the heart of every decision your

business makes. Being completely focused on which types of customers you are supporting enables you and your team to truly understand the needs of your audience and offer them the greatest value.

For your teams to deliver closer communication, better service and quicker responsiveness, businesses need to invest in finding fresh talent (as well as nurturing existing talent). This may sound like I'm telling you to loosen your purse strings (and give your CFO a coronary in the process!), but by creating hyper-enthused teams that are focused on customer needs in addition to having access to the best voice and data products, you will ensure that you are setting your business up for success.

In order to utilise your new hyper-enthused team well you should encourage them to interact daily with your customers. This ensures you are better in tune with your customers' business needs so that you can be proactive in helping them grow and be more successful.

Sometimes it is the little things that sound like they are the biggest challenges. People will doubt you along the way, but as long as you remain focused on the customer and investing in your business this reset will pay dividends in numerous ways. Our own reset enables our teams to entirely focus on building more meaningful relationships with our network of resellers, managed service provider and system integrators.

Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Nimans gets billing boost



Mark Curtis-Wood



Vincent Disneur

A PARTNERSHIP between Nimans and billing solution provider Union Street Technologies has enabled the Manchester-based distributor to elevate its network services proposition to the next level as reseller requirements for automation and on-tap data intensify.

Nimans Head of Network Services Mark Curtis-Wood explained: "Over the last four years we've grown significantly, and while mobile is a big part of our business as we transition from traditional lines and minutes into event type billing for SIP, hosted and connectivity, we require different software platforms and billing solutions in an increasingly automation-based world.

"What our customers require in terms of billing has evolved.

Resellers need to self-serve and have access to key information at their fingertips, so we needed to adapt and move forward with a new billing system that can seamlessly link-up with our portal, which we've now established with Union Street."

Union Street Head of Sales and Marketing Vincent Disneur commented: "Nimans required a billing platform that could scale while maintaining the high levels of speed, accuracy and detailed revenue analysis that its partners rely on.

"Using our aBILLity billing platform as a foundation, we're working with Nimans to develop more solutions and benefits for its channel partners." > p40

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NEWS ROUNDUP

DEVELOPING bespoke sales and marketing plans per vendor and ensuring staff are fully educated about products has again paid off for Purdicom which bagged the Ruckus Distributor of the Year gong for northern Europe. Director of Sales and Marketing Steve Kent said: "Continuous training ensures the sales team know their products inside out and can advise with authority."

KASPERSKY signed its 1,000th MSP last month in less than a year since launching its partner programme. Europe accounted for 95% of the additions. The firm's research says 51% of MSPs believe cybersecurity for IT operations will be the primary trend over the coming three to five years.

CONGRATS to Spitfire for reaching 30 years in business. The company currently employs circa 100 staff, has turnover of £26m and supports 500 channel partners. Joint MD Justin Orde, who started the firm in 1988, commented: "Spitfire began life as a one-man enterprise supplying fax machines and mobile phones. Today, we are one of the largest independent voice and data solution suppliers in the country."

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COMMENT: NEW WORLD ORDER



Itret Latif

LAST month, Openreach on behalf of BT Group started the process of industry meetings and consultation to move ahead with plans to shut the traditional telephone network in Britain and transfer all customers over to IP telephony services by 2025. At one of the industry consultation meetings it was clear from

the participants present that there are several precursors before the move to IP can take place, such as the delivery of a fit for purpose Number Porting mechanism.

Ofcom has also set up industry IP working groups and interestingly has started a consultation on General Condition GCA3.2(b) 'Proposed guidance on protecting access to emergency organisations when there is a power cut at a customer's premises'. As a side note, if industry players are not careful it could put unfair obligations and costs onto CPs that have no direct input in securing 'uninterrupted access to Emergency Organisations' in the new IP voice fibre world.

This is a far more complicated multifaceted project than the industry undertook to migrate broadband to gaining provider led services, which challenged the best of operators. In this transitional environment there will be existing WLR as well as new IP product sets on a copper and fibre connectivity environment which needs to be carefully coordinated and managed for competition to exist, and to protect end users whether they be business or consumer.

Therefore, these workshops (and others that need to be set-up by Openreach and Ofcom to create the necessary building blocks for a transition to the new world) need to be coordinated through an overarching industry project and managed centrally through the regulatory entity, with proper project disciplines and participation from all interested industry stake holders.

Itret Latif, FCS Interim CEO and Deputy Chairman

Verticalisation key to reseller survival

RESELLERS too slow to adopt verticalisation as their primary route to market could become a thing of the past, claims Ingram Micro Cloud's Apay Obang-Oway, Director Northern Europe, Cloud & Software.

"You can't be all things to all people any more, it's important to specialise," he stated.

"The horizontal approach is not realistic when you consider how much deeper you have to go into the customer organisation, in understanding the reality of what they are dealing with, the competitive business they are in, even down to legal issues. That is why verticalisation is key."

Speaking at the Ingram Micro Cloud Summit last month Obang-Oway cited Gartner's projection that just a third of the channel 'will make it'.

"That's not too far off the mark," he said. "We are already seeing new entrants, and the fact that we are changing the conversation is attracting partners – 40% of the Summit attendees are new to Ingram Micro. All business models will change so everything is up for grabs."

"Those that don't understand the marketing won't be able to get the depth and breadth they



Apay Obang-Oway

need. So we take our capabilities out with partners to help amplify their message.

"When we use content about the fourth industrial revolution we are looking at what it means for the end user customer, what it means in retail, healthcare and so on. It's a different way to go to market."

Obang-Oway also noted that Ingram Micro's cloud business is witnessing strong growth in Infrastructure as a Service, and that a current priority is to recruit data analysts and automation experts.

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8x8 partners up with Zest4



Mandy Fazelynia

ZEST4'S link up with cloud comms provider 8x8 positions the business as a service provider distributor targeting mid-market and enterprise firms with its UC&C portfolio expanded by 8x8's X-Series Virtual Office and Virtual Contact Center.

"8x8's cloud solutions enable Zest4 to better meet the requirements of multi-location, distributed organisations requiring integrated, enterprise grade business communications and collaboration solutions," commented Mandy Fazelynia, Operations and Business Development Director at Zest4.

"The new alliance shows how we invest in technology

areas that will bring our partners long-term revenue growth, and allows us to scale the business through recruiting new channel partners, and from our existing channel partner base, by offering bundled solutions."

8x8's UK Channel Director Charles Aylwin added: "Zest4's position as a cloud solutions provider enables us both to scale to new heights as we drive and deliver on the expectations of Zest4's channel partners.

"Whether or not a partner has sold cloud, linking up with Zest4 will enable them to access a high growth market and build revenue opportunities at minimal risk."

Chess buys twice

CHESS has added £7.2m revenues and over 2,200 customers with the acquisitions of Frontier Voice & Data and IT systems, services and software provider StoneHouse Logic, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner and Sage Strategic Business Partner.

Chess Chief Exec' David Pollock commented: "Technically and culturally we see these two acquisitions as a great fit."

Frontier MD Peter Southgate added: "Being part of a much larger business brings new opportunities, supplier choice, expertise and skills in a wide

range of technology disciplines to our customers and partners."

According to StoneHouse MD Mark Hope the business and cultural synergies between StoneHouse and Chess became apparent early in the sale process. "With a strong pedigree and a broader portfolio of products and solutions, Chess is the right home for our customers and employees," he said.

Chess has now made 100 strategic acquisitions.

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Robert adds Azure clout



Michel Robert

CLARANET'S hosting portfolio displays greater capabilities in Azure-based solutions following its acquisition of infrastructure and cloud company Union Solutions.

Union generates revenues of £10m, has office locations in Surrey and Kent and employs circa 30 staff. Its founders are staying with the business.

The company supports large on-premise and Microsoft Azure Cloud managed solutions.

Claranet UK MD Michel Robert explained the reasons for the acquisition: "Claranet acquired Union Solutions to enhance its hosting design, transition and migration capabilities for large scale on-premise solutions as well as additional strong Azure skills and offerings.

"Union has a depth of experience and capability in the design and implementation of mission critical infrastructure, with an emphasis on data storage and security."

Union has a strong presence in the legal, financial services and retail verticals.

Jason Rabbetts, founder and Director at Union Solutions, added: "Union's data management services, hyper converged platform skills and Azure specialism – now coupled with Claranet's public cloud and private cloud capabilities – brings a hybrid transformation proposition to our customers and the general market."

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Martino eyes growth areas

REFLECTING on a strong year in which Tollring's customer base grew by 75% CEO Tony Martino has set the stage for the firm's next growth phase which will include a strong focus on analytics products.

The company's analytics, fraud management and call recording solutions are now used by over 14,500 business customers globally via a channel network of more than 800 service providers, distributors and resellers.

"Growth in new customers has generated a 218% expansion of licenses and endpoints across the product portfolio on

all platforms and 93% activations are now from cloud services," said Martino.

"Fraud and credit management is a growth area. Fraud protection is all about intelligent machine learning, embracing shared responsibility and timely reactions.

"We will see a shift in the channel as it takes a more aggressive and proactive approach to tackling fraud issues across the industry."

Tollring's headcount has grown 12% this year to 68 employees. Martino expects 25% growth in staff numbers in the next financial year.



Tony Martino

NEWS ROUNDUP

SCC has acquired Hobs On-Site, the business processing outsourcing division of the Hobs Group. The acquired business will be renamed M2 Managed Document Services and will sit alongside M2, SCC's existing managed print services business. Hobs On-Site provides services such as document digitisation, document process re-engineering and digital mail management.

KASEYA and Unitrends are set to merge but will continue to operate under their existing brands. Both companies are backed by Insight Venture Partners. The deal followed a successful collaboration between the two businesses on the launch of Kaseya Unified Backup and roll out of Unitrends products to Kaseya's enterprise customer base.

VIRTUAL1 has collected the Virgin Media Business Strategic Partner of the Year 2017 gong. The company's CEO and founder Tom O'Hagan commented: "This award is a testament to the strength of our partnership, as well as the dedication and commitment of the team at Virtual1. We have created an exciting platform for continued rapid growth throughout 2018."

Continued from page 1

Tomlinson noted that product development is now shaped by the channel focus, with work behind the scenes already under way on new access technologies and developments around the portal and online experience.

The sale also enables TalkTalk Business to intensify the nature of partner relationships.

"Our attention is on how we partner with customers and help them to win in the market and build technical solutions," added Tomlinson.

"We're getting more involved in their business, leveraging all of our skills and resources while enabling partners to better man-

age the end user lifecycle using our MI data."

Tomlinson hopes that TalkTalk Business's channel-only operation will provide a permanent foundation for partners as the market evolves and becomes more complex.

"There is some uncertainty in the channel," he added. "Major players are repositioning, there are moves to full fibre and all-IP while new technologies like SoGEA must be embraced.

"We're bringing together the patchwork quilt of underlying supply technology into a single service. Taking a complex landscape and making it far more simple, providing high quality,

high speed Internet connectivity and IP services across the top at scale as the value provider. This is our DNA."

TalkTalk's Chief Executive Tristia Harrison stated: "Last year we set out a strategy to simplify the business, focusing on fewer priorities that offer the best growth potential.

"TalkTalk has strength in the partner and wholesale markets. It represents the vast majority of our revenue and profit and we see an opportunity to continue growing at pace."

The sale would negatively impact TalkTalk's FY19 EBITDA by £15m and strengthen its balance sheet, enabling

investment in a new full fibre network in partnership with Infracapital. Tomlinson confirmed that the channel is the route to market for fibre alongside the consumer business.

Charles Bligh is to step down from the Board as Chief Operating Officer on 30th June when he becomes CEO of the new company set-up by



Tristia Harrison

Infracapital and TalkTalk for the roll out of full fibre to more than three million homes and businesses in mid-sized towns and cities. Paul Reynolds has been appointed Chairman.

Philip Carse, Principal Analyst at Megabyte, observed: "The sale of the direct B2B business helps fund the FTTP JV. TalkTalk is adding a decent war chest while also keeping some revenues through its wholesale agreement with Daisy.

"For Daisy Group, the proposed deal is significant and well timed given the much rumoured current sale process."

The transaction is expected to complete in late July 2018.



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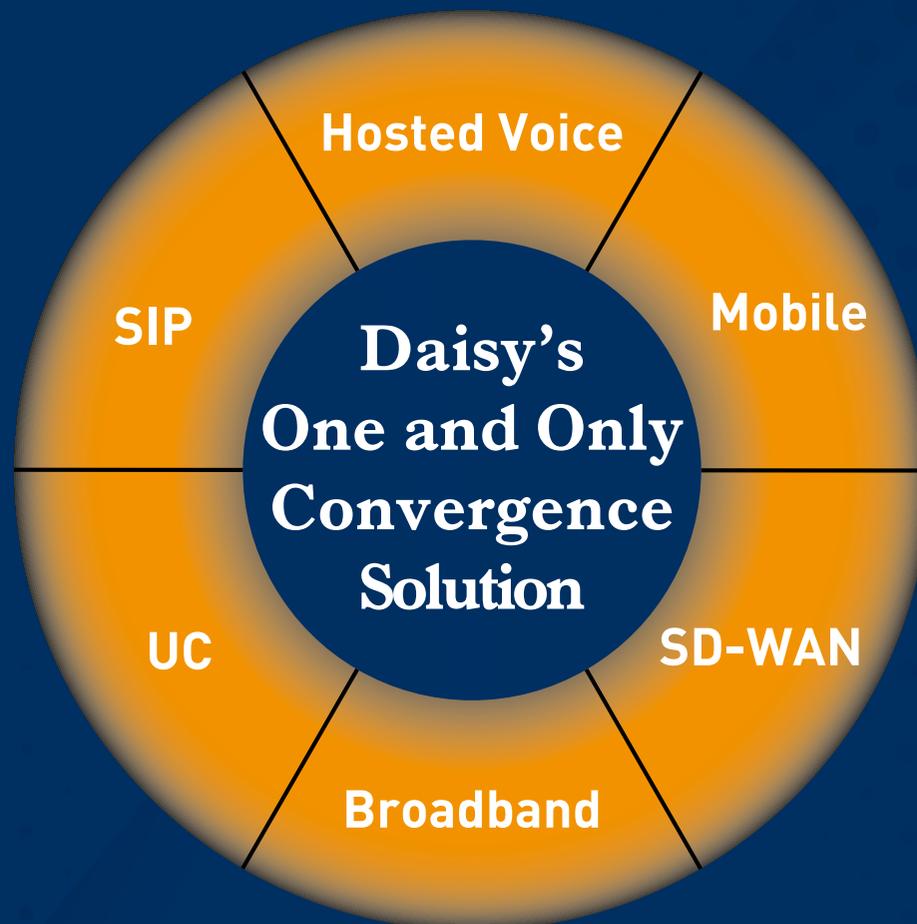
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Corgat joins reseller Loop



Shahram Bagerzadeh and Dave Corgat

RAINBOW Telecoms founder Dave Corgat has secured shares in Colchester reseller Loop Voice & Data, joining the company as Operations Director almost a year since he sold his Sevenoaks-based business to Focus Group.

His remit is to drive a 300% growth rate over three years and oversee operational functions such as the customer journey, systems and processes.

“To take our business to the next level of growth I wanted to have someone working alongside me,” stated Loop Voice & Data MD Shahram Bagerzadeh. “Having known Dave for 12 years he was a natural fit.”

Corgat and Bagerzadeh were members of the Concert Group, a collection of resellers who

sometimes worked together on various projects.

Corgat added: “The market has gone from being in an evolutionary to a revolutionary phase, with everything moving to the cloud. We will help to change the business model from one based on capital expenditure to a recurring revenue one.

“I’m reviewing processes, procedures and compliance, getting everything ready and positioned for growth.”

Loop Voice & Data is now targeting £3m revenues and will pursue an acquisition strategy once this goal has been met. The business also plans to open a London office.

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Hudson in ITS Group job move

ZEN Wholesale head honcho Dave Hudson has joined ITS Technology Group (ITS) as Business Development Director with a remit to spearhead the sales and marketing operation and develop a new channel and wholesale programme.

He reports to CEO Daren Baythorpe and brings 25-plus years public sector, telecoms and connectivity experience.

Baythorpe said: “We have ambitious growth plans which include building new full fibre gigabit networks around the UK, and Dave will play a major role in delivering these goals.”



Dave Hudson

Hudson added: “The UK is on the cusp of a full fibre revolution. My main priority is to develop solutions and product offers for customers and partners, and develop a strong channel to harness the potential of our networks.”

Nicol snares council's CIO

EDINBURGH Council’s CIO and Head of ICT Bruce Strang has joined Commsworld as Executive Director of Operations.

Commsworld’s agility and speed of delivery attracted Strang to the role, having witnessed first hand its modus operandi during the roll out of a 150km WAN and telephony solution as part of the Edinburgh Council ICT contract.

“The stars seem to be aligning for Commsworld,” commented Strang. “Success with large scale public sector contracts has transformed the business. My role will be multifaceted as a result.”

Strang’s previous experience also includes a high flying stint at Capita and a spell as MD of Updata responsible for a team of over 500 and accountable for profits and losses. He also oversaw Capita’s Scottish Wide Area Network framework, resulting in a deal worth circa £325m to deliver public sector comms across the country.

Commsworld CEO Ricky Nicol stated: “Bruce has deliv-



Bruce Strang

ered in challenging roles at private and public sector organisations. That experience will be a huge boon for us.”

Strang’s immediate priority is to oversee the delivery of a £30m Glasgow City Council ICT contract.

His appointment follows Commsworld’s acquisition of ECS, a deal that boosted revenues to over £20m.

Firstcom makes a Difference

CLOUD comms provider Firstcom Europe has bagged contact centre specialist Difference Corporation as it eyes ambitious growth targets over the coming two years.

The deal boosts Firstcom’s revenues to 5.6m euros and adds dialler technology, inbound call handling, automation services, collaboration, social media, email and SMS management tools to its portfolio.

Difference Corporation has offices in Newport (Wales) and Edinburgh and its acquisition



Adam Crisp

builds on previous buyouts by Firstcom in the UK, Denmark, Sweden, Poland and Germany. Firstcom Europe CTO Adam

Crisp commented: “This acquisition gives our sales partners access to a new set of communications services backed by a team that complements Firstcom’s skill sets.”

Jean-Pierre Vandromme, Firstcom Europe’s CEO, added: “Difference is the seventh acquisition for the Firstcom Europe Group in four years. We expect to close another three acquisitions in 2018 which would bring our expected revenue to over 50m euros. Our goal is 100m euros by 2020.”



CAMBERLEY-based comms provider Windsor Telecom has reaffirmed its commitment to Social Corporate Responsibility with membership of the self-funded Community Matters Partnership Project (CMPP), a gathering of like-minded organisations that work together to support important social issues in their communities, such as encouraging the progression of young people in the local population who need help. Windsor Telecom MD Sue Kempton (pictured above) said: “We are now rolling out a programme of fundraising and volunteering days to assist with projects that will make a difference to disadvantaged young people in the local area.”



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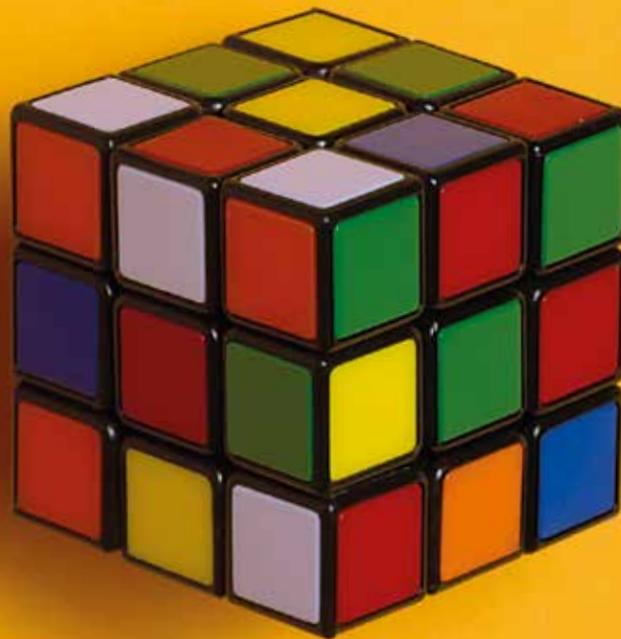
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NEWS ROUNDUP

LEASE Telecom has appointed James Phillips as MD following a 25 year stint at mobile and telecoms provider Access Communications. He is tasked with forming new vendor relationships and extending Lease Telecom's distribution and network programmes. The firm currently has a 350-strong partner channel.

AVAST'S IPO on the LSE last month valued the security business at £2.4bn, raising \$816.6m in primary and secondary proceeds after floating around 25% of the firm's stock, making this the largest tech IPO across Europe in 2018 and one of the five largest tech IPOs of all time on the London Stock Exchange. The company acquired AVG in 2016 and supports more than 435 million users worldwide.

VOIP Unlimited has deployed the DDoS Mitigation service VU Guard across its core network. MD Mark Pillow said: "DDoS mitigation is now as much a commodity as a business's buildings and contents insurance, so that is the model we have based this on."

SYMANTEC has plunged into controversy following an internal probe into its accounting. After concerns raised by a whistleblower it is reported that the company may need to restate its financial results and Q1/FY guidance. Symantec's stock plummeted by a third on the news, wiping circa \$6bn off the its market value.

ACRONIS has credited service providers for significantly boosting its cloud-based data back-up and security business over the last year, driving 200% year-on-year growth in sales of protected devices and 151% growth in client numbers. The company has added more than 2,000 new service providers this year.

Revenue bonanza lifts CMS



Frank Salmon

STORIT, the holding company of CMS Distribution, reported a 38% hike in turnover in its latest financial year to £447m with EBITDA up 40% to £17.3m.

Storit founder and CEO Frank Salmon commented: "In February 2017 we welcomed TNS Connect into the Group, allowing CMS to expand into the Asia Pacific region."

Other investments last year include new offices in Paris, Madrid and Amsterdam and the expansion of its Centre of Excellence in Kiltimagh.

Salmon added: "2018 marks another significant milestone in CMS's history as we celebrate our 30th anniversary with more projects and investments set to roll out throughout the year."

Routes to simplicity roadshow

HOW to capitalise on mobile, connectivity, hosted PBX and broadband were key focus areas during a run of three national Network Services roadshows staged by Nimans last month, that offered a simplified approach to selling these product areas.

"Network services can sometimes seem complex for some resellers, from the technology itself to billing and recurring revenue," commented Mark Curtis-Wood, Head of Network Services. "It's a journey where many resellers are at different stages. If we don't make it simple it's difficult to sell solutions to customers."

Nimans has also launched an upgraded self-serve web portal.



Mark Curtis-Wood

BridgeOne bagged

LONDON-based mobile comms firm BridgeOne Telecom has been snapped up by DoubleEdge in a deal that concludes a ten year working relationship.

DoubleEdge CEO Steve Burges said: "Much of our customer base operates in the retail and financial services sectors. Both are fast moving environments where demand for business communications is always pushing the boundaries, not least in the area of mobile working."

"BridgeOne's expertise gives DoubleEdge greater scope for

developing bespoke services and introduces skills in mobile estate management, which is an area that is becoming increasingly complex and time consuming for the IT manager."

BridgeOne CEO Patrick Crockford added: "For some years we've been flirting with the idea of joining forces and now both parties are agreed the time is right."

The enlarged business will operate from DoubleEdge's City of London office located close to BridgeOne's former base.

UK advances spur Huawei



Robert Yang

OVER 150 Huawei partners converged on London last month for the vendor's seventh UK channel conference where the Chinese giant outlined significant gains made in key verticals and reaffirmed its commitment to compute, storage and networking as the technology pillars of its end-to-end digital transformation strategy.

The company also showcased its Intent-Driven Cloud Campus Solution designed to manage an increasing number of devices and connections, and provide predictive and automated user management.

Robert Yang, Huawei UK Enterprise MD, stated: "Huawei

is making progress in the UK market across a range of vertical sectors including public sector, finance and commercial.

"We're continuing to invest in all areas of our business. The goal is to always enable partners to develop their service capability and become self-sufficient."

Huawei opened its first UK office in 2001 and now employs more than 1,500 staff in the region. The company has pledged to procure £3bn by 2022, building on a total UK investment and procurement of £2bn between 2013 and 2017.

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BUSINESSES wanting to ramp up and formalise their charity and CSR activities should follow Entanet's lead, according to CEO Elsa



Chen who says the formation of a new 13-strong inter-company CSR committee structures and catalyses the process of developing and coordinating fund raising initiatives. Entanet's CSR manifesto is founded on four pillars – charitable giving and fundraising, volunteering, environmental impact, diversity and inclusion. "The CSR committee provides structure, direction and a stronger focus on making a positive difference in the community," stated Chen.

Following a company-wide vote Entanet has pledged its support for Meningitis Now and the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity. CSR Committee Chair Steven Wood added: "We're far more focused on working with colleagues on a range of activities to support these causes alongside other CSR initiatives."

Last year the company raised over £7k for a number of charities including Birmingham Children's Hospital, Severn Hospice and Sands. Pictured above: A baking competition and sale kicked off Entanet's support for Meningitis Now.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

INVOSYS has added SIP trunking to its Number Manager product, enabling inbound service management through the customer's existing platform. Users can order SIP trunks, manage inbound services and view traffic reports while reducing call costs. "Invosys SIP offers the same functionality as hosted IP telephony that a customer can use on their own kit without the need to replace existing infrastructure," stated Sales Director Steve Glaister. "By adding SIP Integration we apply the features customers currently use on their inbound services to SIP numbers."

INCLARITY'S relationship with Polycom has strengthened following its elevation to Gold level status in the Polycom Choice Partner Programme – Hosted Voice. Inclarity MD Enzo Viscito



(pictured) says an increase in Polycom handset sales is due in large

part to Inclarity's popular bundled telephony packages. "Our partnership with best of breed vendors like Polycom will only strengthen our continued growth in the industry," he stated.

8x8 acquires AI knowhow



Dejan Deklich

THE acquisition of Silicon Valley-based MarianaIQ by 8x8 confirms the primary role of AI and Machine Learning in the future look of 8x8's new X Series platform. MarianaIQ has specialised in applying AI and deep learning to practical business problems since 2013.

"With this acquisition we are transforming how customers and employees interact through one system of engagement, and how companies optimise valuable moments of customer engagement with one set of data in one system of intelligence," commented Dejan Deklich, Chief Product Officer, 8x8.

"By infusing MIQ's deep learning capabilities into 8x8's X Series, contact centre agents gain detailed information on previous interactions, complete

customer history and a 360-degree context before they start a conversation."

Deklich also noted that 8x8's AI capabilities will bring intelligent call routing to call centres along with speech analytics.

8x8 CTO Bryan Martin confirmed that acquisitions remain a key component of the company's strategy.

"We acquired Sameroom last year to enhance our team collaboration capabilities," he stated. "The acquisition of MarianaIQ is the right investment for X Series, a single system of engagement and intelligence that combines communications, collaboration and contact centre into one platform."

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

Pennine seals analytics deal

PENNINE'S link up with European AI voice analytics software developer Xdroid enables the Bury-based comms provider to offer an automated speech and emotion analytics solution via cloud or on-premise deployment models.

Pennine Sales Director Steve Watts said: "The solution automatically processes customer interactions and detects differing emotional responses – such as displeasure, happiness and uncertainty – speech patterns, hold music and void periods. This data can then inform process enhancements to increase productivity, customer satisfaction and retention."

Xdroid MD Gerry de Graaf added: "Pennine is an important



Steve Watts

addition to our European partner network. This partnership will provide Pennine with a stronger proposition for the contact centre market and enhance its clients' customer communications capabilities."

According to Watts Xdroid deployments in the finance, insurance and utility sectors have delivered a return on investment within 12-24 months.



CORE pipped all rivals to the post to win the One Identity UK Partner of the Year award, handed out in recognition of Core's success with its Cloud Identity as a Service platform Aurora which incorporates One Identity software. Last month the company was on target to manage circa 45,000 identities through Aurora which is used by large organisations including Government bodies.

CEO Conor Callanan said: "This award recognises the innovative ways we are taking One Identity solutions to market, helping customers to manage identity and security."

Andrew Clarke, Director of EMEA Strategic Alliances and Channel Partnerships at One Identity, added: "Core demonstrates great ideas, deep knowledge and continual innovation. As an early adopter of One Identity's Starling platform Core has embraced the technology and shared ideas and feedback with our product management team."

Pictured above (l-r): Andrew Clarke, Director of EMEA Strategic Alliances and Channel Partnerships, One Identity; Tim Eichmann, Head of Infrastructure and Cloud Technologies, Core; and Ian Sutherland, VP and GM, EMEA, One Identity.

Redwood salutes 25 years

BRACKNELL headquartered Redwood Technologies Group marked its 25th year in business with a silver anniversary plaque unveiled by Borough of Bracknell Forest Mayor Tina McKenzie-Boyle.

Brothers Sean and Martin Taylor founded Redwood Technologies on 14th May 1993 as a maker of components for vendors such as Panasonic and Ericsson, and operated the mass calling platform used for TV shows Pop Idol and Who Wants to be a Millionaire?.



Redwood Technologies now provides comms solutions to hundreds of organisations in over 60 countries.

The brothers went on to establish cloud provider Content Guru in 2005, which later

joined Redwood Technologies under the parent organisation Redwood Technologies Group.

CEO Sean Taylor commented: "It has been great not just to survive as an IT company for 25 years, but to have thrived. I will have handed over the baton by the time the next quarter century milestone has arrived. It will be fascinating to see what can be achieved in that timeframe."

Pictured (l-r): Martin Taylor, Bruce McKenzie-Boyle (Mayor's Consort), Mayor Tina McKenzie-Boyle and Sean Taylor.



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NEWS ROUNDUP

REDSTONECONNECT is to sell its Systems Integration and Managed Services divisions to Excel IT Services for £21.6m. The firm sees more growth potential in the remaining software business which has been a key focus area since the acquisition of Connect IB in March 2016. Its software capabilities are targeted at the agile working and the connected office environment, leveraging the Group's occupancy management software solution called OneSpace. CEO Mark Braund said: "Employee mobility and agile working is driving demand as commercial real estate becomes more of a user experience business."

A CUSTOMISABLE intelligent reporting tool developed by IPCortex comes free of charge with the firm's Hosted Suite comms platform, enabling users to analyse data and gain insights about their communication trends and patterns. CEO Rob Pickering said: "With increasing demand to create better customer communication experiences based on insights and data, resellers are under pressure to provide solutions that can deliver the required intelligence."

A SECURITY skills shortage in the fast moving mid-market sector has been addressed by a new Cyber Security Operations Centre opened by Exponential-e, which aims to equip companies with a real-time view of their compliance status. The centre is capable of monitoring for compliance to multiple standards, from best practice through to PCI-DSS and ISO 27001. "This type of monitoring lifts a heavy burden when adhering to regulations such as GDPR," said Jeff Finch, Cyber Security Product Manager, Exponential-e. "It's this segment of the market where the cyber skills crisis bites hardest, so they need a partner that they can work with."

Mercer eyes firms to buy



Tim Mercer

VAPOUR Cloud CEO Tim Mercer has set a target of £12m revenue by 2020 with multiple acquisitions the primary engine of growth.

Mercer plans to acquire a minimum of two businesses and the immediate priority is to bag a northern-based IT support firm with Microsoft partner status.

The Yorkshire-based business hopes to ramp up 80% growth this year and with a £10m acquisition war chest Mercer aims to buy-in public cloud capabilities in Azure and AWS to complement Vapour's private cloud proposition.

A substantial customer base with potential to migrate from on-premise to cloud is also on Mercer's wish list.

"We mark our fifth year in business in July, and a buy-and-build strategy is a natural progression for the organisation," said Mercer.

"We've established a 96% net recurring revenue rate to date, so our business development model is easy to maintain. We had a 64% seed of growth in 2017 and hope to realise 65-80% by the end of this year."

Mercer did not rule out acquisitions in other regions, but said he favoured the north's 'vibrancy' and believes that an acquisition target in this area would also reinforce Vapour's local presence and reputation.

"There are a number of well established operators in this sector," added Mercer. "Dozens

started out as lifestyle businesses but many are not cloud-first.

"By acquiring two or more such companies we can build on the legacy the current owners will leave behind, while supplying their customers with the next generation products and services they're looking for.

"We're passionate about flexible working too, so the more engineers, technical experts and service advisors we have in the north, the easier it will be to develop a larger, more diverse and engaged workforce."

Vapour Cloud has so far attracted £4m of private equity.

Eyrco got by Welltel for £3.5m

WELLTEL has created a new force in the Irish enterprise market following its acquisition of Eyrco for circa £3.5m.

Eyrco is known as a provider of contact centre, call recording, voice assisted Artificial Intelligence and telephony services and the business will underpin the launch of Welltel Enterprise Division headed up by Eyrco MD Mark Evans.

The acquisition adds 300 enterprise clients to Welltel, which claims to be Ireland's largest Irish owned enterprise communications provider. The deal builds on Welltel's acquisition of the ATS Group.

Welltel CEO Ross Murray commented: "The acquisition allows Welltel to offer a new portfolio of services including enterprise grade communications, compliance recording, speech analytics and workforce management across five key vendors – Avaya, Liquid Voice, Mitel, Nice and Verint."

Eyrco is the only Irish business to hold the Avaya Partner in Customer Excellence Award.

NEWS ROUNDUP

NUVIAS is urging resellers to take advantage of the EU's WiFi4EU grant initiative, worth 120m euros. According to Rob Clark, Director of Technologies & Solutions Development at Nuvias, many councils are missing out on the grant fund (set up to help install Wi-Fi in towns and cities) because of uncertainties over Brexit. "Resellers could also be missing out on a great opportunity to get into the urban Wi-Fi market," he said. "While the UK remains in the EU there is still time for local authorities to apply for a 15,000 euro grant, but they need to do it as soon as possible. We are looking for a group of existing and new resellers to work with us to take advantage of this initiative and deliver Wi-Fi to UK councils."

BARRACUDA Networks' revamped EMEA partner programme aims to ease the quoting process and take admin burdens away from resellers, noted SVP for International Sales Chris Ross. "Cyber security and data protection remains a key area of growth for the EMEA channel," he commented. "The new programme simplifies doing business with Barracuda and helps channel partners to invest in training, technical and sales competence."

SHORTLISTED for three regional accolades swcomms bagged a brace of winners at the Express & Echo and DevonLive Business Awards 2018, scooping the Employer of the Year and Apprentice Employer of the Year gongs and rated 'highly commended' in the Excellence in Customer Service category. swcomms MD Brian Lodge said: "After 35 years in business we are always looking at ways to be innovative, which is critical in the IT and communications industry while being forward-thinking in house."



A CHARITY favoured by former Nimans Chairman Julian Niman, who died in January, has received a £4k boost following a Herculean effort by 20 Nimans staff who ran the Manchester half marathon on May 20th to raise much needed funds. Manchester's Brain And Spinal Injury Centre (BASIC) offers services such as virtual reality rehabilitation for those recovering from brain and spinal injuries. BASIC also supports epilepsy sufferers, a condition that affected Julian. "This was an unprecedented team effort involving work colleagues, the wider company and also suppliers such as Gamma," said Head of Solutions John McKindland who was one of the runners. "BASIC provides vital support and we all went through the pain barrier to help this worthy cause. We ran in memory of Julian too."



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Start-up flies off the mark



Ian MacIntosh

NORTH east Scotland start-up CFN Solutions – founded and led by ambitious MD Ian MacIntosh – has reported early success in its mobile, cloud, fixed line telephony and Internet connectivity markets.

The Aberdeen-based business secured quick wins within weeks of kicking off operations across multiple industry sectors including oil and gas, construction and recruitment.

“We have been overwhelmed by the response,” commented MacIntosh. “There are opportunities in the current market for

proactive companies that can demonstrate a greater understanding of clients’ operations and, through working closely together, can help to fulfil their actual requirements.

“As much of our activity centres around cloud-based software we are well placed to scale up clients’ operations as they grow without the need for significant capital expenditure.

“We also add value by helping customers make better use of their existing technology and changing the way they have traditionally done business.”

Smart 4G back-up

A BACK-UP 4G service for SMEs launched by BT Enterprise and available to resellers works across all broadband including copper, fibre, ultrafast and also supports static IP.

Called 4G Assure, the product is the first launch from BT Enterprise’s new portfolio of converged connectivity services to business customers.

The hub automatically switches to 4G should an organisation lose its fixed broadband connection, and also monitors for the return of the service

every few seconds before automatically switching back to the fixed broadband connection when the line becomes stable.

If a broadband fault is detected BT will proactively fix the fault without the customer having to contact the company to request a fix. 4G Assure will be included at no extra charge for customers taking an Ultrafast, Infinity Premium or Broadband Premium business package.

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

NEWS ROUNDUP

PRIVATE equity investor PAI Partners has acquired M Group Services, the £1bn provider of infrastructure services to regulated sectors in the UK and Ireland. M Group Services CEO Jim Arnold said: “Following First Reserve’s investment in our group we have broadened the markets in which we operate and diversified our service offering. As part of this process an opportunity arose for First Reserve to realise the benefits of its investment to date and for us to introduce PAI as a new long-term investor.”

EUROPEAN expansion has become a priority for a growing number of MSPs and partnering up with like-minded businesses to serve multinational clients is a strengthening trend that was explored at this year’s European Managed Services and Hosting Summit in Amsterdam on 29th May. John Garratt, Content Director and IT Europa Editor, said: “It was clear that many of those attending this year had their sights set on forming some sort of profitable relationship with other partners.”

NUVIAS has signed a UK&I distribution agreement with Sennheiser to supply products from the vendor’s Enterprise Solutions portfolio including personal communications, meeting and online conferencing solutions. Steve Harris, EVP Unified Communications at Nuvias, said: “While headsets will form a major part of sales, Sennheiser also has interesting options for conferencing and video such as ceiling integrated audio conferencing solutions.” Jane Craven, Sales Director for Sennheiser UK&I, added: “Nuvias has a large established reseller base across EMEA which we can now access. Its drive for growth in the UC market mirrors our own.”

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KCOM's new era: An age of

Following strategic investment in a refreshed channel proposition resurgent KCOM is giving partners the flexibility and agility they need to underpin and support their value added services.

KCOM has emerged from a period of strategic adjustment far stronger in its ambition and capacity to deliver on all fronts – and in relation to the comms channel, with an approach carefully calculated to meet the needs of partners under its new unified National Network Services (NNS) team. “We’ve brought together our national connectivity and wholesale call management solutions within a single team, giving customers access to our full product set, one point of contact and a single customer experience,” commented Iain Shearman, Director of KCOM’s national network services and partner channel operations.

One of the benefits of bringing together a siloed organisation has been a better offering to the comms channel, according to Henry West, Head of Channel. “With a single, joined-up strategy from product and propositions through to sales and in-life support, we are much better able to work collaboratively to bring new products to market than in the past,” he explained. “Today, no matter what your route into KCOM you get access to one, complete offering. That’s great for our channel partners because it means we can pull on the best resources and skill sets to help ensure we’re delivering market-relevant solutions.”

KCOM’s vision is clear on how channel partners



Henry West

To stay relevant we needed to adapt and incorporate partners into the business. Our new strategy supports this imperative

should adapt to what is already happening in the market. “Our role is to help partners work out how to differentiate in markets that are increasingly commoditised and where value is harder than ever to come by,” said Shearman.

Channel focus

The response to this question is a two pronged plan that shows KCOM is again a serious channel player, increasingly focused on working in close collaboration

with partners. “We have created two business models,” commented Shearman. “One that serves our large service provider partners and offers education and support on our product set, and also brings an opportunity for these partners to develop bespoke propositions by using our APIs.

“Through working collaboratively with their marketing department to create tailored campaigns

we enable partners to incorporate the value they see in our solutions into an existing service, or do something different that we haven’t thought about like approaching a new target market or creating unique bundles.

“The second model is focused on our resellers who want to grow sales of more traditional volume services like Ethernet and fibre. We have ensured we’re market competitive

on these products and plan to strengthen our portal and pricing tools. This will reduce operational impact and speed to consume, while offering a wider choice of access technologies with an improved level of operational support.”

As well as joined up operations and a clear market vision KCOM says its wealth of experience is sure to support its resurgence in the channel space. “We’re seeing a renewed focus and interest in high speed, low cost access services,” added West. “This is where our strength and heritage lies, so partners can take advantage of this knowledge and expertise as well as make the most of our decades-long commitment to voice services. Just as important, the connectivity market is moving fast and with technologies like G.Fast, FTTP and SoGEA we need to operate differently and provide a new level of service that underpins partner requirements.”

KCOM’s project to streamline operations and rejuvenate its strategy was driven by the need to collaborate far more closely with business partners. The result is a big investment in developing knowledge and expanding the capabilities of teams across all services. “We’re building a bigger and stronger Account Management team that’s geographically aligned to partners so we can fully integrate our account team into partner sales

of rejuvenation

organisations," added West. "Why? Because it's not just a sales conversation any more, it's about smart marketing, operational improvements and product integration. To stay relevant, we needed to adapt and incorporate partners into the business, and our new strategy supports this critical imperative."

Integrated marketing

Creating the conditions for close collaboration between account managers and partners also helps KCOM to formulate and support integrated marketing campaigns for API-based solutions targeted at specific vertical markets. "To deliver this transformation we've invested in our core network services capability and made sure we are relevant, flexible and agile enough to support our partners' growth today and in the future," added West. "We now have a refreshed core network that in the future will allow our customers to move to the world of software defined networking.

This will also open up and change the way our partners can deliver applications to their customers using our service capability."

A powerful network has been developed behind the scenes with 23 next generation nodes enabling KCOM to migrate existing services to the new platform. "Our network footprint brings us closer to our customers and creates proximity when deploying the network and public cloud to exploit hybrid cloud environments," said Shearman. "We have also improved scalability and agility and can address changes in business needs quickly for partners. That will manifest itself through a more attractive commercial model, moving away from fixed contracts and capacity."

Other areas of investment include Myriad, KCOM's inbound call management platform, and its multimillion investment in a new centre for Customer Service Operations which centralises the technical services and

support teams. Meanwhile, KCOM's investment in full fibre broadband in the Hull region is in the final phase of deployment. Hull is already the most fibre rich city in the UK and by March 2019 KCOM's entire Hull and East Yorkshire network will have access to ultrafast speeds. "Since refreshing our wholesale proposition partners can now consume these services and gain full reach across the UK to deliver access circuits," commented West.

KCOM also has a next generation voice transformation plan under way, noted Shearman. "This sees our System X estate being retired by the end of 2019," he added. "We have more than 140,000 consumer and business subscribers in Hull and East Yorkshire but this is part of our investment and transformation programme that delivers services to a converged IP world while supporting service integration."

The developments discussed in this article represent a new dawn not only for KCOM but for partners who will benefit from its new approach and investment. "Everything we're doing is to provide our partners with flexibility, longevity and agility to support and underpin their value added services," affirmed West. "It's not just about our sales relationship, it's about supporting partners' marketing, technical and operational teams. We're in it for the long run and want to demonstrate that while we have the benefits that come from having scale and being long established, we are also agile and able to move quickly in support of our partners' needs."



Iain Shearman

ENERGY UPDATE
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Energy is a gem of a deal for Dunstan

Ian Dunstan set up Cobalt Communications in 2001 as an IT service business but has never been averse to change and his company now has many products in its supply portfolio ranging from the latest technologies to 'old school' PBXs.

Adding energy provision to the services it offers to a range of customers was therefore a simple matter of agreeing a deal with Fidelity Energy managing director John Haw. Within weeks, Cobalt had delighted a current customer with a massive seven figure saving on power, as Dunstan explained:

"Energy is not our core business, but we added it into our proposition and had converted a few small customers along with our own energy. One of our larger customers asked me to review the energy contract that an employee had signed a few weeks before she left the company. She had agreed a much higher rate on a five-year contract!

"I spoke to the team at Fidelity who worked with their suppliers and put a solution in place. We were then able to move the contract and saved my customer in excess of £1,750,000 over the term.

Exeter based Cobalt has decided to operate its energy operations under the company banner as it strengthens the core brand and customer loyalty. According to Dunstan

the support from Fidelity has been top notch and maximising on ongoing customer relationships is key to the success achieved to date.

"The team at Fidelity Energy visited us and gave our sales team the training they needed. They also have a desk based sales support team so all I need to do is pick the bills up from my customers and I am then provided with a white labelled comparison along with a customer contract. Selling energy is very straight forward compared to other products.

"Customers fall into one of two categories; they have either switched before and know exactly how the market works or they have never switched before and may be a little more cautious, but as we have an ongoing relationship and we supply other services this is usually short lived."

Dunstan believes an ICT reseller which hasn't looked at the energy supply business as a new revenue stream is missing out and any fears of losing focus on core services are unfounded.

"Selling energy to your existing base is another great way to earn a bit more from good relationships. It helps the customer and enhances your reputation. I think that people in the industry see it as devaluing the brand. In truth, I did at first but now can really see the benefit as do my sales team with their new extra commissions!"



COBALT FOUNDER IAN DUNSTAN

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Dawson's next moves

As Wavenet CEO Bill Dawson considers bigger acquisitions, his growth ambitions become clearer than ever.



Bill Dawson

The comms sector creates opportunities on an industrial scale, which Dawson has vowed not to ignore. "I've worked in telecoms for nearly 30 years and seen this exciting dynamic market evolve many times," he stated. "Today the opportunities are greater than ever and it is my role to ensure Wavenet continues to seize them. What a great time to be in the industry."

From Cisco's acquisition of BroadSoft to Wavenet's own purchases, the stars appear to be lining up for the Solihull-based comms provider. "Cisco and BroadSoft are both strategic partners of Wavenet, and life just got so much better with opportunities multiplying since their tie-up," added Dawson. "We have completed multiple smaller acquisitions ourselves over the last few years and are now looking at larger acquisitions to boost our growth."

Given that Dawson has confessed to having only short-term projections, we can expect to see more acquisition activity sooner rather than later. "I cannot look more than 12 months ahead, and in the coming year see at least 50 per cent growth," he said.

Acquisition targets

In April this year Wavenet strengthened its presence in the East Anglia region by snapping up Norfolk comms provider APR Telecoms. The deal built on Wavenet's acquisitions last year of Manchester provider of network and cloud services Talk Internet and Norfolk-based Swains. Both deals followed a £30 million investment in Wavenet by Beech Tree Private Equity.

Wavenet currently employs over 100 staff and turnover for the latest financial year was more than £23 million, representing 60 per cent growth. "Similar growth is expected this year,"

reaffirmed Dawson. "We have invested in people, new offices and new portals. The priority now is to continue to drive growth and strong partnerships are key to maintaining our momentum. We deal with our suppliers strategically so we can both achieve our goals. They provide better support and commercial advantages that give us a competitive edge. This is the approach we also take with our partners."

The upside of fruitful supplier relationships is proving to be a gift for resellers engaged in Wavenet's channel proposition, claims Dawson. "Our wholesale business is designed to provide partners with sales and support, giving them a strong go-to-market foundation," he explained. "We are targeting high growth partners who prioritise service and quality and who share our values. Our partners are not me-too suppliers. They understand the value of selling the brand rather than on price. The

industry is currently absorbed in a race to the bottom and quality of service is therefore suffering, so reliability and support will always be the number one priority for us."

Wavenet began its commercial life in 2000 as a lines and calls business. Mobile services were introduced following the acquisition of Centralcom in 2009 and a VoIP service was launched in 2010 soon after the Titan Technology buy. Wavenet's Connectivity options were then boosted with the addition of IZR Solutions in 2011, a deal that strengthened its core network.

Three years later Wavenet bagged UK Data IT to add TPS screening compliance and dialler solutions, while the acquisition of Next IS introduced inbound number and PCI compliant services. In 2015 the company launched BroadCloud and partnered with Level 3 for DDoS attack protection the following year. Today Wavenet boasts a proprietary carrier grade network with a broadening product set, especially in UC and IT services. Dawson joined the company in 2008 when it evolved into a multi-solution business.

"We have target customers rather than operate in a strategically defined area of the market," noted Dawson. "We engage with customers that want to move services to the cloud completely or require help to transition. This is where we will have the greatest market influence. There is too much talk about 'technology'. It's about how to deploy, ease of use, cost and reliability. These critical factors always appear large on my radar screen."

Just a minute with Bill Dawson...

Role models: Warren Buffet for his rules: 1, never lose money. 2, never forget rule number 1. John Harrison, the cabinet maker who solved the greatest scientific problem of his time. And James Dyson who never gave in over 5,000 prototypes

What talent do you wish you had? To fly

What do you fear the most? Failure

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? An explorer

Top tip for resellers? Put as much effort into your supplier as you do your customers

One example of something you have overcome: Fear of failure

Industry bugbear: Voicemail: I hate it

What possession could you not live without? A good scotch

Name one thing you couldn't do without in your job: Coffee

Your greatest strength? I believe in what I do

Lesson learnt: I should have joined Wavenet sooner

What's the best piece of advice you have ever been given? Nobody's better than you, and you are not better than anybody

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Leaving a position with large share options because the new role was more exciting

Name three ideal dinner guests: Audrey Hepburn, Heston Blumenthal and Bob Marley

Your biggest opportunity? Every opportunity is a good one and might be the biggest



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Xelion's UK cloud advent

Xelion is clearly on to something: Its UK channel champion, the bold and adventurous Managing Director for the region Dave Reynolds, has defied the odds and, as if racing the clock, established a fast rising disruptive force in his homeland cloud comms market.

The boom in hosted comms is no secret, and as the cloud rises so emerges an opportunity for ambitious newcomers to overleap national boundaries and set up shop in international markets. From a standing start with Netherlands-based Xelion, Reynolds has become a champion of the new kid on the block and shown himself to be a skilled channel building architect with an expanding practice in the UK.

It started in late 2016 when Reynolds had a big job on his hands. Undaunted, and with an adventurous spirit that has been on display since childhood, he could not resist the chance to build a channel partner network from the ground up single-handed as Xelion's UK warrior. It took Reynolds just over a year to grow the customer base to 10,000 seats, contributing to a total base of 140,000 Xelion users. Monthly growth is running at 2,500 to 3,000 seats. "Now I want to create a tier one group of distributors with the capacity to support new partners," said Reynolds.

He knew from the start that entering a sophisticated and established market like the UK could take a Herculean effort. "The early liberalisation of the UK telecoms sector means we face a lot of competition," commented Reynolds. "However, the market has



Dave Reynolds

Now I want to create a tier one group of distributors with the capacity to support new partners

not yet matured. Hosted voice is surrounded by media hype but adoption is still relatively low. Our principal focus is the SME sector and our goal is to achieve one million subscribers by the end of 2022 via channel partners."

UK partners have already won key customers in all sectors including a major housing association, an international airline and a Premier League football club. According to Reynolds, Xelion is thriving due to the integration capabilities of its

open platform architecture, its partner support and channel-only policy. "Partners can configure to whatever the customer wants," he added. "This puts the comms provider in control, enabling them to build their own proposition instead

of being restricted to a one-size-fits-all service."

Xelion's Integration Market Place provides pre-packaged integration between its platform and an array of CRMs and other applications such as MS Exchange and



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Office 365. "Partners no longer need to spend time, resources and expenditure on programming interfaces between the Xelion hosted platform and their customer's preferred back-office apps," added Reynolds.

Xelion was founded by Micha Cohen in 1988 and employs 45 staff who are mostly based at its HQ in Delft. The UK 'contingent of one' will be bolstered this summer when Reynolds recruits a number of Partner Managers. "We have also expanded into Germany, Spain and recently signed Capstone as our first partner in the Republic of Ireland," noted Reynolds. "A distribution agreement with an important telephony manufacturer will see Xelion launch in Belgium at the end of the year and five other EU countries during 2019. One million seats will not be far off the horizon."

Most new entrants to the UK cloud market are the tortoise to the hare of Xelion's rapid expansion, and the company's bold growth strategy reflects the character, leadership and experience of the man driving the UK business. "When I was young I worked on a high ropes course, similar to Go Ape, in upper New York State," explained Reynolds. "I ran team building sessions with camping, hiking, field cooking and games. I was later tasked with re-building an old scout troop that had broken down which we grew to 28 scouts and financial stability."

Most outdoor adventure specialists would not give computer gaming the time of day, but as a child Reynolds was also a keen gamer, so much so that his

career kicked off as manager of Rogues Asylum, an Internet café and gamer's haunt in Southend near where he grew up, which became successful with a base of 300-plus members. "My first serious job was with Griffin where I had the chance to learn from some of the industry's best sales and marketing minds," he explained. "I soon realised that this was the career for me."

Opportunity knocks

Reynolds struck up an acquaintance with Cohen when he was introducing fixed products into a mobile reseller. He was mesmerised by the potential of Xelion's platform – which was first developed in 2008 as a central hub for corporate communications – and knew that with the right support he could introduce it to the UK market at the right time and make an immediate impact. After moving to channel reseller PMGC, Reynolds exposed the business to Xelion and sales 'went through the roof'. By now Reynolds had successfully introduced Xelion to two resellers and decided to give the wider channel 'something different'.

"You have to differentiate and sell more than a price point otherwise you're in a race to the bottom," commented Reynolds. "The channel's role is to add value. Our partners are moving from customers in the SME sector to bigger enterprises with multisite operations and we need to move with that evolution. The biggest trend we'll see in the coming year is the growing demand for apps and integration, something that the market has lacked for some time." ■

Just a minute with Dave Reynolds...

Role model: Richard Branson, a great entrepreneur who has gone from vinyl records to space tourism

What talent do you wish you had? Cloning myself

What do you fear the most? Being bored

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

What's the best piece of advice you have ever given? Know what you're talking about before you open your mouth

How do you relax when not working? Spending time with my kids, caravanning and gaming

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Leaving as manager of Rogues Asylum in Southend where I'd built a base of over 300 members to go to the States as an outdoor adventure specialist

Name four ideal dinner guests: Bruce Springsteen, Dave Grohl and Lord Baden Powell

Your greatest career achievement? Establishing Xelion in the UK is by far the major achievement of my career to date

Top tip for resellers? Never get complacent because disruptive technologies hit faster than you think

What possession could you not live without? My laptop, I take it almost everywhere

Industry bugbear: Jargon. Why do we have to make it so hard for customers to understand concepts?

How would you like to be remembered? As a great guy who was honest and fun to be with

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illustrious Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

With past hosts including, Jimmy Nesbitt, Ronnie Corbett, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre and Vernon Kay the entertainment as ever will be top drawer.

This powerful combination means the Comms National Awards is the ultimate evening for the ICT channel to gather together, recognise excellence and innovation, network with industry friends and colleagues and, of course, have some much-deserved fun!!

ENTRY DEADLINE JULY 27th 2018



9 MAKE IT A STRAIGHT SIX BY TAKING POLE POSITION AT NATIONAL AWARDS

This year's Comms National Awards, to be held at The Park Lane Hilton, London on Thursday 11th October, will be sponsored for the sixth successive year by leading service provider, 9 Group.

According to Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, there was not even a moment's debate around renewing the service provider's commitment to the event, which is the unquestioned highlight of the awards calendar.

"Last year was another memorable evening and it's wonderful to recall how welcome our brand ambassador, Josh Webster, was made to feel by everyone in the hall as he opened the event, ably supported by a hugely amusing host, James Nesbitt. Saunders believes the standard of award entries will improve once more, meaning the judges will again face the unenviable task of separating them.

"If you win one of these awards, you really can legitimately claim to be the very best at what you do and I look forward to seeing a healthy mixture of familiar and new faces on the podium this year.

"I hope the channel's top people will be there to enjoy the very best night out in our industry and will enter as many categories possible to showcase the incredible range of talent that this industry should so rightly boast about."

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Nick Goodenough

Partner Services Director

Spitfire

"Spitfire is delighted to sponsor the Application Category for the 2018 Comms National Awards. As a company dedicated to providing customers with the reliable super-fast network services and IP Engineering solutions that are the gateway to cloud apps and software, it is appropriate that Spitfire recognises the immense effort made by application vendors to produce reliable, high quality apps.

"The Comms National Awards have become the benchmark for excellence in the comms industry, providing public acknowledgement of achievement. So we can be assured that all the finalist entries will be of the highest calibre and we wish them all the best of luck."

Vertical Market Solution Category



Vincent Disneur

Head of Sales & Marketing

Union Street

"Union Street's channel strategy focuses on developing innovative software solutions backed by comprehensive support, training and consultancy services. Encapsulated by our company strapline, 'powering your potential', this approach enables our partners to leverage maximum value from our solutions. It's a great honour to be sponsoring this year's CNAs, an event which like ourselves, encourages and celebrates excellence within our industry. At last year's CNAs it was extremely gratifying to see so many Union Street partners collecting awards for their efforts. On behalf of myself and team UST, I'd like to wish the very best of luck to all this year's entrants."

Telephony Category



Kevin Boyer

Managing director

IPNetix Ltd

"IPNetix Ltd have sponsored the CNA awards since 2014. This event is the highlight on the calendar because it brings together the channel to celebrate our mutual efforts and is also the predominant channel awards of the year. Winning here really is a special achievement and the CNA team always deliver an event to match the quality and breadth of the participants.

"IPNetix operate a channel-only sales strategy delivering expert professional services to our partners, this event is a pivotal point in the year where we celebrate our joint success."

Distribution Category



Paul Taylor

Sales Director

Voiceflex

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

Entrepreneur of the Year



Adam Zoldan

Partner

Knight Corporate Finance

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

Reseller of the Year – SME



Garry Growns

Sales Director

Daisy Wholesale

"Entering the prestigious Comms National Awards not only brings together great individuals and companies, whilst showcasing businesses' successes, it allows you to acknowledge the hard work, talent and determination of your teams. At Daisy Wholesale, we believe the SME sector has huge potential which is why we are proud to support our fantastic partners and the channel by sponsoring the SME Reseller of the Year category. This is your opportunity to reward the people that make your business a success, so grab it with both hands and get your entry in now."

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Charlton's model career f

Daisy Group's Head of Group Architecture Lyndsey Charlton represents a rare and emphatic breaking of the comms industry's male dominated mould – and ambitious women seeking a role model in IT need look no further.

Much of Charlton's inspiration and acumen is perhaps due to her grandmother, a pioneering and enterprising woman whose occupation ran counter to the pseudo 'rule of law' that women don't run businesses in semi-rural towns. Back then she was no doubt bored by convention and its continuity, a trait that is evident in Charlton's mould breaking career journey having bridged not one, but two divides across engineering and executive leadership in a male dominated industry.

She left school at 16 and signed up to a YTS scheme in Business Administration. The first placement was a local council office where she dispensed bus passes. From there Charlton was on-boarded by Black & Decker in a service desk role and later undertook an IT apprenticeship where three mentors with computer science degrees passed on their knowledge. A move to Orange followed, and after a six year stint delivering local and wide area networking support with design and build Charlton gained experience in IT managed services and hosting while working for a small organisation that was acquired by 2e2, which itself was bagged by Daisy.

"In 2012 I made the leap into a Head of Department role, not quite hanging up my



Lyndsey Charlton

I still have my cabling crimper tools and snips in a drawer. They never get used but I can't quite let them go

technology skills but moving away from a hands-on technical position, with more of a business and strategy focus," stated Charlton. "I learned that I could have a greater influence, not just on the business but also on my colleagues. I still have my cabling crimper tools and snips in a drawer. They never get used but I can't quite let them go."

Charlton's career path is a symbol of Daisy's growth story, which reflects the scale of her ambitions as a whole – ambitions that she would like to instil in other women. "It is hugely important for more women to aspire towards engineering and leadership positions within the comms industry," she said. "The difference of thought, removal of group-

think and addition of skills will have a positive impact on our industry and only grow it further. We are already seeing some great work in this space and this year has been a positive one for women. If we manage to spark interest in the female talent pool through education and changing perceptions we could close the shortage in STEM skills in the UK. If, as

a business, you are at the forefront of that you will reap the rewards. But the rate of change is a concern."

In her career, Charlton has shown her nerve and passion for the job in various ways, not least in overcoming 'conventional' perceptions and challenges linked to gender. "One of the most challenging aspects is salary – being underpaid compared to male peers," she stated. "This has happened on multiple occasions, mainly due to my lack of confidence to drive the issue to resolution. That ability comes with age and confidence, and it's why I would like to see more mentorship for women in male orientated industries."

Charlton moved into the Head of Group Architecture position in 2017. The acquisitions of Phoenix and Alternative Networks meant that, for the first time, there was a need for such a Group function. "I was involved in preparing the business case so it made sense for me to take the lead when it was created," she explained. "As the business grew it became clear that there was a requirement for two new focus areas to help make the shift from being a group of smaller organisations to one larger one, and to enable us to deliver technology standardisation and technical advice to our customers. That was a big challenge, and I love a challenge."



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Her first priority was to create definitions around what teams would do, how they would go about fulfilling their tasks, and what benefit they would bring to the business. It meant writing terms of reference, getting stakeholder buy-in and recruiting the right people to deliver on the plan. "Then it was all about putting in a framework to follow and build effective inter-team relationships," commented Charlton.

Fit for purpose

"My remit has developed as a result of acquisition and growth, as well as my own drive and senior management backing to constantly improve on the service we deliver to our customers. We are now focusing on organic growth and from where I sit in our Group Infrastructure Services area the focus is on delivering an improved customer experience through a ruthless focus on operational efficiency and infrastructure that is fit for purpose."

Charlton's current priorities are to complete two large business cases as part of the lifecycle management of Daisy's Service Provider Network and shared infrastructure platform (a multi-tenant private cloud), which will also support a wider transformation programme as well as strengthen the company's hybrid approach to cloud.

"The long-term objectives are to embed a central architecture function into the business and define it in more detail alongside expanding a customer account-focused architecture and strategy planning team," added Charlton. "We are constantly thinking about all the different types of customers

and sectors, as well as our internal operational teams that have to deliver and support it all. Making this as simple as possible is key."

That's good news for Daisy, but part of an ever evolving challenge for Charlton who needs to keep abreast of all technical and industry developments. "The most challenging part of my job is too much change," she said. "Public cloud is in constant development and new capabilities through hyper-scalers such as Microsoft Azure need constant tracking. Furthermore, the emergence of IoT and bots is interesting. Connecting things to become more efficient promises to be a great benefit to so many businesses.

"Against this backdrop I would like to encourage more time for innovation in my departments. There are so many good ideas and I often find we unwittingly stifle innovation. So, creating the ability to break down hierarchy and traditional formality in a functional structure is important. Not just in my team but in our industry. It's the modern way of working which will be key if we want to attract and retain the next generation of top talent."

Inspired by her grandmother who broke the rule book, Charlton also aims to become a role model for younger women – to this she is dedicated. "I would like to be on a path towards a CTO or CIO role," she said. "And gain the relevant exposure and experience to head in that direction, as well as do more for diversity in STEM and apprentice-graduate programmes – something I am passionate about." ■

Just a minute with Lyndsey Charlton...

Role model: My grandma who was a business woman in an era when that was unheard of

What talent do you wish you had? An ability to travel in time

What do you fear the most? Not enjoying work any more

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Running a Bed and Breakfast in the Scottish highlands, or a Scottish estate with fishing, woodland and deer

One example of something you have overcome: In a room full of opposition speaking up on what you know is right or believe in

Tell us something about yourself we don't know? I am a professional teacher at a local dance school in Durham

Advice for women: Go for it! Don't hold back and don't second guess your ability. Our industry is becoming more diverse and diversity stimulates success

Name three ideal dinner guests: Hedy Lamarr to know more about her inventions; my grandma to ask her how she handled being a business woman in a semi-rural town, and to tell her about my path; and Richard Branson to get some insight into him as a person

Your greatest career achievement? Being part of a team in Daisy that saw the market for UC&C was moving to cloud and being early adopters in this space

The biggest risk you have taken? Stepping out of my comfort zone and moving into a hands-off technical role

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With the impending switch-off of ISDN, the increasing demand for customers for joined up ICT solutions, plus the increasing popularity of cloud communications which creates a plethora of security issues, the opportunities for Voice & Data resellers have never been better.

THE BIG ISSUE IS: WHAT DOORS DO YOU KNOCK ON AND ENTER FOR NEW PROFIT OPPORTUNITIES?

Each year since the turn of the millennium, **Margin in Voice & Data** – affectionately known as 'The Industry event of the Summer' – has helped resellers addressing SME markets identify and open new doors to profit and truly understand the changing ICT environment.

This is a truly inspirational event that will help you really understand the market changes and meet suppliers keen to help you unlock these amazing opportunities.

Where will it take place?

On June 14th, MiVaD 18 returns to the beautiful Forest of Arden Hotel complex in the heart of the West Midlands and once again this 24-hour event promises a day of inspiration and exploration plus a 'once a year' opportunity for resellers to network with like-minded peers and business generators.

Who will qualify to attend?

IF YOU ARE A DIRECTOR OF A RESELLER ORGANISATION TURNING OVER UP TO £3M, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO ATTEND MiVaD 18 COMPLETELY FREE OF CHARGE, INCLUDING ALL HOSPITALITY AND AN OVERNIGHT STAY AT THE FOREST OF ARDEN!

This offer is only extended to 120 reseller directors operating in the ICT channel so do not delay, register now to secure your place.

What happens at MiVaD?

Split into three sessions, the event will comprise a morning thought leadership conference to help delegates get an understanding of the new Voice & Data landscape; an afternoon 'managed meetings' session where resellers can meet new supplier partners; and last but by no means least, a fun evening networking dinner.

Biggest MiVaD line-up ever set to meet and educate new partners

SPEAKER



Adam Zoldan, Knight CF

As Knight Corporate Finance approaches its 10th birthday and targets its 100th deal, Adam Zoldan will be providing an update on market activity over the year; an overview of the M&A landscape and the latest trends driving value in the ICT market. He will also reflect on the changes we have seen over the last 10 years, what has been driving changes in valuation and how this affects your business.



Hospitality sponsor

SPEAKER



Adam Cathcart, 9 Group

In his address, Adam will look beyond the baseline of products and portals to explore the support resellers can demand from their service provider in today's market. He will also let you in on the secrets of 9's most successful tactics to drive new business for partners, equipping you with ideas around how to achieve even greater growth and success.



FREE TO PERFORM
Silver sponsor

SPEAKER



Sean Chumura, Ombex

Sean Chumura is a renowned computer security and forensics expert and programmer with more than twenty-five years of experience working with United States federal, state and local governments, as well as private industry and foreign governments. He is the Co-founder of the first private cyber warfare/terrorism defence centre and developed technologies to identify attacks against critical infrastructure in real-time.



Silver sponsor

SPEAKER



Andy Duncan, Spitfire

Spitfire has developed a core network that is designed to deliver resilient, business only voice and data solutions to our 6000+ partners and end customers. Andy's presentation will focus on Spitfire's differentiators. Key take-aways will be: How Spitfire can guarantee voice quality; Spitfire connectivity – when connecting via the internet just isn't enough; building your solutions with Spitfire services; the Spitfire Partner Service team.



Silver sponsor

SPEAKER



Mark Curtis-Wood, Nimans

In his talk at Margin in Voice & Data, Mark will emphasise how the size, scale, trust and ease of doing business with Nimans remains as strong as ever and how the company continues to take resellers on a simplified journey based on the evolution of its product set through automation of its back office and a 'one pane of glass' philosophy.



Silver sponsor

SPEAKER



Iain Sinnott, Vanilla IP

Iain will share his thoughts on how Professional Solution Sellers will dominate the next phase of our industry's evolution and truly LEAD the customers to a rewarding and high ARPU adoption of a blend of smart and agile cloud services. He will discuss the need for increased depth in product knowledge and the ability not only to sell core services in simple bundles, but also to layer on micro products and related cloud tools in an on-demand, user by user fashion.



Silver sponsor

SPEAKER**Paul Taylor, Voiceflex**

In 2017 Voiceflex launched a Web Real Time Communication (WebRTC) application at Margin in Voice & Data highlighting the benefits and opportunities of applications leveraging WebRTC technology. In addition, the company developed and launched an additional WebRTC application bringing further value to its SIP Trunks. This year Paul will be demonstrating these applications live and will also provide an overview of the SIP and hosted market and what we expect will happen over the next seven years.



Silver sponsor

**Philippe Matos, MyPhones**

"MyPhones are delighted to be returning to the MiVaD 2018. Our development team have been working extremely hard to deliver something very unique for our existing and prospective partners and we are really excited about launching our brand new partner portal at the event. We will be showcasing the best that British UCaaS technology has to offer and discussing how our partners can benefit from our technology partner status with Cisco MPP and why it has been hugely successful to date."



Bronze sponsor

**James Warner, Glide**

"MiVaD is perfectly timed for Glide, Glide is the new brand of the combined forces previously known as WarwickNet and CableCom Networking Ltd. Having just launched our channel program, you can now access our unique, closed footprint and extremely competitive Ethernet services. Talk to us about how Glide can give you something a bit different as we install our own FTTC and Full Fibre to thousands of businesses across the UK that we serve. Planting our own cabinets and laying our own fibre, we offer truly unique capability in the areas we service."



Bronze sponsor

**Don Moore, Channel Solutions Resource**

"Margin in Voice and Data is one of the major industry events which we all eagerly look forward at Channel Solutions Resource. Our offering of channel-only support, maintenance and provision for telephony and data is now complemented by a new world-beating hosted telephony platform that can work with any network provider or line type, all backed up with our legendary service delivery and attention to detail. We look forward to meeting with channel delegates at MiVaD to discuss ways we can work together to address market opportunities."



Hospitality sponsor

**Shaun Bodsworth, Inform Billing**

"We are delighted to return after such an enjoyable and beneficial event last year. As exhibition zone sponsors, we will be available all day for delegates to drop by and speak to us about the Next Generation of our award-winning billing software. There's no need to make an appointment with us - just pop by for a chat and find out about the new features and enhancements we are releasing throughout 2018. We are looking forward to catching up with existing and prospective customer as well as other channel partners, during the event."



Exhibitor Zone

**Vincent Disneur, Union Street**

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



Bronze sponsor

**Justin Blaine, NTA**

"NTA are proud to once again be sponsoring Margin in Voice & Data 18. This year, NTA will be highlighting their Hosted Telephony platform (which was recently highly commended at the CNA Awards) with a whole raft of different models that resellers and dealers alike can easily onboard with and take to market. More importantly, NTA will demonstrate how their margins can be increased to over 80% by reselling the 'No Per Seat License Fee' model which has been widely adopted by over 100 partners across the UK."



Bronze sponsor

**Dave Reynolds, Xelion**

"MiVaD is a major opportunity for the channel to explore profitable new business opportunities. That's why Xelion wants to explain the advantages and benefits of our hosted telephony platform. In particular, Xelion's open architecture and our 'Integration Market Place' means channel partners can easily configure the platform to their unique customer needs and applications. Xelion has a standardised user interface app for desktop, mobile and tablet so users can use the solution anywhere, anytime. The platform brings together voice, instant messaging, SMS, video, wallboards, delivering a single organised communication service for customers on any device."



Bronze sponsor

**Steve Harris, Nuvias UC**

"The Nuvias UC team are looking forward to our first year at Margin in Voice & Data 2018. We will be showcasing products from industry leading UC vendors and talking to delegates about our own innovative full CPE management platform 'Dovetail' which has been carefully designed with the channel in mind. We truly believe that success in this space depends on the delivery of disruptive, customer-centric solutions. Join us in the exhibition zone to find out how we can build them. We have the technology and skills. We enable and make UC what it should be."



Exhibitor Zone

**Darren Garland, ProVu**

"ProVu is delighted to be sponsoring MiVaD for the third consecutive year, we look forward to meeting new and existing customers and discussing how we can support the growth of your business. We have an impressive portfolio from the world's leading manufacturers, partner them with our award-winning team, technical support and value-added services to simplify your delivery of Customer Premise Equipment. Visit us to discover the value of becoming a ProVu partner."



Exhibitor Zone

**Tim Brooks, Pragma**

"We're looking forward to Margin in Voice and Data as an ideal opportunity to meet new and existing partners. As a channel only vendor bringing Ericsson-LG iPECS UC, hosted and applications to the UK market, we offer real differentiation by enabling our resellers to deliver iPECS as either an on-premise, cloud or hybrid solution, based on their customer's requirements, together with channel leading sales, marketing and technical support."



Bronze sponsor

**Matthew Barnett, Gamma**

"As one of the industry-leading events, Gamma is pleased to sponsor this year's Margin in Voice and Data. The day provides an excellent opportunity for us to meet with existing and new partners. Gamma is the only major UK communications company and network operator that has a clear market focus on targeting customers through the channel and we offer a variety of ways of working with us to ensure our Channel Partners are successful in their markets. To find out how we can help grow your business come and speak with us at the event."



Bronze sponsor

**Mike Wilkinson, Edgewater Networks**

"Edgewater Networks is a leader in service assurance, security and SD-WAN products for the hosted PBX, UCaaS and SIP trunking markets. Our solutions are widely implemented by some of the world's largest service providers including Comcast and AT&T. We have recently begun operations in Europe and can help solution providers add value to their SIP and collaboration offerings with our market-leading solutions."



Exhibitor Zone

**Sean Dixon, Fidelity Energy**

"At MiVaD we'll advise resellers how you can grow additional margins from your trusted client relationships. We will help you quickly upskill your business, train your sales teams in the art of advising on energy, build a marketing plan and give you the tools you need to add energy to your product portfolio"



Bronze sponsor

Nimans sticks to Plan A

The only way for Nimans following the death of its founder in January is expansion and growth, and in taking control of its destiny the distributor's leadership team intends to build a northern powerhouse that will serve as a model for the rest of the channel, according to Director of Channel Sales Richard Carter.

Since the death of Nimans founder Julian Niman in January the company has not undergone a reorganisation at the top. There was no Plan B. Responsibility rests on the existing executive team, and whether in logistics, products, services or new technology areas, Nimans' future is about expansion and reseller engagement. "We have the same strong and experienced board in place," stated Carter. "The board has been making the day-to-day strategic decisions for some time. Nimans remains a fully independent organisation in line with the wishes and plans Julian had put in place. The board is in charge and has a clearly defined action plan for further growth."

Nimans' growth into a £125 million turnover business is an endorsement of its leadership team and strategy. The Manchester-based business has over 6,000 customers and aims to reach the £150 million milestone sooner rather than later. "To facilitate growth we have

expanded our warehouse by over 30 per cent and also increased the number of staff positions," added Carter. "Our headcount is almost 390, and 10 per cent of those roles were newly created during the last year."

These growth factors underline Nimans' critical development as a value added distributor and readiness to invest in specialisations such as conferencing, headsets, Skype for Business and PBX systems. "But to fully embrace UC we have reinvested in all our teams so that everyone is comfortable to talk about, advise and educate our customers about the complete UC mix," commented Carter. "This has broadened our reach. We have up-skilled our teams to develop reseller knowledge."

Nimans remains true to the core of its founder's mission and displays equal loyalty to traditional markets that continue to show potential for growth. "In many ways we are the last man standing in the PBX arena – sales



Richard Carter

continue to grow," said Carter. "Obviously, in line with market trends we are also helping resellers capture greater share of the hosted market where we have our own solution as part of our Simplified Network Services proposition. Furthermore, we are offering resellers next generation billing services in partnership with Union Street Technologies. Teaming-up with this billing and provisioning expert is a natural progression as we evolve our network services proposition."

Growth drivers

Nimans generates growth in all areas of its operations but significant hotspots are across the major accounts section of the business, where the big carriers sit, and in the System Integrator arm. "This growth is primarily driven by large Skype for Business projects," noted Carter. "In many ways it's all about Microsoft and Skype for Business and

Teams. In this context we have also become a logistical powerhouse around UC end points where sales were up 15 per cent last year with almost one million units sold. Personal conferencing shipments rose 30 per cent."

Many turning points have helped to throw off Nimans' reputation as a traditional distributor. Its logistical heritage is of course a boon rather than a ball and chain. "We stock around 8,000 products which are available for next day delivery," said Carter. "We are vendor agnostic and every customer can rely on a personal Account Manager. We've restructured our former systems team and up-skilled staff to work across different brands as many resellers cross over between vendors. Everything has been streamlined from a pre-sales and field sales perspective. We have also moved to a territory based system.

Overall, we have become more approachable and more reseller driven, which is reflected in roadshows such as last month's Network Services tour."

In terms of product and technology evolution, Carter expects M2M, IoT and AI to gain traction. "Tools that enable greater levels of collaboration and smarter ways of working are becoming much more popular too as the lines between traditional voice and IT services continue to blur," he commented. "Our cradle-to-grave IP delivery and support solution Compendium is an auto provisioning and estate management service that enables resellers to secure a bigger slice of the burgeoning UC end point market. With initiatives like this Julian's original mission statement 'to serve the customer' remains as strong and as relevant as ever." ■



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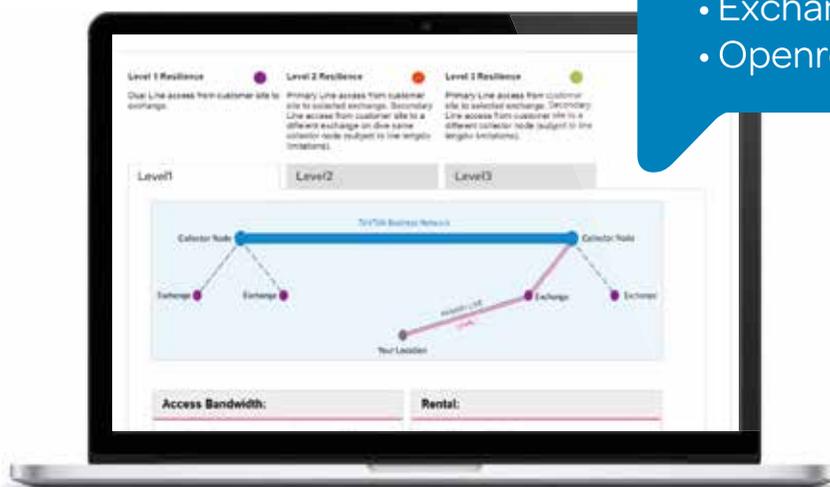
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Good channel relationship

Good supplier/reseller relationships are what makes an industry tick and in the ICT channel partnerships are clearly not 'just business'.

At the numerous channel events we run, strong bonds of friendship and a mutual drive for success are strikingly evident.

It's all about people. People who have their own goals, hopes, and struggles. Being aware of the humanity involved in every business interaction is the first step toward building a successful relationship with partners whether you sit on the vendor or reseller side of the channel fence.

In days gone by sales people badgered and haggled for the best price and receiving everything and giving nothing in return became a badge of honour. Thankfully, those days have long passed.

Without naming names, there are vendors who seem to have forgotten the importance of their partner channel. Resellers have told us they haven't seen a representative from some vendors in two years. It's simply lackadaisical (or arrogant) and it's hardly surprising they are losing market share.

On the reverse side of the coin others are absolutely flying because they have committed to their reseller partners and share mutual goals with them. The London based data network business Virtual1 is a case in point, It's a channel only business and at last month's Comms Dealer Sales Awards the company picked up four trophies including Overall Team of the Year based on the support and service it has delivered to its partners (see pages 48-49).

It's important to remember that not having empathy and understanding for your partners, could cause you to lose them and tarnish your reputation. Bad news, and a bad reputation are hard to lose. In our industry good news travels fast, but bad news travels faster!

Our contributors to this month's Kaleidoscope come from both sides of the channel but agree on the fundamental issues on partner relationships: trust and understanding are paramount.



ANDREW DICKENSON
JOLA

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?

Trust, price and support are 'givens'. Jola partners want to control the relationship with their customers and that means Jola investing in zero-touch white label systems.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?

Anyone that tells you price isn't important is usually the most expensive. For most resellers, finding and converting prospects is difficult. How does your supplier help?

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?

Resellers have customers waiting for information. Suppliers must be candid, comprehensive – and most of all quick! Drop everything you are doing for your partners.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?

A mature reseller only needs a 'fixer' to act as an advocate inside an inefficient supplier. The best channel managers are trusted to sell with the reseller, helping them win deals.

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS

We recently worked with a reseller to win an IoT/M2M deal for 330 data SIMs with a local council. We helped them show how a multi-network SIM could save thousands a year.



TOM MAXWELL
NIMANS

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?

A range of factors play a beneficial role. Seamless collaboration creates a win-win for all parties. Support and the highest standards of service along with guidance and flexibility are key.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?

Trust is very important in any relationship along with a wide product range, impartial advice and all-round support.

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?

It's very important to market information and take programmes and initiatives to resellers that will help them clinch more business by communicating it out to their customers

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?

Channel Managers are vital. They are the key interface. The quality of information they deliver is crucial along with being there when needed.

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS

We set up many new accounts each month and go through a familiar and very valuable routine from credit lines to training and development and pre-sales support. It's a true partnership from start to finish.



ANTONY BLACK
WAVENET

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?

Partnership, but in the true sense of the word. It is impossible to have thousands of partners, you can have thousands of customers or lots of suppliers which is a transactional model and never mutually beneficial beyond a price point.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?

Quiz on service, quiz on operational efficiencies then quiz on price.

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?

Our business objectives, values, products and strategy are important to our customers and we like to keep them updated.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?

Channel Managers are the mouthpiece for the business, however, they are only as good as the engine supporting them. Good communication has to come from the very top to cascade down successfully through the business and land well with customers.

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS

We have acted as a trusted consultant to deliver network savings for the partner and revenues more than £1.3m per annum for Wavenet. This is what true partnership is about, it's not simply growing a customer base!



JUSTIN BLAINE
NTA

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?

Key relationships are driven by empathy, great support, an understanding of each other's businesses and the supplier being flexible to the resellers ever changing needs.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?

Find a supplier that appreciates your business, offers wrap around support and, most importantly, doesn't compete with you!

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?

This is fundamental, it's all about trust. Information should be two way and by sharing this can only provide a stronger and closer relationship.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?

Some resellers need motivating, however in my experience most do not, they have their own targets and have the drive to make themselves successful!

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS

A reseller recently requested an analytics package on our platform for a customer. We developed this and now it's available for all our channel partners.



The New Wave
in Channel



Voice



Security



Data



Mobile



Cloud

Partners are not just about price



NEIL WILSON
VIRTUAL 1

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?
Trust, simplicity, transparency and empowerment. The supplier should not hold a reseller back, but push them forward.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?
I look for partners that make it easy to do business, be that simple pricing, automation or integration potential or service ethic. Many times, these make the difference with the success of a new product or service

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?
Context is everything and Information sharing is what takes a relationship from the transactional into a true partnership, where both parties are getting more than just financial benefit to wider synergies.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?
They are the lynchpin of success, simultaneously advocates for both organisations, they should bring the wider businesses together. When done well the relationship should out grow them.

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS
Our relationship with Acronis has allowed us to bring a backup product to market that has grown at 100% every 6 months. A simple product, clearly and simply delivered to us in a wholesale friendly way.



MARK SHRAGA
NSN

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?
Both parties really must listen to each other on a regular basis and ensure they face the challenges in the market place together.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?
If your new supplier doesn't have a clear case study for how your business can be successful, I recommend reviewing the market until you find one who does.

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?
The ongoing conversation between parties is super important; being included within the cultures of both businesses as so much vital information is shared this way.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?
Channel managers should keep the promises made to their partners; over promising kills the relationship, and under promising can restrict growth and come across as flakiness.

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS
One key supplier always makes time to chat through all areas of the business, always finding somewhere we can grow; subsequently they get more business.



ERICA LEWIS
DIVA TELECOM

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?
Key ingredients that spring to mind are mutual trust, support, regular contacts, honesty, teamwork, integrity as well as understanding and belief in the products.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?
Do your research - look at credentials, finances, status in news and social media, speak to peers about their experiences with supplier - before deciding.

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?
It is extremely important to share mutually beneficial information, although sensitive information is shared only under a non-disclosure agreement.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?
Close relationship with our channel manager has an immediate impact on our motivation, which transforms into passion for the product, that drives our team and leads to success!

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS
We received national recognition by winning NextGen Connected Britain Award for Gigabit City Leeds project with CityFibre and we were CDSMA Reseller Best Marketing plus Best PR Campaign finalists.



ADAM CATHCART
9 GROUP

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?
We believe the key foundations of a successful partnering relationship is based on communication. Providing accurate and honest information builds trust and ultimately helps each other grow.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?
Work with suppliers that you enjoy doing business with...

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?
We try to make sure that we are open and transparent with our suppliers & partners, sharing information helps us to develop strategies and builds trusting partnerships.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?
I believe the best Partner Managers become an extension to a Partner's business. They understand how they fit in and how we as a supplier can assist them to achieve their business goals.

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS
Mobile Account Solutions became a new 9 partner following an acquisition. We spent some time with them to understand their strategy and have seen them massively grow multi product revenues.



ANTON LE SAUX
ZEST 4

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?
Trust and confidence has to be key, you need to be confident that all of the goals for success are aligned

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?
Don't be seduced by just a cheap rate. Service and support is critical when choosing a supplier. This is true value not cost

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?
Very, if you're afraid to share with your partner / supplier you will never be able to align a proposition that will meet customer demands

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?
Relationships are key to success. A good channel relationship is like any other relationship, you support each other to achieve joint success

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS
Zest4 have just invested in becoming a channel only IoT MVNO. This was achieved on our success in the last 18 months with a great partner



ANDREW WILSON
NODE 4

SUPPLIER/RESELLER RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT WORKS?
People, relationships and information flow are key here. It allows accountability on each side of the fence – ensuring information and education is flowing in each direction.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARTNERS?
Ensure your vendor strategy is solid. Don't assume that if a product is cheaper it must be easier to sell, something that can falsely lead to the building of a portfolio that is made of multiple vendors.

HOW VITAL IS INFORMATION SHARING?
From feeding enablement and education further down the supply chain, through to market positioning, and strategic direction. None of it is possible without regular information exchange.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE CHANNEL MANAGERS?
Channel managers have one key role, and that is to maximise relationships. They are a vital part of the channel 'machine'.

OUTLINE AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS
Partner enablement has been a key theme for Node4, and our flagship events Seminar-in-a-Box and TransformIT are all possible because of our supplier collaboration.

Stronger Together

We are challenging the old ways of partnering. We want you to ask whether you are being delivered the level of support you need to grow your business or, are you simply helping your suppliers to grow theirs. Partner with Wavenet.

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Billing sector 'chained' by

Against progress in the billing sector (and the interests of customers) stands the obstacle of legacy technology to which an intransigent and substantial section of the industry is wedded, claims Strategic Imperatives Head of Business Development Tim Sayer who argues that old systems and their limitations must be regarded as belonging in the past.

Strategic Imperatives has shown itself adept at mapping the only sane path in a billing landscape defined by two starkly different trajectories, according to Sayer, who says arguments in favour of modern systems over legacy technology are tantamount to one-way traffic. "Legacy billing platforms are designed to bill for lines and calls," he stated. "This has no relevance in today's fast changing comms environment and keeps the channel in virtual shackles. There is only so much you can do to crowbar today's modern services into a traditional billing platform before it becomes a barrier to growth and ultimately a terminal risk."

You only have to consider Openreach's new consultation to withdraw WLR to understand the limitations of legacy technology and the dangers of being wedded to it, believes Sayer. "This is critical," he emphasised. "It is also important for providers to look beyond billing as a mechanism to calculate and produce invoices. A billing platform should be the cornerstone of revenue assurance, ensuring profitability and automated due diligence with the multitude of suppliers a typical CP deals with."

It is impossible to argue against the rationale put



Tim Sayer

The concept of a bill run, a phrase that is synonymous with billing, is a historical legacy that is well past its sell by date

forward by Sayer, who says billing vendors owe it to their customers to be more flexible and better able to accommodate the different ways that CSPs want to service and bill end users.

"In some cases that may require an element of re-engineering, but there is a limit to what a software company can shoehorn into legacy architecture," commented Sayer. "I'm

not talking big picture stuff here. It's often the simple things that make the most difference. Recent examples include the fact that calls don't always originate from a telephone number, so

why try and enforce that? Cloud usage data doesn't look like a traditional CDR so why should users be manipulating data in Excel before it can be billed?"

Strategic Imperatives built its system from the ground up. The design was greatly influenced by observations of what was good and bad about legacy implementations, with adaptability being prioritised as a core strength, not only to ensure the platform evolved with the industry but also to manage the stick-in-the-mud nature of traditional operations. "We invested heavily in creating generic usage rating and subscription rating engines that allow CSPs to monetise any product, service or event," explained Sayer. "But we are surprised by the longevity of traditional PSTN-based services and the time it's taking for the move into IP-based hosted models."

Unlike traditional systems, Strategic Imperatives' multi-tenanted real-time Elevate billing platform is based on AWS and offers multitasking, hyper scalability and disaster recovery along with financial grade security and encryption. Open APIs mean customers can build OSS/BSS implementations including CRM, provisioning, ticket management and revenue assurance systems which communicate with



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legacy systems

the billing platform. The company operates a PAYG licensing model which, says Sayer, levels the playing field by supporting businesses of all kinds with equal scale and automation.

Strategic Imperatives has also modified its approach to bring its billing system to CSPs of all sizes, enabling them to leverage the capabilities of open APIs and achieve implementations that punch above their weight alongside the bigger players and those with an in-house development team. "We want to level the playing field and will play a more active role in bringing the benefits of automation to CSPs," stated Sayer.

Integration matters

"We are in the process of creating a number of out-of-the-box integrations with third party systems such as Salesforce, and working with integration partners to design, manage and deliver projects on behalf of businesses that may not have the capability to do so themselves. CSPs should keep an open mind and not accept bad or outdated practices as the norm. Billing doesn't have to be time-consuming or complicated."

Strategic Imperatives sees itself as a technology company and invests heavily in its own R&D and skills to stay ahead of hi-tech advances in areas such as AWS which is in a state of near permanent innovation, creating new ways for companies to leverage more powerful services. "A big focus area is data and analytics, and AWS services such as Redshift allow us to bring enterprise grade solutions to the masses,"

stated Sayer. "The channel is rapidly evolving to be a much more technology centric marketplace with requirements to bill for hybrid cloud services, IoT and M2M as well as the need to offer complex support and licensing capabilities."

Elevate's functionality and hyper-scale technology means core usage, subscription rating and invoice production engines can be measured in minutes rather than hours and days. "The majority of our roadmap sits around the fringes of that core functionality and we are working with

We are surprised by the time it's taking for the move into IP-based hosted models

customers in areas such as supplier reconciliation, usage monitoring and data analytics," added Sayer.

"Once a business has freed up resources by accelerating the bill run and streamlining processes through integration and automation, it's the areas of revenue assurance, acquisition and churn, ARPU and margin that are the most important. There are some great data analysis tools out there but the challenge for billing vendors is to take that data and present it to users as information that can be easily understood and actioned."

This capability is crucial in combating the emergence of

'unicorn' companies making a success of the recurring billing model as they exploit the new subscription economy. "Right now these unicorns don't have the core usage rating capability that's still an essential part of the portfolio for most CSPs, so they would struggle to make inroads into the channel," noted Sayer. "However, we are keeping a close watch and continue to invest in our own subscription and usage rating capability to ensure that we provide a tailor-made solution to the changing requirements of CSPs."

The billing sector faces its greatest challenge in a generation and its future success hinges on an industry-wide consensus being reached to break the chains of legacy modes of operation and deliver what the modern market ordains. And according to Sayer, the legacy versus modern billing hold-up is as much about perception and semantics as it is the long stretch of obsolescence. "The concept of a bill run, a phrase that is synonymous with billing, is a historical legacy that is well past its sell by date," stated Sayer.

"Its origins lie in technology limitations at both the network operator and billing software levels. The concept is fundamentally flawed and is not compatible with a culture focused on flexibility, real-time and an emphasis on the 'power of now'. Billing systems should focus on the customer. If they want to be billed weekly, daily or monthly then that should be possible. If they prefer regular micro payments – why not? Networks are almost there, but billing systems are still some way behind."



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Innovations in billing

Billing providers that lack agility will fail the test of the market, according to Union Street Technologies Head of Sales & Marketing Vincent Disneur who says the future success of agile billing platforms relies entirely on their constant innovation.

A great weight of expectation is being placed by partners, and customers, on the agility of billing providers, and a sure sign of their adroitness is the speed with which R&D projects are executed and the high levels of investment that make innovation in the billing space blossom. Union Street Technologies, for example, ploughs over £1.5 million per year into the development of its aBILLity platform, and parades the channel with a new and popular web-based application having successfully transitioned from the desktop. The company employs 90-plus full-time staff, many working on the next software versions, while others provide support to partners of all kinds, from start-up level (managed bureau services) to carriers.

"Many partners, particularly those using our Bureau Billing Service, now use aBILLity's web client as the primary interface for the platform," stated Disneur. "We provide hosting services for well over 80 per cent of our 550 CP partners, and almost all new partners choose to host aBILLity in our data centre.

Therefore we have channelled significant resources into developing and maintaining our hosted environment, which is powered by Azure and offers practically limitless scalability for compute resources, along with robust data security and availability."

Not a month goes by without more partners migrating to hosted, noted Disneur. Another common theme he pointed out is systems integration with nearly all new partners requiring some level of integration between aBILLity and other business support systems. Integration is a must, but the method of integration is a subject of debate, with Disneur believing that there is a clear case for leveraging the agility of 'amazing APIs' versus the plug-and-play approach.

"Out-of-the-box integrations for popular back office software packages sounds good on paper, but due to the differences in the way CPs operate it's inevitable that integration requirements will differ greatly from one CP to the next," he explained. "Developing clever APIs is more effective. They allow partners to work



Vincent Disneur

with third party systems integrators and develop integrations according to their exact requirements. This ensures that our partners can integrate aBILLity with other platforms to any degree that works for them."

Market power

The R&D activities undertaken by providers such as Union Street point to the power that agile and cutting edge billing platforms now hold in the market. Another key function is to speed up the quoting of next gen' network services, which Disneur says is a boon to partners who only need to input one entry to compare data connectivity services and prices from multiple suppliers. This service also offers standardised workflows for progressing quotes through to fulfilment and for populating data into aBILLity to enable billing.

Disneur also noted that the hazard of billing platforms in the past has been issues

around inaccurate reporting and identifying inaccuracies, something that Union Street has been active in eradicating. "As margins in voice and data continue to be squeezed there's greater pressure on CPs to avoid being overcharged by suppliers and to know when they are undercharging customers," stated Disneur. "There is a greater need for billing platforms to provide accurate reporting and in-depth analysis to pinpoint loss making customers and those receiving an inappropriate service."

Disneur also stands by the view that service-based contracts, where each customer is charged a flat fee for bundled services, will grow in popularity. CPs investing in their own soft switch is another noteworthy trend he's observed. "Owning a soft switch brings many cost benefits and offers the flexibility to create packages for customers,"

added Disneur. "This is a dead cert game-changer for the market. Billing systems are well placed to complement this step-change by offering a greater range of tools for provisioning and service management."

When in discussion with a potential billing platform partner, resellers would be doing themselves a big favour by knowing the difference between strategic waffle and rational argument, to which Disneur shines a light of clarity. "Don't just look at the billing platform," he advised. "Be sure that you assess the competence and capability of the billing solution provider. The skills and size of the development team should be considered as a sign of the provider's commitment to product development. If the platform lacks agility and fails to keep pace with the market this could hinder business growth and limit a reseller's ability to capitalise on emerging opportunities."

Other sensible objectives are to assess a provider's training and support capabilities and know their SLAs like the back of your hand. "Check if the provider can show evidence of robust operating procedures, particularly around data security," commented Disneur. "If, for example, the provider being considered is certified for compliance with the internationally recognised ISO/IEC 27001 Standard for Information Security Management you can be fairly confident that all data will be securely managed. Compliance with Ofcom's Total Metering and Billing Scheme is also a sign of a provider's commitment to high standards." ■



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Why adaptability is key

No area of the comms industry is so alive with innovation and adaptability than the billing sector which is in perpetual step with the march of the market. Here, we talk to three leading protagonists to gain a collective view of the forces driving the current and future development of modern billing platforms.

A sense of challenge typifies the billing sector which is under pressure to seize the moment and refashion itself in accordance with the new customer landscape. It is an environment in which legacy architectures are likely to fail in all their aspects, believes VanillaIP CEO Dave Dadds. "A billing system can easily become like a speed limiter on a racing car if not designed from the ground up for its specific market, in our case on-demand cloud services," he stated.

"The big challenge is how to provide on-demand multi-product and multi-vendor self-service in a simple user based environment, and bill the elements regardless of type, service, packages, hardware, minutes etc so that all revenue opportunities are available to charge. Then there's the different commercial options to consider."

It comes as no surprise that traditional billing practices are dying out, but the

new market offers a far brighter future for resellers, and they must grasp its demands, urged Dadds. "Cloud is about delivering big and micro products," he added. "To make the most of cloud, resellers must be able to capitalise on micro products like apps on mobile phones without a noticeable overhead. This is why billing is less of an external service and more a core function of an integrated ecosystem."

"Once customers get used to the fact that cloud communications consists of a myriad of on-demand services for which they only pay when they consume, we will see a buyer driven market. At the moment big service providers are driving the market with restrictive bundles and one-size-fits-all solutions, but an expansion of buyer knowledge and evolving worker behaviour will soon change that."

The future direction of billing lies not so much in the technology push as in the specific user requirements of the day, says Dadds.



Dave Dadds

The market is shifting and we need to react to emerging suppliers, evolving products and a changing customer profile

"Our developments are heavily driven by the feature request system in the Uboss portal which is open to our staff, our resellers and all customers," he explained.

Listening to the market

"We listen to the needs of the market and develop solutions to support them. For example, automation reduces back office costs and customer self-service also brings savings. Suppliers with a dynamic and fast evolving portfolio of services will inspire confidence. Slow and steady no longer wins the race. Agility is key. The market is shifting and we need to react to emerging suppliers, evolving products and a changing customer profile."

Automation and integration are also core to Inform Billing's development strategy. The company invests approximately 40-45 per cent of turnover every year into improving products and services. Its Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth said: "Over the past few years our strategy has been predominantly geared around product development, and we have invested over £1 million in converting our entire billing platform into a fully web-based application."

"We have been addressing the increasing requirement for automation and integration through the use of APIs. By developing a web-based application it has become much

easier to 'hook' up with other applications and we are currently working to build useful integration with a range of complementary systems."

In terms of integration, Bodsworth noted the wide variety of systems that Inform Billing's platform is required to integrate with, from CRM to accounts packages, support desks to payment gateways and ERP systems, not to mention carrier providers. "That's in addition to the requirement to process CDRs in a more automated way," he added. "It is no longer sufficient to tie-in with one mainstream provider, and necessary to transfer key information between multiple

Continued on page 44



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Continued from page 42
different systems of the reseller's choosing."

New technological areas in which billing systems are vital include cloud and subscription services and more inclusive package-like propositions, observed Bodsworth. "The trend has moved away from creating a single platform as specialist products allow for more tailored solutions for specific operational areas while enabling the systems to talk and transfer information," he commented. "This can then be taken a level further with multiple subscriptions in a single package. Resellers can often be confused as to why, when the proposition appears simple, their billing and particularly their invoice verification and reporting is so much more complex."

Complexity

"A reseller may want to provide a small business with a 10 user package that includes office connectivity, mobile connectivity, hosted voice, office 365 licences and IT support on a per-user or per-company subscription. While this creates a simple to understand proposition it adds significant complexity to the billing element. The end bill for the customer is clean and simple, but all of the individual components of the connected proposition need to be validated on a line by line, item by item basis, which may also include components from multiple sources."

Arvind Meghani, Managing Director of ebillz, is focused on improving the firm's



Shaun Bodsworth

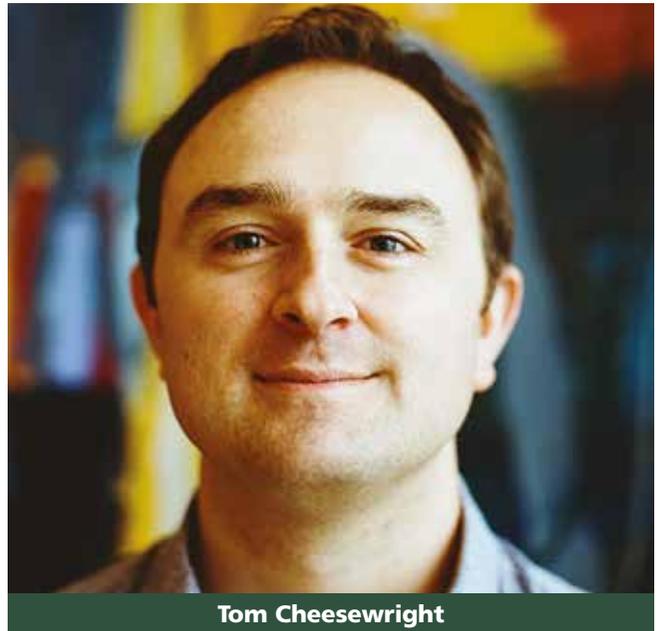
cloud-based billing solution. "Customers are used to the flexibility and security of the cloud solutions we offer in other areas of the businesses, and billing is no exception," he stated. "We'll also be focusing on growth and attracting new players in the market."

"Flexibility will be key. Billing providers need to be able to handle all types of data sources. Some development will be required to make it an intuitive process for resellers to map these out themselves. Alternatively, billing providers must be responsive to varying reseller needs."

Meghani also pointed to the growing importance of billing solutions for converged product portfolios, IoT and cloud products. "Our systems handle these already and we've collaborated with industry players to offer a tailored billing solution for their IoT customers," he explained. "Going forward, billing efficiency and intuition will be key. For example, mobile, SIP, IoT and inbound on a single, understandable invoice. We're focused on developing this area."

Invisible digital pathway opens

Plot the path of technology over the last 60 years and you can watch a number of different trends develop, writes Tom Cheesewright, Applied Futurist. But arguably the most important is its increasing usability. Much of the rise in processing power, bandwidth and storage has been applied to the simple task of making the machine do more with less input. I think this trend is set to continue, resulting in a future of increasingly natural, human, and nearly transparent interactions with our machines.



Tom Cheesewright

Think back to the age of the punched card. Think how explicit you had to be in your instructions to the machine. Think how alien that language of matrices was to any normal human, and the level of instruction needed to elicit even the most basic response from the machine. Think back to the early days of mainframes and terminals. The explicit code required in perfect syntax to provide the machine with problems, solved incredibly fast by contemporary standards but requiring a huge amount of work on the part of the operator.

Then things started to change. The graphical user interface and the mouse brought us skeuomorphic designs – icons of things, recognisable from the real world that succinctly communicated their purpose. Now we could just point at what we wanted and click, a mode of interaction that has evolved through the touch screen, allowing

rough gestures as inputs into our virtual world.

Today the machine does nearly all the work. I can call across the kitchen in entirely human language, no training required, and the machine will respond, correctly playing the song I want. At least half the time, anyway.

Tactile desires

Alongside technology becoming progressively more human, so our use of technology has become progressively more around achieving very human goals. Look at the top apps at any given point in time and they're generally not activities that take people away from human interaction. They are apps for communication, navigation, dating, for setting up meetings in the real world. They are apps for capturing those events and sharing them with those that can't be there. And they are apps for discussing what happened after the fact, a digital morning after the physical night before.

As the world has become more digital there has been a counter trend towards more physical, visceral experiences: Rising expenditure on travel and eating, even the resurgence of that most tactile of media, vinyl.

The next wave of technology naturally sees these trends collide – invisible technology enabling more physical, tactile interactions. Smart sensors and our social graph will feed personal AIs that know us as well as we know ourselves, triggering actions without us needing to stare at our screens. Seamless augmented reality will overlay the digital world on the physical, making the two near indistinguishable and shifting our posture from head-down to head-up.

Plot the path of digital technologies and our relationship with them, and I think you can actually see a course to a very positive future – one where the technology is invisible, and the people are the focus.



Arvind Meghani

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Node4's boxing clever

Cries of potential channel conflict have long hounded comms suppliers that deploy both direct and reseller sales strategies, but a Comms Vision 2017 keynote prompted Node4 to turn this perception on its head with the roll out of a well modelled Seminar in a Box programme.

The cloud and hosted services enabler has over 300 channel partners whose customers make up 40 per cent of its £40 million turnover, and Channel Sales Director Andrew Wilson and COO Paul Bryce fervently maintain that Node4's remaining direct customers provide a resource that can be leveraged via 'referenceability'. We meet at the company's Northampton data centre, one of three spaced across the east Midlands, while the company's TransformIT seminar is in full swing with speakers from suppliers and customers providing education on the benefits of digital transformation and Node4's enabling technologies.

Wilson has been with the company for just over a year since joining from Virgin Media where he was Head of Indirect Channels. Before that he held the same role at Daisy. Wilson was eager to explain why he firmly believes the channel can benefit from Node4's direct customer relationships and

the inspiration he gained from Comms Dealer's annual Comms Vision education and networking event. "People see having a direct sales force as a negative, but I see it as a positive, especially in a complex IT environment because we have true proof-points," he stated. "From today's perspective it's about taking customer case studies to describe how and why we won their business. People want to see how new technologies are being bought and consumed.

"At Comms Vision you had a large enterprise customer talking about what he liked from his supplier and how he likes to be approached. I distinctly remembering him saying if you could call him he would never answer the phone. It was all about how you fit into his strategy and that really got me thinking. We have many case studies of our own with enterprise and mid-level customers who have gone on journeys with us, where it started with one product and lead to us supplying multiple services and becoming a key part of their IT strategy.



Paul Bryce and Andrew Wilson

I thought... 'How have we done that? Let's hear it from them', so I launched Seminar in a Box six months ago.

"I have pre-canned content and go-to-market messaging for the channel and given them the ability to have access to our data centres, a presentation suite with all the AV facilities and all the key note speakers such as those at our TransformIT event. All they need to do is top and tail it, invite some customers along and we'll help them do the rest."

Partner promotion

Wilson says the programme will help resellers develop their status and lead to face-to-face customer introductions where Node4's support team can help close deals. "I did some research with Virgin based on interviews with resellers on what they wanted from their supply chain," added

Wilson. "One of the resonant points was that they needed help promoting their business and services and building their brand rather than the suppliers'. At the end of the day if a partner gets us in front of their customers with them, we win. That's what we are good at."

Bryce is certain the Seminar in a Box concept will give channel partners the confidence they need to open new customer conversations. "The channel has always been a route to market for us and it's a large part of our success – 40 per cent of our business comes indirectly," he added. "Andrew's appointment was an acknowledgment that we could do better to support our partners more. We have been trying to equip and enable partners more effectively and Seminar in a Box will give them everything they need to

present to their customer base. It's never been done before. They can forklift the whole event into their brand and business and even use our venue if they want.

"Our strapline is 'enabling business to do business' and we absolutely see ourselves as an enabler. We are in a fortunate position where we have been able to make a lot of investment early on. We've built data centres, cloud platforms, collaboration solutions and security operations centres. All this infrastructure adds up to a great end-to-end capability and we believe our partners should make the most of this investment and add new solutions to their portfolio because the customer conversation is changing. It's now more about strategic direction and digital transformation, and partners need to adapt to that conversation." ■



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Heroes all! The channel's sales and marketing teams celebrate in style

The UK's top channel teams know how to celebrate success and they did so with a large portion of superhero magic at this year's spectacular Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards.



teams bagged four awards - the biggest haul in the event's history - including the coveted Team of the Year accolade.

Held at the Sheraton Park Lane Hotel in London's Mayfair on May 3rd the extravaganza was brilliantly hosted by TV presenter Mark Durden-Smith (pictured below) and once again reflected the growing strength of the channel's sales

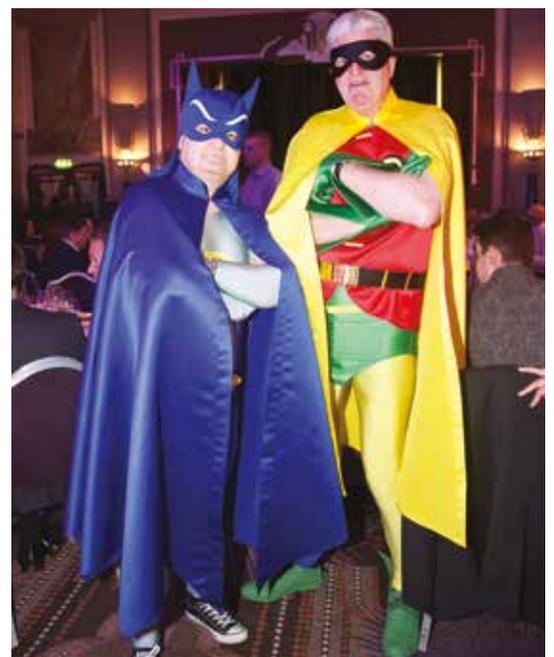
organisations, as Sergent reflected: "No-one ever really doubts the quality of sales and marketing teams in the channel, but these awards process endorses and underlines what a vibrant, unified and creative industry we work in. I would like to congratulate all the winners and pay tribute to all the teams that entered and made it such a positive, life affirming event."



The caped crusaders theme was a winner and there was even a welcome cameo from 'Batman and Robin', AKA Comms Dealer Managing Director Mike O'Brien and Editorial Director Nigel Sergent (pictured far right).

In his keynote address Henry West, Head of Channel Sales at headline sponsor KCOM, told the 400 strong audience: "We love this event, it provides a moment to pause, reflect and celebrate success, acknowledge those that have gone well beyond the cause to create a moment of success within our sales and marketing communities."

Top winner on the day was Virtual1 whose



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DISTRIBUTOR CHANNEL SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR.
Winner NUVIAS. Judges comment: "Great growth and very impressive numbers."



DISTRIBUTOR CHANNEL MARKETING TEAM OF THE YEAR. Winner PROUV. Judges comment: "An extremely professional entry."



DISTRIBUTOR CHANNEL MARKETING CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR. Winner WESTCON-COMSTOR. Judges comment: "An outstanding campaign with impressive results."



SERVICE PROVIDER CHANNEL SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR. Winner DAISY WHOLESale. Judges comment: "An excellent entry that demonstrated quality of service."



SERVICE PROVIDER CHANNEL MARKETING TEAM OF THE YEAR. Winner FIDELITY GROUP. Judges comment: "The team showed innovation in delivering a unique e-learning programme."



SERVICE PROVIDER MARKETING CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR. Winner CHANNEL TELECOM. Judges comment: "The ISDN Scrapage Scheme is a great idea that resonates with channel partners."



VENDOR CHANNEL SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR
Winner VIRTUAL1. Judges comment: "A well-presented entry demonstrating why Virtual1 has achieved such amazing growth."



VENDOR CHANNEL MARKETING TEAM OF THE YEAR
Winner VIRTUAL1. Judges comment: "Superb results achieved by a well-motivated team."



VENDOR CHANNEL MARKETING CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR. Winner INFORM BILLING. Judges comment: "A great integrated campaign produced with little resource delivering impressive ROI."



BEST VENDOR PARTNER PROGRAMME
Winner GAMMA. Judges comment: "Well executed Accelerate programme is clearly helping partners grow and succeed."



RESELLER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR UP TO £2.5M.
Winner SIRUS TELECOM. Judges comment: "Sirus has achieved impressive growth without sacrificing its core principles."



RESELLER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR £2.5-7.5M
Winner PURE TELECOM. Judges comment: "Customer service is clearly paramount to Pure and resulted in a massive client win."



RESELLER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR ABOVE £7.5M
Winner FOCUS GROUP. Judges comment: "The company's growth has been exceptional. It certainly hasn't rested on its laurels."



RESELLER BEST MARKETING CAMPAIGN. Winner CISILION. Judges comment: "The small team created a campaign that had clear goals and produced impressive results."



BEST SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN
Winner BERRY TELECOM. Judges comment: "A brilliant, inventive and 'bally' campaign. Hope no 'Brian's' were hurt in the process."



BEST PR CAMPAIGN. Winner BOXX COMMUNICATIONS. Judges comment: "A very innovative and different campaign that must have got the company noticed in its community."



BEST PARTNER OR CUSTOMER EVENT
Winner DAISY WHOLESale. Judges comment: "The event was clearly well targeted, well executed and well attended."



BEST APPRENTICE SCHEME
Winner FIDELITY GROUP. Judges comment: "The Fidelity apprentices are clearly well looked after and are very optimistic about their futures."



BEST COMPANY WORK TO WORK FOR UP TO £7.5M
Winner LILY. Judges comment: "An exceptional entry. The new offices and nurture programme sound like they are resonating with the employees."



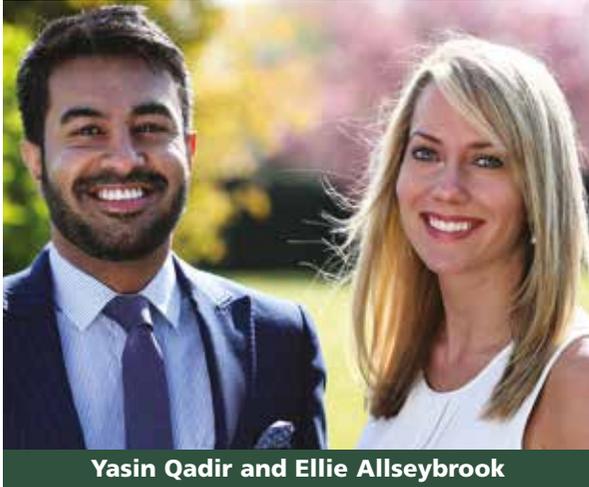
BEST COMPANY TO WORK FOR ABOVE £7.5M
Winner VIRTUAL1. Judges comment: "An outstanding entry with an abundance of evidence of an amazing workplace environment."



THE COMMS DEALER TEAM OF THE YEAR
Winner VIRTUAL1. Comms Dealer comment: "Virtual1's sales and marketing teams clearly work in harness and the success they have achieved deserves this recognition."

Qadir's well Informed CTO boost

for Adept4



Yasin Qadir and Ellie Allseybrook

THE appointment of Yasin Qadir as Business Development Manager for Inform Billing marks a step-change in the company's long-term expansion strategy led by Head of Business Growth Ellie Allseybrook. Qadir brings 13 years industry experience to the role including eight years in the billing sector, most notably as Head of ebillz Sales at Chess, the billing solution developed by Shaftesbury Systems and sold to the comms provider in 2010. Qadir stated: "My true passion and expertise lies in billing and I can't wait to get stuck in. With Inform Billing I believe I can help transform the billing user experience and take it to another level."

His remit is to accelerate the

momentum of Inform Billing's latest iteration of its next generation Eclipse billing software first taken to market last year and subsequently winning the Best Billing Platform gong at the Comms National Awards in October. Allseybrook commented: "Following the launch of Eclipse NG we have seen unprecedented levels of demand and Yasin's appointment will enable us to maximise on this interest while building stronger relationships with customers and across the channel as a whole."



Mike Williams

ADEPT4 has added 30-plus years industry experience with the hire of former Microsoft strategist Mike Williams as CTO. The appointment coincides with a period of investment in the company's managed and cloud services portfolio. For the past seven years Williams operated as a technology strategist for Microsoft helping MSPs to build services-led portfolios, a task that gave him a strong grounding to lead the strategic development and delivery of Adept4's managed services portfolio.

"I have a passion for technology and the role it can play in an organisation's success," said Williams. "We don't just want to satisfy our clients we want to be an ongoing partner in their success. That means helping to innovate for them."

Adept4 MD David Griffiths added: "Mike's passion and commitment are representative of Adept4's ethos and we welcome his expertise in delivering client focused thought leadership."

Also on the move...

Mitel makes way for Silke



Michael Cox

A NEW Channel Development & Alliances Directorship role opened up by Westcon-Comstor has been filled by channel veteran Michael Cox. He brings almost 30 years industry experience to the position having held a number of

channel development and vendor relationship roles including stints at Arrow, Computacenter and Avnet. Westcon UK&I MD Antony Byford said: "Mike gets the channel and how to ensure the goals of our vendors are met through the right mix of partners." Cox commented: "By understanding what partners are looking to achieve we can make a positive difference to their customer value."

ALISON Hastings has pledged to work closer with partners as Avaya's new UK Channel Lead. She brings 20 years tech sector experience and



Alison Hastings

moved from TalkTalk Business where she developed channel partner accounts and worked on retail and insurance outsource deals. In a previous role she managed Juniper Networks' UK alliance partnership with IBM. Hastings

reports to Steve Joyner, European Channel Lead, who said: "As partners become more strategically important to the future of our business Alison is a perfect fit for the role. She has a strong track record of developing major strategic partnerships."



David Silke

MITEL'S EMEA and APAC management team has welcomed David Silke as Vice President of International Marketing. Based in the UK, Silke brings 22 years technology industry

experience to the position and joins Mitel from Juniper Networks where he led global marketing campaigns. Previous roles include spearheading EMEA and APAC marketing programmes for Brocade and Nortel. Jeremy Butt, Mitel's Senior Vice President of International, said: "David's track record of taking a 360 business approach to marketing while remaining focused on the needs of the sales organisation is closely aligned with our strategy to move to the cloud."

Silke added: "Demand for cloud-enabled communications and collaboration solutions is sky rocketing, and marketing plays a key role in driving Mitel's growth."

THE appointment of Nicola Mercer as Pangea's IoT Channel Partner Manager is a sign of growing demand for IoT solutions as well as the firm's expanding reseller base, noted MD Dan Cunliffe. "Nicky's a strong leader, brings plenty of enthusiasm and will be key in helping our partners make the most of the IoT opportunity," he said.

Microsoft exec secured by GCI

MICROSOFT long-timer Patrick De Smedt has joined GCI as Non-Executive Chairman in a move that sees current Chairman Wayne Martin step down from



Patrick De Smedt

the role but remain on the GCI board. De Smedt spent 23 years at Microsoft which he joined in 1983 when it had just 200 employees. He went on to become Chairman for Microsoft EMEA. Since leaving Microsoft in 2006 he joined a number of public and private (equity backed) boards including Kodak Alaris Holdings, Morgan Sindall, PageGroup, Victrex and KCOM Group. De Smedt's move to GCI follows Mayfair Equity Partners' acquisition of a majority stake in the business and associated £60 million acquisition war chest.

CEO Adrian Thirkill said: "I have worked with Patrick before and know what a great strategic thinker he is, and he has a passion for technology and supporting high growth businesses."



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