



UKCloud Chief Exec
on competing with
the tech giants p30



Roberts spotlights
channel's pivotal
success factors p40

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This month's movers and shakers



Major Fern deal boosts Giganet

THE acquisition of Giganet's parent company M12 Solutions by Fern Trading supported by a major four year £250m funding deal creates a new force in regional full fibre building with scope to exert a national influence.

SPECIAL REPORT

The investment enables Fareham-based ISP Giganet to offer high speed full fibre connectivity to over two million homes and businesses, building on its existing offering on CityFibre and Openreach fibre.

The company is now building its own network in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and West Sussex (with more locations to follow) creating 200 new jobs in these regions.

Founders Andrew and Matthew Skipsey will work alongside newly appointed CEO Jarlath Finnegan.

"Giganet now has the resources to quickly connect lots more customers across the UK, creating sustainable high tech job opportunities for local communities," said Finnegan.

Andrew Skipsey (pictured), CSMO, commented: "We created a plan that justified a significant sum to enable us to build first in the areas we identified as

being off the Openreach or other alt net radar. Also, we are seizing the big opportunity to expand our commitment to the fast paced CityFibre and Openreach builds as well as increase our own network footprint.

"As time passes and the build in our planned region matures there are likely to be towns that will feel left behind. We will then go to other areas in the country – we are not constrained by geography."

See page 22 for the full story

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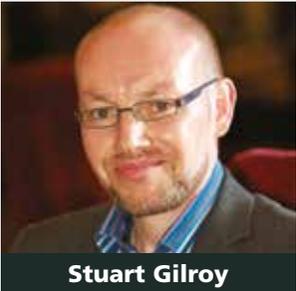
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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

TO SAY that Covid-19 has put the nation's planned switch to all-IP in 2025 in jeopardy could be a big misjudgment as there appears to be no sign of a revised schedule and no letting up of action on the ground. The roll out of full fibre is now such a race to secure

market share that, if anything, the 'wheels of industry' remain well and truly greased with large doses of lubrication from investors such as Fern Trading and its generous backing of Giganet a shining example.

In simplistic terms we can see that Giganet's formula appears straightforward – be motivated to sell and build fibre, do some networking and establish good contacts, pull in the right team, devise a business plan and present a watertight case for investment. Giganet, which to date has been a relatively small and local ISP, did just that and in the process put on display for all to see what is possible for those with ambition at this time of massive industry transformation (see page 22).

Still, there are many resellers yet to even consider IP, and a large number of partners are not yet of a mind to be an active part of the all-IP project, despite the 2025 deadline that is rushing towards their doorstep at a rate of knots. That's not all: Many end user organisations are unaware of the 2025 all-IP transition and what it means to them.

On the one hand, some elements of the channel are failing to grasp the inevitable and act accordingly for the good of themselves and their customers; on the other hand the channel's go-getters are taking a lead and spreading the word locally and far and wide.

These themes continue to emerge from the pages of this magazine. In fact the writing is on the wall... more than ever the channel could be polarising into groups of highly active winners and do-nothing losers. The good news is that it is not too late to take decisive steps towards securing long-term sustainability.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Kerv bolstered by cloudThing swoop

KERV'S MS skills received a major boost following the acquisition of cloudThing, creating a £35m revenue organisation with 330-plus employees serving over 800 customers, and offices in London, Birmingham and Bangalore in India.

cloudThing is Kerv's fifth acquisition in under a year and its largest to date in terms of value, revenue and headcount. The deal was funded using part of a recently announced £70m credit facility.

cloudThing will operate as a division of Kerv and is best known for its Microsoft Dynamics & Power Platform know-how and bespoke software development.

It was ranked as one of the fastest growing tech companies in the UK in the Sunday Times Tech Track 100.

Kerv Executive Chairman Alastair Mills said: "This acquisition is a significant step and a major investment in the growing digital transformation market. We are combining our cloud managed services and infrastructure transformation capability with cloudThing's digital proposition."

cloudThing was founded in 2012 and is a Microsoft



Mike Ing and Alastair Mills

Gold Partner with credentials in the government, non-profit and membership organisation verticals. Its team of 220 staff include developers, solution architects, data analysts and DevSecOps specialists based in the UK and India.

The founders remain with the business and current COO Stuart Harper assumes the role of cloudThing CEO, joining the Kerv management team along with Chief Customer Officer Mike Wrout.

Kerv MD Mike Ing added: "Over the years we have seen many companies in our space grow rapidly through acquisition, only to be followed by aggressive centralisation and

cost-cutting, and eventually any organic growth evaporates. Our strategy is different. We are focused on delivering organic growth by embracing the character of each complementary business within the group and leveraging our respective strengths. The combination with cloudThing is a great example of our approach."

Kerv was formed in July 2020 in partnership with mid-market private equity house LDC. It first came to market following the £30m merger of three cloud transformation businesses: DoubleEdge, Foehn and Metaphor IT. Since then Kerv has also completed the acquisition of UCNS Managed IT.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

NEARLY half of the 400 SMEs surveyed by Spitfire Network Services did not know that their comms services will be curtailed by 2025 as part of the analogue and ISDN switch off. The research also found that 83% of businesses have no visibility of when their services will be switched off, and over three quarters haven't prepared for the potential disruption. "The lack of preparedness has surprised us," stated Sales Director Dominic Norton. "Now is the time to take action because the future of businesses depends on it."

A CLOUD comms deployment model established by 8x8 unites standalone UCaaS and CCaaS solutions under the Experience Communications as a Service (XCaaS) banner. The move is reflective of new work requirements following Covid-19 and provides one platform to optimise both employee and customer experiences. The platform includes integrated cloud native contact centre, voice, team chat, meetings and CPaaS capabilities. CEO Dave Sipes said: "XCaaS eliminates communications silos, brings the employee and customer experience together, and helps drive the cloud communications industry forward."

Ex-Siphon execs set up Podia

A BUSINESS supported by former execs of UC distributor Siphon aims to meet various demands created by the rise of hybrid working practices following the pandemic.

Called Podia, the service provider offers technology, furniture and employee well-being content as-a-service and is backed by ex-Siphon Chief Executive Steve Harris and CTO Rob Smith who are the lead investors.

"We have built a strong team of staff and advisors that can help enable businesses to embrace new ways of working," stated Harris. "We want to deliver an effective collaboration experience to every workspace in the home and office."

The company claims to deliver a fully integrated workspace in days and its portal enables businesses to on-board and manage their remote staff.

Smith commented: "Well-being and productivity content means businesses have one place to manage everything they need in delivering an inclusive and effective experience for remote staff."

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Trio of acquisitions drive BDR's growth

A TRIO of acquisitions sealed by Stratford-Upon-Avon's BDR Group puts the business on track to complete its transformation and expansion plans, according to MD Malek Rahimi.

The company bagged ACR in Manchester, Buckinghamshire-based Boffins and Integratech which is located in Worcester.

"I am repositioning our focus towards IT, infrastructure and virtualisation," stated Rahimi. "The three businesses acquired are specialists in different aspects of IT and IT support, including storage, SAP integration, virtualisation and remote support.

"Organic growth must be complemented by a comprehensive acquisition programme to meet our plans."

The deals follow a record year for BDR Group which leveraged a 2020 cash surplus to fund the transactions independent of borrowing.

"The potential for growth across our acquired companies is huge," added Rahimi.

"Bringing these organisations and their expertise into the BDR family enables cross-pollination of services across the group. This is changing the landscape of our offerings and



will enhance BDR's positioning and competitiveness. I plan to remodel the group's offerings and increase its penetration into other areas of our market."

The acquired companies will continue to operate as normal

with key leaders joining the Group's management team.

Pictured (l-r): Boffins CEO Jon Buckley, BDR Group MD Malek Rahimi, ACR MD Tony Burrison and Integratech MD Ian Warr.

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BT brings in Cisco Webex



Gavin Jones

BT HAS added Cisco Webex to its Wholesale Hosted Communications (WHC) solution, giving partners access to video conferencing and online meetings, instant messaging, screen sharing, collaborative spaces and IP calling features.

The move is reflective of the rise in hybrid working models and is a step stone for businesses in the lead up to the 2025 transition to all-IP.

The collaboration tools are scalable and underpinned by BT's 24/7 monitored network.

Gavin Jones, Channel Director, BT Wholesale, stat-

ed: "The pandemic has created a market necessity for collaboration and accelerated digital transformation. A one size fits all approach doesn't exist. That's why it's vital that we provide the collaboration tools and services to help partners navigate through that change."

Jeff Boslem, Regional Director EMEAR Partner Collaboration Sales at Cisco, added: "Companies are reimagining how they work and with Cisco Webex companies can maximise their productivity and keep employees connected no matter the location." See page 18

NEWS ROUNDUP

ESSEX-based ISP County Broadband's workforce has expanded in number seven-fold in three years, from a headcount of 16 at the start of 2018 rising to 116 at the last count in May 2021. The rural full fibre provider operates in East Anglia and is supported by a £46m private investment from Aviva Investors. The ISP says it has so far engaged with 100 villages across Essex, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. Director of People Operations Lewis Simington commented: "We need to accelerate the roll out of real fibre networks to digitally future proof rural communities."

FULL fibre provider ITS has pledged customer install leadtimes of 15 working days or less for on-net lease lines – or it will give three months connectivity for free. "Once an order is placed that meets the terms of the promise the 15 consecutive working days install leadtime is triggered," commented Philip Lee, Head of Wholesale. "ITS will not stop and restart the clock for any reason other than at the partners' or customers' request."

BCN Group strengthens MS capabilities with Cloud2 buy

BCN Group has strengthened its Microsoft capabilities with the acquisition of data analytics and process automation business Cloud2.

Bradford-based Cloud2 leverages the Microsoft Power Platform to create real-time visualisations that help to resolve complex data and compliance issues.

Beech Tree-backed BCN boasts 10 Microsoft Gold accreditations following the transaction and Cloud2's healthcare and public sector propositions augment BCN's partner accreditations for the



Simon Kelf

NHS' Health and Social Care IT Network (HSCN) and G-Cloud.

The deal also builds on BCN's cloud and managed service offering, particularly in the areas of PowerApps, Power BI data analytics and reporting.

"We can take our combined capability to the next level and establish BCN as a key service provider across the public sector and healthcare arena," commented Simon Kelf, CEO of BCN Group.

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Glide nets full fibre firm CSP

GLIDE'S network footprint and customer base received an expansion boost with the acquisition of Concept Solutions People (CSP), which designs and builds fibre networks.

The company, now known as Glide Fibre, has built over 100 kilometres of owned duct network in 27 locations. Its customers include councils, data centres, telco service providers and universities.

CSP co-founder Dave Bowler said: "When we looked at the two networks we could easily see the synergies. As a small business we wanted to scale and have now joined a company that we know can scale."

Glide Group CEO Tim Pilcher commented: "Our investors, Alinda Capital Partners which purchased Glide in 2020, invest in asset rich infrastructure that will provide a lasting return for the next 20-30 years, and this acquisition suited those criteria well."



Tim Pilcher

Pythagoras seized by EY



Benoit Laclau

EY HAS acquired Microsoft Gold Partner Pythagoras Communications. The deal boosts EY's professional services and solutions offering around Microsoft Azure, Dynamics 365, SharePoint and the Power Platform.

Privately held Pythagoras was founded in 1999 and achieved Gold Partner status in 2006.

It has offices in Maidenhead, Solihull and London, employs 118 people and has more than 140 clients. In May 2020 Pythagoras acquired the K3 customer engagement business.

The company grew 15% in FY20 reporting sales of

£10.45m and profit before tax of £1.1m, with circa £4m cash in the bank. Up to now it has focused on the higher education, local government and financial services sectors.

The acquisition advances EY's growth strategy in the UK and Ireland. In the last 18 months EY bought SAP consultancy AgilityWorks and tax services firm Frank Hirth.

Benoit Laclau, EY Managing Partner for Consulting in the UK and Ireland, said: "This acquisition enables our teams to not only advise clients on strategy but also helps them design and provide advanced Microsoft technologies."

Groucutt adds 4sl business

DATABARRACKS' acquisition of Commvault-focused 4sl increases the firm's headcount to 75 including 50 data protection specialists.

The move is part of Databarracks' transformation of core services as it migrates customers' back-ups and disaster recovery workloads from its data centres into Microsoft Azure, AWS and Google Cloud.

"With 4sl we are adding an enterprise capability and the ability to transform legacy tape environments," stated Databarracks MD Peter Groucutt. "In 2020, business continuity and IT resilience were thrust into the spotlight. Protecting data and keeping systems online are fundamental for all organisations.

"The growing cyber threat is driving organisations to revisit their resilience strategies to ensure they are protected and can recover from any incident."



Peter Groucutt

Security proves a big boost

HOT demand for IT security solutions alongside new vendor partnerships have been credited for boosting Dublin headquartered DataSolutions' 2020 security revenues by €7.5m compared to 2019 figures.

"2020 saw increasing demand for cybersecurity stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic and the rising number of more vulnerable people working from home – with new products, applications, web and cloud platforms catering for a significant increase in cyber threats," said MD Michael O'Hara.

"With the increase in sophisticated cyber attacks targeted at dispersed workforces, security teams are under serious pressure to protect vulnerable organisations and critical data.

"That's not to mention the fact that they are potentially dealing with unprotected networks, personal devices and unofficial app downloads.

"Hence we will continue to expand our offering and deliver technologies and services which, now more than ever, are the difference between organisations surviving and thriving."

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Three Decades of Innovation and Commitment to the UK Channel

Hot on the heels of Comms Dealer's 25th anniversary, Ericsson-LG marks its 30th year in the UK channel.

This time 30 years ago, the first GSM phone was launched, the first website was created, and Linus Torvalds released the first version of Linux. It was clearly an important year for the world of tech. Big things were happening in the newly deregulated telecoms market, and the reseller channel as we know it was beginning to form.

David George, Tracy Jackson, and the team at Crane Telecommunications were about to launch a game-changing product and brand to the UK market. That launch was the GSX Key telephone system from Goldstar, which was the brand they originally traded under before adopting the LG brand we know today. It was the entry point into the UK market for Ericsson-LG Enterprise, and that heritage has shaped their products, business model and total focus on the channel for 30 years.



Tim Brooks, Managing Director, Pragma

Since 1991, Ericsson-LG Enterprise has sold every single product and delivered every pound of revenue through the channel. The technology may have changed, and many aspects of the business model have evolved to deliver the UCaaS products that resellers provide today. However, one thing that hasn't changed:

A total and complete focus on the reseller channel, their needs, listening to their voice and delivering the products they need to win and support businesses across the UK.

Discussing their thoughts from the original launch in 1991 are:

Tim Brooks, then Tech Support Engineer at Crane, now Founder and Managing Director at Pragma, said: "As a vendor, they are as relevant today with their UCaaS proposition as they ever have been, a strategy that has been fulfilled by their total commitment to the channel. Resellers can invest with confidence, knowing that the solutions are delivered by Ericsson-LG and will focus on

the needs of their customer base. Having been involved with the brand in its different forms for over 30 years, I'm hugely proud of our relationship at the forefront of the Ericsson-LG global partner community."

Tracy Jackson, then Founder and Director at Crane, now Sales Director at AdEPT Group, commented: "Back in 1990, David George and I concocted the idea that we could create a company that would do things differently from the rest. Although at first, we were laughed at for our channel-only approach, as time went on, it became part of Ericsson-LG's success in not just the UK, but globally. It isn't by accident that Ericsson-LG has had 30-years of success. It's down to the community of partners initially created by Crane and continued by Pragma coupled with the evolving reseller focused product portfolio from Ericsson-LG. Here's to the next generation to continue the journey and follow in our footsteps."

Bahman Rahimi, Chief Executive at BDR Group, added: "It is a sobering thought to think it was 30-years ago I came across Goldstar and I'm thrilled to be part of Ericsson-LG's journey and their UK and global success. The only way to describe my experience through BDR is what a bunch of fun it's been, working directly with Ericsson-LG in South Korea, who have been forever listening and accommodating. The supply chain has always been great end-to-end, from David and Tracy at Crane Telecom to Tim and Will at Pragma. The product has been continuously developed, modernised, kept up-to-date, current, and relevant. However, the cherry on top for me is the forever reliable policy of 'supply through reseller channel only'. Here's to the next 30-years."

Thank you to all the teams at Ericsson-LG Enterprise, everyone at Crane, and most of all, to all the resellers over the years who have helped Ericsson-LG deliver an outstanding solution to customers and build the foundations for the fantastic reseller channel we have today.

To hear more stories about the journey of the Ericsson-LG, visit: wearepragma.co.uk/blog/



Barclay's on a big mission

BELFAST-based Barclay Communications has embarked on a campaign to halt auto-rolling contracts and called on Ofcom to change the rules that allow communications firms to auto renew business contracts for up to five years.

Barclay founder and MD Britt Megahey says extending landline contracts forces many UK businesses to overspend tens of millions of pounds per year, despite regulatory bodies informing telecoms firms they must notify clients of an extension in advance.

The Protect UK Businesses: Hang up on Auto-Rolling Contracts campaign aims to kibosh terms and conditions that work against the interests of customers; and Megahey is encouraging businesses to sign a petition to ban what he calls a 'restrictive practice'.

"Auto-rolling is exploitative and a concern," he said. "Within the small print of the contract the client must give anything from 30 to 90 days notice if they want to end, alter or review their contract arrangements.



Britt Megahey

"If the customer is unaware of the procedures and fails to give such notice they are automatically rolled into an extended contract which could be for another 60 months.

"Right now, clients feel there is no way to get out of this contract and they have no way to appeal the extension. It's a UK wide problem.

"We are now encouraging businesses to stand with us and make a difference by signing our online petition and by sharing their experience of auto-rolling. We will present all information to the industry regulator, Ofcom, to encourage change in these regulations."

NEWS ROUNDUP

A REVAMP of Virgin Media Business's wholesale contract model sees anytime cancellation brought in as standard for managed Ethernet, Internet access and high capacity services. The new strategy will see excess construction charges abolished with pricing refreshed and benchmarked against acquisition prices. The majority of installation charges will also be removed. Mike Hallam, Executive Director of Wholesale, said: "The new contracts will provide partners with the agility they need to support customers transitioning to hybrid working."

COMMSWORLD has appointed banking and tech veteran John White to its Board as Non-Executive Director. His previous roles include stints at IBM, National Australia Bank and RBS. White said: "I stand ready to help Commsworld grow, particularly south of the border." White was awarded an OBE in 2003 for contributions to banking and tech. He also received a British Computer Society Flagship Business Achievement Award and an IT Director of the Year award.

ITP supports Vorboss push for diversity and apprentices

THE ITP and Vorboss have joined forces in a bid to recruit 150 installation technicians this year, half of them women.

The ITP runs a scheme which recruits, trains and mentors apprentices. "Our industry faces a digital skills gap and needs more skilled professionals to meet future challenges," said ITP CEO Crissi Williams.

"We're seeing a decrease in the number of young people studying STEM subjects and there is still a large gender disparity in those seeking



Crissi Williams

and applying for digital roles. The current workforce is not representative of wider society. We're on a mission with Vorboss to create greater equality in the UK tech industry."

The move is the latest development in Vorboss's campaign to drive diversity in the industry.

Vorboss CEO Tim Creswick added: "We have welcomed eight female apprentices this year. We are running open days where potential applicants can see what the role involves and meet the team before applying.

"The majority of attendees have applied for roles in the business as a result. Initiatives like this will build the future leaders and the next generation of our industry."

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KCOM in fibre trials with ISPs

HULL-based infrastructure builder KCOM has partnered with four ISPs in the east Yorkshire towns of Hornsea and Withernsea as part of a trial to provide wholesale services across its full fibre network.

The pilot is the first step for the wholesale business towards working with more resellers across its Yorkshire and Lincolnshire expansion area.

Tim Shaw, MD of KCOM Wholesale & Networks, said: "This is the next step as we seek out opportunities to work with new partners across our expanding full fibre network. This pilot scheme is just the start of what we believe has huge potential for both us as a wholesaler and our reseller partners.

"We are investing heavily to build a FTTP network that gives potential partners a platform to sell their products and services. We're now seeking new partners to join us on this journey."



Tim Shaw

CWSI snares security firm



Ronan Murphy

DUBLIN located CWSI's acquisition of Berkshire-based AVR International is expected to boost UK revenues to 65% of CWSI's total figures.

The deal is CWSI's first transaction and values AVR, a provider of cyber and cloud security services, at up to £4.5m.

AVR's founder and 12 employees become part of the CWSI Group. The combined entity will manage more than 500,000 customer endpoints including PCs, laptops and mobile devices globally, have over 50 employees and combined forecasted revenues of £13m in 2021.

CWSI provides mobility and security solutions to enterprise and government clients directly and via partnerships with

telecoms providers including Telefonica, Telstra and Three.

Since entering the UK market in 2017 CWSI has notched up organic growth of over 50% (pre-acquisition), predominantly via partner channels with UK revenues accounting for half of total group revenues.

CWSI CEO Ronan Murphy said: "AVR provides us with an opportunity to scale at pace in the UK and grow a successful direct business alongside our indirect channel operation.

"AVR's international base also allows us to build our footprint across Europe and we will accelerate this through organic growth and more acquisitions."

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Self-serve IVR portal rolled out

A NEW platform rolled out by PromptVoice enables users to self-serve bespoke IVR, in-queue and on-hold audio compilations via a white label portal. Users have access to a library of licence free music playlists, 10,000-plus marketing message templates and professional voice recordings.

Portal users can also record bespoke messages and leverage over 300 professional voice artists or text-to-speech characters.

Customised playlists can be streamed directly to phone systems and playlists can be scheduled to play at a specific time and date.

"This platform complements existing voice services and turns in-queue and on hold music from a silence filler into a tailored communication tool – and helps resellers unlock incremental revenue streams," said CEO Anthony Buxton.



Anthony Buxton

Google's deal with Starlink

A PARTNERSHIP between Google Cloud and SpaceX is set to deliver data, cloud services and applications to customers at the network edge, leveraging Starlink's ability to provide high speed broadband Internet around the world and Google Cloud's infrastructure.

SpaceX is to locate Starlink ground stations within Google data centre properties enabling the delivery of data from more than 1,500 Starlink satellites launched to orbit so far to locations at the network edge via Google Cloud, enabling the delivery of enterprise applications to virtually any location.

The service is expected to be available later this year.

"Applications and services in the cloud can be transformative for organisations, whether they're operating in a highly networked or remote environment," said Urs Hölzle, SVP Infrastructure at Google Cloud.

SpaceX President and COO Gwynne Shotwell commented: "Combining Starlink's high-speed, low latency broadband with Google's infrastructure and capabilities provides global organisations with the secure and fast connection that modern organisations expect."



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New design on cabinets

A SIGNIFICANT barrier to the speedy roll out of 5G has been overcome by CHH CoNeX and its approach to densified cabinet designs, claims Sales Director Kevin Wilcox.

He said the company is producing cabinets that enable engineers to put more network resources into the same amount of space, maximising the capacity of new cabinets.

“Higher data rates and the increase in fibre network options, together with modular designs for cabinets, ultra-high density shelving and optical distribution frame racks make densification a possibility,” stated Wilcox.

He claims that the densified cabinet designs show what could be achieved in the UK’s 5G roll out if more street side cabinets had improved capacity and enabled greater spatial efficiency for the installation of cable looms and assemblies.

“Thousands more small cells are expected to be required to service 5G and this sort of infrastructure densification must be



Kevin Wilcox

carried out fairly and quickly to get the cost of 4G and 5G deployment down across the country,” he said.

“The most obvious way to do this is to invest more heavily in digital infrastructure and to install a greater number of data cabinets and connection points. However, real estate, particularly in urban areas, is at a premium and expensive.

“Also, planning permission is becoming increasingly harder to come by. By manufacturing cabinets with greater capacity and duct miniaturisation in mind, the country can make better use of these resources and accelerate the roll out of new network connections.”

Landlines set for IP change

A LANDLINE replacement solution launched by Gamma, called PhoneLine+, is a key step stone for small firms needing to prepare for the all-IP world, according to Chief Marketing and Product Officer Chris Wade.

“With the 2025 PSTN switch-off fast approaching, PhoneLine+ is created for micro businesses that rely heavily on their single legacy landline,” he said.

“PhoneLine+ is delivered and fully managed from the cloud so the service is always available and maintained, as well as being simple to set up and easy to use.”

The VoIP-based WLR replacement service supports the key elements expected of a traditional telephone line including voicemail, call divert, call transfer and call hold.

It is estimated that over three million business telephone lines are yet to migrate to a digital solution. “In developing PhoneLine+ we spoke to hundreds of small business owners about their biggest daily chal-



Chris Wade

lenges and managing time better and more productively was top of the wish list,” added Wade.

“Any investment in communication tools and technology is expected to deliver tangible results in this area. It was clear that having a business phone that works every time, is easily accessible and allows customer and call information to be available in an intuitive way would be an advantage.”

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

NEWS ROUNDUP

GARTNER forecasts global security and risk management spending to exceed \$150bn in 2021, up 12.4%, which is almost double 2020’s growth figures. The research house attributes the strong growth rate to demand for remote worker technologies and cloud security. “Organisations continue to grapple with the security and regulatory demands of public cloud and Software as a Service,” said Lawrence Pingree, Managing Research VP. “Looking ahead, we’re seeing early market signals of growing automation and further adoption of machine learning technologies in support of AI security. To combat attacks, organisations will extend and standardise threat detection and response activities.”

EUROPEAN distributor Nuvias Group has expanded its scale and capabilities with the acquisition of Cloud Distribution, known for its security, networking and SaaS solutions. “Our philosophy and values are a perfect fit,” said Nuvias Group CEO Simon England. “Nuvias gains a focused early engagement specialist, extending the group’s ability to operate earlier in the technology lifecycle, driving opportunities with emerging and new technology providers.”

EXERTIS reported a 15% jump in sales for the year and an 11% rise in profits. Revenue rose to £4.48bn and operating profits reached £72.4m. The company said circa 75% of operating profit growth was organic. “The impact of the pandemic on customer behaviour saw strong demand for higher volume, lower margin consumer and working from home products,” commented a spokesperson. “But trading conditions in the higher margin B2B sectors, such as the Pro AV product category, remained challenging throughout the year.”

Telco teams invited to join the last ever epic Twin Town Challenge charity rally

BRENDON Cross is encouraging telco teams to sign up to the 2022 Twin Town Challenge which was postponed last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

With 50 additional places available the STL MD hopes to hit a £1m fundraising target for Charlbury-based charity SpecialEffect.

This will be the fourth and final iteration of the event that has so far raised £800k for the charity, which helps to bring fun and inclusivity into the lives of those with physical disabilities.

The challenge will see teams drive in £500 ‘bangers’ from



Team Focus Group rev up for the 2018 charity rally

Witney to its twin town Le Touquet in France between 29th April to 2nd May 2022, ending with a street party. Cross commented: “This is the final Twin

Town Challenge and the more cars that participate the more likely it is that we will hit our fundraising target of over £1m. All the costs of the event will be

covered by sponsorship which means that every pound paid by the teams in entry fees as well as the fundraising by the teams goes straight to the charity.”

Commenting on the theme for 2022’s drivers – Battle of the Bands – Cross said: “We’re looking forward to seeing people dressed as Abba, Village People, Spice Girls and Queen driving around northern France in London taxis and stretched limos, as well as the more ordinary vehicles imaginatively decorated for the event.”

For more information visit: www.twintown.org.uk



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A spiral-bound notebook with a white page is open on a dark wooden surface. The page contains the handwritten text 'Some things just work brilliantly together.' in black ink. A blue pencil lies vertically to the right of the notebook. A glowing purple arc is visible on the right side of the image.

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Cartwright's 17th buy up



Ian Graydon and Wayne Cartwright

COMMUNICATE Better's influence in the north west will be more strongly felt following its acquisition of Salford located Staveley Comms. The deal is Communicate Better's 17th in 10 years and beefs up its capabilities in IT, mobile, telephony and telematics.

CEO Wayne Cartwright also says the transaction will give Communicate Better greater cross-sell opportunities.

"After a testing last 12 months guiding the business through the pandemic, the time is right to pick up and continue

with our buy and build strategy which has always worked well for us," he said.

"Staveley adds products and services to our portfolio, such as the Avaya and 3CX products."

Staveley Comms was established in 1998 and will continue to operate under its existing brand name. Its MD Ian Graydon said: "Communicate Better is a great fit to help take the business forward. There are many common synergies and the expanded product portfolio on both sides offers increased choice for our customers."

NEWS ROUNDUP

A NEW group holdings company set up by VoIP distributor ProVu (called The T2100 Group) is intended to bring a sharper strategic focus to the activities of ProVu and its sister company Alliot Technologies. The move introduces two new operational committees made up of managers and directors to define and drive the future of each company. Group MD Darren Garland said: "We have been looking for some time at the best way of giving each company the focus they need to continue to grow while giving our up and coming managers a mechanism to get involved in setting and delivering the strategy for their companies."

OPENREACH has detailed 27 more locations where it will be rolling out full fibre, ranging from areas in Scotland, Wales and Devon. Overall, almost 800 locations have been included in the company's Fibre First programme – a £12bn project to build full fibre technology to 20 million premises by the mid-to-late 2020s. Openreach has so far built full fibre technology to more than 4.5 million premises.

Arrow pins UK-tec in bid to build out services portfolio

SURREY-based Arrow Business Communications has sealed its second deal of the year, this time snaring services company UK-tec.

The transaction gives Arrow access to a range of network and security products and services including an SD-WAN offering and managed services.

Ian Jackson, co-founder and MD of UK-tec, said: "The acquisition advances our strategy by at least two years. Being part of the Arrow group provides us with the structure and



Richard Burke

capability to support the channel with a range of services."

Arrow CEO Richard Burke added: "As a group we have been looking to accelerate the development of our SD-WAN,

complex networking and wider channel offering.

"Bringing the UK-tec business into the group enhances our capability in all of these areas, with experience that will benefit the group and its channel partners."

The deal follows Arrow's acquisition of Complete Networks in March.

Previous acquisitions also include cloud services provider Click, and Altinet, an international provider of IT security and storage services.

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Why Are Ecosystems the Key to Survival in the New Telecom Reality?

The telecom industry has always been fast moving, but the recent mass adoption of new ways of working – MTeams, Zoom, and more – has crammed years’ worth of change and challenge into mere months. PortaOne has just released its 2021 Telco Survival Guide, and one key area it identifies is the critical importance of using a platform that has a well developed ecosystem around it. Here, Enzo Viscito, Managing Director, UCaaS, for PortaOne, offers a personal look at what is driving this transition, and how companies must respond to the new normal if they want to survive.

When I was involved in the early days of VoIP, it followed the trend blazed by PBX vendors who kept adding more features as a way of differentiating themselves: voicemail, call recording, and so on. Today, such features are merely table stakes – but it’s an ante that’s only getting higher.

What I’m hearing in conversations with our partners now is that their business clients are racing to improve their customer experience, along with their own productivity. And they’re doing this by linking up a wide range of disparate systems.

This is not just about integrating CRM systems, this is about unifying a massive range of applications and hardware. At PortaOne, we are seeing providers from diverse areas of accounting, security, and ERP software all seeking to integrate with telecom solutions, and the results have been impressive. Just as one example, our partner Melita leveraged the APIs and open architecture of PortaSwitch to build a complete hospitality solution that allows any residential service to provide a great guest experience, whether that’s a boutique hotel, 5-star resort, or retirement home. For me, seeing innovations like these is one of the most gratifying aspects of taking our open



Enzo Viscito

approach, rather than just delivering a secretive “magic black box.”

The telecom industry has long encouraged customers to collaborate, but, from my perspective, it is often reluctant to do so itself. I believe it’s time for this to change. Today, it is essential for telco platform providers to fully embrace collaboration, and to provide a complete ecosystem that allows their partners to create new revenue opportunities. This requires a change of mindset: to start seeing your company not as simply a supplier, but as an enabler for innovation.

As times got tough this year, I watched as many providers tried to bypass critical channels and cut back their investment in their ecosystems. This, in my opinion, is a short-sighted fix. I believe true, long-term success depends not on closing in, but on opening up: taking a collaborative, open approach across all industries to create products that people want – and need. Doing this requires more than open architecture: it requires an open culture, one focused on helping others succeed alongside ourselves.

Forward-thinking providers are recognising that opening up their platform is the best way to extend the capabilities of their solution while still being able to focus their resources on what they do best: improving their core product.

PortaOne has been actively encouraging our partners to extend our platform for years. We understand that our partners are, by nature, closer to their customers, and have the best expertise on the demands of their niche. In turn, we can help them promote their industry-specific developments via our iPaaS marketplace.

Take our client RingLeader. They developed CrowdVoice – a calling and messaging app that’s popular

among US military personnel overseas. By building a clear and transparent product, they have quickly gained over 160,000 customers across 800 military bases.

The flexibility and ease of integrating with our solution was shown when our partner Redworks created a solution in just one week to help emergency control room personnel work from home during the coronavirus outbreak.

Having previously run a business that owned its own softswitch, I can say confidently that anyone doing the same today should be asking some hard questions about how their current platform provider is approaching the new world of ecosystems:

1. How easy are the APIs to access? And are those APIs well documented?
2. How easy will it be to customize and develop new innovations in-house? Do you have access to the source code, or will you need to beg, bully, and “hand-twist” the vendor to get it done?
3. What test facilities and support are they offering when it comes to developing applications and integrations?

4. Do you have any control over when and how platform updates are done, or is it forced by your vendor? Is there an option for gradual updates to avoid negative customer experience?

5. Finally, when you do create your own innovations, what can your provider offer to help bring it to the world and monetize it? Do they have a resale marketplace, or are you on your own?

At PortaOne, we can offer a positive answer to all of these questions. I cannot overstate the benefits of a platform which has a large and well-developed ecosystem. For resellers, it can help you make yourself relevant to a far greater range of potential clients, and offer more and more profitable revenue services. For developers, it can help you monetize your creations and incentivize a greater choice of solutions for your resellers. The end result? A virtuous circle of expanding opportunities for everyone, and the end of the “not-invented-here” syndrome.

To discover more ideas and guidance for 2021, find the new PortaOne Telco Survival Guide at:
<https://content.portaone.com/telco-survival-guide> 

Contact Enzo Viscito today › sales@portaone.com › +44 207 048 2089

Wavenet to expand with new investor



Bill Dawson

WAVENET has new owners following Beech Tree's sale of the business to Macquarie Capital in a deal that has ramped up the Solihull headquartered ICT provider's growth ambitions.

Since Beech Tree's investment in 2016 Wavenet has grown from a £14m turnover business to £60m-plus via a combination of acquisitions and organic growth.

Investments in people, network, products and systems enabled Wavenet to support large scale enterprise solutions,

while its recent acquisitions of VIA, Townley and Qubic provided the infrastructure to deliver a suite of connectivity, cloud and cyber services, and move into the ITaaS space backed by a partnership with HPE.

According to Wavenet Chief Executive Bill Dawson the partnership with Macquarie will provide a further boost to growth potential.

"We will continue to build on this growth as we enter our new partnership with Macquarie Capital," he commented.

"The passion and quality of our people, management and infrastructure combined with Macquarie's experience will drive us."

Adam Joseph, Head of Private Equity for Macquarie Capital, commented: "We are using our experience from growing other UK businesses to support the development of Wavenet from an organic and acquisitive standpoint."

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

Gamma sets out boosted mobile plans

THE relaunch of Gamma's business-only mobile service builds on a strengthened partnership with Three UK to deliver improved coverage for voice and data and provide access to the latest mobile technology as it becomes available.

"Three UK's £2bn-plus investment in its network means Gamma's partners and customers will benefit from improved connectivity, speed and coverage," said Chris Wade, Gamma's Chief Marketing and Product Officer.

"With Gamma Mobile, customers will be able to take advantage of Three UK's 5G spectrum position, enabling them to unlock the future opportunities 5G brings to the business market."

Wade also noted that Gamma Mobile features new services such as Voice over LTE (VoLTE) and Native Voice over Wi-Fi (VoWiFi), to deliver enhanced voice capabilities and better call quality.

"Mobile is increasingly important to Gamma's overall

product portfolio," added Wade. "Customers are demanding more of their communications providers. They're not just demanding voice, they're also demanding strong access and data capabilities."

John Dunican, Director of MVNO and Carrier Services at Three UK, commented: "Last year we invested more than £2m a day in our infrastructure. Gamma's customers will benefit from our network, our technologies and the future opportunities that 5G brings." See page 32

NEWS ROUNDUP

AS COMMS Dealer went to press Fern Trading-backed full fibre builder Giganet announced a further 22 areas to its partnership with CityFibre, with the altnet aiming to connect 1.8 million homes in the south of England. The expansion will see Giganet take its total areas covered to 27. See page 22 for the full story.

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Kathy Quashie, Head of Indirect Business at Vodafone UK, says, "A significant shift to more flexible working styles has called for connectivity that offers more than just a basic service. Businesses are moving away from traditional connectivity products to cloud-based connectivity and collaboration products, requiring more dependability and speed from broadband solutions. Vodafone's move to SOGEA and FTTP for our Wholesale Broadband products ensures we can fully support the needs of businesses and support the closure plans for ageing telephone and broadband infrastructure for all of our Partners."

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To learn more about SOGEA and FTTP and how they can benefit your business, visit:

<https://uk-business.vodafone.com/FTTP-SOGEA>



Kathy Quashie
Head of Indirect Business at Vodafone UK

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Why collaboration-first is

For many organisations the great strategic challenge of the aftermath of Covid-19 is to establish a long-term operational and growth strategy. At the heart of this lies collaboration-first super solutions, rich in integration and consultancy opportunities for resellers, according to leading industry thinkers during an online Insight Session held by Comms Dealer in association with BT Wholesale last month. That's not all: The virtual round table also put a bright spotlight on all verticals, laying fertile ground for collaboration-first strategies tightly linked to business goals.

An extraordinary outburst of the channel's energy has gone into keeping Britain working during lockdowns. But while collaboration deployments are at the heart of the new hybrid work dynamic sweeping Britain's knowledge workers, it is important to bear in mind that collaboration is a solution gaining ground in many verticals. "I don't equate cloud collaboration with working from home, it's so much more than that," stated Ian Cottingham, Wholesale Specialist Sales Director, BT Wholesale. "I have use cases where collaboration is just as important for a site manager in a portacabin and a doctor on the hospital floor. There's

a risk of the industry fusing cloud collaboration with working from home. It's also important to get granular about job functions. The different roles that need to collaborate presents a challenge to any IT department that wants to put in a single standard, and there may be different flavours of that standard."

For all the plaudits soaked up by the channel for helping to keep Britain working, the longer-term reality of this major project is that it was based on quick-fire investment decisions. "The challenge now is for resellers to understand the specific end user profiles," added Priya Rai, Voice and Collaboration Propositions Manager, BT. "We're going



Ian Cottingham

There's a risk of the industry fusing cloud collaboration with working from home

to have a mix of people working on the frontlines, in offices and at home. How can collaboration work for those specific profiles and personas? How are they going to be using different CPE elements?

"It's about understanding the different personas and making sure that the collaboration solution isn't a one-size-fits all approach. There's lots of opportunity for channel partners to showcase the longer-term value of how collaboration can

and scalable proposition that suits the new needs of today's modern world."

Many organisations face two titanic headaches: Managing a long-term move to hybrid working and setting in stone strategies to underpin sustainable growth. The same applies to ICT resellers with two feet in legacy products and solutions. "Partners, especially traditional ones not yet in the world of IP telephony, had to jump into a learning curve and not only educate themselves but also their end customers," commented Anna Roper, Sales Director, Partners, 9 Group.

"It follows that partners didn't necessarily know what the end customer needed



Priya Rai



Anna Roper

s the new super solution



Barry Ward

and just gave them a solution to work remotely. The challenge is getting partners to move to IP, especially with the end of ISDN and PSTN approaching, and also understanding customers' business requirements in order to assess the collaboration solution that is ideal for them."

Sales strategies should not be rooted in past thinking nor old pitches. The world has changed almost overnight. "If we flip back two years, the video and collaboration aspect was an afterthought in many cases," stated Barry Ward, Director of Disruptive Technologies, Wavenet. "Customers wanted the voice service primarily, and then you would bolt something on the back of it. The pandemic has turned that on its head. Now, it's a video first environment and all about getting under the skin of what the

customer wants to integrate, including document sharing and security – that whole piece. Partners need to understand the benefits and how to integrate them into a particular solution. One size doesn't fit all. It's a different way of getting into the customer base."

The predictable outcome of an overnight shift to home

Our industry is on a journey, our customers are on a journey, and we should be the thought leaders

working means that partners need to understand that collaborative communications is a diverse and broad church that needs to be approached in a consultative way. "It's not about selling single products now, you've got to look at the individual requirements

of each customer," added Rob Sims, CEO, Elite Group. "Furthermore, don't walk away after the sale. There is the education piece so continue working with the customer. Our industry is on a journey, our customers are on a journey, and we should be the thought leaders, we should be educating end users on how to use these technologies in a joined-up way that drives productivity and profitability. Yes, collaboration is great. Yes, it's allowed companies to survive and share documents and all those sorts of things. But have they really focused on security? And is the company truly safe?"

We can see that as demand rises amid the Covid-19 technology boom, so will the requirement for a more apt

and strategic solution which requires a more granular and questioning approach from resellers. "We've been training our sales people over the last 12 months to act as advisors and consultants with the ability to take people on a journey away from the tactical collection of bits and pieces to something more suitable," said Phil Race, CEO, AdEPT Technology Group. "That's a valuable journey for everyone. But complexity has increased, expectations have also increased and people want simplicity. So, we have this melting pot of confusion and the options available now to any business are huge. The complexity has grown



Phil Race

because you need to bring in security, you need to bring in resilience, you need to bring in the whole business continuity piece, and people expect the virtual world to have the same performance as the fixed and rigid office space. The underlying infrastructure needs to be high performance. That creates its own challenges."

Claire Richards, Head of Voice Portfolio, Digital Wholesale Solutions, says that one of the most frequent questions asked by partners and their customers is – which is the right product for us? "You really do have to get down to the nitty gritty of the opportunity and what exactly that customer is expecting from their collaboration solution," she stated. "It does not simply boil down to... I want to work from a soft phone, and I want to be able to go into the office and use a handset. You've

got to consider hardware expectations and flexibility. We also need to make sure that we provide beyond the line technology, the connectivity, the equipment, the laptops, the routers that support these services and make them reliable. The last thing you want is to get the best fit solution but not have that conversation about whether the connectivity stands up. We need to look at the full picture."

According to Duncan Finlay, Head of Voice and UC Product Management, Virgin Media, education is where the channel can add huge value. "The paradox is that many customers have never been more aware of the need to transform, but financially they may be the least able to drive that transformation," he said. "It's easy for a customer to wrap themselves around whatever
Continued on page 20



Rob Sims



Claire Richards

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Duncan Finlay

Continued from page 19 technology they've been sold, rather than technology wrap itself around their business needs. Customers need somebody who understands the mechanics of how their particular business works, and is then able to stitch together the right solution based on the technical options.

"It is ironic that the smarter technology gets, the more stupid most people feel. Therefore many businesses are looking for somebody to explain their options and pull it together in a way that works financially, is scalable, secure, cost-effective and does what is required – rather than use something that was botched together out of necessity over the last 12 months."

It is a fact that organisations will not get their long-term

strategies on track until they optimise their technology assets and align ICT with business goals. According to Race, it is time to assert a new consultancy-based solution and define the path companies should be treading. "I'm increasingly thinking that the most important part of my business is the training department," he stated. "You've got so much change, you've got so much interconnected capability, you need to be able to hold a conversation about all of those aspects. Training is crucial and never ending. Ask lots of questions, don't assume anything, find out the full ecosystem and don't just focus on one part of the solution. Look at the whole picture. If you can follow those basic principles you can get to the heart of the challenge and find out where the customer is now and where they'd like to be.



Jed Pell

There's loads of opportunity if you can do that."

The opportunity is undeniably challenging with the answers embedded in the DNA of a business's essence, and this needs putting under a microscope if operational excellence is to be the guaranteed outcome. "We see more success when customer adoption is linked to solutions that help with their business processes," noted Jed Pell, Director, Head of SP & Partner Collaboration Sales, Cisco EMEAR.

"Customers are starting to design their businesses around resilience. In the Gig workforce environment, how do I onboard people quickly? How do I train them? Is the technology intuitive

It is ironic that the smarter technology gets, the more stupid most people feel. Therefore many businesses are looking for somebody to explain their options and pull it together

enough? It's addressing those challenges rather than speeds and feeds and leveraging collaboration technology that is key. Integrating into a business application is the true benefit.

"We're also going to see the rise of vertical SAS software suites. It's easy to talk about knowledge workers. But when you've got different people working in different locations, in a warehouse for instance, the key personnel need to be part of that collaborative experience."

Ward pointed out that Wavenet has secured some big wins in manufacturing, logistics and financial services, using collaboration as the central hub but with sector specific apps sitting around the side to fulfill the requirements. "There's



Sue Elliott

a whole dynamics piece that sits in the ecosystem of different applications and workflows," he explained. "There are specific industries and sectors that operate

any industry that can't be touched," she stated. "If you look at manufacturing, people are wanting to collaborate even more – they're walking a warehouse floor, for example. There's a lot of businesses that haven't moved to a work from home model and want choice in terms of collaboration. People are asking for choice from their business owners. And if they aren't prepared to give their people choice, then they're losing a competitive advantage when it comes to attracting talent."

around certain applications or requirements. Having that ecosystem is key."

A strategic risk is being taken if collaboration technology is not seen in the context of the whole market, believes Sue Elliott, Managing Director, DRC. "I don't think there's

The strategy proposed by Elliott brings into question how best to deliver digital transformation to stick-in-the-mud organisations wedded to traditional CPE. Pritesh Gajjar, Managing Director, Aastha, observed: "We have customers still on legacy platforms. By legacy I mean not even having IP



Pritesh Gajjar

More Session Insights...

We need to remember that the switch-off is an industry driven change. Customers aren't saying, 'rip out my traditional voice lines'. We're driving this, we're forcing this on them. So we need to enable the change.

Duncan Finlay, Head of Voice and UC Product Management, Virgin Media

Industries are different. Collaboration is more than doing your job in a study at home. If we can bring together communities and data sets in particular verticals, create pre-packaged solutions and take people on the consulting journey – that can demystify this complex world of technology.

Phil Race, CEO, AdEPT Technology Group

That people are our greatest asset is more true now than ever. Invest in people, no matter how painful or costly that may be. You just won't get there without them.

Rob Sims, CEO, Elite Group

We should be showcasing the benefits of collaboration in a fully hosted scenario. But if customers are not ready to part ways with legacy solutions, collaboration will form part of a wider conversation around all-IP. That will be a catalyst to drive change.

Priya Rai, Voice and Collaboration Propositions Manager, BT

BT talks about smart working focused on where the knowledge resides within teams and identifies the best work style for them. This largely comes back to aspirations, culture, the type of businesses people want to run in three to five years time and the tools that underpin all this criteria. Simplicity is key.

Ian Cottingham, Wholesale Specialist Sales Director, BT Wholesale

The best way to promote collaborative communications is to use it yourself when you are communicating with clients. People need to be educated on how they can utilise applications. It's about understanding how they fit and what the whole business can get out of the solution.

Pam Blanchard, founder and Managing Director, ICA

Customers are moving from survive to thrive. They don't necessarily know exactly what they want, or what they need, until you start delving deeply into their business and almost help to define their goals.

Sue Elliott, Managing Director, DRC

One of the biggest bugbears for our support team is dealing with issues around the home network infrastructure, Wi-Fi and connectivity. We need carriers to pay more attention to the challenges that resellers could face, and perhaps create open communication channels with other service providers to prioritise traffic.

Pritesh Gajjar, Managing Director, Aastha

end points. They're going to be the biggest challenge.

Do we follow a rip out and replace strategy? In the majority of cases this approach will be the most economical and we can help customers see the benefit of reviewing their collaboration solutions. Change is

inevitable, embracing it is the way forward."

The issue is not just about change, but navigating the available options, according to Pam Blanchard, founder and Managing Director, ICA. "There's so much choice of UC vendors, and there's even

more emerging vendors," she added. "It's difficult for customers to choose fit-for-purpose collaboration tools. The adoption was so fast in 2020 that we delivered collaboration to some companies that had no strategy. Retrospectively, it is important to revisit some of those businesses and assess whether the right applications were deployed.

"For example, do they have the right infrastructure? Establishing an insightful strategy and a policy doesn't only help the business, it also helps me and my support team to understand what contributed to the decisions that were made in the first place. It is time to sit down with clients and look at the strategy, introduce a policy and then support customers moving forward."



Pam Blanchard

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Giganet supercharged

From telecoms dealer to trail blazing fibre builder: The acquisition of Giganet's parent company M12 Solutions puts the full fibre brand into the major league of altnets, according to founder and CSMO Andrew Skipsey. Here, he gives us the inside story on last month's transformative £250 million Fern Trading deal.

Fern Trading acquired M12 Solutions (which uses the Giganet trading name) in April 2021 and committed £250 million over the coming four years to build an FTTH network. Fern also owns Jurassic Fibre, Swish Fibre and Vorboss, all backed to build networks deploying over £1 billion of capital over the next four years. Fern is a large trading group, circa £2.5 billion in size, and active in the renewables, healthcare, property and fibre sectors. "Fern is as excited as us about how well Giganet complements its existing businesses in the space," stated Skipsey. "B2C will be our focus as we take on new subscribers, but our B2B VoIP and business connectivity heritage will continue to be key for Giganet. Our aim is simple but bold, to be acknowledged as the best UK ISP."

The seed of a deal was sown in 2017 when Skipsey was

in discussions regarding M12's exit from its Wessex Internet joint venture, prior to establishing the Giganet brand. He was introduced to merchant bank Cameron Barney about raising capital and its advice was to come back after exit and when Giganet was properly underway. "We did this, there were a couple of false starts and their introduction of Jarlath Finnegan (new CEO) and Paul Brazel (CFO), alongside my son Matthew and I securing Rob Baynes (formerly CityFibre) and Kevin Barry our build director who Jarlath found, all meant that we arrived at a complete and balanced team to create and deliver our new plans," added Skipsey.

"It took us months to design our plan and stress test it, as well as create an associated slide deck before starting the process, via Cameron Barney, to begin discussions and presentations with potential funders. From agreeing



Andrew Skipsey

We will go to other areas in the country – we are not constrained by geography

Heads of Terms it was then a few months to get the deal over the line. With the transaction effectively being a buy-in management buy-out there was much due diligence against the established M12 Solutions business."

Thinking big

During the early process Skipsey realised that the cost of building out is expensive, and while he considered looking for £30 million to first prove the business he also knew that time was of the essence. "We worked out that we could credibly create a plan which justified a really significant sum to allow us to first build in the areas we identified as being off the Openreach or other altnet radar," he said. "Also, at this level of funding we are

seizing the big opportunity to expand our commitment to the fast paced CityFibre and Openreach builds as well as increasing our own network footprint. Plus, of course, there are other new wholesale providers that we are engaging with.

"The network will be wholesale ready but our focus is direct for a few years initially. As time passes and the build in our planned region matures there are likely to be towns that will feel left behind. We will then go to other areas in the country – we are not constrained by geography."

The new team's immediate priorities are to secure new premises and kick off a staff recruitment campaign. "Last

year, pre-deal, we grew revenue by over 20 per cent and increased to 24 people," added Skipsey. "Just weeks after the deal we are well over 30 people and our plans will have us exceeding 250 for sales, marketing, network engineers and provisioning and systems teams as well as customer service. We've found additional offices between Southampton and Portsmouth and new offices in Reading. We're also looking to build local teams of installation technicians and community champions across the south."

Giganet is clearly focused on its build, however Skipsey noted that the significant growth opportunity over the coming year resides in marketing CityFibre to the 27 locations comprising 30-plus cities and towns where it will have a local interconnect for Openreach. "Just as important is connectivity and VoIP for business," he added. "With over 80 per cent of business revenues on a monthly recurring basis we're investing to build on this success and the massive localised marketing spend building our Giganet brand."

As well as this big business model push Skipsey also noted that Giganet has been busy on product development. "Our technicians have installed our network-based SIP aggregation 'box' and introduced our home VoIP platform," he explained. "Both offer more control, better pricing and help with our competitive advantage."

In other developments, Giganet is working on products to deliver optimised home and SME Wi-Fi. "This

Continued on page 24



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Team Giganet ramps up as a key player in full fibre roll outs

Continued from page 22

means great Wi-Fi 6 routers, Wi-Fi mesh, extenders and end user support apps to get it all working as well as possible," said Skipsey. "Apart from speed, we see this, as well as great pricing and back-up, as the key factors to the success of full fibre."

He believes that although FTTC is cheap and adequate for some, people will move to full fibre as the availability increases and the benefits become more obvious. "This is more than just evolving services to higher speeds, it's about improvements to their relationship with a different kind of new provider which engages with the whole local community," added Skipsey. "This market is an exciting place to be! With our hyper local approach, where we will be visible to new and potential customers and providing employment, to local community sponsorships, we feel our differentiation will really appeal."

Skipsey is delivering Giganet's message to bring greater clarity to the market with military precision. This is second nature as he started his comms career in 1988 after nine 'tremendous years' in the Royal Marines. "Earning my Green Beret gave me a fantastic level of experience in responsibility, understanding fundamental values, the appreciation of risk and knowing the value of having a good plan," he said.

"This translated into success in Civvy Street which led to living a great quality of life with many opportunities."

Skipsey rounded off his Royal Marines career with a leaving course – a Diploma in Sales and Marketing which enabled him to seek a good sales role. "And what a dynamic sector to find myself in! I became a board member after four years and sold huge amounts of SDX and later INDeX," he commented. "After we underwent a buy-out in 1995 I did the IoD Diploma course to be better qualified in business management. We sold SOTEL and became Convergent Systems. When Azzurri took over in 2003 I was able to negotiate an elegant exit with a contract to look after

Earning my Green Beret gave me a fantastic level of experience in responsibility, values, appreciating risk and having a good plan

my old customers as an agent, but with the freedom to build my brand and introduce complementary products for my direct sale."

After starting M12 in 2003 with two assistants Skipsey built his team to 22 people before the financial crash, having mainly focused on sales of Splicecom, WLR and minutes. "In 2012 we became an ISP and

commercialised the fledgling Wessex Internet WISP," he explained. "Matthew, my eldest son, had joined after Uni and did some impressive technical and software work. My middle son Luke helped us sell to over 2,000 subscribers by our exit in early 2018, when our JV partner bought our share and built their own version of what we did. We kept our people and upgraded our London Internet Core, Matthew designed and engineered a multi-provider quote tool and we optimised our Giganet brand that now secures thousands of enquiries a week."

Key projects

Other key projects included upgrading Splicecom traditional customers to

people get more selling time to ultimately do more business than they otherwise would. This optimal approach is evangelised by Justin Roff Marsh in his book *The Machine* and is working really well for us.

"Another book that has influenced us is *3Hag Way* by Shannon Bryne Susko, which I found from a brilliant podcast series (*The Melting Pot – Dominick Monkhouse*). It sets out a framework to guarantee business growth and it was pleasing to see that many of the elements suggested were already a part of how we operate. Just doing some more of this helped us when we pitched for funding."

According to Skipsey, the different pricing strategies for full fibre is a challenge to the industry and he aims to remove complexity where possible. "On CityFibre we have a simple model, our build will be similar," he added. "We want to offer honest, easy to understand products and pricing that doesn't require a calculator to compare. We're looking to reduce the length of our contracts and help people move sooner, even when they are in contract. We also believe that those who resell without value-add and only have price in their armoury will be overtaken by rivals with a better speed for lower cost advantage, backed by inherent innovation, coupled with a great business culture." ■

Just a minute with Andrew Skipsey...

Role model: Geoff Bezos: Whatever you think of Amazon their market disruption has been pure genius.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I have cycled from Lands End to John O' Groats twice and I want to do it for a third time in the next few years.

What do you fear most? Being diagnosed with Alzheimer's before there are effective treatments.

The biggest risk you have taken? Just done it... I lost control of my business for a far greater good for all.

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Writing a book or two.

In hindsight: I should have got myself a good board and management structure earlier than I did.

Hardest decision you made: To let eight people go to stay solvent when we hit the financial crash.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I'm known in the business for my positivity and a determination to get things done; but I could do more to be a bit less cringeworthy – apparently.

One example of something you have overcome: Milk in coffee.

If you could transform any part of the comms industry what would you do? Introduce a quality barrier to entry so that the harm done by those who have a 'flog and forget it' or zero customer care mentality don't keep dragging down the reputation of our vibrant and critical sector.

Best piece of advice you have been given: Write down your goals and live every day like you want to attain them.

Name your three ideal dinner guests: Tim Peake, Ben Ainslie and Lewis Hamilton – three people I admire for many reasons.

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Cunliffe talks monetising

Mobile data opportunities should have resellers' fingerprints all over them, and you don't need to be Sherlock Holmes to uncover a gold mine of revenue generating demand for IoT solutions, according to Pangea Managing Director Dan Cunliffe who discusses how resellers can evolve and do justice to this wide ranging and growing market.

Channel-only IoT provider Pangea delivers mobile connectivity through the major UK operators and gives partners access to 960 networks around the world. It has deployments in 52 countries including pop-up hospitals, home connectivity for students, Wi-Fi in vehicles and lone worker devices. Here, Cunliffe answers key questions about this market and brings mobile data to life for resellers...



Dan Cunliffe

How far ranging is the mobile data opportunity?

Our partners work with just about every sector. What makes IoT different and powerful is the value added services it enables on mobile connectivity, like static IPs, eSIMs, unsteered multi-network SIMs with local phone numbers, and L2TP capabilities over 4G for ISPs. So it's our job to ensure that partners have what they need to service deals with any data requirement in any market niche.

Where are Pangea's partners seeing success?

The spotlight's on mobile data now, as it's the quickest and strongest option for so many industries post-pandemic. It's led to some significant deals for us and our partners. One included connecting 55,000 under privileged students with 4G mobile broadband so

IoT used to be all about aiming for high volumes with low revenue per connection, but today it's any amount of SIMs with any amount of data

they can study from home, which won £2.5 million for our partner. The project is ongoing, reaching 102,000 students and growing to a TCV of £6.5 million. Our mobile data content filter was crucial here. The partner used it to ensure their connectivity met compliance regulations and kept the students safe online.

Another big sector is automotive where we're using 12,000 multi-network 4G SIMs to power the telematics solutions for a premium transport

company's entire fleet of vehicles. Our flexibility was key to winning this one: Our partner won the deal over a major mobile network operator using our custom mobile data aggregation and automatically adjusting tariffs, which landed them £2.2 million.

How do you help partners secure such deals?

We give our partners sales training to help them pinpoint undiscovered mobile data opportunities in their existing base, and offer IoT solutions at a specialist

level even if their business is focused on a variety of technologies, like fixed line or cloud services. IoT and mobile data opportunities are worth several times more than their fixed counterparts, which makes them gold dust to our partners. They're seen as safe investments since they're hard to replace and lead to long-term recurring revenue. On top of that, because the mobile data market is growing so fast (3.5 billion IoT devices connected via cellular by 2023 according to Ericsson, with an annual growth rate

of 30 per cent), IoT is seen by investors as a valuable asset, so it makes our partners' businesses that much more desirable. We drive that value for partners, showing them they can get more out of mobile data than any other kind of connectivity service.

We're working on ways to give our partners the autonomy to make faster decisions and clinch winning deals, without bringing us into their sales cycles. Timing is everything when it comes to sales, so the aim is to give partners complete control over that timing. We're also working on automations that take away operational headaches that can be handled without partners spending time or resources, freeing them up to focus on their customers and make better decisions.

Are there still misconceptions surrounding IoT?

One challenge that we face is helping partners to understand IoT. There are lingering perceptions from the old days that aren't true now, so we do our best to demystify the market. For example, selling IoT used to be all about aiming for high volumes with low revenue per connection, but today it's any amount of SIMs with any amount of data. You can have thousands of 20MB SIMs for tracking shipping

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g mobile data

containers across the world, a handful of 10GB SIMs running a mobile WAN for remote construction workers, a single (and lucrative) 1TB SIM providing all-purpose connectivity for a party yacht – the possibilities are endless.

How is Pangea addressing the 5G market?

The channel has so much to gain from 5G, not just from the massive data rates of enhanced mobile broadband, but also the near-instant communications from latencies as low as 1ms, and massive device density (up to one million per square kilometre). Plus, 5G network slicing will give partners more control over their mobile data services. They'll be able to pick and choose exactly what they need – low-latency, bandwidth, and quality of service – for the exact amount of time they need it.

For example, a smart factory customer might need low latency and high device density for instant communications between their thousands of robots and smart equipment. Whereas a car manufacturer might need massive data rates to roll out software updates for their fleet, but only once a year. Network slicing makes it possible for partners to set these exact parameters within the mobile data they provide, which will save precious network resources.

If you could transform any area of the mobile data industry segment what would it be and why?

I'd want the whole mobile data industry to have access to products and services at the same time, rather than innovations being drip fed through to certain sectors or parts of the country, like

the 5G roll out being split between operators and locales. Specifically, I'd want operators' business divisions to have access to products as quickly as consumers do. Right now, partners often see packages advertised for consumers and want them, but can't have them, like data plans for consumer SIMs that can't be used in business applications (or would end up being massively expensive if they were).

What else frustrates and surprises you about the mobile data space?

There's been a lack of support from operators in driving product innovation and roll outs. I understand they've got roadmaps to follow, and it's risky pouring your resources into any new technology, but it brings industry innovation to a grinding halt: Like 5G just rolling out to heavily populated areas, or delaying 5G-enabled hardware's arrival on the market. It makes financial sense, but it then falls on the shoulders of channel partners to help with projects that excite MNOs and speed up the process – such as Cisco's 5GRuralFirst initiative to bring 5G to remote areas, Nottingham Council's 5G forest or our own 5G Project.

You can also see this in the sluggish progress of roaming between networks internationally. For example, getting multi-network 4G with one operator doesn't happen as soon as they make 4G available, there's usually a big delay. That's surprising, because it means operators let potential business pass them by. Lastly, I'm also surprised that the industry's still in the dark on the 2G sunset date. It's at the point

where people have sent open letters to Ofcom requesting information so they can plan their migration timelines. No word from UK MNOs yet, so we'll have to wait and see what happens.

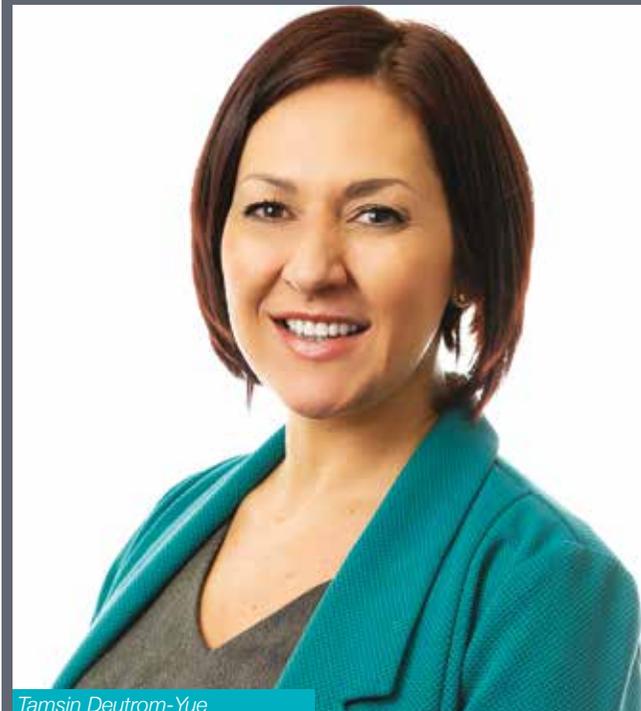
What mobile data led strategies and roadmaps should comms resellers adopt now to succeed long-term?

For resellers, the clear path forward is to focus on fixed and mobile connectivity together as one cohesive strategy. Even if you're a fixed line provider, endpoints aren't necessarily fixed and all the services you're running today can be moved if they need to be. Take 4G on-demand backup that kicks in and keeps customers online through outages, or pre-Ethernet that gets customers connected right away and lets partners collect revenue from day one. Both of these are products that pair beautifully with fixed line connectivity.

The industry is shifting away from the mindset of 'I have ten sites to connect' to 'I have one hundred endpoints to connect'. There'll be less emphasis on what a connectivity device is, and more on what that device enables.

The number of RFPs we see today that require 4G multi-network SIMs, static IPs, back-up services and WAN services, are no longer bonuses, but standard requirements. Going mobile isn't a scary process any more. It's about picking the right partner. Make sure they aren't trying to tell you what to sell, and make sure they have a portfolio chock full of options – the market is hungry for choice. ■

Jump the queue on contact centre adoptions



Tamsin Deutrom-Yue

We're supposed to be on our way out of this pandemic but nobody seems to have told contact centres. I know plenty capitalise on cloud technology to allow agents to work from home, thereby negating the "due to Covid wait times are 30 minutes longer" excuse. It just never seems to be any of the ones I need to call!

I think each of these is a red-hot sales opportunity for enterprising channel partners; tell them it's 2021 and that no contact centre should be compromised just because people aren't in the office.

What's really new about contact centres is the opportunity for the channel to target SME customers for the first time. Affordability and accessibility are no longer sticking points. "Not being big enough" is no barrier for smaller customers innovating omnichannel customer experiences with chat, email, voice and social.

Larger organisations will need to up their game, which is more good news throughout the channel. Support to Win enables them all.

There are great CCaaS opportunities everywhere. My message is go out and sell them, safe in the knowledge that the technical implementation will be swift and straightforward.

Contact centres embody the saying, "work is what you do, not where you go". That's very attractive to contact centre

workers who just want the right tools to do their jobs – preferably from home and around flexible hours. With the economy rebounding, contact centres who facilitate this will find it easier to fill positions and attract talent – driving CCaaS demand further.

We're also seeing new trends in consumer behaviour that impact on the contact centre, and new ways in which contact centres are innovating. For example, using collaboration (Teams video calls and screen sharing for example) to discuss documentation, address specific queries and fill forms. Again, it's all about the customer experience, and using that to stand out from competitors. A case of "my contact centre is better than yours" among companies of all sizes looking for an edge.

And it's not just the initial implementation or upgrade of contact centres that counts, but how they perform in the long-run. There's no more unedifying prospect than a contact centre having to call a help desk – like the sad sight of an AA van broken down by the side of the road. Equipping contact centre admins and users with the right skills is a big part of this; alongside the necessity of accurate configuration and testing.

If you want to jump the queue on contact centre adoptions, give me a call!

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Why total strategic align

Covid-19 has jolted many organisational strategies into a home working context and accelerated thinking on a number of trend drivers as we undergo rapid and irreversible industry change. Against this backdrop many resellers lack a playbook to set new pathways and build a strategic vision that aligns with market dynamics and the evolving customer experience. Therefore, industry thinkers at last month's Channel Forecast Insight Session aimed to identify the key action points to help resellers, and the industry, better prepare for the future.

Everyone knows that the comms sector is in the grip of change. We also know that the industry's instinct is to respond with energy and dedication to a national crisis, evidenced by the channel's role in underpinning the overnight switch to home working. If only we could harness these gargantuan efforts, replicate and align them to industry goals that affect us all. And referring to one of the key industry priorities right now, Matt Worboys, Business Development Director for Channel at Gamma, asked, is the channel doing enough?

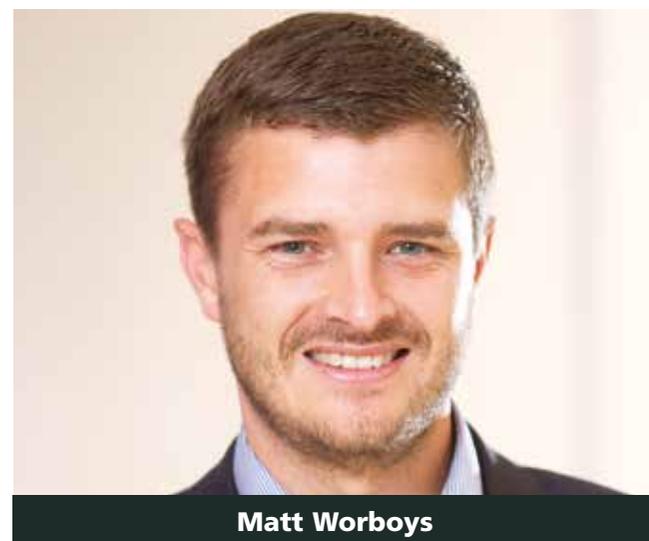
"One of the areas that has not had enough air time is the PSTN switch off in

2025," he stated. "That's not far away. It's important that channel partners start to understand how they're going to transition customers and target the market specifically with a digital-first strategy. There must be alignment and engagement with the customer and the technology, or the contract just won't stick. That's where you will start to see churn within your customer base. Adoption will be important."

According to Dan Jones, Sales and Public Affairs Director, Full Fibre, the channel should pump more energy into boosting action plans ahead of 2025 and avoid a crisis of misalignment by following the lead of ambitious altnets. "Copper is coming to the



Dan Jones



Matt Worboys

end," he stated. "But rather than hit the copper switch off and then think about it, there are many network builders like ourselves building out throughout the UK. The engagement for the ISP is not a quick one. They obviously want to do their due diligence on the product.

"But it's about starting that process now. It's an evolving marketplace to give the customer the best experience we can. People are now working all through the evenings or through the weekends, and they're having meetings abroad. They need support and it's about giving them that all-time connectivity."

It is a fact that the comms sector is at the crucial developmental stage of a digital transition, and David Barber, Head of the Core Connectivity and Communications Portfolio at Zen Internet, is a staunch enthusiast for accelerating strategic plans through knowledge sharing.

Industry revolution

"We talk about the full fibre revolution, so it's about education for our partners," he explained. "It's about making sure they know in a given geography what can be delivered to a customer. We've already had 200 exchanges posted as fibre priorities from Openreach. So

helping to educate partners on that, especially those in the local footprint who are going to be most impacted by the stop-sell, is key.

"Being able to deliver a frictionless sales order journey is crucial. Sixty per cent of our full fibre business is transacted through our website. And having processes and contact capabilities that support that, for an affordable cost, is important. Customers might want support in their own time, and in their own way. We're starting to see the use of WhatsApp chat and Facebook Messenger, for example."

In recent times, channel activity has been chiefly focused on the fast move to home working, where demand for connectivity and services has been unleashed with higher requirements for security in attendance. "There's going to be a huge change and evolution over the coming months and years," commented Sachin Vaish, Managing Director, Vaioni Group. "It's not just about delivering a broadband connection into the premises, you've got to make sure it works across the property

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Engagement is key to success

and then overlay services such as video. Who's going to provide the support and security for those elements? There's a big burden and responsibility on providers to understand what the connection is being used for and to deliver external support. It's going to be interesting over the next 12 to 18 months to see how broadband is adopted and how we consume connectivity from our home."

There will be a close correlation between the long-term success of channel organisations and their current alignment (or otherwise) to end user requirements in the office, at home and other remote locations across many verticals. "We have a team that is tasked with understanding the end customer and what they're looking for in a solution," stated Worboys. "Over the last three months we've done three product launches and produced more video content than we have during the previous 15 years. People are looking to interact with data in various different social media forms; and being able to engage with the customer in the right way is

key. So we've given partners access to the investments we've made in videos using their branding. That's the big marketing initiative behind recent launches."

There is clear evidence that deeper engagement with customers will yield a higher solution performance, better sales figures and sticky end users – and this boils down to approaches to delivering 'quality' services, believes Barber. "We tend to partner with organisations that see quality as a key part of the pitch to the customer," he added. "We encourage partners to listen to their customers more closely. We mostly acquire partners through referral, and to help partners do the same we run a Circle of Excellence made up of volunteers who have their Trustpilot and NPS score measured by an independent party, to make sure they're listening to their customers and acting on feedback. We've seen the long-term benefits of this approach. It's not a short-term thing, this is something you need to sustain."

Barber also noted that more of Zen's sales and marketing strategies are focused around



Sachin Vaish

digital and social. "At the same time, partly due to the roll out of full fibre, we're seeing locally targeted messaging," he added. "Partners have a great opportunity in a local area to talk to small businesses, even have feet on the street to get their message heard. There is an element of being targeted, an element of social and digital, and also face-to-face. That's the way to drive your messaging."

Defining the journey

According to Jones, it's not just about fibre delivery to the property, it's more to do with fibre penetration throughout the premises and the Wi-Fi coverage and multiple devices. "It is about understanding the customer's real need against different technologies within the business or home," he stated. "It's trying to understand the full customer journey and educating them."

"We have a community of ambassadors who talk to people and find their real pain points, then try and address them. Those issues will evolve as we move forward. And as

5G improves there will be different challenges, but it's about delivering against those pains rather than just selling a cheap product that doesn't really help."

Meanwhile, Vaish said it is vital for resellers to not just think about the broadband because, ultimately, homes are being converted into business units. "The long-term piece, apart from the connectivity, is insights and analytics that help businesses to truly understand what's happening across their network and user base," he stated. "Another key area is application optimisation and how we bring those applications closer and faster to the domestic user working from home. Those are key areas that the industry should focus on. We need to be multifaceted and almost provide a full play on all products, and normalise all of the noise that's going on at the moment."

This all forms part of an ongoing alignment of organisations with industry driven targets, like 2025 and the Government's full fibre goals. And Jones suggests a

clear correlation of success with the rise of automation. "What is happening across the board is automation to improve the experience for customers," he stated. "But I'd be interested to know where the balance will reside between automation trends, which can be complex, and a future that will also be characterised by increased personalisation. A big question is how the channel aligns with these trends to make the most of the business optimisation opportunity."

"Also, there are good portals providing visibility for the consumer to see exactly what's happening with their connection, whether it be remote or at the business premises. They can see what their staff need in terms of data and base the installation and fibre connectivity on that information. The more we do that, the better the customer journey and the less churn we get."

Taking all of this discussion into account, the more strategic we make the pathways to 2025 and a full fibre Britain, the less risk involved for the channel and end users. And according to Worboys the key lies in finding a balance. "The first thing to do is to ensure that you have a strategy, write that strategy down and communicate it to your staff," he said. "Unless people buy into the business and what you're trying to achieve, you're not going to have the alignment. It's important to talk to and understand customers to help mould the strategy, and ultimately deliver on the plan. Then, stay true to that strategy but act on continued feedback from customers." ■



David Barber

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UKCloud: We salute you

UKCloud's capacity to provide the public sector with the critical hyperscale cloud services it needs should be celebrated as a victory for the channel. Here, CEO Simon Hansford outlines what it takes to effectively compete with the tech giants.



Simon Hansford

"Greater regulation to enforce the prioritising of social and sustainability values throughout procurement will benefit us all. It cannot happen quickly enough. While it is mandate in public procurement, it needs to be more rigorously enforced and measured. The benefit to the UK taxpayer and economy is enormous and we're missing out on opportunities."

Hansford says public sector institutions deserve a high level of innovation and cyber security care, which is what drives the company to offer multi-cloud services that can make a tangible impact and nurture innovation.

UKCloud, UKCloud Health and UKCloudX are different brands focusing on local government, central government, police and justice, health and defence covering all aspects of civil service. The firm's key partners include Cisco, Microsoft, Red hat, VMware and over 300 partners that deliver solutions into the public sector on UKCloud's platforms.

UKCloud currently employs 280 people which will grow by 20 per cent this year. And the Board has signed off an aggressive investment plan that will see the business develop and expand in many areas, both organic and inorganic, and across several new markets. "Delivering quality infrastructure and services at speed will certainly define service providers in future," commented Hansford. "It's no longer about if providers can do it, which many can, it's about the quality and speed in which projects and services can be launched to make a real impact in our daily lives as users and citizens." ■

Good news: UKCloud's selection as one of nine suppliers on the new Crown Commercial Service's (CCS) Cloud Compute Framework (which provides a route to market for public sector organisations to adopt hyperscale cloud deployments directly from suppliers) proves the system is working well for smaller cloud providers. "There is no longer any excuse for the public sector to assume it can only fulfil hyperscale requirements from the tech giants," stated Hansford. "This opens up the market for the UK public sector and we believe this will be a very welcome development for many buyers as competition and choice drive value, resilience and innovation."

Hansford noted that to secure public sector opportunities and places on key frameworks resellers need to be focused and invest. "There are no easy wins and it's certainly not a nirvana to easy selling," he added. "But, with focus and after gaining an understanding

of the market there are many opportunities."

UKCloud has been part of the One Government Cloud Strategy since its inception in late 2019. Led by Cabinet Office and GDS, this was about helping Government understand its future cloud strategy, the capabilities of the market and how to ensure maximum benefit for the public sector. "It included a small group of cloud providers and that led to UKCloud signing MOUs with Cabinet Office and gaining Strategic Cloud Provider status," said Hansford. "This work identified the need for a new framework and eventually led to the Cloud Compute Framework."

UKCloud was one of four smaller UK cloud providers (UKFast, Fordway and Frontier) that have now proven beyond doubt that hyperscale public cloud is not solely within the domain of the global cloud providers. The technical criteria set by the CCS were very specific. But Hansford was confident that UKCloud's services met

the hyperscale requirements of the tender. "Gearing up was more a case of ensuring that we kept tabs on the timelines and had the right resources available when the tender went live," he added. "Our preparation involved dialogue with CCS around potential clauses and outcomes that we felt might disadvantage the best outcome for the public sector. Now that we're listed we're

UK cloud providers," stated Hansford. "It shows that we have a national capability to produce socially benefiting public cloud services, and that the choice is not, and should not be, limited to three US providers."

Key values

"Social value has always been a key focus for UKCloud and should be one of the main criteria for all public

There is no longer any excuse for the public sector to assume it can only fulfil hyperscale requirements from the tech giants

dedicated to showcasing how we can boost public sector organisations."

The framework's qualifying requirements included an emphasis on social value and sustainability which has become a key factor in public sector procurement. "It's a great testament that the framework names four

procurement. It's something we have been calling upon and continue to believe a better and tighter definition is needed that benefits the UK economy. We recently announced that we're the first tech company to receive the Social Value Quality Mark Level 1 by Social Value Business, and are quickly working towards Level 2.

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Make gains in mobile

Harnessing opportunities in mobile can only be to a reseller's gain, and developments at Gamma ensure that partners are up to the job and supported by key differentiation factors as 5G emerges into market reality, according to Rob Kittler, Head of the Connectivity Practice.



Rob Kittler

types and the proposition is also becoming popular with data resellers. "Over the past 18 months we have seen an influx of more IT specialist partners coming to Gamma," stated Kittler. "As we have attracted partners that previously did not vend mobile, our go-to-market information and collateral have also been bolstered. The challenges have been linked to creating new opportunities as we onboard more partners that have varied mobile expertise, but with a clear view on how they want to go to market and exploit their immediate potential. Fortunately, this is the kind of challenge that Gamma has plenty of experience with.

No matter how much effort and resource a reseller puts into developing a long-term mobile strategy it can be wholly justified, says Kittler. For Gamma's part, a big priority has been the relaunch of its mobile proposition based on full network parity as an MVNO, new price points on tariffs and its Optimiser bolt-on (more on this 'differentiator' later). "Mobile will encroach further on the traditional connectivity market as the speeds rise and coverage is enhanced, especially with projects like The Shared Rural Network," stated Kittler. "It is an exciting time to be a reseller in mobile as we see more opportunity from 5G and software and hardware solutions beginning to appear."

Kittler also believes that as price begins to become similar in a commoditised market, resellers may find themselves competing on service more. "Their ability to adapt and show real value

with specialist knowledge, and a product portfolio linked to software and hardware with both indexed to SaaS and UCaaS products should be a focus area," he added.

"Software has always been a big part of the end user experience with apps and MDM in mobile, but the faster speeds that we will experience will bring an extra set of demands from the market, especially as we service and cater for more SaaS and UCaaS products across more mobile estates."

Another trend that Gamma is keeping a close eye on is the growing interest in unlimited data tariff sets, both for smartphone and mobile broadband, often purchased to control costs, bill shock and data use fluctuation. "Although they bring value to the business, mid-tier tariffs are too often overlooked, while lower bundled tariffs are still relevant as long as robust management controls are present," said Kittler.

We see more opportunity from 5G, software and hardware solutions

"These entry level bundles are still in high demand within B2B and wholesale."

Portfolio development

These trends have all been significant to the development of Gamma's mobile product and tariff mechanics. Its entry level smartphone tariff, called Business Extra, offers 4GB and has been developed based on the need for a higher GB tariff entry point. "We have also distilled the mid-tier selection to make it less confusing and bring value in a wholesale environment," he added. "And we are offering an unlimited bundle at the top end of the tariff ladder."

Gamma also introduced a Tariff Optimiser bolt-on for all smartphone and mobile broadband tariffs. It operates

dynamically throughout the whole tariff suite, from the smallest bundle up to unlimited tariffs and all in between, allowing partners to add and show value to end users, accommodating any inevitable fluctuation. "When users incur higher costs or experience bill shock and data fluctuations, it means they chose or were sold a particular tariff that may not be the best value in any given month," commented Kittler. "We developed and launched Optimiser to solve this issue."

Gamma works with Three UK to offer a wholesale model, using its network with the Gamma Portal to provision and control management features. Gamma can buy data in bulk and, if required, bypass tariff stacks. It handles all mobile estate

"To date, we have focused on offering as much value as possible to our partners, minimising barriers to sale and making the connection journey simple and commercially rewarding. More recently our strategy has been to simplify the tariff set and launch Optimiser to allow partners to offer extra value and service, while at the same time making 5G more widely available."

Gamma is working with Three UK on its 5G proposition which Kittler says represents the greatest opportunity to partners. "Three UK holds the most spectrum and has an ambition to bring this technology to the fore," added Kittler. "It is paramount that our partners have access to this feature from our network, coupled with our front end portal and tariffs to enhance the proposition. We are upbeat about the 5G bandwidth that Three UK gives us access to. We believe it will be a game changer in the market." ■

Working together with ease and simplicity

The coronavirus pandemic has accelerated plans for digitalisation across sectors. According to a recent McKinsey Global Survey of executives, companies have accelerated the digitalisation of customer and supply-chain interactions by three to four years. And importantly so; not only is this critical to resilience and business continuity, it is the key to future success. Our channel partners (CPs) are perfectly positioned to aid businesses in their recovery and help future-proof them moving forwards.

Our recent research in partnership with Cisco found over 90% of channel respondents agreed that transformation is back on the agenda. They confirmed that customers are taking a more strategic, long term, approach to their digital investments and that savings and efficiencies are vital today.

In order to deliver on this increasing demand for technologies, CPs need to ensure they are working with other like-minded organisations that fully support them and enable them to grow. That's why we've launched Partner Plus, our new partner programme, as part of our transformation to get closer to the market and help the industry grow.

Supporting our partners

Partner Plus is designed to help you grow, by making it easier for you to do business with us and offering a variety of resources and support. So you can better serve your customers and meet the changing demands of a digital Britain.

This new programme is made up of three tiers – Partner, Premium and Elite – each with varying benefits. Each tier will come with a greater range of benefits than seen before, including commercial support, sales and marketing resources, learning tools built by industry experts and access to exclusive events. Many of these benefits will be delivered through our new Partner Plus Hub which offers an end-to-end digital experience, giving you control of your account with a range of self-serve tools.

Our approach to partnering is keeping the requirements to a minimum, so that you can focus on connecting your customers. Our programme structure is straightforward, geared to helping you build a strong business by delivering leading communications services, and taking them to market with impactful sales and marketing support.

And, with over 70 percent of partners asking for more brand association with BT Wholesale, you can now – for the first time – qualify to use our brand in your marketing communications to demonstrate your partner status with a trusted UK provider, whilst also building your own identity.

What's more, our sales and marketing support means that you have access to assets including pre-written campaigns, battlecards for your sales team, datasheets to educate your customers on the benefits of specific products and 'How to' guides that help your team make the most of our campaigns and elevate your business' potential.

Key benefits to you

Partner Plus marks a fundamental shift in our business strategy and focus, based on what matters most to you, our partners. We know that ease of business is an important focus, which is why we've ensured the Partner Plus Hub is a single destination for all your needs. From downloading our comprehensive, white labelled marketing campaigns and sales support documents, to accessing training and booking events – the Hub will have it all.



Investing in your business

We understand you want to build your business your way. Your business thrives on your people and we want you to have the best in the business. We've invested heavily in online tools and training, so that we can help your teams to become expert advocates and beacons of best practice in the communications market.

We want to make sure that doing business with BT Wholesale is as easy, rewarding and beneficial as it can be. Our new partner programme will be a step in the right direction for you to navigate your customers' digital transformation.

To find out more and sign up to Partner Plus visit btwholesale.com/join.

Join us on 24th June for our Partner Plus event to find out how our new partner programme will support your business. Click [here](#) to register for the event now.



Prime time for CCaaS

Tollring CEO Tony Martino says the latest cloud-based contact centre tools and key areas of CCaaS innovation are the next big opportunity for comms resellers – and he outlines why they need to adopt a consultative role to be part of this fast expanding market.



Tony Martino

The exciting thing about CCaaS is that it makes call centre functionality accessible and affordable to all types of organisations. It is particularly beneficial to mid-market organisations with around 150 to 350 employees. This size of business tends to have multiple customer facing teams using the phone for support, sales, account management, retentions and cancellations as well as outbound telemarketing.

With teams now working from a mix of home and office, CCaaS in the cloud has become invaluable. The ability to visualise customer information is especially relevant for the mid-market enterprises that want to de-risk their business and deliver services from an 'anywhere' perspective. CCaaS is all about that. It delivers the flexibility to scale the number of agents as a business grows or contracts; and with the same CCaaS technology available throughout the sales operation a business

can resource more effectively, perhaps switching an outbound telesales team to support inbound calls when it's needed. Like everything in the cloud, CCaaS is used on a per user per month basis, so a business can easily stop or adopt licences as required.

CCaaS represents lots of different services. It is not just about a contact centre receiving and making calls. It can include the supervisory functionality, the agent capability, CRM integration, the added analytics, call recording and sentiment analysis. With the current high customer demand for all of these tools, resellers need to look at how they can provide as seamless and as simplified a customer experience as possible.

The aim is to minimise the fragmentation of tools and services provided to a customer. If a reseller can achieve this, the customer can reduce management and training costs. In contrast, a business with fragmented capabilities can lead to poor a user experience which

in turn leads to unhappy staff and potentially unhappy end customers.

The effects of a good customer experience are tangible. The return on investment is not just about increasing orders and financial returns. It also encompasses the softer elements such as wellbeing, and the significant benefits of

having the right tools in a portfolio to meet customers' changing needs. A breadth of complementary services will also make it much more difficult for customers to switch to another provider.

A business needs to understand a customer's end-to-end journey to see the full customer experience. This means identifying how a

With teams now working from a mix of home and office, CCaaS has become invaluable

a simplified customer journey and a joined-up experience.

Resellers should also consider how CCaaS helps them to increase their ARPU and customer retention. There are numerous up-sell opportunities too. A reseller can take their customer on a journey, solving their current issues knowing full well that as the business changes and grows they can offer further capabilities to complement the portfolio of services. The key is in

customer first made contact, what routes they took, through to the conclusion and the effectiveness of the whole process. Furthermore, interoperability, supervisor and agent integration are vital in a CCaaS solution. Agents need to communicate with each other and with their supervisors in real-time and across different channels.

The supervisor role is vital. They need to understand how things have gone and how to improve, how to

manage staff productivity and determine staff levels for different times of the day. And increasingly, agents have their own wallboards to understand what colleagues are doing in real-time. This enables them to share their knowledge and information, as well as collaborate with peers, colleagues, supervisors and managers.

Customer experience analysis from a holistic perspective is another key feature. This dovetails into the more technical elements of APIs and CRMs which empower the customer experience analytics with a greater understanding of their interactions and journeys.

CCaaS has to be easy to sell. By its nature, it can be hugely complex but many of these tools now visualise the provisioning and management journeys to ensure it is easy to deploy. This means the journey for the reseller needs to be seamless too, providing them with full control over those provisioning journeys with the ability to turn on licenses and capabilities for customers when required.

Our experience tells us that it is important to invest heavily in research and development to ensure that journeys for resellers and end customers are as strong as possible. We also prioritise our partner and sales enablement programmes to help resellers develop the skills they need to deliver a consultative approach and become the trusted advisor that their customers need. This dual-focused approach is key to a successful CCaaS proposition that allows partners to widen their addressable market, increase ARPU and reduce churn. ■

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Tee up for mental health

The ICT mental health charity MHA continues to help people in need of a friendly ear and advice, and now the organisation is urging more industry businesses to get involved so it can take the support it offers to the next level.

Founder Peter Orr is hoping ICT companies will help the charity recruit and train more MHA Associates who are needed to cope with the continuous demand for assistance with mental health issues. "We have some wonderful Associates on board who are helping people working in all sectors of the ICT industry across the UK, but our recruitment has halted purely due to lack of funds," he said. "If just a few organisations were to get

behind us and pledge a few thousand pounds it would make all the difference."

One way big companies could support the charity would be to sponsor a hole at the MHA Golf Day which will be staged exclusively for golfers in the ICT industry on 13th September 2021. Brocket Hall in Hertfordshire is not only one of England's finest stately homes, but also home to two of the finest golf courses in the UK and the MHA golf day will give sponsors a unique opportunity to offer colleagues or clients the chance to play at one of the finest venues in the UK.

Both courses regularly play host to professional and members' tournaments as well as Pro-Am tournaments



Mental health drive

where members can meet and play with professionals from around the world.

Here is the run down on the day:

- Twenty teams of four (individuals can apply).
- Corporate opportunities to sponsor a hole.
- A great day of golf in wonderful surroundings.
- A chance to catch up with industry friends

and colleagues.

- Dinner with some football legends to end a great day out.

"Obviously, fundraising has been difficult over the course of the pandemic and we wanted to celebrate the return to some kind of normality, by staging an ICT golf day that raises money for an ICT charity," added Orr. "We already have holes sponsored by Cisco and IBM, so we still have 16 slots available. In truth, if we managed to get all of these sponsored our funding issues would be resolved in one day!"

MHA provides listening support and signposting to anyone in the industry suffering with poor mental health and anxiety, but funds

are needed to keep providing:

- MHA training for local Associates who provide peer support.
- The MHA telephone listening service.
- An MHA in-house trainer and administrative support.
- MHA Awareness days and workshops. ■

To book your team or sponsor a hole at the MHA golf day email Peter.orr@mentalhealthassociates.co.uk or call him on 07766 088775. Individuals can apply.

- For further information on MHA workshops, the golf day fundraiser or becoming an Associate, email peter.orr@mentalhealthassociates.co.uk
- If you need help urgently go to www.mentalhealthassociates.co.uk or call 03301 244 338.

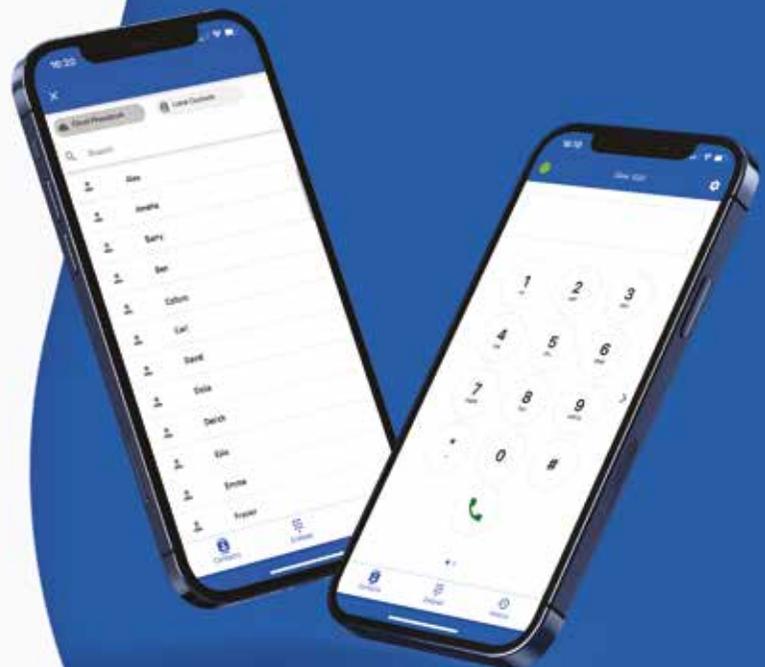


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Harnessing the X factor

Meeting and exceeding customer expectations is an undertaking that demands far more action than optimising the customer experience (CX) alone, says Content Guru Deputy CEO and co-founder Martin Taylor. Here, he argues the case for embedding an elevated employee experience (EX) as well as CX into all CCaaS strategies.



Martin Taylor

channels into a single, easy-to-use interface that keeps customer data secure. AI toolkits should enable mass personalisation of interactions using Natural Language Processing (NLP), extracting meaning and intent from speech to categorise calls before they reach the human customer service agent.

By the time the call is answered, the agent knows the caller's specific issue, whether they are a repeat customer and their identity. When integrated with an organisation's internal CRM this technology triggers automated screen prompts of historical data for that customer together with any information relevant to their query. Furthermore, workforce optimisation and management tools ensure that agents are trained, supported, monitored, motivated and organised.

The next big step for contact centre technology will be advancements in sentiment analysis, which will continue paving the way for monumental changes to the chatbot of the future. A sophisticated matrix of keywords, voice tone and volume creates a deeper understanding of the consumer and their needs.

With this information, organisations can ensure that each consumer is routed to the agent or department best equipped to deal with their enquiry, and that agents are prepared to meet the consumer in the particular moment. Understanding these dynamics and that CX and EX are linked and essential in optimising customer engagement should form an essential part of all CCaaS portfolios. ■

CX is going to be the most important factor for many businesses over the coming 12 months, and your customers are desperate to differentiate themselves through the quality of the customer experience they deliver. Furthermore, these customers are realising the influence that their employee experience is having on their customer service offering.

Many of the organisations that make up your customer base are struggling to survive, or are facing adverse future trading conditions. Last year the UK economy shrank by 10 per cent, the biggest GDP fall of any major nation. In today's tough market, your customers must position themselves to thrive by creating a competitive advantage. CX, especially where this incorporates improved EX, will give customers the best possible tonic for a fast-acting post-

Covid recovery. But how can you provide customers with the solutions they need to become long-term market leaders in customer engagement and experience?

As we recover from Covid-19 customers have higher CX expectations from businesses than ever before. Customers are demanding a digital-first experience where they can switch between their channel of choice to reach businesses any time, from anywhere. They want contactless interactions that still feel safe and secure, and are flexible on their terms. Meanwhile, they desire to feel understood and valued, and to have their query resolved as quickly as possible.

Post-Covid, customers won't stick around for long if their needs aren't met. Just one negative interaction is enough to make 89 per cent of consumers and 66 per cent of businesses switch

brands. For your customers, meeting these demands is make-or-break. You must be able to provide a CX-focused solution that enables them to communicate securely through any channel, at any time, and empowers agents to deliver a personalised service.

Collaboration

Offering solutions that allow employees to collaborate with one another through their communications platform of choice is essential if you are to appeal to businesses with a remote or hybrid working model. Having experienced the benefits of flexible working, your customers' employees have also become more demanding than ever. Contact centre workers want flexibility, feedback and support. They expect integrated systems with effective knowledge management, and to feel empowered to deliver excellent CX. This means

your customers require a flexible working solution that not only improves CX, but also enhances EX, or they will suffer the consequences of disgruntled employees delivering sub-par service.

It is clear to see that CX and EX are intrinsically linked – one drives the other in a circular flywheel. And as more businesses recognise the value of tightly connecting these two elements a largely untapped market is being revealed. To take advantage of the opportunities on offer resellers should ensure they are armed with a cloud engagement solution that enables their customers to tightly link CX and EX.

Resellers should look to partner with a contact centre technology provider whose solutions are CX and EX-centric. A best-in-class CX solution is truly omnichannel and integrated, converging all

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Pandemic has widened the digital skills gap

With the UK economy likely to take an upward trajectory post Covid, the ICT industry must first bridge the digital skills gap that threatens to block its path, writes Greg Denholm. This issue is not new to our industry and nor should it take our readers and contributors by surprise. Back in 2016 IBM tech guru Sanjay Brahmawar predicted we would have one million unfilled jobs in the IT sector by 2020. He was not wrong.

At the end of 2020, Tech Nation's UK Tech Ecosystem update report supported by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Digital Economy Council, revealed that a tenth of all UK job vacancies are tech roles. They estimated then that if the growth continued at the same rate, there would be 100,000 job vacancies per month before the end of June 2021.

Last year, the Open University concluded that the UK skills shortage is currently costing organisations £6.3bn which, according to Crissi Williams, CEO of the Institute of Telecoms Professionals (ITP), has been greatly exacerbated by Covid-19.

"The skills gap is particularly significant in the context of the pandemic, with many businesses pivoting towards a more digital focus, and many employees continuing to work remotely, meaning digital skills are more valuable than ever," she said.

Williams cited Microsoft's report 'Unlocking the UK's Potential with Digital Skills', which reveals a macro image of how recruiters are viewing the issue.

The report found that 80% of UK leaders believe investment in digital skills will be important to the country's post Covid-19 economic recovery, whilst 78% also view a large pool of digital talent as essential to the UK's competitiveness. And, two-thirds of UK business leaders surveyed said their organisation was facing a digital skills gap, with concerns being expressed that new roles could go unfilled.

This illuminates an ongoing issue for recruiters. With the technologies we utilise and sell being improved and replaced at an exponential rate, the industry must ensure new hires and existing staff are up to date with the digital skills required. This is a view shared by this month's Kaleidoscope contributors.



SOHINI RAIATHATHA
REDSQUID

"During the last year, technology has rapidly and fundamentally changed the way we work, which has instantly increased the demand we have for digital skills in our workforce. This change, which occurred overnight, created an instant demand for the right candidates with the suitable qualifications. The shortage of digital skills must be addressed quickly to avoid the otherwise serious issues we will meet, which will affect both our economy and society. I find it paramount that the industry takes on responsibility to upskill and develop the talent we already have. This will make us equipped to handle the change in digitalisation and cloud-based solutions going forward. To overcome this shift, re-training of workforces should be implemented continuously while accelerating the learning curve. This will be the only way to prepare our industry to meet customer demand and the speed of which new technologies continue to develop."



PAUL WATSON
TRUSTACK

"The Coronavirus pandemic has had a profound effect on IT skills and the IT services industry. Demand for IT services such as agile working or cloud-based services has increased due to national and local lockdowns, placing much greater demand on IT skills which were in short supply before COVID had an impact. In addition, both the pandemic and the skills shortage have been catalysts for widespread consolidation within the IT sector; companies are either being acquired and consolidated or are themselves an acquirer. Consolidation is being seen as a way to 'buy' the IT skills which companies need to develop those services in demand such as cybersecurity and cloud services. Once acquired, highly skilled individuals are being well looked after with salary increases and enhanced benefit packages effectively placing them out of reach of smaller companies, compounding the skills shortage even further."



AIDAN PIPER
WELCOMM
COMMUNICATIONS

"With the technology industry booming and traditional geographic barriers no longer a concern for many employers due to newly introduced remote working policies, we are finding it challenging to onboard skilled IT personnel ready to hit the ground running from day one. We are seeing an influx of hospitality and tourism trained workers applying for support roles, but often they do not have the digital skills or experience that we need to support our business customers. As our lives become more digitally oriented, with devices and applications increasingly accessible and integrated in everyone's day-to-day working lives, I think it is incredibly important for all of our people to have exposure and understanding of how our technology solutions work. That is why, as an industry, we must shift our focus and invest heavily in internal training programs, providing opportunities to develop those that show potential to deliver greater value to customers."



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Digital skills gap in ICT industry



DARROL STEVENS
NEOCI

"This has a lot to do with employer expectations. For example, 10-15 years ago companies were more open to considering candidates with transferable skills and were more willing to invest in training. The technical advances we've seen in recruitment tools such as job boards, professional networking etc. mean that finding a nearly exact match to your job description is more achievable. Employers have high expectations because this is what they've become used to. I think the problem isn't necessarily a lack of suitable talent, but rather a lack of willingness to invest in training. A job description used to be a summary of what was expected in a role. These days, it's become more of a checklist for what you need to be doing already. If employers can embrace a 'will over skill' approach to hiring and invest in training, this will help bridge the gap."



LIZ MCDOWALL
ICA

"As an SME, recruitment is a highly concentrated process for us because the impact on our business is far greater than for some of our larger competitors. Finding potential candidates with suitable qualifications is easy, if you remain open-minded and have time to mould and nurture. However, finding the right candidate, with desired experience and skills for working in technology is difficult. It immediately narrows the criteria, overlooking credible people because they have not got desired qualifications in STEM or any prior work experience in the industry. To bridge the gap for those entering the sector, a grounding platform to build knowledge and understanding is a necessity. The induction into the sector needs to be just as concentrated as the recruitment process is. However, this creates the new challenge of keeping this up with an ever-changing industry that can become outdated within the space of 12 months."



CHERIE HOWLETT
JOLA CLOUD SOLUTIONS

"At Jola we have recruited staff during lockdown on Teams in sales, provisioning, accounts and support departments. We are currently recruiting for sales and marketing positions and have been pleased with the volume and quality of the applications. We are passionate about building a diverse team and train and mentor in-house to encourage staff to develop their careers with us. In our industry we have the advantage of using the technologies we sell, so are in a good position to offer work experience and apprenticeship programmes to enable new starters to learn on the job and acquire relevant qualifications. It also allows us to employ the right people and bring them into the channel from other industries. Online and distance learning is much more popular today and easy to fit into busy lives. It is often more cost-effective too, which helps the training budget go further."



ADAM CATHCART
9 GROUP

"As the country emerges out of lockdown, we've observed a surge in recruitment across the board, which is positive to see. We've spotted a trend amongst ambitious candidates who are at the early stages of their career, searching for their next step up. The quality of candidates that we've had approach us has been phenomenal. There's no doubt that a basic digital skillset is almost universally required these days. Four in five job vacancies now require candidates with a basic digital skill set, but around a quarter of applicants have a skills gap, according to a research by the Learning and Work Institute. The channel plays a crucial role in driving digital growth, both through delivering solutions that transforms how people work, and by helping to develop its employees to become digital leaders. Helping young people to establish strong digital skills is crucial, as they will form our future workforce."



LAUREN MCMANUS
GAMMA

"Firstly, it's important to understand why there is a digital skills gap in the UK. The way businesses operate has changed because of rapid advancements in technology and the implementation of digital transformation strategies across all industries. Because of this, the skills required for any given jobs have also changed and the digital skills gap will only continue to grow as technology continues to evolve. The bad news is that it's not an issue you can just throw money at in hope of recruiting more skilled employees. In a few years, even your new, highly-skilled recruits won't be suitable for those jobs generated by the coming technological advancements. The solution lies in investing to reskill current employees. Whether through an ad-hoc programme, or by enrolling employees into third-party courses, businesses will need to ensure their existing employees have the digital skills required to succeed in the Fourth Industrial Revolution."



ANDY MURPHY
PESCADO HOSTED

"Without doubt it is a difficult market to find the right blend of personality, fit and the digital skills/experience we need as an employer. At Pescado we are generally choosing to look at apprentice/junior level employment, with individuals we see as the right 'team fit' and then look to upskill them with specific internal training. We are also looking at implementing a buddy system with more experienced colleagues who will act as a technical mentor providing that real world experience. In terms of what the industry can do to drive this and assist, we need more generic training availability in areas such as Installation and Operational ordering/porting – these sort of training courses would be an invaluable additional to induction plans for junior staff."

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Roberts outlines pivotal

The comms channel faces the biggest evolution of its entire history but the extent of the transformation at hand is also reflected by the scale of the opportunity for innovation and growth, according to Mitel Vice President for Northern Europe Richard Roberts.

There is every sign of an unprecedented upsurge in the adoption of new technologies, new business models and ever closer, more strategic vendor-partner relationships, believes Roberts, who hails innovation as a foundation stone and route to growth at this pivotal time. "We're living in an age of technological advancement that's quite unlike anything that's come before," stated Roberts. "Technologies like AI, IoT, 5G and Wi-Fi 6 are breaking new ground and disrupting the communications landscape. We've got an opportunity to use these technologies and weave them into our solutions so that we can drive innovation and collaboration on a mass scale. We're seeing white hot competition and brilliant innovation leading to impactful solutions.



Richard Roberts

Partners must have a resilient business, be capable of switching from the physical to the virtual in a heartbeat and credible in the creation of customer-specific solutions

"We're also seeing rapid growth in the market – not just more users, but savvier users too, particularly when it comes to solutions like communication and collaboration tools. When the pandemic hit it threw all kinds of challenges at customers. Now, everyone wants to know what comes next. As a society we're not going back to the way things were. Many of our customers are working with us precisely because they see

their future best served by a hybrid way of working, with employees able to continue working remotely for at least part of the time."

At the start of the pandemic remote working was a novelty for many people and organisations, but already it's business as usual. "Now, end users know what they like, and what they don't," added Roberts. "That links to perhaps the biggest concern – one the whole industry

should consider: How can you create more compelling, meaningful connections with your colleagues, partners and customers? Creating exceptional customer experiences has never been more important."

Software development

Roberts has taken a particular interest in how Mitel partners are developing their own software capabilities to service end customers, which he says is a testament to

their flexibility in the face of change. "We are seeing our partners acquire the capabilities to reach ever deeper into their customers' businesses, and in doing so derive much greater value while building long-term, strategic partnerships with them," he commented. "This may be borne out by the custom development of AI bots to facilitate better customer interactions within CX, tighter vertical application integrations

into communication workflows and decision making processes, or the development of data mining and insight tools to allow customers to continually improve the quality and/or profitability of their precious customer interactions."

To meet the needs of today's customers resellers would be doing themselves a big favour by providing service diversity via a choice of partners and integrated, differentiated propositions that deliver a competitive advantage, advocates Roberts. "Mitel has always appreciated the role our partners play in delivering these critical elements," he stated. "The great thing about having a capable partner network is that they are always challenging themselves to stay relevant and deliver real business value."

This is especially important when you consider the industry shift towards open consumption models, as customers increasingly appreciate the benefits associated with more flexible, opex-based as-a-service models, observed Roberts. "We are already seeing the swing to cloud delivery, where our partners mediate between multiple service offerings to create tailored outcomes for their customers," he added. "We've also moved towards



CATEGORY SPONSORS



success factors

a 'whole customer' approach to solution sales. That means making sure we're embracing the technology, culture and processes of our customers to fully understand them and their end users.

"The pace of change we're living through can make some companies feel uneasy, but there's no denying the world we're living in. From our perspective, there are lots of positives – like the rapid acceleration of technological advancements brought on by the necessities of recent events. And consider AI or augmented reality (AR), we are well beyond the point where these could be considered something of a gimmick.

We are seeing our partners acquire the capabilities to reach ever deeper into their customers' businesses

We're seeing real world practical implementations."

Roberts' observations show that customer insight has never been more important, leading to a focus on data analytics, process innovation and AI-inspired solutions to deliver quality innovation at scale. One example is the development of AI chatbots. Mitel's Google AI-powered Virtual Agent can integrate with existing customer experience platforms and handle basic tasks alone, allowing human agents to focus on more complex requests.

"The pace of innovation is increasing as the expectations of our customers continue to build," stated Roberts. "In an ever more mobile world

the key to success lies in the delivery of communication and collaboration experiences customised to the role of the individual, to provide a seamless experience irrespective of location, medium or application. The choice of the most appropriate business and consumption model lies with the customer and there should be no impact upon experience, innovation or integration capabilities."

Strategic choices

The need for partners to make the right strategic vendor choices to underpin insight-driven, differentiated and critical solutions such as DR is also growing in significance, noted Roberts.

"The importance of true business continuity as a fundamental offering has been highlighted very clearly, but so has the need for greater customer knowledge in terms of key processes, roles and systems," he added.

"Flexibility is also critical: Partners must have a resilient business themselves, be capable of switching from the physical to the virtual in a heartbeat and be credible in the creation of customer-specific solutions. Off-the-shelf may be attractive to some, but for those customers seeking competitive advantage, more than this is required.

"Understanding who our customers are and what they

need, then delivering on that, is the key to success. Our partners must have the same high level of understanding when it comes to technology. We must continue to help them stay ahead of the curve and understand how emerging technologies can fit within their own business.

"We can't stand still, and neither can our partners. So we've taken practical steps to help them, like boosting the available resources. For example, we've increased the number of partner-aligned field sale resources by over 60 per cent, provided dedicated sales engineers to our partners, and offered specific sales support that works alongside our Partner Interaction Centre."

If Roberts could transform any area of the comms sector it would be to accelerate initiatives across the industry to drive diversity, from pre-employment through to late-career. "While notable progress has been made in some areas we would be better placed as an industry to respond to the changing needs of our customers if we more closely represented the diversity we serve," he added.

"I'd also increase the focus on the human element within IT. Human factors like the emotional, psychological and cultural impacts of technology are so important to our wellbeing and productivity. As we've all witnessed over the past 12 months, the effectiveness and value of technology often comes down to how well we can integrate it into our lives. This is becoming a higher priority for the industry, but there's still plenty of work to do." ■

Enreach plugs into energy to boost UK customer outreach

Enreach UK provide the tools and technology for businesses across the country to work efficiently from anywhere. With ambitious plans to become the 'go to' provider for SMEs in the new normal, they are part of the European-wide group with colleagues in 25 countries. Having recently acquired Pace Telecom, they have plans to grow considerably across the UK.

The HD Touch and Enreach Contact pioneers aim to increase their product and service offering throughout 2021 and beyond and to offer their customers everything they need to work their magic. As a result, they have partnered with Fidelity Energy.

Senior Account Manager, Emily Mould said: "Here at Enreach, we provide everything businesses need to work wonders. Offering futureproof cloud solutions, reliable business broadband and affordable mobiles, we are part of a wider European group with colleagues in 25 countries across Europe. Our key customers are SMEs, but we can help anyone from one-man bands to multi-site organisations in any industry type."

Detailing what persuaded them to offer energy procurement and become a partner with Fidelity Energy, Emily said: "We originally offered telecoms solutions and then added IT services to our portfolio. We were then looking for additional products and services that would add significant value

to our customers. Becoming a Fidelity Energy partner has not only added value but has also offered us a 'stickier' product to offer clients."

During the Covid-19 lockdown, Enreach evolved an agile approach to acquiring new customers and its energy offerings played a big part in helping them adapt, become more efficient and improve the customer experience, as Emily explained.

"Like many other businesses we had to move to remote working when the pandemic hit. This meant that all appointments- from Engineers to Sales and Account Managers - had to assist customers as effectively as usual, but from home. Despite these challenges we have still been able to support our customers throughout the pandemic and energy has played a significant role in this.

"The reason is simple. With businesses considering hybrid working, being able to offer a one bill solution that also includes energy has enabled customers to effectively budget and plan for their futures in the so-called 'new normal'."

Since originally partnering with Fidelity in 2019, Enreach has progressed its energy marketing programme focused on the cost savings customers can achieve which are so vital in the current economic conditions.

"We've ramped up our customer communications to make them aware that we can save them money on their energy as well as telecoms costs. We have also created dedicated landing pages on our website to send our current customers to and we have made sure to equip all of our account management and sales teams with collateral advertising the energy solutions we can offer."

"The Fidelity team are great. We get support from Clare Stratford, our Business Development Manager, and the internal staff. They are always willing to help answer any questions thrown at them. The marketing team has also helped us, creating templates that we can use to help get customers to engage over email as well."



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CHANNEL CHAMPIONS

1st July 2021, Regents Park, London

After lockdown let's toast our champions!

Channel Champions, the new event borne out of the Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards, has been re-located to Regent's Park, London and re-launched as an 'outdoor' extravaganza on July 1st.

This exciting event will recognise the impressive achievements across all functions of channel businesses, namely:

- Sales & Account Management
- Marketing
- Tech Support and Engineering
- HR, People & Culture
- Billing & Finance
- Executive Leadership

In line with Covid-19 restrictions, finalists will now gather at a celebratory summer garden party with the awards ceremony staged in an open marquee followed by networking in the glorious surroundings of London's most elegant Royal park.

Terry O'Brien, CEO of Channel Champions headline sponsor DWS, commented: "We are so pleased the Comms Dealer team is determined to give people in our industry the event they deserve after working so hard during the pandemic and helping millions of key workers to keep Britain working.

"As headline sponsor of both this event and the Comms National Awards later in the year, we are delighted to play our part in paying tribute to the amazing professionals in our fantastic industry. Staging Channel Champions in the open air with a festival atmosphere will make this an event to remember and I can't wait," he added.

Channel Champions Event co-ordinator Nigel Sergent confirmed that entries will be based on work and activities carried out between March 1st, 2020 and March 1st, 2021.

"This has been the most challenging time in the channel's history - when so many teams performed miracles to make sure the UK's crucial organisations could keep working and



millions of staff and management across all sectors could relocate to their homes," he said.

"It's been said many times in the last year, but the ICT sector has been Britain's fourth emergency service during the pandemic, providing vital communications to millions and we aim to reward these heroes at the Channel Champions event in Regent's Park, which promises to be a very different but very exciting day for our industry.

"Given the year we have been through, I am sure all ICT companies will want to take the opportunity to properly acknowledge their teams by entering and with the entry deadline extended to May 5th, there's plenty of time to get submissions completed," added Sergent.

Terry O'Brien urges all channel businesses to get involved in the process to recognise teams which do not always get the credit they deserve.

"Winning, or even being shortlisted for these Awards, will bring a huge uplift in morale as everyone feels valued and they can see how their hard work is paying off. Channel Champions will be a fantastic opportunity to recognise the contribution teams have made not only to their business, but to the wider Channel as well."

To enter go to www.channel-champions.com



Photo by cottonbro from Pexels

Celebrate your team champions at our unique Party in the Park!

The Channel Champions Awards provides a fantastic opportunity to celebrate your teams' successes and network with your industry peers at an open air summer garden party to be held in Regents Park, London on July 1st. This top notch event will be staged in an open-sided marquee and all Covid-19 protocols will be strictly adhered to.

This will be the first major channel event since the ending of lockdown. Tickets for the event will be limited and are in high demand so don't delay, contact Heather Miles now to secure your place.

Email hmiles@bpl-business.com or call her on **0751 9790297**.

SPONSORS LINE UP TO RECOGNISE THE CHANNEL'S AMAZING TEAMS



GAMMA

"It's an honour and a pleasure for Gamma to sponsor the 'People and Culture Team' category at the Channel Champions Awards. These awards celebrate many of those teams that don't often receive enough recognition for their hard work. People and culture teams have played an integral part within their business, particularly throughout the past year, and we're pleased to be able to celebrate their accomplishments at this important event. We wish all nominees, especially those within the Gamma partner community, the best of luck."

Daryl Pile, Managing Director- Channel



TALKTALK BUSINESS

"TalkTalk Business Wholesale is delighted to be the sponsor for the Sales and Account Management Team category for Resellers, Service Providers and Distributors at Channel Champions 2021. Comms Dealer does an amazing job at bringing the channel community together to recognise and celebrate success. We can't wait for the event as it will be an opportunity to meet old and new friends, after what has been a challenging year for us all."

Richard Thompson, Managing Director



MITEL

"This year, channel awards will mean so much more to many in our industry. It gives us all the chance to acknowledge what partners and vendors have achieved in what has been one of the toughest years for everyone."

At Mitel we didn't hesitate when we were approached to support the Channel Champions Awards in 2021. We are really looking forward to celebrating the success of everyone involved and being part of what promises to be a fantastic occasion. Best of luck to all the finalists!"

Nick Riggott, Country Sales Director, UK & Ireland



UNION STREET

"In an industry as competitive as the channel, effective billing strategies are essential for success. As the channel's leading provider of billing solutions, we know this better than most, and 2020 was a particularly challenging year. It's therefore a great pleasure to be able to recognise the channel's top performers in this critical area of expertise, as sponsor of the Channel Champions' Billing and Finance categories. We're greatly look forward to meeting with our friends and colleagues when we attend this spectacular event in July."

Vincent Disneur, Managing Director



MYPHONES

"MyPhones is delighted to be sponsoring the Sales Support Team categories and celebrating the fantastic work they do across the Reseller, Service Provider and Distributor channels, at the first year of the Channel Champions Awards. The awards ceremony promises to be a great event with recognition for those teams that work tirelessly behind the scenes, alongside those more prominent roles more regularly featured. Well done to everybody in this category. You all do a fantastic job and are essential in the effective delivery of products and solutions."

Paul Gibbs, Sales Director



ENREACH

"The Channel Champions event is arguably now more important than ever before and is set to be a true celebration of the hard work of the Channel"

after one of the most challenging years yet. As a new entrant to the UK market, Enreach is excited to be sponsoring the Executive Leadership Category to recognise those who have gone above and beyond and guided their teams, partners and customers to work wonders in the 'new normal!'"

Duncan Ward, CEO



VIRTUAL 1

"As a wholesale provider, the channel is the lifeblood of Virtual1 so we are keen and excited to support Comms Dealers' recognition of the Channel Champions. The decision to embrace all of the teams that contribute to the channel's success is a great step forward, and something we very much wanted to be a part of. I'm very much looking forward to seeing everyone at Regents Park in July and to toast to all of the hard work and dedication of the teams across the Channel."

Neil Wilson, Head of Products and Marketing



VOICEFLEX

"Without the people in the Channel our businesses wouldn't deliver outstanding products and services and flourish. CoVID-19 has bought unprecedented change and many unanswered questions. It has been a truly challenging year and so we are delighted to be sponsoring an event that recognises the hard work, dedication, and commitment of all teams in the Channel. We are looking forward to this fantastic opportunity to say thank you and celebrate the achievements of our valued teams and wish the finalists the very best of luck."

Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director



TO SEE THE SHORTLIST OF CHANNEL CHAMPIONS FINALISTS GO TO:
www.channel-champions.com/finalists

TO SEE THE LINE UP OF CHANNEL CHAMPIONS JUDGES GO TO:
www.channel-champions.com/judges

A sector that enthrals PE

A classic sign of the health of the comms sector is how far private equity continues to court ICT businesses, through direct investment or by backing acquisitions. Here, Knight Corporate Finance co-founders and Directors Paul Billingham and Adam Zoldan share insights into why PE is attracted to ICT resellers, and what they can offer business owners and managers.

It has been over 10 years since private equity first started to become seriously interested in ICT resellers, recognising the value of contracted recurring revenues and strong cash generation from entrepreneurial and ambitious ICT providers. Since then private equity has been behind the vast majority of transactions in the sector, either investing directly or through its backing of the numerous buy-and-build resellers.

There has now been over 50 private equity investments into the ICT sector since the start of 2016, with a number of ICT resellers now on their second or third round of PE investment. While the pandemic reduced the number of private equity investments into the sector last year, Babble, with its investment from Graphite, and Digital Wholesale Solutions, with its investment from Inflexion, are two examples of transactions that did complete during 2021, and as we emerge from lockdown we expect more direct private equity investments into the sector to be announced over the next few months.

Private equity likes investing in ICT resellers for a range of reasons, including the high levels of contracted recurring

revenues, low levels of capex, strong cash generation, the provision of business critical solutions, disruptive technology changes and the fragmented nature of the market, all providing wide availability of acquisitions to accelerate growth.

So what is the attraction for business owners in taking private equity investment? Firstly, private equity allows business owners to release equity value in their business. Founders often get to a size where the business has a material value and it becomes the vast majority of their personal wealth. While they may not want to sell their organisation, the idea of realising some value through a partial sale is attractive, and private equity can offer this. It also allows a business to offer certain shareholders an exit at the point of transaction while others remain, and bring in purely investment with no equity released by shareholders initially. There is always a range of transaction options.

Secondly, private equity does bring more value than just a cheque. They can help professionalise a business, provide greater access to capital, and crucially provide support and guidance on taking the business to the next stage, including support on acquisitions.



Paul Billingham



Adam Zoldan

equity investment allowed them to accelerate their M&A strategy considerably, which in turn created greater value for both the existing management teams and the private equity investor.

More recently, Air IT received investment from August in early 2020 and has now strengthened its management team and undertaken multiple transactions, following years of steady but not exciting growth. At the time of investment Air IT was at circa £1 million annual EBITDA. Following its sixth acquisition in less than 12 months, annual EBITDA is forecast to be over £5 million. This could not have been achieved without private equity backing.

As mentioned above, there are always a range of options available to business owners and their management teams, and every PE investor is different, both commercially and culturally. As we always say, the best thing to do if private equity is of interest is to understand your options, the process and whether it is something that could be realistically achieved, having discussed with advisers and people who have undertaken a similar transaction themselves. We expect 2021 to be a busy year for private equity investment into the sector. ■

As we emerge from lockdown we expect more direct private equity investments into the sector to be announced over the next few months

By taking private equity investment you are creating a new partnership, with aligned interests, to grow the business to a level that it could not achieve in its present state.

Solid credentials

Private equity can also add to the credibility of a business, especially when it comes to undertaking acquisitions. Any seller will know that a private equity backed business is serious about M&A and is well funded, therefore a

potential strategic advantage in a competitive field.

There are a number of excellent case studies of ICT resellers taking private equity investment and achieving significantly faster growth following the transaction. Good examples are Southern Communications, Arrow Communications and Wavenet, which all took private equity investment in 2016 and are now at least four times larger from an EBITDA perspective. Private



CATEGORY SPONSORS



Don't miss the first business networking event after lockdown!

Each year since the turn of the millennium, Comms Dealer 'Margin In' events have helped resellers addressing SME markets identify and open new doors to profit and truly understand the changing ICT environment.

This summer, as the UK slowly emerges from the Covid-19 lockdown, we are proud to announce that our latest 'Margin In' event – Margin in CaaS – will take place at the Forest of Arden hotel as a 'live' event (with social distancing measures in place).

The transformation to digital and cloud technologies has meant that comms solutions and the networks and software platforms they sit on are now being delivered 'as a service'.

The big issue for resellers is understanding how to present 'Comms as a Service' within these new frameworks and ensure that customers remain, happy and 'sticky'. And with 60% of organisations planning to move to hybrid working practices, wrapping connectivity and cloud-based hardware into bundled solutions billed as a service must be the way forward for channel partners.

The need to provide a holistic Customer Experience (CX) has become a fundamental component of a reseller's armoury and has been intensified as the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent work from home directives have transformed living rooms into makeshift offices, classrooms, and gyms.

That's why the theme of Margin in CaaS 2021 will be: "Building the customer experience and engagement through communications".

Over the course of the MiCaaS educational seminar, leading industry 'as a service' providers will discuss and debate the following questions:

A digital future

How can ICT providers can help organisations prepare for the next wave of challenges, invest in digital transformation reshape businesses and boost productivity?

Putting CX first

How can ICT providers gain competitive advantage through greater agility and scale and simplify the process of meeting the communication needs of customers?

Digitising the customer's enterprise

How can ICT providers unlock productivity through automation and orchestration of workloads across client departments and create great experiences for their customers and employees by focusing on what people encounter, observe, or feel when they interact with a service?

Simplifying systems with smart workflows

How can data be quickly and accurately correlated to identify common errors and predict remediations, freeing up employees to personalise the customer experience?

Margin in MiCaaS is an invitation only event for MD/CEO level directors representing reseller businesses up to c.£2m.

MEET OUR KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Mark Lomas, Head of New Business – Channel Sales and Andy Robinson, Head of UCaaS Practice, GAMMA

"Our business model is all about driving value into our channel partner businesses. Everything we do, everything we invest, is to help add value to our partner businesses.

During this turbulent year of unprecedented changes, Gamma continues to innovate and disrupt the market with new products and services that help partners be successful in their markets. Subjects we'll be covering at MiCaaS include: the Wholesale Line Rental switch off and how resellers can maximise on the huge opportunity of PhoneLine+; adding value to cloud voice sales and simplifying customer engagement with our contact centre software, Horizon Contact; how our enhanced mobile proposition and strengthened relationship with Three offers a best-in-class mobile network built specifically for UK businesses."



Cliff Chandler, Head of Sales and General Manager Kevin Burns, NTA

"NTA is a powerhouse within the hosted telephony industry. Our unique approach to customer relations and innovative business solutions have been transforming resellers and their profit margins for 20 years.

Our portal, and hardware provided can all be branded as yours – it is all about Your Brand, Your Business, Your Customers and most importantly, Your Profit. Our tailored channel model allows for an adaptable approach to your customer solutions, enabling margins to be created as you decide the per seat costs that apply to your solution. Using this flexible approach means you can share lines across your customer base and benefit from the low concurrency and no fixed costs per extension. That's what makes NTA's hosted telephony solution so unique."



Paul Taylor, Sales Director, Voiceflex

"Telecommunications used to be relatively easy: you put a PABX on the wall, connect ISDN, and away you went, simple! Nowadays, we have a myriad of products and services that are separate applications in separate locations that need to work in harmony to provide the 'Customer Solution and

User Experience.' How much do you know about the infrastructure or foundations required to support the applications? What skill sets do you need to buy in? What are the questions you should be asking of your suppliers? What if my customer wants home working for their staff? What if they want to combine the benefits of Microsoft Teams UC&C applications with voice? We'll be addressing these 'what if' questions and more at MiCaaS."



Russell Lux, CEO, TelcoSwitch Group

"TelcoSwitch is a channel-led business, having grown to over 120,000 users in five years and ranking as the 25th fastest growing tech company in the Sunday Times Tech Track 100. Our Unified Communications and compliance solutions, delivered

through our CallSwitch hosted telephony platform, enable channel partners to offer a suite of customisable and white-labelled solutions through competitive licensing, supported by our 'TelcoSwitch Academy' training programme. At MiCaaS we look forward to speaking about our analysis of the omnichannel landscape and how we're delivering advanced contact centre solutions that scale for SMEs and enterprise alike, along with how resellers can leverage margin from Microsoft Teams through voice and compliance solutions."

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Bluecube duo hired



Becky Jolly and Ben Palmby

LINCOLN-based Bluecube's capacity to act fast on larger enterprise sales enquiries received a boost with the appointment of Ben Palmby as Sales and Account Manager. The company also instated Becky Jolly as a new technical support team member. "We've seen a 12 per cent increase in our sales in the last 12 months which in the middle of a global pandemic was unexpected," said Managing Director Paul Reames. "We worked hard to keep up with the demand for working

from home and flexible communication systems. For the most part our customers are giving their staff the option to work remotely at least some of the time and to do that they require a more flexible communications strategy. Consequently, this year continues to be incredibly busy for Bluecube as well as the industry as a whole."

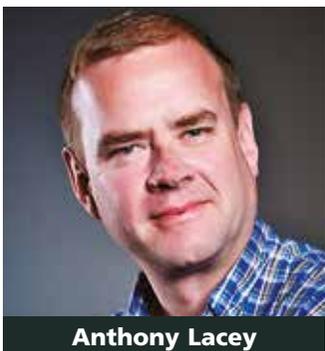
Also on the move...

SALESOLOGY founder Gary May has moved to Union Street Technologies as Sales Director. May first worked with MD Vincent Disneur in 2013 via his sales training consultancy set up that year. "Gary has worked with our team over the years with a focus on ethical sales practices that prioritise the requirements of, and benefits for, our partners," stated Disneur. May added: "Private investment has combined with a range of new software products and cross-sell opportunities at Union Street. My objective is to ensure the company is able to fully capitalise on these opportunities and to refine our sales strategy."



Gary May

WINDSOR Telecom has pulled in Anthony Lacey as COO. He brings 25 years IT and comms experience including a stint as Transformation & Portfolio Director at TalkTalk where he led large customer projects, systems change programmes



Anthony Lacey

and the integration of acquisitions. CEO Pete Tomlinson stated: "Anthony's experience in managing large transformation projects alongside his love for leading and inspiring teams makes him the perfect fit to join our leadership team as the company continues its growth and diversification." Lacey added: "The opportunity here is evident as we continue to diversify our product portfolio across communications, connectivity and IT services at speed."

JAY Kainth's appointment as Senior Executive at Knight Corporate Finance provides a boost to the dealmaker's key projects. Kainth joins from PwC where he was part of the Transaction Services team in London and he will help Knight Corporate Finance develop its Vendor Assist product, financial due diligence projects and big company sales.

THE newly created role of Executive Vice President of Strategy and Transformation at Colt Technology Services has been filled by Jaya Deshmukh who reports directly to CEO Keri Gilder. Deshmukh joins Colt from Google Cloud where she was Head of Strategy for the EMEA region. Her previous roles also include stints at Microsoft, PwC and Cognizant. Gilder commented: "Jaya's experience around digital transformation and the cloud makes her the perfect fit to lead this new team within Colt." Deshmukh added: "Being able to join an organisation as it embarks on its next strategic journey is always exhilarating."

Hill promoted to Ops Director

SYSTEMWORK'S Senior Technician Rob Hill has ascended the career ladder following his instatement as Director of Operations. The move comes as the Leeds-based IT support firm seeks to boost turnover by £350k in 2021, building on 2020's £250K revenue hike.

"As you might expect, our services have been in high demand as people have made the switch to home working," stated Hill. "We implemented remote working for around 600 individual users within the first week of lockdown mainly due to planning, and this rose to 900 by the end of 2020."

Systemwork's founder Jamie Durham added: "We exist to ensure users can work with no issues, and Rob has been at the forefront of ensuring our values remain front and centre over the past 10 years."

Systemwork's services include managed IT support, VoIP, cloud, connectivity, data security, mobile device management and employee monitoring.



Rob Hill

Checkley steps up as Flomatik's CEO

NETWORK services provider Flomatik has appointed Dean Checkley as CEO. He joined the firm as Chief Delivery Officer in January this year. Checkley's comms career kicked off at the age of 16 as an apprentice at GEC Telecommunication. His 45 years experience includes a stint as Interim MD at Rural Optic and a spell as Head of Shared Services and IT operations at The Law Society. He was also Director of Service and Operations with Virgin Media Business WiFi.



Dean Checkley

"Every industry has experienced a difficult time throughout the pandemic, but it's also paved the way for some exciting developments to come to the fore," said Checkley. "Our sector continues to play a pivotal role in the recovery and doing everything we can to keep the nation connected will be key to moving beyond the crisis."

Chairman Kevin Barrie stated: "Dean's strategic focus and ability to build sustainable business relationships means Flomatik can continue to build into a more forward thinking and transparent company."

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