



Adept Telecom boss thrives on basic principles p26



Coyle calls for greater neurodiversity in UK's tech sector p30

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launches campaign

Service puts customer ownership, flexibility at core, claims CEO Bob Falconer.

...d data network," ... (pictured). ... ose Three to pro- ... y radio access in ... s separate roam- ... s that give mobile ... ever there is a ... MutiNet bolt-on. ... offering partners ... vice where they ... ownership and ... and pricing, ... e gives partners ... o the core of the ... rk so they can ... to the mobiles

... within their base in real-time without having to involve a third party," added Falconer. ... Gamma Mobile includes 4G as standard on all tariffs and offers improved data monitoring with near real-time mediation and billing alongside more flexible data usage alerts. ... "Our mobile service meets the needs and challenges of today's business market while providing the control and flexibility our partners need to deliver a differentiated service," claimed Falconer. See page 28



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This month's movers and shakers



Gamma launches mobile campaign

GAMMA'S new business mobile service puts customer ownership, flexibility and control into the hands of channel partners, claims CEO Bob Falconer.

SPECIAL REPORT

The core mobile network infrastructure acquired by Gamma in 2014 has been developed to underpin Gamma Mobile, a new service launched last month.

The core is founded on the latest Ericsson software build, including 4G, and is capable of supporting technologies such as Voice over Wi-Fi and VoLTE.

"By owning the core network Gamma has full control of the mobile service in addition to the control it already has over its

fixed voice and data network," stated Falconer (pictured).

Gamma chose Three to provide the primary radio access in the UK and has separate roaming agreements that give mobile coverage wherever there is a signal via the MutiNet bolt-on.

"As well as offering partners an MVNO service where they have customer ownership and control over brand and pricing, Gamma Mobile gives partners direct access to the core of the mobile network so they can make changes to the mobiles

within their base in real-time without having to involve a third party," added Falconer.

Gamma Mobile includes 4G as standard on all tariffs and offers improved data monitoring with near real-time mediation and billing alongside more flexible data usage alerts.

"Our mobile service meets the needs and challenges of today's business market while providing the control and flexibility our partners need to deliver a differentiated service," claimed Falconer. **See page 28**

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

TO THINK 'big is best' in the comms market is like wielding a blunt instrument in a sector that is unresponsive to sledge hammer approaches with little impact. To think 'big is best' usually means more of the same and a lack of innovation, agility and customer intimacy. Rarely does size cut it as a USP, and rarely

does playing the numbers game stack up in a sophisticated market founded on partner and customer relationships.

It is in the minutiae of business interactions where the sparks fly, where the detail of long-term relationships are painted in through consultancy supported by a USP with its own stand-out hue, resistant to the general swipes of a big broad brush. In our business, perhaps small and 'different' is best, more powerful when aligned to the requirements of end user customers.

The best IT consultants combine the creativity of an artist and the close scrutiny of an analyst. They get under the skin of a business and leverage their company's USP to make a real difference. One company has achieved the sublime unification of its individuals, brand and USP, an embodiment of values that is far beyond the reach of the 'big is best' brigade, and is therefore a striking competitive advantage. To find out more about Auticon, a company that only employs autistic IT consultants, see page 30.

Targeting the Achilles heel of industry giants has become Bob Falconer's trademark. Gamma's CEO has long rallied smaller players around their ability to be flexible and all-encompassing in their responses to customer requirements, and lauds their ability to brush off the looming shadow of larger rivals with detailed strokes of consultancy, to create a likeness. Last month Gamma put its partners more prominently in the mobile picture (page 28), enabling them to more easily overturn false assumptions that 'big is best', and flew the flag for an army of 'small' channel players, upon whom many of the industry Goliaths actually depend.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Mesch pads UK footprint

CITYFIBRE'S fast-spreading national footprint has extended to Cambridge, Portsmouth and Southampton following the acquisition of Redcentric's duct and fibre networks (at least 137km), taking its presence to 40 cities.

This latest development in CityFibre's strategy to acquire non-incumbent owned fibre infrastructure assets also brings incremental coverage to a number of existing city footprints including Nottingham, Derby and Northampton.

As part of the £5m network acquisition CityFibre has secured £4.5m in long-term dark fibre leasing commitments from Redcentric which has become a new customer.

CityFibre's new network will continue to serve 188 Redcentric customer connections.

Redcentric has also entered into a framework for the use of CityFibre's infrastructure across its national footprint in future.

The newly acquired networks, such as the 44km footprint throughout Cambridge, are all routed to address local areas of identified strong demand for high bandwidth services.

For example, in Cambridge the network reaches many of



Greg Mesch

the city's science, business and research parks.

Fraser Fisher, CEO of Redcentric, commented: "This disposal is in line with our strategy of control over our customer affecting core assets while not tying up capital where ownership is unnecessary.

"We will continue to service customers in Cambridge and Portsmouth exactly as before, and expect to generate additional revenues and network efficiencies as a result of our relationship with CityFibre."

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch commented: "Once again we've shown that under utilised legacy fibre assets can find a new home in which to flourish within CityFibre's wholesale shared infrastructure model."

SHORT CALLS

SOS Communications is to continue as an authorised distributor of Toshiba UC systems, a position held since 1998. SOS will offer technical support, product maintenance, spare parts, repairs and modifications. "We are glad to have this confirmation and to quash the rumours," stated MD Colin Hepher.

Entanet has sealed a wholesale wireless deal with Metronet (UK). Stephen Barclay, Sales Director at Entanet, said: "Through this partnership channel partners can deliver a cost-effective working solution to a customer fast, whether a primary or interim connection."

Avnet is to sell its Technology Solutions operating group to Tech Data for circa \$2.6bn. Tech Data expects to achieve annual cost savings of \$100m within two years after closing, mainly from efficiencies related to technology platforms as well as duplicative functions and corporate expenses. Avnet CEO William Amelio said: "This transaction presents us with the best strategic path for Avnet's success and profitability."



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COMMENT: LONG ARM OF THE PAST



Richard Carter

VHS videos, public phone boxes and fax machines are all indelible relics of the past in an ever evolving technology world. It's fair to say I've witnessed many historic changes throughout my 30-year comms career, inspiring lots of fond memories along the way. One of my earliest recollections was the emergence of the fax machine, fuelled in part by postal strikes during the late 80s.

Much has changed since then but the technology of today can still be influenced by innovations from the past. Take two-way radios for example. For many resellers it's a sector probably not on their radar screen, overtaken by more modern mobile and cloud-based trends. But here at Nimans we've just brought back a famous name from the past, Storno, because radio comms now combines advanced technologies with full integration capabilities.

We're lucky to work in an industry that's constantly changing where lots of new opportunities are always being created. The growing influence of the cloud has triggered a huge rise in demand for IP end points and this will continue to accelerate. Our new end-to-end IP deployment and support solution aligns with these industry developments. With any technology timing is crucial as every reseller is on a slightly different journey. Thus we maintain success by look forwarding and embracing the technologies of tomorrow, but not completely forgetting the influences of the past.

Richard Carter, Group Sales and Business Development Director, Nimans

• Neurodiversity in the workplace guarantees a unique business model and offers an unassailable competitive advantage, according to Auticon's CEO Ray Coyle (page 30).

Aussie ISP expands into UK via Virtual1

AUSTRALIA-based ISP Exetel has reached around the globe to seal a launch deal with wholesale network provider Virtual1 and other industry players in a bid to shake up the UK market with its VoIP and data solutions for SMEs.

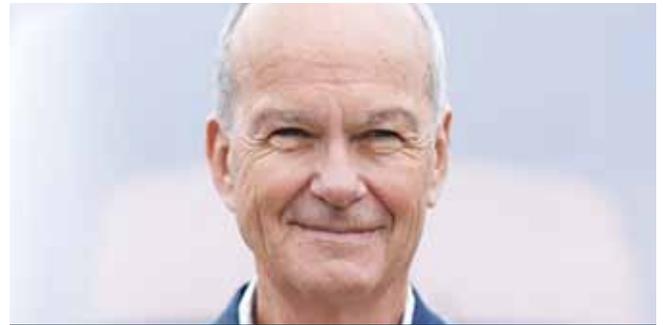
Exetel's international expansion follows a period of growth in its domestic market based on what it calls a 'straightforward approach' to business clients.

The family owned company, now rated as Australia's biggest independent ISP, provides a range of data solutions with flexible contracts and what CEO Richard Purdy claims is an industry changing level of agility, speed and affordability.

"Exetel's entry into the UK market will see a lowering of the costs of data services for businesses, changing the shape of the industry," he stated.

"The UK market is undergoing a seismic shift as more than 3.2 million ISDN lines will have to transition to VoIP during the next 10 years following the decision by BT to phase out ISDN services.

"With many of our existing clients having a presence in both markets, this expansion is a logical step for us."



Richard Purdy

According to Purdy, SME market growth and the proliferation of cloud services create an increasing need for affordable data packages. "This is precisely where Exetel's offering

sits, and Virtual1 is very much aligned to our straightforward approach," he added.

"We aim to replicate the success that we have achieved in Australia in the UK market."

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Rural pipes put fibre on tap

RURAL ultrafast broadband provider Gigaclear is carrying out a pilot project using Affinity Water's redundant pipes in an area of Hertfordshire between the villages of Furneux Pelham and Little Horstead.

The project aims to establish the feasibility of using disused water mains to house the cables needed to deliver its FTTP broadband services into or within rural environments.

Gigaclear is assessing the concept and its scalability, as well as testing the technical

aspects of installing the fibres through the pipes.

Chris Harrison, Gigaclear's Head of Design, stated: "On paper, the concept of using existing infrastructure to deliver the latest technology direct to homes makes perfect sense. This feasibility study will help us understand if we can turn a great idea into reality.

"If it's successful, it will bring significant benefits to our customers. Because Gigaclear is building completely new broadband networks, putting

our fibres through disused pipes means we don't have to dig trenches to lay cables, minimising the disruption to the rural communities in which we work. It would also speed up our build programme, particularly in areas where we would otherwise need to dig in or beside roads."

Harrison said the trial could mark the start of similar partnerships with other suppliers across the country.

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THE annual Sir Trevor Brooking/Comms Dealer Celebrity Golf Day held at Batchworth Park, Rickmansworth, last month was bigger and better than ever with a bumper sum of £19,000 raised for children's charity Sparks. "The weather was perfect, the number of teams that played was great and the standard of golf was amazing," commented Freedom Communications MD Pat Botting, who has helped to run the event for over decade. "We are very grateful to all of the teams and personalities who took part, and a special thanks must go to our generous main sponsor TalkTalk Business," he added. Picture shows the post event cheque presentation to Sir Trevor Brooking and event host Willie Thorne.



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INCA in drive for pure fibre



Malcolm Corbett

AN INDUSTRY body representing alternative infrastructure builders and ISPs has called on the Government to take measures to ensure that 80% of businesses and homes will have a pure fibre connection by 2026.

The Independent Networks Corporation Association (INCA) also wants a suspension of all business rates on new fibre assets for the next ten years and an overhaul of advertising guidelines to emphasise connectivity quality.

Regulation that encourages competition and private sector investment should also be a priority, according to INCA.

In a report compiled by INCA, called Building Gigabit Britain, it is stated that the UK currently has the lowest FTTP deployment in the OECD, with around 2% coverage.

The report argues that Britain is at an inflection point, with legacy copper-based networks increasingly unable to cope with the growth in data.

INCA reaffirmed that fibre networks are needed to support the growth of both fixed wireless and mobile wireless services. And asserts that the deployment of pure fibre infrastructure – supporting greater speeds, more symmetry upstream as well as down and lower latency than copper or hybrid networks – is the only way to support the UK's growing needs.

The report also pointed out that investments in pure fibre networks have accelerated in recent years, driven for the most part by a larger number of players challenging the dominance of BT and Virgin Media.

The Altnets are expected to pass 4.9 million premises – or 18% of the UK population – with FTTP by 2020, which is estimated at 1.5 million more premises than BT and Virgin's networks combined.

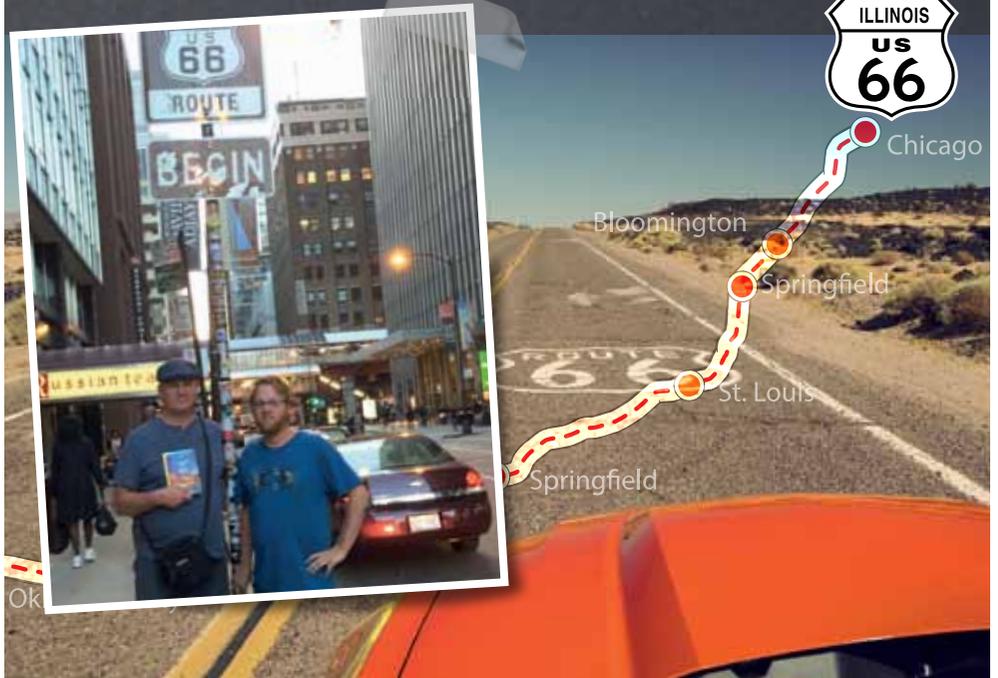
Malcolm Corbett, CEO of INCA, commented: "Unless the Government takes action we will soon be faced with a clear divergence between supply and demand in our digital communications. The UK has some of the lowest pure fibre deployment in the OECD, yet our economy is one of the most digital in the world, which is dependent on our digital infrastructure.

"We urgently need to upgrade to pure fibre connections and government needs to act by setting the vision and framework to encourage competitive investment.

"The Altnets are doing a great job. Five years ago few of them existed, today they are building Gigabit Britain and if we don't support their investment the UK's economic position will be put at risk."

INCA members include CityFibre, Hyperoptic, Gigaclear, Relish, ITS, Warwicknet, Sky and Vodafone.

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Maintel's on the up in H1

MAINTEL'S acquisition of Azzurri in May significantly propelled the firm's H1 2016 revenues which spiked to £38.1m, up 54% from the same period in 2015 (£24.8m). The acquisition contributed £15.4m to the Group's revenues.

Adjusted profit before tax also increased by 17% to £3.9m, while recurring contracted revenue made up 75% of the overall revenue, compared to 71% from the same period in 2015.

Maintel Group's CEO Eddie Buxton said: "The highlight of the period was the acquisition of Azzurri which was transformational for Maintel, adding significantly to our offering both in terms of products and services,



Eddie Buxton

specifically in the high growth areas of managed and cloud based services.

"During this period, Maintel has successfully closed a number of large contracts and, as such, we enter the second half of the year with a strong order book as well as a full pipeline of opportunities. We are confident of delivering a profit performance for the year in line with market expectations."

ITS raises new fund of £2.4m

ITS Technology Group has secured a £2.4m cash boost having successfully completed a round of funding that included investments from new private shareholders and the conversion of some existing shareholder loans into equity.

CEO Roy Shelton said: "This latest investment will fund our growth, including the expansion of the existing, new and national super and ultrafast networks currently in planning.

"The funding will allow us to push forward with our value proposition of creating networks for digitally deprived rural and urban areas. It also enables us to further develop our partner channel to provide broadband and associated services on a wholesale basis."

ITS has won four concession agreements with local councils including London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, Bristol City Council and most recently Nottingham City Council, as well as the build of 17 business park and community networks.

ITS was advised by Cameron Barney LLP.

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Curran plans pocket filler

PLAN.COM is adding greater appeal to its proposition with the roll out of a revamped channel strategy that, says the firm, is designed to put more commission into partners' pockets.

"We've introduced new tariff options including unlimited EU minutes and texts, flexible commissions that apply to even the lowest ARPUs, new renewal commissions with no clawback, new worldwide roaming bolts and free 3G to 4G upgrades for all existing customers," enthused plan.com co-founder Keith Curran.

He also revealed changes to the company's commission models which enable new plans to be priced lower than previ-

ously but nevertheless earn 'significantly more commission', he claimed.

"In terms of renewal commissions we have effectively removed clawbacks," Curran said. "Partners will now earn 100% of the tariff they choose for the remainder of the original contract. We're also paying more commission across the board on renewals."

The free upgrade offer automatically switches customers with a 3G data service to 4G. Customers who own 3G-only devices on 3G tariffs will still be able to use them. Curran also hinted at updates to plan.com's portal that will bring 'new levels of data, insight and tools'.



NIMANS teamed-up with router manufacturer DrayTek to jointly stage a pizza-filled fun day that also underscored the importance of business continuity amid instances of network outages most commonly caused by ISP issues, line failures such as a power cut, hardware failure and network congestion. "Business continuity is essential in today's modern world with ever greater reliance on the cloud, VoIP, remote working, point of sale transactions and general communication," commented Julian Hubble, DrayTek's Sales and Marketing Manager.



BT'S ADASTRAL Park research campus is home to a new higher education ICT training institute named after computing pioneer Tommy Flowers (pictured). The institute will bring ICT sector organisations together with academic researchers to solve some of the challenges facing UK businesses. Dr Tim Whitley, Head of Research for BT and MD of Adastral Park, said: "It's appropriate that this institute is named after Tommy Flowers, a pioneer of computing and comms technology who brought together the best of industry and academia to create the first Electronic Programmable Computer."

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COMMENT: MARKETING MATTERS



Elvire Gosnold

E-MARKETING remains one of the most effective methods of driving traffic to your website. It also promotes your brand and opens up communication with prospects. As more and more users are viewing e-shots via their mobiles and other devices, mobile-centric marketing is more important than ever. Each e-shot you send out should be set-up and checked to ensure mobile viewing is perfect.

Here are some other pointers to help you get the best from your mobile e-shot activity: Keep your subject line short and simple. Use fewer than 50 characters and don't use words such as 'free' or 'cheap' as it will be flagged by spam filters. Also use strong sub-headers to deliver a more impactful message. Breaking up a whole block of text makes it more inviting to read. And resize your images to fit on a mobile screen so that reading and layout is perfect for mobile and not just an afterthought.

Keep in mind the font size and copy length. Readers will soon lose interest viewing lots of text on a small screen. The recommended minimum font size for all main content on mobile is 13px. Like other marketing material you need to include a clear call to action and keep in mind where you position it. Can it be seen when the email is initially opened or do you have to scroll down first?

Don't forget your landing pages: Encourage readers to interact with you by finding out more details on your website. This also creates a longer user journey and allows you to track their activity in greater detail so that you can build up more in-depth profiles about your customers and prospects. And finally, remember to track your open rates and conduct general analysis.

A good e-shot portal will give you a variety of details about your customers and prospects enabling you to improve your customer engagement.

Elvire Gosnold, Director, Blabbermouth Marketing

Cradlepoint eyes channel

CRADLEPOINT, a 100% channel focused provider of cloud-based network solutions, has invested £4m in its EMEA HQ at West Byfleet and will bolster its existing team with newly created sales, marketing, operations and channel roles in a bid to expand its EMEA business via the IT channel.

"In the last year alone, Cradlepoint has seen its growth in EMEA business double," said Hubert Da Costa, Vice President of EMEA.

"This rapid growth is set to continue in the coming year as organisations across the region embrace cloud, mobile, and IoT technologies to increase their business agility, empower distributed workforces and gain operational insights.

"As a result, an increasing amount of enterprise network traffic is moving off private IP networks and onto the public Internet. Now is the right time to invest so that we can not only grow the business, but make a difference to the customers we already serve."

Cradlepoint's HQ will house a Solution Centre to demonstrate its solutions including the NetCloud platform which enables companies to deploy



Hubert Da Costa

private cloud networks over wired and wireless broadband Internet services for branch, mobile workforce, vehicle and IoT networks.

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SHORT CALLS

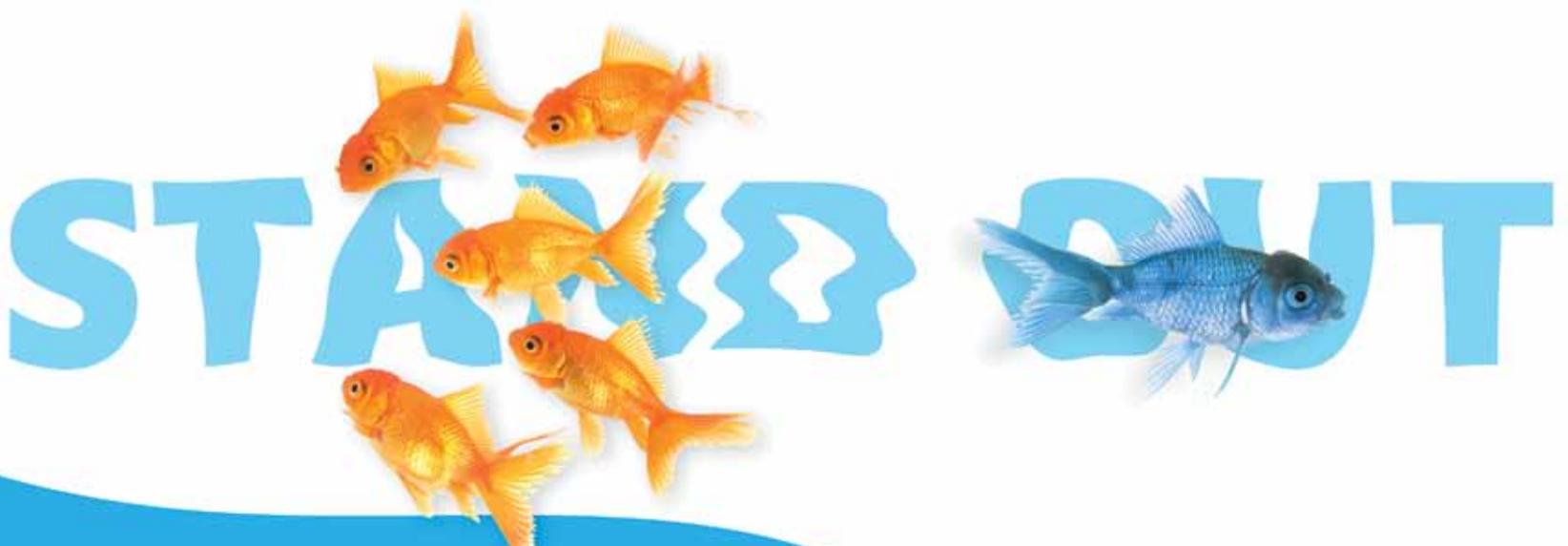
Nimans has become BT's exclusive UK high street distributor for consumer telephones and baby monitors across the UK. The agreement marks a 30 year trading relationship and includes BT's 8500 Premium Nuisance Call Blocker.

GCI has secured a position on G-Cloud 8 through which it will offer a range of options across the SaaS, IaaS and Specialist Cloud Services lots on the framework. Mike Ayres, Chief Commercial Officer, said: "The framework has amassed over £1.2bn in sales since it was established in April 2012, which is a significant achievement."



distributor's partner base. Julien Parven (pictured), Marketing Director, commented: "Last year saw fantastic engagement from our partners leading to a 19% increase in unit sales volumes."

A TRIP to Iceland next March courtesy of Daisy Distribution awaits the highest sellers of 'premier' Samsung devices following the launch of a new partner incentive scheme. The promotion builds on last year's Portugal incentive and runs until 31st January next year. Partners will be split into four tiers with a number of spots allocated to each tier, allowing an equal chance across the



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Guidance on offer for R&D tax relief

A NEW organisation set up by Knight Corporate Finance offers SMEs advice and guidance on how to maximise their claims for R&D tax relief while meeting HMRC's expectations.

Called Knight R&D, the advisory service is led by R&D Incentives Specialist Rupert Mayo who heads up a multi-disciplinary team that provides industry, technical, tax and accounting expertise across all aspects of the R&D Incentive claim process.

Mayo boasts 15 years experience, initially as an industry scientist followed by a nine-plus year stint at one of the Big Four accounting firms.

To underscore Mayo's firm grip on HMRC's expectations he has never had a claim reduced or disallowed.

Knight R&D is holding a workshop designed to determine whether attendees have a claim to make, and if so estimate their potential entitlement.

Knight R&D also offers a free one hour health check for companies already claiming to assess whether the claim covers everything a claimant may be entitled to, and estimate any potential increases in claims either as amendments to exist-



Paul Billingham

ing claims or to be introduced into future claims.

"An estimated 80% of UK businesses I have met with have not been receiving their full entitlement of R&D tax credits," commented Mayo.

"Many companies rarely understand how broad the qualifying criteria are, and frequently have more qualifying costs than they realise.

"Misconceptions associated with the R&D definition often lead to under claims, and misunderstandings relating to the qualifying cost categories can lead to errors in deriving the qualifying cost amounts.

"Furthermore, SME businesses are often ignored by larger professional services companies. At Knight R&D, we are able to identify the qualifying areas of activity and expense and unlock the full level of R&D credits."

Paul Billingham, Director at Knight CF, commented: "Partnering with Rupert gives us a new opportunity to support our clients' growth.

"The goal of Knight R&D is to help even the smallest start-ups across industries get the tax incentives and credits they deserve so their business can thrive."

Carter rallies VARs to VoIP

DMSL boss John Carter is calling on SME focused IT resellers to start reaping the benefits of VoIP following his exclusive UK distribution deal with global cloud communications powerhouse Vonage.

"Many IT resellers have not converged yet and they're missing out on massive opportunities in the small business arena," said Carter.

"There are hundreds of thousands of small, five-to-ten seat companies that are crying out for a flexible telecoms deal, not to mention the 2.75 million home businesses that want to give the impression that they are bigger than they are, and prefer to deal with their trusted local IT supplier."

Carter says the Vonage deal, coupled with the long standing connectivity partnerships that DMSL has with BT, Gamma and Virgin Media Business, plus endpoint manufacturer Polycom, means he can offer IT resellers a one-stop-shop for the supply of VoIP services.

"We can turn an IT reseller into a fully-fledged cloud communications supplier within hours," he said. "They get a demonstration kit including a plug-and-play IP phone and a

complete pack of marketing collateral to get started.

"All we need is for the reseller to advise their customers of the benefits of a VoIP comms solution, send us their details and we'll manage the installation and all the connectivity."

DMSL is offering resellers payments upfront for one to three year contracts and a free Polycom 410 is included in three-year deals.

Vonage is running a nationwide ad campaign and DMSL will distribute the leads to signed up IT partners. "We also provide support during the sales and provisioning process and can give resellers access to our own billing engine to simplify customer management," commented Carter. **See page p42**

SHORT CALLS

The largest system produced by Panasonic was unveiled last month, scaling from 50 to 2,000 users across 32 sites. The KX-NSX comes in two versions and features collaborative functions between multiple devices, presence management, audio, text or video chat and synchronisation with Outlook Calendar.

Entanet is bringing its partner and end user management portals together in its revamped synergi portal. Partners can also white label the management interface. "The new synergi gives resellers and their customers more visibility and control," commented Darren Farnden, Head of Marketing. "Partners value having direct access to core functions such as availability checking and ordering."

Norton's growth strategy on Track

CHANNEL Telecom's head honcho Clifford Norton has credited the efforts of staff and partners for the company's listing in this year's Sunday Times Tech Track 100 league table, a ranking of Britain's 100 private tech companies with the fastest growing sales over the past three years.

This is Channel Telecom's second inclusion in the league table, following 2015's listing with 78th place this year having achieved a 50.50% sales rise over the measured period.

During the past 12 months the company has almost doubled staff numbers, generated £10m-plus turnover, welcomed over 150 new channel partners, introduced new services, improved business processes and restructured its customer support operations.

Norton enthused: "This year has been incredible. We have welcomed so many new faces, staff and partners, and this success is due to a combined effort by all of them. The bar was set exceptionally high this year and



Clifford Norton

we are working in an incredibly competitive market, which makes our Sunday Times Tech

Track 100 achievement that little bit sweeter."

The ranking adds another gong to Channel Telecom's trophy cabinet which also houses this year's Comms Dealer Sales Awards 'Marketing Team of the Year' accolade.

"This is just the start," stated Norton. "We expect the next 12 months to be our most successful yet.

"Channel Telecom does not just want to feature in 2017, we want to climb that leader board year on year."

COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

ONE of the reasons why I love working in the IT channel is because it can be so fast paced. Technology is developing all the time. Consequently, the products and services we can all offer our end customers are always improving. However, being in such a fast moving industry also means we have to keep up

with the pace of digital transformation and help our channel partners to be ready for the future.

Two of the biggest disruptive technologies that we've all had to deal with are cloud and mobility. Both provide huge opportunities for our end customers and have been, in their own ways, game changing. But these new technologies still rely on a first class, fast and reliable network to support them and to fully reach their potential. The network is at the centre of all innovation and disruption. Some people might not see the network as exciting, but its importance cannot be underestimated.

More innovation is on the way too. Whether it's the movement to video conferencing as standard, or even the VR remote working of the future, digital disruption will continue to change the way we do business. The job for network providers is to focus on the core principles of performance and agility in order to stay ahead. Networks of the future will make more use of new technologies and dark fibre for increased capacity, speed, and reliability. Capabilities such as SDN and NFV will also be used to make networks more intelligent than ever before.

We're focusing on future proofing our networks so that channel providers can make the most of disruptive technologies now, and continue to do so well into the future. Disruptive innovation is almost certain to take place, but with the right network technology the channel will be able to adapt to disruption quickly and turn new technology into a profit.

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Fenby lauds acquisitions

AUDIO visual and document solutions distributor Midwich has bagged the lion's share of UK-based Holdan for £7.9m and also acquired New Zealand AV distributor Wired.

Holdan operates from Glossop, focusing on the broadcast, professional video and traditional audio visual markets and employs 35 staff.

Midwich has acquired 75% of the issued share capital of Holdan from its MD Chris Daniels and Sales Director Allan Leonhardsen.

Daniels has stepped down as MD but will continue with the business full time before retiring in 2017. Leonhardsen has taken over the MD role while Kieron Seth becomes Sales & Marketing Director.

In its last financial year to 31st December 2015 Holdan reported annual turnover of £20.6m and profit before tax of £1.1m.

Under the terms of the deal Midwich has options to acquire the remaining 25% over the next three years in a deal linked primarily to earnings growth.

The Wired acquisition augments Midwich's existing market position and capability in the Australian and New Zealand



Stephen Fenby

markets. Wired reported revenues of NZ \$2m in the year to 31st March 2016.

Midwich MD Stephen Fenby commented: "We recognised some time ago that the broadcast and professional video markets are a natural adjunct to our traditional audio visual activity.

"Having made some headway in penetrating these markets ourselves, we believe that the expertise and focus of Holdan will give Midwich the ability to provide a more comprehensive value added service to our customers.

"Similarly, Midwich's reach into the audio visual market provides Holdan's vendors with an opportunity to expand into a growing segment."

Midlands DC opens

SIX Degrees Group (6DG) has opened a new data centre in the centre of Birmingham, located alongside the city's so called Silicon Canal.

The new 5,800 square metre facility adds to the company's existing south Birmingham and London-based data centres.

Mike Ing, COO at 6DG, commented: "This is a significant investment that helps to cement Britain's second city as a major digital hub for the future. It also establishes us as one of the main players in the Midlands hosting marketplace."

Timothy Arnold, who is the Colo Technology Director at 6DG, commented: "Birmingham Central will better enable our new and existing customers to take full advantage of our converged proposition."

SHORT CALL

TeleWare has gained Avaya accreditation and joined the vendor's DevConnect Program. TeleWare's COO Nick Reaks said: "This enables us to work with other companies and offer complementary products via partnerships. Together we can grow organically and open new markets."

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GCI gets enterprise grade SMS solution

GCI's acquisition of Stoke-on-Trent-based Packet Media bolsters the MSP's contact centre and UCaaS proposition with SMS messaging capabilities. The deal follows GCI's acquisition of Outsourcery's assets in June.

Mike Constantine, CTO at GCI, said: "Packet Media has some great parallels with our own business. We are excited about its enterprise-grade SMS messaging platform and associated Management Information (MI) reporting capability. This blends nicely with our other core cloud and UC services, including Skype for Business, Azure and PCI DSS."

Julian Gallimore, MD at Packet Media, added: "SMS



Mike Constantine

is what email used to be and the stats are compelling. While emails now clutter inboxes (many unopened), SMS messages are on average viewed within three minutes of receipt.

"Response rates are better. On average it takes 90 minutes

to respond to email but only 90 seconds to respond to texts.

"We believe the deployment opportunities are endless – from patient prescription reminders to service renewal notices, to sales and marketing messaging, all trackable and MI reportable."

GCI CEO Adrian Thirkill enthused: "This new SMS capability is another critical addition to our portfolio. If the stats are to be believed, approximately 23 billion text messages are sent worldwide daily with a staggering 98% open rate. SMS is helpful and concise. That's the reason for its success and why it's a great fit in our portfolio. The timing is perfect."

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GAMMA'S Daryl Pile (pictured) has been promoted to the role of Channel MD following a 13 year stint at the company, the latest phase of a 20 year career working in the comms channel in a variety of senior business development roles. Pile said:

"We've come a long way since I joined Gamma, and I'm looking forward to continuing the drive of our success and growth. There's no let-up in Gamma's plans and ideas and it's great to be a part of it."

Billing firm in hosted boost

UNION Street Technologies has augmented its hosted aBILLity billing system proposition with the launch of a new platform based on Microsoft's Azure public cloud.

The company first introduced a hosted option in 2011, called the Cloud Hosted Billing service, which has proved popular among resellers.

Now, 50%-plus of the firm's partners use the service with almost all new resellers opting in, prompting Union Street to future proof its systems in terms of security and scalability.

Tony Cook, MD, said: "We wanted to ensure that our hosted environment could scale effortlessly without limits as more partners opt to use our Cloud Hosted Billing service.

"Azure provides tools for monitoring applications and analysing traffic, giving us in-depth, real-time insight into how our platform is performing.

"We're able to instantly respond to increases in demand, proactively scaling up compute resource to manage capacity as required. No matter how many partners choose to use our Cloud Hosted Billing service they will always have access to the resources they need."



Tony Cook

The platform also offers data security. "Protecting data has never been more important, or more challenging, than it is today," added Cook. "As such, we have built our platform from the ground up according to best practice for data security."

David McGrath, CTO, played a leading role in developing and deploying the new hosted platform. He noted: "The platform features a traditional three tier network with web, application and database legs.

"Communication only ever crosses a single tier and each tenant has its own dedicated security group which controls database access, file system permissions and access to the aBILLity remote app.

"The platform will only accept secure connections and multi-factor authentication is available for clients that need an added layer of security."

Sennheiser unveils MB 660

SENNHEISER has unveiled its 'Rolls Royce' of business headsets to address workers who need peace and quiet when talking on their desk phone or mobile in open plan offices.

The business grade MB 660 Series is designed specifically for knowledge workers in noisy open offices. The solution features adaptive ANC (active noise cancellation), UC certified communication abilities to ensure clear speech during voice calls and audio quality for music and multimedia use.

The MB 660 does not have a boom mic, the headset cups contain three digital microphone arrays to deliver superior voice quality regardless of how noisy the environment is. Sennheiser says the battery life is 30 hours.

"Today's open office environments have been shaped to facilitate fast, flexible collaboration. But there will always be times when we need to reclaim space for ourselves – either to fully concentrate, communicate and collaborate in mobile work environments or simply to relax

while listening to music," commented Andreas Bach, President at Sennheiser Communications.

"With the MB 660 we can now upgrade the work experience for office workers, help them take control of their environment and create a disruption-free workspace for increased productivity and well being."

Bach confirmed that the product will roll out to the UK channel via distributors Corporate Telecom, Duplex, Nimans, Tech Data, Westcoast and Westcon.

CBS snapped up

CONVERGED Communication Solutions has snapped up Aberdeen-based IT provider Century Business Systems (CBS), its first acquisition.

The deal, valued at circa £500k, strengthens Converged's in-house service operation.

CBS was established in 1999 by Brian West and Kevin Sinclair and supplies computer hardware, software and technical support to businesses across north east Scotland.

The firm's entire team will transfer to Converged and re-

locate to its premises, increasing the workforce to over 25.

Neil Christie, MD at Converged, said: "We are in a strong position following the investments we have made over the past 18 months.

"This is another notable move. To date, we have grown and expanded naturally, so our first acquisition is a major step. Brian and Kevin, supported by a talented team, have built a strong business and its integration into Converged will enrich the service that we offer."



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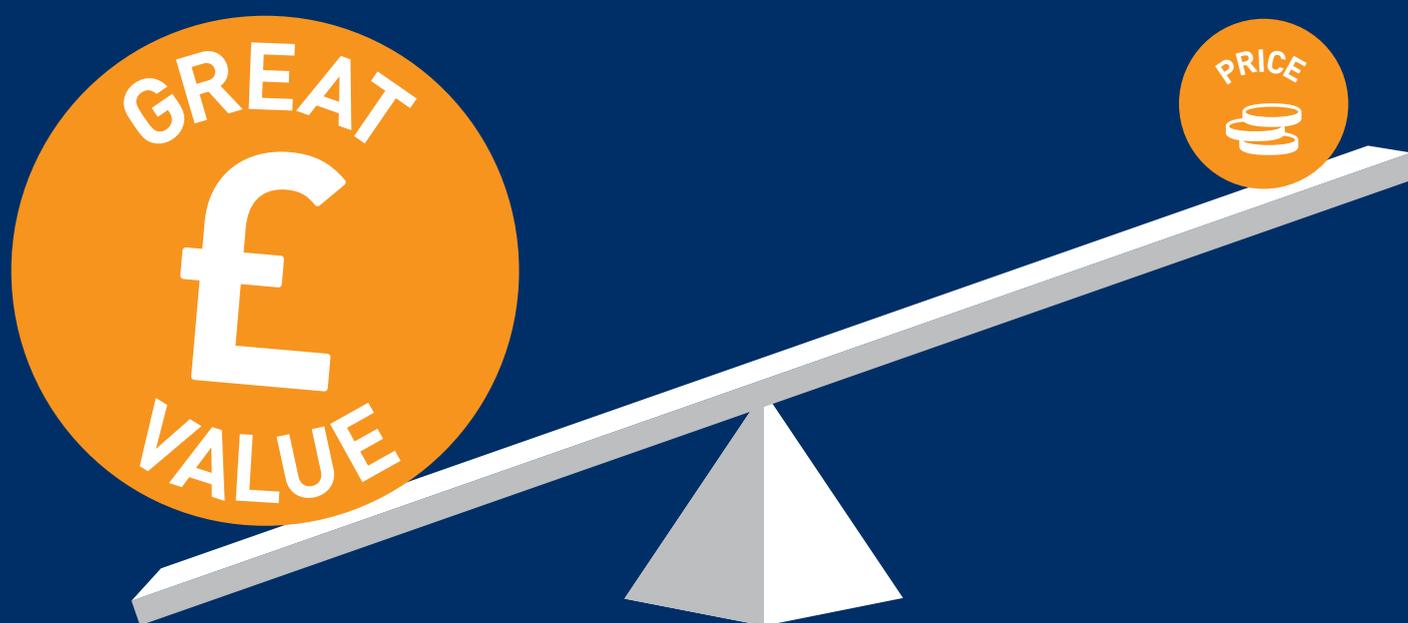
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DMSL states VAST pushes home truths Exclusive's H1

DMSL has put the spotlight on a new report into the growth of home businesses and is urging comms and IT resellers to recognise this trend as a significant opportunity.

The Heart of Home Business Britain report, which is based on analysis by the Centre for Economic and Business Research and includes research by YouGov (commissioned by Vonage UK), says that there are over 2.75 million home businesses in the UK, which accounts for more than half of the UK's total private sector business population and represents a 23% increase over the past decade.

These businesses are said to be contributing circa £94bn gross value added to the economy and the total annual revenue of home businesses is projected to be £212bn this year.

The report also points out that while technology has enabled home businesses to thrive by lowering the barriers for start-ups, there remains a need among such companies for mentoring and support.

DMSL MD John Carter said: "The Heart of Home Business Britain report shows us that there is absolutely no short-



John Carter

age of opportunities for resellers who can offer the quick, simple and effective solutions and services that these small, home-based businesses will be looking for.

"Availability of high speed broadband is spreading and while this is an opportunity in itself, the greater potential lies in taking the benefits of cloud-based comms and other services to these businesses."

According to Carter, most home-based firms prefer a local supplier. "Many of these businesses will be dependent on their IT and communications and when things go wrong they will need to get problems sorted out straight away. They will want their trusted IT supplier to be close at hand."

EXCLUSIVE Group's latest set of financial figures reflect a strong focus on value added services and technologies (VAST) and show significant returns on vendor business globally with the acquisition of cyber security VAD Transition Systems also paying off.

Exclusive's H1 results show 60% year-on-year growth with total revenues of 575m euros, putting the firm on target to double revenue every two years.

"The intention to have a more blended business through our VAST strategy is paying dividends, with each of our ancillary services businesses contributing to strong growth," said Olivier Breittmayer, CEO of Exclusive Group.

"These results also show how well balanced the Group is globally, able to absorb fluctuations in regional geographies and economies with little impact on momentum.

"It is pleasing to see our expanding BigTec business in the software defined web scale infrastructure marketplace returning triple digit growth.

"This, allied to our strong cyber security focused Exclusive Networks operations and a renewed focus on developing



Olivier Breittmayer

premium-based services is having a positive impact on the overall integrated business."

Group COO Barrie Desmond added: "These strong six months have put us ahead of our plan and budget. But more hard work is needed to achieve our annual target of doubling revenue every two years until 2020."

SHORT CALLS

A three-way comms firm link-up sees Panasonic's IP handsets connected via the BT Wholesale (BTW) network to Radius Communications's storm cloud platform. Connectivity to BTW's Ethernet, broadband and IP networks will be sold with the storm package via Panasonic's distribution model.

Koris is taking the Enhouse Interactive portfolio to market including the Communications Centre and Attendant Console solution having signed up to Enhouse's EMEA partner programme. Koris will focus on mid-range contact centres in the public and private sectors.



A CHARITY walk organised by Watford-based Telecom Resource raised over £3,000 in aid of Watford Workshop, an organisation that helps disabled and disadvantaged people to gain work experience, skills and employment. The 5km walk featured Telecom Ted and other Telecom Resource employees who caught the attention of passers by and met with strong demand for selfies near local landmarks.

SHORT CALL

F-Secure's just launched reseller recruitment drive reflects growing demand for security solutions from UK IT service providers. This year, the cyber security firm has seen a 50% increase in the size of its corporate sales team in response to rising demand. "It is imperative that companies use best-in-class security solutions as part of their security strategy," said Andy Harkness, UK Corporate Sales Manager.

CityFibre hits 50

CITYFIBRE has signed up its 50th service provider partner, Hampshire-based ISP Onecom, the largest reseller in Vodafone's Partner Programme. The link-up takes CityFibre to the half way point in its medium term strategy to secure 100 service provider relationships.

The five-year deal sees Onecom become the commercial launch partner for CityFibre's Southend-on-Sea network currently under construction.

The £1.7m agreement commits Onecom to a minimum of

150 business customer connections across the network.

CityFibre has sold 270-plus connections on the Southend asset, an incremental unit sales uplift of 125% above the original anchor customer commitment in only six months.

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch commented: "Onecom's national base of over 300,000 customer connections is testament to its reputation for quality and customer service, making it an ideal addition to the CityFibre partner universe."

Synergi's in flow

GATESHEAD-based Synergi IT is to roll-out Nintex workflow automation software to Northumbrian Water's 2,900 employees as part of a wider investment programme in new Microsoft Cloud, Office 365 and SharePoint services.

Nintex technology enables users to automate processes in minutes using PC-based drag-and-drop workflow tools.

This market is thought to be worth over \$2.7bn and rising as more organisations digitalise their processes, says Gartner.

According to Justin Short, who is a Director at Synergi, public and private sector organisations are recognising the advantages of business process management technologies and acting on their observations.

Short commented: "We are seeing strong demand as more organisations look to migrate to new technologies that quickly deliver demonstrable benefits and RoI." See page 32

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TeleWare achieves LPWANS key Azure platform first to IoT growth

TELEWARE has routed, recorded and analysed a call in real-time through Microsoft's Azure cloud computing platform in a fully encrypted compliant environment in what Microsoft has confirmed is a world first.

TeleWare enhanced its solutions to achieve a seamless call of the same quality as one using physical equipment, overcoming the issue of data packet loss and latency previously associated with using a pure cloud-based system.

The call was carried out with a TeleWare customer rather than in a test environment.

TeleWare CTO Rob Corrigan said: "Many people advised that this wasn't possible. We've had to overcome some techni-



Steve Haworth

cal hurdles, but our technology teams have all pulled together with one common goal and achieved the 'impossible'. This is significant as it demonstrates that our overall goal of going 100% cloud is possible."

Steve Haworth, CEO, added: "This milestone has wide reaching implications, not just for

us, but for the wider Azure and cloud community."

TeleWare's fixed line recording product will be fully migrating onto the cloud with its MVNO product also planned to migrate in the coming quarters.

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BEECHAM Research has tipped LPWANS (Low Power Wide Area Networks) as the driving force behind IoT development in the UK, and thrown its weight behind the Digital Catapult 'Things Connected' initiative that aims to jump-start LPWAN adoption by lowering barriers for technology access and application development.

"LPWANS offer a new low cost connectivity option to connect a large number of IoT devices over long distances in a power efficient and cost-effective way, opening up enormous potential for a new wave of IoT applications," said Saverio Romeo, Principal Analyst at Beecham Research.

"The key features of LPWANS such as low consumption of energy and low cost of deployment mean SMEs can explore new territories and new ideas not possible with other forms of connectivity."

Things Connected is initially focused on supporting London-based organisations and SMEs with the network utilising 50 IoT gateways to establish a LPWAN covering Zone 1 across the capital.

The wider aim is to create a national support programme



Saverio Romeo

around LPWAN test beds in different UK regions and provide SMEs, entrepreneurs and communities with the skills to harness the technology.

Jeremy Silver, CEO, Digital Catapult, added: "We have reached a pivotal point in the deployment of the Internet of Things across the UK.

"We want to capture more of the digital dividend in the UK economy and to do so it is fundamental that we accelerate the adoption of the IoT. By enabling the testing of IoT innovation, Digital Catapult 'Things Connected' will enhance the quality of life for those across the capital and further empower London's tech community."

Engineers aided by monitoring tool

COMMS Supply has launched a new monitoring solution available via all mobile platforms enabling the company's partners to monitor their Comms Supply Internet connections in real-time, including checking uptime and throughput.

Karl Alderton, MD of Comms Supply, said: "By using this solution we believe our

partners will be able to offer more efficient first line support.

"As long as they have a Wi-Fi or 4G connection engineers can instantly check for any connectivity issues, from latency to high-utilisation causing slowness for the end customer."

The new monitoring solution also enables Comms Supply partners to prepare reports that

can be presented in customer service reviews.

The new software is available on web, android and IOS.

"Most engineers spend a large part of their working week out on the road so it was vital that our solution was available on mobile devices as well as being clear and simple to use," added Alderton.

SHORT CALL

Claranet has achieved AWS Premier Consulting Partner status, one of only ten service providers in Europe to have gained the distinction. Olivier Beaudet, CMO, said: "AWS is a true enabler of business agility and it forms a critical part of our product roadmap and strategy. We can now work much more closely with AWS to help our customers take advantage of the platform and transform their businesses."

Nimans expands mobile services

A YEAR-long feedback gathering campaign conducted by Nimans' Head of Network Services Mark Curtis-Wood has helped to align the distributor's mobile offering with the evolving requirements of resellers, coming to fruition with the launch of an expanded mobile services proposition.

The portfolio now includes EE in addition to O2 and Vodafone and offers new commercial models and a springboard into the mobile data and M2M markets.



Mark Curtis-Wood

Curtis-Wood said: "Over the last year I have met many of our existing resellers to understand

what we need to do to help their businesses grow and explore gaps in our proposition.

"The common message was that while the wholesale offering is the cornerstone of their business there are times when they need something extra and a different commercial model to help win more orders.

"They also shared how having multiple network offerings would give them a competitive edge by enabling them to compete in different ways based on a more diverse supply."

Nimans' revamped mobile connectivity offering comprises six elements: O2 Wholesale, Vodafone Wholesale, O2 30 day contracts, Vodafone 30 day contracts, an EE dealer model and Mobile Data/M2M.

Resellers have a choice of single or multiple user inclusive tariffs and bundles or bespoke pay-as-you-use options.

"We also want to make the process of ordering as streamlined as possible and plan to provide more services online," said Curtis-Wood.



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PE firm bags cloud player Nimans adds Storno range

INTERMEDIA has been acquired by Chicago-based PE firm Madison Dearborn Partners (MDP). Intermedia is known as the world's largest independent provider of cloud Microsoft Exchange email, generating annualised revenues of \$200m with 75,000 customers, 6,000 active partners and 700 employees around the globe.

The deal sees Intermedia's shareholders led by Oak Hill Capital Partners sell their stake in the company to MDP and company management. Intermedia, which was founded in 1995, was acquired by Oak Hill in 2011.

The partnership with MDP is expected to catalyse Intermedia's growth through increased investment in the company's channel partner programmes and more acquisitions.

Michael Gold, who remains Intermedia's CEO, said: "Over the past five years we've more than tripled our revenues, EBITDA, users and product offerings. We've also experienced dramatic growth of our customer and partner base."

Zaid Alsikafi, MD at MDP, commented: "Intermedia is successfully capitalising on the worldwide shift to the cloud,



Michael Gold

and possesses tremendous upside potential to capture further market opportunities with its reach, scalability, customer support offerings and enhanced product functionality."

Gold commented: "Recognising that the channel influences 65-75% of IT spending, we've built our business to meet the needs of the channel in the \$20bn-plus cloud business applications market."

The transaction is expected to close this calendar year, subject to customary regulatory approvals and other customary closing conditions.

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

NIMANS has added the Storno range of licensed radios to its two-way radio communications portfolio, offering resellers an entry level springboard into what the distributor claims is a market worth millions.

"Radio communications is hailed as the missing piece in the comms jigsaw, combining advanced technologies with rich untapped revenue streams of over £40m this year alone," claimed Gary Redshaw, Radio Communications Category Manager at Nimans.

"We've sold two-way radios for many years but now offer more powerful licenced equipment able to communicate over much longer distances.

"Today's solutions also offer full integration with telephone systems and perform many seamless functions not available via other devices.

"There's a perception that two-way radios are yesterday's technology and limited to niche markets, but that's absolutely not the case.

"From leisure centres and shopping malls to warehouses, car parks, building sites and schools, demand is on the rise."

Nimans supplies licenced and licence free equipment



Gary Redshaw

offering Digital Mobile Radio (DMR) and Private Mobile Radio (PMR) devices. The distributor stocks brands such as Hytera, Icom and Motorola.

SHORT CALLS

3CX equipment is to be incorporated into BT Wholesale's SIP Trunking platform, enabling resellers to connect SIP trunks using the 3CX PBX system. Oli Barker, Head of Hosted Products at BT Wholesale and Ventures, said: "Interoperability testing with vendors such as 3CX is an essential part of our service."

SSE Enterprise Telecoms has added two more data centres to its national fibre network. Customers of Ark and Datum's data centres in Farnborough now have access to SSE's range of carrier Ethernet, dark fibre and optical networking services.



Office 365 offerings." Prior to Microsoft, Martorano led a number of key initiatives and strategies at other notable companies such as Sage Software and Ingram Micro. He also holds an active seat on CompTIA's Board of Directors.

MICROSOFT'S former General Manager of US Partner Sales Eric Martorano (pictured) has joined Intermedia as Senior Vice President of Worldwide Sales. He spent over eight years at Microsoft and was responsible for \$17bn-plus revenue. Michael Gold, CEO of Intermedia, commented: "Eric's understanding of the Microsoft ecosystem will prove invaluable as we expand our

SHORT CALL

Metronet (UK) has provided National Museums Liverpool (NML) with a fully managed wireless MPLS solution in partnership with Gardner Systems. NML manages eight museums and galleries within the Liverpool city region including the Merseyside Maritime Museum, the Museum of Liverpool and the Walker Art Gallery, attracting more than 2.8 million visitors each year.

IT aids sales staff telent in key buy

A NOTABLE majority of sales professionals say their jobs are made easier by the efficiencies and support provided by IT.

In a survey by RingCentral and Censuswide 80% of respondents experience a slicker sales process while 90% cited the support they receive from IT as a positive factor.

Sahil Rheki, who is the UK MD of cloud comms provider RingCentral, commented: "The relationship between sales and IT is integral to business efficiency and these stats demon-

strate how vital the IT department is to sales teams."

More than half of the survey's respondents also believe that the IT department is a business improvement operation, introducing new IT processes and infrastructures.

"With the rise of team collaboration and off premise cloud networks, KPIs for IT teams are evolving from reducing downtime to boosting efficiency and supporting the sales, marketing and operations departments," added Rheki.

TELENT'S networking capabilities and kit bag of solutions and services have been significantly bolstered following the acquisition of Richardson Eyres.

The acquired firm brings a 30 year technology heritage and provides data centre infrastructure solutions and services for large organisations in the UK and Europe including banks, pharmaceuticals, law firms, construction companies, software, retail and online businesses.

The deal also adds multi-vendor capabilities and bolts on

a base of engineers; and follows telent's acquisition of Arqiva's Secure Solutions Business in October last year and its earlier purchase of Telindus in 2014.

telent CEO Mark Plato said: "With increasing numbers of customers moving to the cloud and requiring more virtual and flexible technology, this acquisition broadens our offering and extends our reach particularly within the ICT space.

"It also offers Richardson Eyres' clients access to telent's capabilities and expertise."



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3CX riding the WebRTC wave

There's a new buzzword, or to be more accurate a new abbreviation, that comms and IT resellers will be hearing a lot more about in the months ahead: WebRTC.



“ WebRTC will do for communications what HTML did for information; start a revolution that will make communications richer and accessible to all. ”

Nick Galea

Web Real Time Communications is a technology supported by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) that allows open standard browsers to communicate with each other and exchange audio, video and even files using a simple JavaScript based API. WebRTC effectively gives users the ability to make audio or video calls with each other, without requiring a plugin or

any additional software to be installed.

The WebRTC standard is gaining significant momentum and Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox and Opera fully support it. Microsoft, not surprisingly, is trying to push its own 'standard' and while Apple is still on the fence it is likely to join the WebRTC wave soon. Even without WebRTC support in Apple's browser it's possible

to use the technology on Apple devices.

WebRTC is an API, not an application and its application vendors such as 3CX that must leverage the technology for it to be useful for resellers and their customers. For example, there are a lot of basic services that demonstrate how easily you can connect two browsers and make a call. Whatsapp is rumored to use WebRTC to deliver audio calling between its users.

“WebRTC will do for communications what HTML did for information; start a revolution that will make communications richer and accessible to all,” said Nick Galea CEO at 3CX.

“Naturally, we have been following WebRTC technology right from the start and have been investing heavily in WebRTC development. For example, WebRTC could allow 3CX to deliver and accept calls to anyone connected to the internet, without requiring any software to be installed and even anonymously. Customers could call you free of charge at a click of a button, and they could be connected to the right person immediately. The customer service and productivity gains achievable are immense.”

So where is the win-win for resellers?

“There is a unique selling point for resellers: A Unified Communications System powered by WebRTC offers all the requisite features with complete ease of use. It works right out of the box and will boost collaboration and increase productivity almost immediately. Adoption is easy, because workers learn to use features like videoconferencing very quickly. Additionally, resellers can sell conferencing hardware to increase their revenue” said Bianca Allery, Head of Marketing, 3CX.

But that's not all. Purveyors of Web and Video conferencing solutions could get the uplift they have been hoping for as WebRTC makes web conferencing inexpensive, seamless and effortless explained Galea.

“Breaking free from proprietary standards, expensive vendor tied hardware and fat client software requirements, WebRTC could finally set out to do what it was always meant to do: Start a communications revolution. And that is exactly in line with the 3CX vision.”

So what is the background to this new communications tool?

Fundamentally, WebRTC is an open-source project – promoted by Google, Mozilla and others – that enables plugin-free Real Time Communications via Javascript API's.

The technology facilitates browser to browser applications for voice calling, video chat and file sharing using a Web Conferencing Server in conjunction with a STUN Server that provides the initial page and synchronises the connections between two WebRTC endpoints.

“WebRTC is the ability to communicate live with somebody or something as if you were right there next to them. WebRTC fills a critical gap in the web platform as you can communicate in real-time just by loading a web page,” said Justin Uberti, Tech Lead on WebRTC, Google.

“At the moment, support for these browsers comes in the form of 3rd party plugins, which are not an ideal solution,” said Nick Borg, Product Manager at 3CX.

“The beauty of WebRTC is that when you are invited to a web meeting, no other action is needed other than clicking on a link that you've been provided. Installing yet another plugin might be “asking too much” for a lot of users.

“Microsoft and Apple cannot ignore the momentum that WebRTC is gaining. It will be interesting to see who the first adopter will be,” concluded Galea.

To find out more on how 3CX could bring WebRTC into your solutions portfolio contact info@3cx.com or call +44 (20) 3327 2020

SMS expert steps up UK channel play

SMS communications business Textlocal has ramped up its UK channel ambitions following the launch of a partner programme that enables comms resellers to put text messaging at the centre of their customers' communications strategy.

According to Senior Partner Business Development Manager Daron Healy Textlocal's channel recruitment campaign reflects a significant opportunity for resellers to incorporate SMS messaging into their cloud UC propositions and hold a new conversation with clients that creates scope for greater chemistry between end users and their customers.

"SMS offers businesses the chance to build relationships through instant communication," stated Healy. "The range of uses for this opt-in technology is vast."

He noted that Textlocal's Messenger platform achieves a 98% open rate followed by a 32% redemption rate and he believes that these statistics indicate a lucrative revenue stream for resellers, adding that the market potential for SMS is underscored by the company's base of circa 165,000 users who have sent over one billion texts using the firm's platform.

The popularity of its service has secured Textlocal a ranking in the Deloitte Technology Fast 50 and Sunday Times Tech Track 100 listings, along with a recurring appearance in the Media Momentum Top 20 fastest growing digital agencies.

Textlocal's re-energised partner programme invites resellers to adopt a fully customisable white labelled 'out of the box' version of the Messenger platform supported by a service wrap. "Full resale partners can



Daron Healy

rebrand the platform and create their own pricing models and marketing initiatives," noted Healy. "We provide white label collateral, product training and dedicated account specialists."

Textlocal has also introduced a dual branded resale model, enabling these partners to focus on selling while Textlocal manages the customer support.

Healy said: "Delivering SMS messaging alongside existing cloud-based telecoms and IT solutions gives resellers another reason to engage with their customers while generating sustainable additional revenue and enhanced client acquisition."

Free VoIP guidance paying off

A FREE training scheme introduced by plan.com designed to remove all barriers to VoIP sales for mobile dealers has yielded strong results, so much so that the company is recruiting staff to roll out the initiative across the south of England.

"More mobile partners are realising that to grow and secure their business they must expand their offers across different channels such as VoIP, fixed and broadband," stated Chris Reilly, Training Manager.

"Over 90% of all VoIP connections that we process come from VoIP virgins – partners who have never sold anything other than mobile before – which is great to see."

Reilly trains partners in their own offices and tailors the content according to their requirements. "Our training scheme not only helps partners understand our portal and what it can do, it also gives them the tools and knowledge to offer a range of solutions that could, in time, add resilience into their business models," he added.

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Larkin leads brand vamp

JUNIPER Bridge's transition from a managed technical support operation to a software business has been underscored by the development of a self-service platform called JuniHub that enables resellers to better manage and control their connectivity footprint.

JuniHub incorporates network monitoring software that pinpoints any outages experienced by customers and allows users to analyse and resolve performance issues. The software also detects circuit, router and end user problems.

"Clients will also be able to manage customer interactions with a fully integrated ticketing system that captures emails, tasks and call recordings," commented Juniper Bridge founder Steve Larkin.

"Other services give resellers access to zero touch provisioning of their routers and devices, logistical support and a 24/7 technical support team to their end users."



Steve Larkin

Juniper Bridge's advancing mode of operation is reflected in the launch of new brand identity in association with the watchwords 'Connecting the dots', as well as a revamped website.

"Undertaking a brand refresh was crucial to better communicate the sophistication of our new products to the channel," added Larkin.

"Our strapline 'Connecting the dots' encapsulates the future direction of the business, helping customers to fully unify their communications."

Sky courts businesses with Fluidata link-up

SKY has entered the business comms market for the first time via a link up with launch partner Fluidata to offer a high capacity Ethernet solution.

Sky's new wholesale division will leverage Fluidata's comms market experience and address up to 95% of businesses in the UK. The ISP will also provide a dedicated support team.

Fluidata MD Piers Daniell commented: "Customers choosing to commit to long-term high capacity connections strengthen the growth potential in their

businesses. Sky's investment in the consumer market means we can push 1Gbs connections as standard and ensure customer connectivity is future-proof."

Graham Sargood, Sky's Director of Telecoms Wholesale, added: "Our investment in a telecoms infrastructure to deliver voice, video and data services to our residential customer base also enables us to serve the business marketplace."

All services will be available with SLA+, Fluidata's standard guarantee of service up-time.



CHESS'S annual festival (Chesstival) raised over £2,500 for charity and welcomed for the first time Scotland-based staff and their family members. Attendees of the Scottish Chesstival, held at Paisley Rugby Club and coloured up by a Hawaiian theme, raised over £250 for the Red Cross. Chess Digital MD Alan Cassidy said: "Much work went into making this happen for our people. We have such a great mentality within the team."

South of the border staff converged on the telco's Alderley Edge HQ along with employees from the Burnley office, jointly raising £2,314 in aid of the East Cheshire Hospice.

Chief Executive David Pollock said: "It's in our culture to play our part in the wider community, and the East Cheshire Hospice is close to many peoples' hearts at Chess. Our former Operations Director Julie Wright spent her final days in their care and we will always support the excellent work they do at the hospice."



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THE first stage of Air-IT's diversification and growth acceleration strategy has been completed following a revamp of the management team.

Founder and MD Todd McQuilkin has moved to the CEO role while Technical Director James Healey takes over the MD position.

McQuilkin said: "James has been an integral part of our journey having been by my side every step of the way.

"We've experienced significant growth, consistently reporting 20%-plus year-on-year increases and in my final year we're expecting a rise of 30% or more."

Air-IT was set up in 2005 when McQuilkin invested a £20,000 redundancy payment from his previous position as Head of IT at Femcare Nikomed. The business first operated out of residential cottages in Nuthall, Nottinghamshire, and Healey was recruited as the first member of staff in a leading technical role.

In 2013 Air-IT acquired local telecoms provider Managed Business Communications (MBC), enabling it to offer a full portfolio of IT and



Todd McQuilkin

Communication services under one roof.

Healey added: "Having been on board since day one I have seen the company experience significant change and high growth in an industry that's fast paced and always evolving. I'm eager to continue this journey."

As CEO, McQuilkin will continue to drive Air-IT's business strategy, heading up a new venture under Air-MSP Consultancy which is aimed at helping others in the ICT service industry benefit from operational improvements.

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Skills crisis to ease by year 2020

ON-PREMISE and data centre skills are in highest demand despite the rise of cloud communications, according to almost 80% of respondents who took part in a study into the nature of the UK's ICT skills gap and its likely development between now and 2020.

Research by OnePoll commissioned by Agilitas found that 64% of respondents believe that the skills shortage will be resolved or reduced over the coming four years.

"These results are in contrast to the arguments we hear about the industry running out of talent," said Shaun Lynn, who is the CEO of Agilitas.

"Rather than resting on their laurels, many in the industry are confident about making positive changes to reduce the gap.

"We're seeing growth in the number of important apprenticeship schemes that build up the next generation of talent, but the challenge between now and 2020 is the extent to which we can improve existing skill sets to meet customer challenges.

"The survey highlighted the need to invest in internal skills training and the channel must take note."

SHORT CALL

Equinix has expanded its LD6 International Business Exchange data centre in Slough. With £26m of capital investment the upgrade adds 1,385 cabinets, bringing the total operational capacity to 2,770 cabinets. Equinix UK MD Russell Poole said: "As one of the most pivotal connection points in the world, London continues to play a significant role in facilitating the flow of data that supports the digital economy."

FORMER Azzurri CFO Andrew Marshall (pictured) has been appointed to a similar role at Solar Communications. His instatement as CFO comes as Solar continues to develop into a managed services provider focused on organic and acquisition growth. Marshall's new remit is to drive commercial and operational efficiencies while working with investors and the board to identify M&A opportunities. His 20-plus years industry experience includes stints with Cable&Wireless, Schlumberger, Nokia Siemens Networks and most recently leading Azzurri in its exit to Maintel.

Solar CEO John Whitty said: "Andrew has demonstrated his ability to drive transformation in a way that improves efficiency, effectiveness and profitability."



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Consortium for security



Sean Sullivan

CYBER security provider F-Secure and ten research organisations have co-founded a consortium to address concerns that efforts to secure digital infrastructure and data may come at the expense of European rights and values.

The CANVAS (Constructing an Alliance for Value-driven Cyber Security) consortium brings together participants from various scientific traditions and fields to structure and disseminate research regarding the ethical, legal, empirical and technological issues related to cyber security.

It aims to create resources that inform policy makers, experts and the public on the development of cyber security technologies and policies that

offer security without sacrificing emerging needs, such as basic access rights.

“Everyone’s struggling to secure digital assets,” said Sean Sullivan, Security Advisor, F-Secure. “Doing nothing is not an option given the capabilities of today’s attackers.

“But at the same time, being too heavy handed harms innocent people and companies looking to make the most out of new technology.

“Governments, companies and the public are coming to the European cyber security industry with questions about how to make security both effective and practical for their needs, and CANVAS is going to help us get answers to the people that need them.”

Lamb reports ‘solid’ trading



Gary Lamb

ISLE of Man business Manx Telecom has reported a dip in H1 revenues, posting £39.2m compared to £39.8m in the first six months of 2015.

Profit before tax rose slightly to £8.3m (H1 2015: £8.2m).

Data centre revenues were down 15.7% due to a decline in low margin kit sales and customer consolidation; but global solutions revenues showed strong growth of 12.4%.

Fixed line, broadband and data revenues rose 1.3% driven by take-up of high speed broadband. A 4.7% rise in mobile revenues was offset by lower roaming charges.

Gary Lamb, CEO, commented: “We have had a solid six months of trading which saw the group continue to make progress with its strategic objectives and perform in line with the board’s expectations.

“Demand for superfast broadband and the increased speeds offered by 4G mobile services continue to grow and help drive growth in our cash generative core.

“We recently introduced 4G roaming to our customers as well as trialling superfast 4G+ during the summer period. We will continue to explore new

ways to grow the business by leveraging our mobile technology platform and we are confident in the long term outlook for the business.”

SHORT CALLS

Reading-based businesses now have access to ultra-fast Internet services through CityFibre’s launch partner BtL. Rob Lamden, MD at BtL, said: “Demand for ultra-fast services has grown exponentially in recent years. This project has the potential to unlock a tide of demand for faster, more resilient and more affordable services.”

plan.com’s partner portal includes new software that reduces the change of business ownership process to just minutes. Chris Smith, COO, said: “In today’s fast paced business environment you can’t afford to have manual processes slowing things down.”

VAIONI Wholesale has set-up more interconnects with cloud partners including Gamma and TalkTalk to meet growing demand for end-to-end QoS on SIP and related services. Sachin Vaish (pictured), MD of Vaioni, said: “We are seeing strong demand from channel partners to directly interconnect to key providers of various cloud services such as Microsoft Azure and AWS, as well as standard ones. We always set-up multiple connections to ensure resilience. With the interconnects in place, our partners can reassure their customers that they are receiving end-to-end quality of service, guaranteed lower latency, privacy and security.”

Vaioni has embarked on a wider roll out of interconnects to cloud providers in line with demand, and has pledged to work with partners on new interconnect requirements that may, for example, help them to win bigger deals.



SHORT CALL

Hats off to UKCloud (formerly known as Skyscape Cloud Services) which topped this year’s Sunday Times Tech Track 100 league table published last month (a ranking of Britain’s 100 private tech companies with the fastest growing sales over the past three years). The Farnborough-based cloud services provider scooped first place following an impressive annual three-year sales rise of 262.66%.

Comms-care deal Phone hack alert

COMMS-CARE has been contracted for a further five years by KCOM to deliver Cisco support and professional services to its UK customer base via a collaborative services model in partnership with Cisco. The contract extension follows an initial three year deal.

The agreement provides field-based support, spares management and professional services across multiple Cisco technologies spanning 6,000 end user sites totalling around 100,000 Cisco products.

Sean Royce, Executive Vice President for Technology, Service and Operations at KCOM, commented on the deal: “Cisco technology remains an important element of the range of contact and collaboration solutions we offer and the decision to extend the contract was a simple one.”

Comms-care was acquired by Fortune 100 company Ingram Micro in May this year.

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NIMANS and NEC have alerted comms dealers to the continuing threat of phone hacking, drawing particular attention to a new in-built app launched by the vendor for its SV9100 and SL1100 systems.

“A health check feature scans a customer’s system and network for any weaknesses with a traffic light safety score,” stated Yvonne Tierney-Neave, Nimans’ Solutions Business Manager for NEC. “By identifying these security risks the installation is then tailored

for the specific user set-up making it as effective as possible.”

Anti-hacking technology is supported by an awareness campaign led by Nimans and NEC.

Tierney-Neave commented: “Global phone fraud costs an estimated £25bn per year with the UK one of the most targeted countries, so it’s not a problem that should be ignored.”

She cited figures that suggest 84% of UK businesses are not safe from hacking. “Fraudsters can gain access to a phone system in seconds,” she added.

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Telecoms industry enters golden age as video takes lead

THE telecoms industry is on the verge of entering a new 'golden age' led by video services, claims Huawei in a new report first released at the European Mobile Video Forum (12th September, Amsterdam).

The company has urged European operators to capitalise on mobile video by leveraging their particular advantages in terms of technology, economics and content.

Ken Wang, who is the President of Global Marketing and Solutions Sales for Huawei's Carrier Business Group, commented: "It is clear that European operators should update their strategies and business models to unleash the potential of the mobile video market.

"Intelligent devices with cameras are now more common, more social platform vid-

eos are being created and spread in an easier way, and virtual reality and augmented reality technologies are developing on a large scale.

"For carriers such as LG Uplus in Korea video services now contribute over 20% of the total revenue."

Qiu Heng, President of Huawei Wireless Network Marketing Operation, noted that video is the driving force for an 'explosive increase' in network traffic. He added: "The three operation modes of mobile video include traffic operation, platform operation and ecosystem operation, and European operators are ready for mobile video growth."

Huawei's mobile video report highlighted that Western Europe scores well across key technology dimensions includ-

ing high smartphone penetration, LTE coverage and Wi-Fi penetration, all critical enablers for mobile video growth. Western Europe also leads in the economic dimension by offering affordable mobile data packages, noted the report.

"But when it comes to facilitating the fast growth of mobile video consumption and innovative monetisation models, European mobile operators lag behind those in North America and advanced Asia Pacific countries," added Nitesh Patel, Director of Wireless Media Strategies, Strategy Analytics.

"This may in part be due to different market characteristics such as an aging population less inclined to fully embrace mobile video when compared with a younger generation in Asia Pacific.

"Operators in Europe are also hampered by consumers' concerns over data consumption and average cost.

"Western European mobile operators should strive to reclaim leadership in innovation and differentiation and provide consumer-centric and video-centric approaches to address the growth opportunity of the mobile video market."

At the forum Heng put a spotlight on operators such as LG Uplus, T-Mobile in the USA and Verizon which have demonstrated a strong ambition to monetise video content.

"Some leading European mobile operators are already exploring the use of video services and they are seeing increasing revenue as a result.

"We would like to see more European mobile operators consider similar approaches to maximise growing demand for mobile video."

General move into Energy paying off

CARDIFF based General Communications is the latest independent telecoms business to start selling energy to its customers with Fidelity Energy and according to Sales Director Tim Evans, the response has been extremely positive.

General, which has recently celebrated over 20 years in business, is a specialist b2b mobile phone, fixed line and hosted solution provider but diversification into energy supply has proved to be seamless, as Evans explained.

"Being independent we are able to offer solutions from many comms providers and when we heard what Fidelity Energy were offering it was a logical step to add energy services to our portfolio.

"Having a different revenue stream, but also another product to offer our existing base of customers makes perfect sense and after an initial meeting with Fidelity Energy we were up and

running within two weeks which really impressed us."

The energy business will operate under the General Communications banner and all clients will be offered money saving deals.

"Our base is very diverse but we are targeting customers who are in manufacturing or heavy industry along with the housing sector which are bigger energy users," said Evans.

"As it's a new venture we are currently building the pipeline but there have been some good wins already with huge potential.

"We have an assigned Fidelity Energy account manager who analyses the opportunities with the salesperson and together will provide a proper comparison from all the available providers.

"I would conclude by saying if you have an existing customer base it's definitely worth giving energy a go."



“ We have an assigned Fidelity Energy account manager who analyses the opportunities with the salesperson and together will provide a proper comparison from all the available providers. ”

Tim Evans, Sales Director, General Communications



CHANNEL M&A and finance specialist Knight Corporate Finance sponsored the 'Corporate Challenge' at this year's annual English Half Marathon in Warrington and netted £800 for Comms Dealer charity Sparks. Other industry teams participating included VoIP hardware distributor ProVu. "It was a privilege to be involved in such an amazing event and congrats to all the industry teams that took part," said Knight CF Director Paul Billingham. Picture shows the Knight CF runners Sam Davies, Tom Jones (in the Knight costume), Rupert Mayo and Paul Billingham.

Adept boss abides by ba

The latest set of financial figures from Tunbridge Wells-based Adept Telecom prove again that its CEO Ian Fishwick has succeeded in his strategy, posting a 31 per cent sales increase and 34 per cent hike in EBITDA.

Fishwick has been a Managing Director or CEO of telecoms businesses for over a quarter of a century and March 2016 marked the 25th consecutive year of increased EBITDA generated by companies under his leadership. Fishwick's growth plan is founded on a simple common sense strategy that in practice can only achieve its purpose and hasten Adept towards the realisation of its goals. Not surprisingly, sticking to a policy of 'back to basics' remains a potent force in Fishwick's thinking. "Cash is King," he stated. "You only go bust if you run out of money."

Recognising the primacy of cash may not be an ultimate guarantor of long-term prosperity but according to Fishwick the thought should always be at the forefront of a business owner's mind whether expanding or contracting. "In 2008 when the financial markets crashed the City believed that small companies were the most likely to go bust, and that those most at risk had borrowed money," he said. "That was a gross over-simplification. I told the team to pay back our debt as fast as possible and within three years we were in a different position. The major thing to remember is that Cash is King."

These basic business principles imposed by



Ian Fishwick

Fishwick have propelled Adept a long distance away from its commercial beginnings in Fishwick's spare bedroom back in 2003. Today, Adept is a public company and Fishwick is also Commercial Director of Innopsis, the trade association for network service suppliers to the public sector. He is also a man who has grown accustomed to achieving his purpose and

offers important pointers to those starting out with similar aspirations.

Top tips

"My advice to young entrepreneurs is to resist giving away too much equity stake in your business," said Fishwick. "Be wary of building your own bespoke platforms as integration issues will make it difficult to buy your business. And

always be mindful that ten very good people will always be better than 100 not so good staff. Some people get a kick out of being the boss of a large number of employees. I've been there and got that T-shirt, and it's not the answer."

Fishwick managed 1,250 staff and circa 400,000 customers when running Telewest London and South

East in the late 1990s. This job followed a stint at Marconi Secure Systems between 1990-95, after Fishwick 'fell' into the comms industry by accident. "I had qualified as an accountant and saw a job advert for Plessey (which later became Marconi) in Liverpool," he explained. "Plessey wanted someone to transition the business from paper accounts to computerised finance

Basic principles

systems. I then became the Managing Director.

"In 1995 I went into cable. These were truly exciting years building the networks and launching services like Sky Movies, Sky Sport and Digital TV as well as doing telecoms and Internet at the same time. I ran Telewest North West and then Telewest London and South East. When we moved from four regional heads to one UK boss I didn't get the big job and had to leave."

At this juncture in Fishwick's career a US company called World Access asked him to manage its seven UK acquisitions. "I inherited £250 million sales with over 1,000 people but the company was losing £20 million a year," said Fishwick. "After 16 months we had merged the seven businesses and were profitable, making £1.6 million. But the US parent went into Chapter 11 bankruptcy and I was forced to break the organisation up and sell it. We improved the profitability by £21.6 million in just over a year, but it still went wrong. That's when I'd had enough of large companies and set up Adept in 2003."

Adept Telecom has since grown to employ 90 staff based across three sites with sales of £33 million and EBITDA of £7 million. Acquisitions have been a running theme and an important growth factor in terms of scale and capabilities, with the purchase of Fleet-based Centrix in 2012 being particularly significant, adding £10 million revenues and placing Adept in the UC space. "We started out selling simple products to

The priority is to continue our unbroken track record of increasing EBITDA every year, and to ensure that it turns into cash

small businesses but larger organisations now account for over 65 per cent of sales revenue," said Fishwick.

"We have transitioned rapidly and mainly sell complex integrated solutions to bigger clients. We are now strong in Avaya products with a specialism in both Aura and IP Office. We may consider other manufacturers such as Cisco and Mitel. We are also keeping an eye on data companies as telecoms and IT is increasingly converging. UC is our biggest opportunity, where we provide everything from the connectivity to the desk phones, smartphones and tablets, all integrated with contact management systems."

Acquisition strategy

Adept's current go-to-market strategy builds on 11 years spent acquiring connectivity businesses and integrating their customer bases. "We did that 19 times," said Fishwick. "When we started out the orthodox thinking was that you couldn't make money from small firms as the support costs were too high. Our view was that if we automated our processes early this would enable us to make lots of money, and we did."

"The priority remains the same, to continue our unbroken track record of increasing EBITDA every year and to ensure that it turns into cash. We will use strong cash flows to increase our dividends and also identify selective acquisitions. As we move into more complex solution selling there is inevitably an investment needed in more expensive, highly trained specialists in every area from pre-sale through to installation and support. We are increasingly strong in the public sector but it has taken us six years of hard work and re-training people. Selling to this sector is very different to approaching a commercial customer."

Technologies such as UC have become the default mode of industry discussion, but Fishwick has a helicopter view of the bigger picture and does not hold back from pricking the comms industry's tendency to talk up the market with ballooning hype. "Not every customer wants fancy technology for road warriors," he stated. "Some are just hairdressers who use broadband for a PDQ machine once every half hour."

"That said, there is no shortage of revenue in our sector, up to several billions of pounds. However, there is too much cost supporting that revenue. We have massive duplication across the industry because there are so many small companies, often with technically focused business leaders who believe they can do everything. But it's blatantly not possible for a small company to be all things to all men and be profitable. We are not here to discuss technology, we are here to make money." ■

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Gamma ups mobile anti

Gamma's acquisition of a core mobile network infrastructure in 2014 was its first step on the road to launching an exclusive business mobile service to the channel. Following the roll out of the new service in June to existing mobile partners Gamma last month threw the doors open to what Rob Davis, Head of Converged Products, claims is a rare opportunity to take on the big boys.

The UK's business mobile market is fiercely competitive and Gamma has made a name for itself as an ambitious competitor with the determination to go up against industry monoliths as well as smaller rivals. Last month Gamma added considerable muscle to its mobile campaign with the launch of a business mobile service that better enables reseller partners to square up to bigger companies with a converged fixed and mobile capability exclusively configured for business customers.

"We hear from our partners that their business customers want a better overall mobile service and one that is supported by someone who understands their needs," stated Davis. "Gamma Mobile, together with our channel partners, can make both of these a reality with bolt-ons like MultiNet providing coverage from multiple UK networks

from the same SIM, as well as business class support from their channel partner who can provide near real-time control over network provisioning, barring and usage alerts using the Gamma portal that has direct links into the core of our mobile and fixed network."

Gamma has been delivering mobile services for business customers through its channel partners for more than eight years, offering a high level of control, ownership and flexibility. "However, we wanted to take it to the next level by investing in our own core mobile network so we could give channel partners more of an edge when competing with the large mobile networks," added Davis. "So we've invested millions over the last two years building our own mobile core network and integrating it with our fixed line network. Since it is focused exclusively on business customers we're building the features



Rob Davis

that business customers want most, such as the aforementioned MultiNet bolt-on for providing increased coverage across multiple UK networks, and a business grade voicemail platform with options for different greetings inside and outside office hours and much longer message storage."

Single supplier

Alongside fixed line and data services Gamma Mobile is a key area of the firm's product portfolio, aligning closely with a growing number of business customers who are demanding more services from a single supplier. Furthermore, resellers want the operational benefits of having fewer suppliers that are able to offer a high level of automation and support. "The response from both existing and new partners has

been positive and we have increased our team of mobile specialists who are working closely with partners as part of the transition to the new service," added Davis.

Positive partner feedback has prompted Davis to forecast strong growth in the number of resellers taking up the mobile service. "Many resellers and dealers tell us they are increasingly frustrated by the large mobile networks continually changing their commission plans and channel strategy, costing them money and reputational damage," stated Davis. "As with our other services we aim to be fair to our partners on mobile and expect this approach to help increase both the number of existing Gamma partners that sell Gamma mobile as well as helping new partners sell some or all of our services."

For more than ten years Gamma's portal has been central to putting resellers in control of the services they sell to customers, and its evolution has been a focal point of ongoing development for many years. According to Davis, the portal is also a boon to resellers of Gamma's new mobile services.

"Many telecoms companies rely on call centres and manual processes to make simple changes such as adding network bars or doing a SIM swap," said Davis. "But this adds delays of often up to 48 hours based on standard network SLAs of a 24 hour response time added to a 24 hour network change time. We are committed to developing and giving resellers the tools to do as many network changes as possible in as close to real-time as possible while their customer is on the phone, which is the only way of providing a true business class service."

Davis reiterated that the Gamma Mobile service gives channel partners margin opportunities by combining both the operational savings of working with Gamma's portal for all fixed and mobile services as well as the ability to win more business from the big mobile providers with a differentiated mobile proposition. "We're pleased with the level of engagement, feedback and sheer enthusiasm of ideas from our partners in terms of which business services they would like to offer customers but have struggled to get other mobile providers to take on-board," added Davis. "The Gamma Mobile roadmap is partner-led, so watch this space." ■



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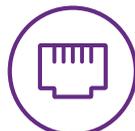
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Neurodiversity adds con

The ultimate gauge of any USP is whether it communicates and delivers real practical benefits like no other, and neurodiversity in the workplace passes this test, guaranteeing a unique business model and unbeatable competitive advantage, according to Auticon's CEO Ray Coyle.

Auticon has shown us that the days are long gone when autism was categorised as an all encompassing 'disability'. For the company's UK CEO, the power of neurodiversity in the workplace is beyond argument, so much so that autism-specific strengths are what define Auticon's culture, philosophy, growth strategy and go-to-market. The German-based B2B IT service provider exclusively employs autistic people as consultants and launched its UK operation in March this year to advance a remarkable business model that leverages the exceptional cognitive abilities of those in the autistic spectrum to bring significant value to clients.

IT consultants that hold the advantage

AUTICON'S consultants have a genuine awareness for quality, attention to detail and they intuitively recognise novel patterns in complex quantities of data. They uncover these patterns effortlessly and free of preconceptions. Auticon's consultants also have the ability to think 'vertically', the thinking style familiar to most non-autistic people. They have a sharp sense of logic, think analytically and infer far sighted conclusions, making them innovative problem solvers.

"By 2020 we plan to have a team of over 100 autistic consultants carrying out great projects across the UK," stated Coyle. "Our core strengths are in software testing and QA, data analytics, compliance, migration and transformation projects; and we are keen to work with channel partners who want to offer their clients a consultancy service in any of these areas. Auticon handles all of the job coaching and project management aspects when working through partners."

Auticon was established as a social enterprise in 2011 by Dirk Muller-Remus who has an autistic son and was alarmed by his job prospects. The company grew rapidly in Germany and now employs 90 autistic consultants across nine offices – seven in Germany, with the French and UK bases set up this year. Its customer base is predominantly blue chip organisations including 50 per cent of the companies on the German DAX index.

Coyle pointed out that it is important to recognise that there is as much variety in autistic people as in non-autistic. "Many autistic people would not fit into peoples' general preconceptions in any shape or form," he said. "There are some skills that have been shown to be more prevalent in autistic adults, including sustained concentration,



Ray Coyle

attention to detail and cognitive pattern recognition. Therefore, our consultants are frequently able to tackle problems from a different perspective. Their approach has been described as being 'wired differently' and can deliver huge benefits in problem solving and within project teams generally.

"Our tag line, 'Systematically creative', points to the combination of systematic thinking and creative intelligence that is first evident during the initial brainstorming and conceptual project stages.

Our consultants enhance the client's project teams with their pattern recognition and innovative capacity.

Systematic creativity

"During implementation they excel with a systematic approach, their attention to detail and persistent concentration – all strengths that are invaluable in the field of IT quality assurance. Our alternative perspective can generate far more creative solutions and make the whole team more productive and efficient. People often do not think of creativity when they consider autism, but that

is one of the key commercial benefits of neurodiversity in the workplace."

Coyle advocates an immediate reassessment of autism as the key to unlock a new creative dimension in IT consultancy. "The UK is fairly advanced in its knowledge of autism, and in my view the IT and comms industries are ahead of the curve in recognising the talents of autistic adults," he added. "Research shows that 79 per cent of UK autistic adults would like to work if they had the right support. However, only 15 per cent

Competitive edge

are in full time work. There is a lot more that can be done to bridge this gap, and we do not meet with much resistance from potential clients and find they are generally keen to engage with us. The key thing for clients to understand is that our role is to support our consultants so that they can deliver to their full potential."

There are of course challenges as well as advantages for people on the autism spectrum. Many autistic people find social interactions difficult so Auticon provides skilled and experienced job coaches to assist with that aspect. "We have also found that small and simple changes can be made to help our consultants perform to their full potential such as reducing background noise and distractions," he added.

Not surprisingly, Auticon's recruitment challenges are different to most in the industry. "There is a large pool of talent out there that is being wasted," said Coyle. "Often people do not have the confidence to approach us as they are concerned that the application and interview assessment process will be daunting. We stress that we interview all applicants and do not prejudge on the basis of qualifications, experience, CV or even interview performance. We run a range of thorough skills assessments to really find out what the applicant's skills are so that we can offer employment based on talent rather than history."

Coyle's industry experience is rooted in IT distribution at Frontline (now Tech Data) in the early 1990s. He worked for a number of large and

In the coming years more businesses will see the benefits of neurodiverse teams, particularly in technology projects

small IT businesses until switching to a career in law, spending eight years at the tech focused city firm Osborne Clarke before being hired to run Grow Software, a DRM platform for 3D printing, two years ago. His experience is therefore a mix of technology and high-end advisory work that is today being put to good use in helping Auticon build on its evolution.

"As Auticon has grown we have learned how to operate better, making constant changes to the business model and our own processes," added Coyle. "For example, our original business model involved just consultants and job coaches who both acted as a support person and point of contact for our consultant, and also liaised with the client. We have now split these roles so we have a job coach and a project manager on each implementation. This has brought a number of benefits in terms of reporting and communication lines, and the process now works much more efficiently."

Coyle has been mindful of Auticon for some time.

While running the Impact Investment Team at Osborne Clarke one of his clients was an early investor in the firm. "When Auticon launched in the UK I was keen to be part of its journey," stated Coyle. "Our immediate priority is recruitment to expand our team in the UK. The longer-term objective is to demonstrate to the industry that there is a huge untapped skill set that is being overlooked and to raise our profile as an open, honest and supportive organisation. While we are a commercial business, our social purpose runs through everything that we do. We expect that, over coming years, more businesses will see the benefits of neurodiverse teams, particularly in technology projects." ■

Just a minute with Ray Coyle...

Role model: Alan Turing for relentless determination in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds

What talent do you wish you had? To be great at rugby. I hate just being an armchair supporter

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? I have perseverance, patience and passion for what I do. But I need to work on embracing and learning from failure.

I have worked in the US and they are much better than Europeans at seeing setbacks as learning opportunities

What do you fear the most? Fear itself

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Living outdoors, climbing mountains and jumping in lakes

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Joynson liberates firms f

Synergi IT's Managing Director Peter Joynson shows how fully engaged customer education provides a framework in which cloud service providers can flourish.

Joynson's relationship with new technology predates the emergence of word processors way back when. He's been in the IT sector ever since, and aside from industry experience shaping his foolproof go-to-market strategies other personal influences are on vivid display. In large part, Joynson attributes his ambition to family factors. These include his father who instilled a familial drive and determination as well as a clear perspective on what is 'really important in life'; and the family office equipment business where Joynson worked immediately after leaving school at 16 years of age.

"This was the beginning of my career in technology," said Joynson. "In the early days it was electronic typewriters followed by word processors and the desktop PC revolution in the late '80s and early '90s. For 30 years my career has reflected developments in software and technology, but the biggest step-change is the rise of cloud technology and SaaS, and Synergi IT is well placed to help drive this transformation."

Since the sale of the family business in 2003 much of

Joynson's game plan has been founded on sharp observations of evolving technology; and following a 10 year stint working for a large national services provider he intervened in the market with an immediate purpose. "I began to see the strategic direction companies like Microsoft were moving towards, and noted the growth projections for cloud technology services," explained Joynson. "Justin Short, my co-Director, shared the same vision so we created Synergi IT in 2013 as a Microsoft Cloud and SharePoint focused services partner."

Joynson's mission is to liberate organisations from the outmoded technoworld in which they live – that of legacy premise-based systems. He thrives on the front line, meeting buyers, educating them and generating growth. In Joynson's business plan, education has become an important strategy and there is no shortage of ambition. "We focus on helping to educate the market and become trusted partners to our clients," he added. "We call it Digital Transformation and have secured several great success stories and some excellent client wins as a result. These



Peter Joynson

include regional water supplier Northumbrian Water, care home operator Hadrian Healthcare, and Walker Filtration which manufacturers compressed air filtration and drying equipment."

Award scoop

By far the most positive sign of Synergi IT's advance to date is winning the Nintex Partner of the Year Award 2016, handed over at

Microsoft's Worldwide Partner Conference in Toronto this summer. "Integrating modern business platforms like Nintex, Microsoft Office 365 and Azure can improve and automate what were previously seen as labour intensive processes," noted Joynson. "In doing so, it is now possible to provide better access and greater mobility to business data, improving the user experience with agility. We

will continue to invest in the right team and products to secure our hard won position as a leading Microsoft cloud provider in the north of England and Scotland."

Joynson pointed out that every index of Synergi IT's business growth improvement shows a steady upward graph. "We started with a team of four back in 2013," he explained. "Today we are 16 strong and have



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in 2017. We also have a robust, expansive customer base that ranges from local SMEs to internationally recognised brands."

The essence of Joyson's market engagement strategy is a total commitment to putting live experiences back at the centre of educational activity. "We've been running educational breakfast workshops for the last 12 months and have another six planned across the north east of England for the year ahead," he stated. "The focus of these free events is to help business leaders better understand the full power of Microsoft cloud and how Synergi IT has the experience and expertise to help them transform their businesses."

Educating buyers about the improving state of ICT enables Synergi IT to identify and nurture the prospects who most readily accept new technology and understand that their progress will ultimately depend on it. "Our proposition is simple: We want to work with businesses that wish to improve," commented Joyson. "Many, if not all, commercial sectors have been under intense economic pressure during the last five years. A lot of organisations have reacted by driving through cost cutting measures, stopping unnecessary purchases and reducing headcount in a bid to remain competitive. However, we want to work with businesses that perceive technology as the way to improve how they sustain long-term efficiency and, ultimately, growth."

Another of Joyson's triumphs is to have overcome one of the industry's biggest

challenges – finding the right staff. "The technology market is relentlessly fast paced, so keeping abreast of the changes and developments is a constant challenge," he added. "To do this we have become adept at recruiting high quality talent and built a strong, like-minded and forward thinking team that has an eye on the developing market. We select both experienced and talented IT professionals while searching out an enthusiastic new breed of bright young people who can quickly flourish in a nurturing environment that's also positive, creative and focused."

Key priority

"Our priority is to ensure that Synergi IT is always a great company to work for and do business with. We will continue to display a positivity and agility in our working relationships with clients. But of course we are only human, so balancing

The advent of Microsoft Dynamics 365 platforms excites us and we are well placed to build on this opportunity

that with the pace of change and a constant need to learn is always a challenge – but one that we relish."

What also excites Joyson is that his portfolio continues to evolve as Microsoft and Nintex release enhanced

functions to their solutions. "Since 2013, we have seen massive steps in what can be achieved by Office 365," he added. "No longer is it Word and Excel in the cloud, rather a multi-component business platform that, when implemented well, truly influences how our customers interact with each other and their business data."

Nintex is a key component in Synergi IT's portfolio and a strategic tool to enhance workflows and introduce electronic mobile forms to clients. Often these tools are at the core of delivering cost savings and tangible improvements. "Nintex's new Hawkeye Workflow reporting and Document Generation solutions will play a big part in our ongoing development throughout 2017 and beyond," noted Joyson.

Cue another 2017 product strategy. "Although Microsoft has had offerings in the accounting ERP and CRM space for many years, these software technologies have to date been mainly server based on-premise software deployments," pointed out Joyson. "This is about to change. The emergence of Microsoft Dynamics 365 platforms excites us and we are well placed to build on this opportunity along with the wider Office 365 platform. We have been to Microsoft UK's HQ at Thames Valley Park to align our strategy and we're enthused by the next generation of Dynamics ERP solutions."

The potency of such cloud-based solutions is becoming inherently more influential in a market receptive to change. "We are now seeing huge adoption of cloud technology by all kinds of businesses,"

noted Joyson. "We spotted the change in technology early and are focused on it. We don't have the distraction or baggage of more traditional IT firms, but we know there is still much to do in terms of education on how modern technology really can make a positive difference. Soon we will all look back and wonder how we ever ran successful businesses with all those servers and software licenses to manage." ■

Just a minute with Peter Joyson...

Give one example of something you have overcome: Shyness as a child

How would you like to be remembered? Fondly, and as a family man who loved life and laughed

What do you fear the most? Failure, and Newcastle getting relegated again

Three ideal dinner guests? Tiger Woods, Ayrton Senna and Pele – all iconic winners in the world of my favourite sports

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? I don't take life too seriously, perhaps that's a weakness in certain environments. However, I do always try to put myself in other people's shoes, so empathy could be considered a strength

Industry bugbear: Ban confusing acronyms and make it more simple for all to understand

What possession could you not live without? Ventolin inhaler as I'm an asthmatic

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? I have a passion for building, so perhaps construction

a talented, experienced and passionate team. Turnover is also tracking headcount growth, while our ability to grow is linked closely to investment in resources and team numbers. We broke through the £1 million turnover mark this year and are well positioned to continue to secure growth through the addition of new Microsoft cloud accounting software solutions to our portfolio



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WebRTC gathers pace

Any examination of the big trends that currently dominate the communications landscape expose the unstoppable march of WebRTC, according to Paul Clarke, Regional Sales Manager UK&I, 3CX.

An upward movement in WebRTC adoption last year continues to gather momentum with industry analysts projecting a CAGR of 50.9 per cent and a market worth \$4.45 billion by 2020. Clarke believes that it won't be long before WebRTC acquires a life of its own as the Internet Engineering Task Force continues to prepare a series of WebRTC standards even as the technology is gaining ground in all sectors far and wide. From a development perspective, the WebRTC API and the Google codebase for mobile apps has also spurred adoption rates.

"Ongoing development, usability and security have all led to a global proliferation of business apps in every vertical," said Clarke. "Users can run video conferencing sessions without plug-ins on all supported browsers, and this communication is secured with encryption. WebRTC does not rely on outside applications to maintain complete data security at all times, using SRTP encryption in its code."

One fast growing trend pointed out by Clarke is the use of WebRTC-powered links that can be sent to customers or partners, or placed on a landing

page for rapid contact with potential customers. "The ability to get face-to-face with customers easily boosts sales," commented Clarke. "Retailers, for example, can bring a website viewer directly into their showroom in seconds."

Contact centres also represent a strong potential market for WebRTC-based services. "It is important for contact centres to decrease the 'time to issue' resolution, making them more productive," commented Clarke. "Amazon pioneered this approach to customer service with its Mayday button that got a Kindle user in touch with an agent with just a click. The concept has since been applied on thousands of websites that boast a WebRTC-powered link to Help.

"Contact centre agents are also using WebRTC to receive incoming calls, with callers being routed to an agent's web browser via a company's IVR. Another growth area is WebRTC's file sharing capability which is being broadly exploited in data analytics and business collaboration."

Clarke also pointed out that a growing number of new start-ups are using WebRTC technology for



Paul Clarke

disruptive applications. London-based Cloud9, for example, offers a trading system based on a WebRTC platform that expands the communications range of the industry standard product, and which cuts the costs of trading while maintaining a high level of security.

Harnessing the power Meanwhile, Dutch company 24Sessions provides live contact with experts for consumers via WebRTC-powered online meetings. In Japan, carrier NTT is offering a speech recognition API compatible with multiple browsers, available for no charge on SkyWay, the company's WebRTC space for developers. These are just a small sample of businesses that are harnessing the power of WebRTC.

Not surprisingly, WebRTC offers a raft of opportunities

for comms resellers. "Given the wealth of business applications for the technology, resellers can point to the best solution for a particular vertical or context," explained Clarke. "They can also show how these WebRTC apps provide solutions for business issues, working effectively as a consultant. Increasing productivity is, for example, a key issue for large and small businesses. Users can access WebRTC-enabled services over any network, public or private, Wi-Fi, mobile broadband or wired LAN, accelerating communications and collaboration.

"They can use the same services working remotely from the laptop or smartphone. This is possible thanks to integration with Unified Communications. The ability to hold WebRTC-powered online

meetings gives a potent boost to collaboration, a key ingredient in improving productivity."

Improving technical assistance is another issue for many businesses. With WebRTC conferencing, technicians can share screens with the person they are helping. Similarly, companies can easily combine a face-to-face meeting with photos and information in a web conference to speed up and close sales. "Customers never have to look elsewhere for the information required to make a decision," said Clarke.

Resellers can also capitalise on the increased revenue streams from related hardware sales, providing webcams and headphones to use in web conferencing. "Resellers should look to offer a fully integrated open standards solution that provides a one-stop shop for all of an end user's communications needs," stated Clarke. "This will combine WebRTC-enabled web conferencing, click-to-call and an IP phone system."

3CX is an early adopter of WebRTC and the company quickly set about integrating this technology into the video conferencing feature of its own UC solution. "The evolution of WebRTC is fascinating," enthused Clarke. "Next will be the integration of comms into many different kinds of applications, just as we have seen with CRM. There will be complex solutions that combine, for example, big data analytics, communication and accounting software. Analysts are already talking about 'comms as a feature'." ■

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Time to take a real-time

WebRTC: What better time for resellers to assert their sales knowhow and profit from a transformational technology that is growing in popularity among users across the world?

The advent of WebRTC is already fundamentally transforming how many businesses communicate with their customers and reserving judgement on whether to dive into this deep pool of market potential is not an option for comms and IT resellers, according to Dean Manzoori, Vice President of Global Cloud Communications at Masergy. "We are starting to see WebRTC real-world applications in gaming, social networks, content streaming, job interviews, online retailing and even real-time language translation," he stated. "One of the most obvious WebRTC uses is to facilitate customer engagement on websites. It enables visitors to click a button to initiate a call or video chat with a call centre agent. We use WebRTC ourselves on our own customer support page."

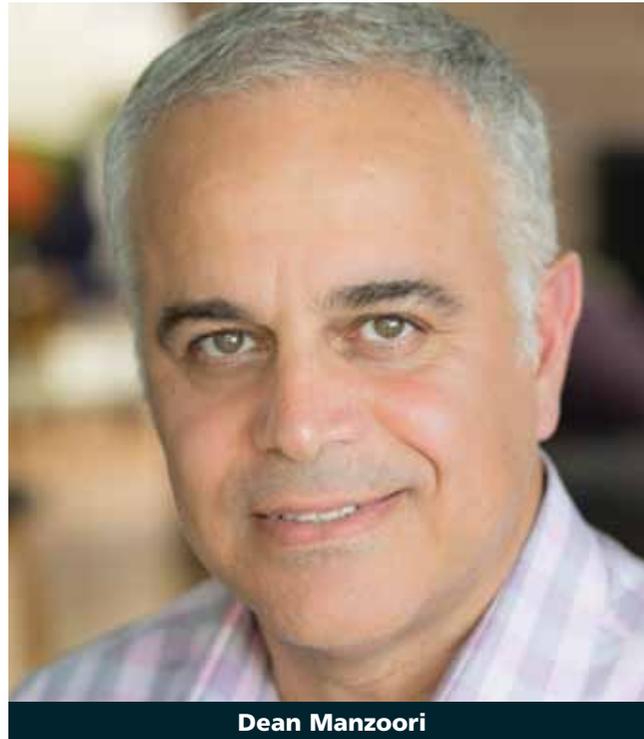
In an enterprise environment, WebRTC can extend collaboration beyond the corporate borders and, for example, enable individual sales people to more easily conduct video conferences that let customers see not only the sales person's face, but also slides, on-screen demos, videos and other supporting material. WebRTC is also making a notable difference in the NHS. Andrena Logue, a health expert at public sector technology analyst firm Kable, commented: "Collaborative tools are starting to be used more

extensively by clinicians, not only to consult with peers but also to offer online patient consultations. GP practices and hospitals are already offering this capability. When usage becomes more widespread there will be considerable scope to offer services in areas such as social care via public sector agencies."

To opportunistic comms resellers the rise of WebRTC is their chance to capitalise on a tech-trend that can only gather pace. "Resellers are in a unique position to help customers truly understand WebRTC," added Manzoori. "Businesses that embrace WebRTC will undoubtedly see commercial and competitive benefits, not least better customer engagement, boosted sales, improved communication and reduced call costs. If 2015 was the year WebRTC was hurled into the limelight, then 2016 will be the year it becomes the go-to solution for real-time communications. Comms, IT resellers and VARs should be taking full advantage."

Scalability and freedom

In most cases, personal video conference services that make use of WebRTC operate on a monthly pay-for-use subscription fee, offering plenty of quick scalability and the freedom from having to own expensive and difficult to manage hardware. Facebook, with its 1.9 billion worldwide users, recently added a WebRTC powered feature that allows Chromebook users to initiate



Dean Manzoori

"If 2015 was the year WebRTC was hurled into the limelight, then 2016 will be the year it becomes the go-to solution for real-time communications."

video calls without the need to install plugins or go through workarounds. "Gone for good will be the hassle of downloading software, managing frequent software updates, searching for contacts to join a video call, and the disappointment of finding your contact isn't even a Skype user and prefers FaceTime," said Manzoori. "Anyone can use WebRTC."

Ease of use has helped WebRTC services to gain strong appeal, but until recently there has been a slow take-up of the technology as the industry has struggled to understand how to apply it to real customer situations, hampered by

Apple and Microsoft's slow progress toward adoption which is now starting to pick up, believes Darren Hilton, Director of Partner Services at Timico, who also predicts that 2017 will be the breakthrough year for embedded real-time communications and collaboration.

"WebRTC plays a significant role in the Digital Transformation movement that is currently taking place," he said. "It enables a business to offer tailored real-time contextual communications throughout the customer experience workflow. We already have WebRTC live and working on our own website and

are launching our WebRTC-based Synergy Smart Office technology in Q4 this year. Next year it's all about working with our partners to enable them to start delivering this technology and showcasing some of the examples of how we've already done this.

"The short-term impact of WebRTC is hard to quantify but it is accepted as a disruptive technology and being adopted by all the players who define future markets. Clearly it has the potential to seriously impact existing telecom business models and for those looking at longer term value now is the time to act. The biggest winners will be the early movers. For us, our technology partnership with Greenland has been key to overcoming the challenge of providing a scalable platform to bring enterprise class WebRTC services to market."

The influence of WebRTC is already strongly felt by some of Timico's partners who face the challenge of implementing it. "It's our job to give partners the technical assistance and training they require to meet their customers' demands," added Hilton. "Software vendors are ahead of the game so IT resellers and traditional comms resellers need to start thinking about how they can add software and web development skills to their capabilities."

Hilton re-emphasised that partners require particular

browse of WebRTC usage

assistance with the software development aspect of integration in order to give their customers a tailored solution. "Software development skills are currently not prevalent in the partner community, but we have seen a new breed of partner emerging with the integration skills that are traditionally lacking," he said.

Just as these new entrants could speed past traditional resellers, WebRTC bypasses the traditional models of monetising voice and video communications and therefore threatens the business models of many established players. "Although WebRTC won't remove the minutes model immediately it will start to erode that model over time," said Hilton. "There are new resellers who are approaching telecoms from a completely different perspective and consider voice to be simply an application to be used on the web. Innovate or die has never been more relevant in the telecoms industry than today."

As noted, WebRTC has the power to eliminate traditional boundaries, including distinctions between device manufacturers, operating systems and types of browser to deliver always-on communications between any parties. "WebRTC will rapidly change our understanding of communications," stated Martin Taylor, CMO at Content Guru. "With no downloads or plugins and its ability to incorporate video, text and voice communications straight from the browser on any connected device, WebRTC has the potential to transform the way we communicate on a global



Darren Hilton

"We have seen a new breed of partner emerging with the integration skills that are traditionally lacking."

scale. By breaking down these barriers, organisations are just a click away from their customers."

Organisations are increasingly looking for cost-effective UC solutions that are both easy for users to operate and simple for corporate IT departments to incorporate within their existing systems infrastructure, noted Taylor. "WebRTC is already the stand-out option for businesses on account of its ease of use, accessibility and affordability," he added. "Users will increasingly look towards providers who embrace WebRTC as a seamlessly integrated communications experience. As adoption continues to grow and more mature WebRTC-based solutions emerge, these capabilities will continue to drive widespread advances across communication and collaboration, as traditional pre-requisites such as physical equipment become redundant."

However, noted Taylor, WebRTC in isolation can be difficult to monetise. Resellers therefore need to consider

ways that WebRTC can be integrated with existing, mature communication portfolios and other technology roadmap items. "As portfolios become more diverse, so do customers' expectations," he added. "Resellers therefore need to look for cloud providers that not only have a roadmap in place to continue delivering on customer expectations, but also those that offer a true multi-channel solution."

Unwittingly adopted

WebRTC is already ingrained to the point that people are unknowingly adopting the technology, observed Rob Keenan, Head of Portfolio Readiness and Growth UK and EMEAR at Unify. "For example, WebRTC is embedded into UC products such as Unify's Circuit," he said. "WebRTC is also starting to replace communications in existing products from known vendors and it's used by new entrants to the market."

According to Keenan, WebRTC supports the future of the market because the technology works side by side with the cloud model

and is easy to deploy and use on any device. "For comms and IT resellers WebRTC will be at the heart of any products they are selling, so they must be able to explain its impact and benefits," he added. "WebRTC is as fundamental as IP or SIP and will be the standard to deliver the communications and collaboration businesses need. The opportunity for the channel is immense. Resellers have the relationships to make these products successful."

Customers are crying out for more integrated, less complex, less expensive yet more seamless experiences, and WebRTC is one technology that can help to make that a possibility, agrees Spencer Bradshaw, Manager of Advanced Applications and Solution Architects for EMEA at ShoreTel "As new applications and devices come on to the market we're likely to see interest in WebRTC continue to grow," he said. "The emergence of CPaaS (Communications Platform as a Service) will start to see WebRTC-based applications communicate with each other without the need to log into all of



Martin Taylor

"WebRTC is already the stand-out option for businesses on account of its ease of use, accessibility and affordability."

them and carry out the discreet tasks. Expect to see wider adoption in areas like video and collaboration as the mobilised workforce jumps on the trend."

WebRTC has many use cases but one that stands out for Bradshaw is the potential to remove the proprietary nature of integrations and make it possible to give similar user experiences to client-based application users via a browser, securely and without having to be resident on an in-house system or be licensed to use one. "This makes it possible for me as a ShoreTel user to send a collaboration request to a prospect who uses another voice platform and for them to join that session without having to download anything," he added. "Easy, intuitive, borderless communications is the future."

Also anticipating WebRTC dominance, Paul Taylor, Sales Director at Voiceflex, is in early discussions with his customers about the technology, sharing ideas to see which applications can be delivered via WebRTC. "WebRTC opens the door for high quality audio and video communications and will transform how we communicate," he concurred. "We will see a significant shift from telephony to the web, and stepping stones are being put in place to provide high level web-based content. Resellers will need to increase their understanding of WebRTC and realise that they will not make money from calls, but from selling services and data connectivity. WebRTC moves the industry away from a me-to market into a consultancy based sales environment." ■



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Collaboration champ strikes

On the development of seamless collaboration technologies and products few can challenge the experience and influence of Toby Gold, Chief Executive Officer at sipsynergy.

Advances made in creating a strong market for seamless collaboration are in large part down to the efforts of technology champions such as Gold who recognised the benefits of collaboration early in his working life and soon after set about meeting the demands of customers wanting ever more seamless interaction. "My initial introduction to what I'd call collaboration goes back to my time in engineering," he recalled. "I trained as an engineer in what were called simultaneous engineering techniques, where people would collaborate over the lifecycle of product development. That was in the 80s and was the first time people were starting to use technology to collaborate effectively. That approach would then become embedded in a lot of future visualisation technologies. Not long after that, still fairly early in my IT career, I began working officially in collaboration and have been involved in it, and passionate about it, for over 20 years."

The most visible sign of collaboration as we know it today emerged in the early 2000s when Cisco,

for example, prioritised the development of UC. And recognising the potential impact of collaboration and UC across the entire range of businesses Gold moved to Cisco before running the collaboration practice at Logicalis that was responsible for the video conferencing business. "We were very much in that vanguard of organisations that were in the midst of working out how to create a seamless collaboration experience across voice, messaging, video and other collaboration technologies," stated Gold.

"While at Logicalis we tried to create our own hosted collaboration solution so that the whole customer lifecycle becomes more integrated and repeatable while costing less from a partner perspective. I tried to do this using the resources of one of the largest systems integrators in the UK, and even then it was a struggle. We managed to come up with an amalgamated approach to what I call the end-to-end service ethos but really didn't get any further than that."

According to Gold sipsynergy has passed through this impasse and his overwhelming urge was



Toby Gold

to resume his role as a lead player in driving the market for true collaboration and help to realise sipsynergy's potential. "I know how hard this is to do and appreciate what sipsynergy has done," explained Gold. "When I saw what the company had achieved I was so excited, but knew it needed structure

and investment to take it further. That's why I joined.

Formative years

"I've run start-up type organisations, I've worked for a manufacturer and I've worked in more mature systems integrator and service provider environments, so I know where we're coming

from and where we're going. I understand the manufacturer's perspective and believe I've got the ability to realise sipsynergy's potential, which is to be a far more scaled up business addressing the needs of the SMB and mid-market customer. Much of what I've done in my career has



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kes Gold with sipsynergy

led me here. The role is a summary of all the things I've achieved to date.

Fingers crossed, my greatest achievements are ahead of me here at sipsynergy."

Gold joined the company two months ago along with another industry heavyweight, Tom Kelly, who is the firm's Chairman. The duo are charged with accelerating sipsynergy's growth and customer base following a £2.75 million investment from YFM Equity Partners. Gold moved from Dell Software where his most recent role was Director of Northern Europe. His first priority in the new job was to ensure that sipsynergy had a sound financial plan and ability to measure and track progress. "We're in a period of accelerated growth therefore much of our current focus is around identifying and recruiting the right people for the right roles," he added.

sipsynergy was established in 2009 by Barnaby Ritchley and John Fox as a developer of software solutions for Cisco UC service providers. The founders soon realised they had the basis of a strong UCaaS business and invested in a Cisco HCS platform. Their insight into the requirements of the service provider community and an innovative approach to process and technology automation gave them a powerful USP.

"We obtained the VC funding and recruited a number of new executives to fully exploit the market opportunity," added Gold. "We're focused on bringing the benefits of UCaaS to business customers through the partner community and

we plan to grow aggressively over the next few years."

Gold's current role reflects the technology gulf between the mid-2000s and now. Initially a software company, sipsynergy recognised the best way to serve its customers was to create a platform and deliver it as-a-service. From the outset it was solving the problem of multi-tenancy and service automation and applying that to create a UCaaS platform. "There's been an enormous amount of growth in the hosted collaboration market for companies with less than 250 users," said Gold. "That market in Cisco's space hasn't

It's the combination of entrepreneurial flare and deep techie geekdom that makes sipsynergy what it is

been well served and, historically, it's been difficult for organisations like ours to deliver a service that was sufficiently repeatable and would meet the requirements of smaller organisations. So we have a fast growing market that's not been well served, and our approach is to build a highly repeatable automated platform and scale into that market using a partner led approach. We've put a tremendous amount of effort into making the partner's life easier."

Automation plays a significant role in Gold's plans and he expects to peak at circa 65 employees. The firm currently works with 50 partners and has almost 10,000 subscribers on its platform. "We want to increase the number of partners we work with, but

our focus is very much on quality rather than quantity," added Gold. "Our two main challenges are to quickly broadcast the message of what sipsynergy is able to offer to our customers and partners in terms of capitalising on the benefits of our platform. Secondly, our ability to innovate needs to be matched by our ability to execute or any potential competitors will catch up. The aim of where we want to get to over the course of the next three-five years is key to our whole company ethos. We want to be universally known as a partner-enabled collaboration provider for the mid-market and SMB

customer space, whatever shape collaboration takes over the course of the next three-five years."

Key decisions

The challenges of the present are more easily overcome by looking forward to a new golden age of communications which draws on the experience and achievements of industry movers such as Gold whose contribution is irrefutable, and often associated with pivotal decisions. "We decided to make a substantial commitment to Cisco's hosted collaboration solution platform and ensure that it was deliverable to our partners, as well as making the conscious decision to be white labelled," commented Gold. "Through our partnership with Cisco, working through resellers

into SMBs, sipsynergy has created one of the first white labelled UCaaS 'Business in a Box' solutions. This has enabled partners to deliver their own branded enterprise class collaboration solutions to small to mid-sized businesses."

Collaboration technology and the marketplace is constantly evolving so another point of focus for sipsynergy is monitoring industry trends and making sure that its roadmap is ahead of the game. "The biggest industry trend impacting us is mobility," stated Gold. "People want the same experience from their corporate collaboration platform as their consumer apps and they want to be able to have access any time, on any device.

"To stay aligned with the market we take a considered approach to keeping our edge on innovation while adding more process and structure around what we do. Our culture is entrepreneurial. We're fortunate to have some of the most gifted developers I've ever seen. It's the combination of entrepreneurial flare and deep techie geekdom that makes sipsynergy what it is."

The expansion of sipsynergy has validated Gold's early assumptions about the growth potential of true collaboration. He looks back on those days as an engineer from the standpoint of a business leader who aims to bring a transformation in the way businesses operate and communicate, typified by an urge to make a difference, not only to sipsynergy, its customers and partners, but also the wider industry. "As a sector I'd like to see

us practice what we preach more, have better access to the full range of talent out there and bring more women into the workplace," he said. "I'd also like to see people be productive while living a fulfilled family life. I don't see why technology needs to be so intrusive. It should support a work-life balance." ■

Just a minute with Toby Gold...

Give one example of something you have overcome:

My father died when I was five years old. That was challenging for both me and my mother, and I wound up being the man of the house aged six

How would you like to be remembered?

As somebody who gave others the opportunity to be as successful as they could be

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I'm a General Aviation pilot in my spare time, flying wherever and whenever the UK weather allows

What do you fear the most?

I'm completely driven by the fear of personal failure

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

Flying. I'd have loved to have been a pilot

What talent do you wish you had?

To be a good dancer

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on?

Perseverance is my biggest strength (and weakness), but sometimes I persevere with things longer than I should

What possession could you not live without?

My dog
Top tip: Fully understand your differentiation and proposition



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Payne opens new goldm

Trailblazer Simon Payne has something of a legendary reputation in the channel for building and selling a number of successful businesses. Now he is applying his Midas touch to Fidelity Energy to open up golden utility opportunities for ICT resellers.

Payne has duplicated the channel focused template he established in telecoms 20 years ago in the utilities sector and believes that comms, IT and mobile resellers should all be helping customers manage their energy services. Payne established Fidelity Energy a year ago on the back of the success he achieved with Cable Telecom, V-Networks and, latterly, Fast Track listed Fidelity Group. Fidelity Energy has already secured over 80 partners in the ICT space, but Payne believes this has only scratched the surface of a veritable gold mine of opportunity for resellers.

“Energy deals represent cash for resellers and it’s in their pocket so it will make a material difference to most of them,” he said. “When we run through the accounts of partners and see the amounts of profits they have made historically, some of them have already made more profits selling energy than they make in telecoms. They simply cannot afford to miss out on this opportunity as it’s so lucrative and so cash generative. Customers are not managing their energy services and are crying out for trusted partners to help them do this, so it’s an attractive value added service to add to their portfolio.

“Of course they do not want to distract from their core business which they need to

maintain to protect existing customers, but it is much easier to sell another service to an existing customer than it is to go out and get a new customer for your core activities. So there’s absolutely no reason not to take advantage of energy. If resellers can sell multiple products into an existing account base they’ll make a lot more money than continually trying to sign up new customers.”

Crucially, Payne’s team has just secured a partnership with British and Scottish Gas which he says takes Fidelity Energy to a new level in terms of brand reassurance and represents a quality ‘door opener’ for reseller partners. “This is a massive deal for us,” stated Payne. “Any potential British Gas partner has to jump through a lot of hoops and tick a lot of boxes before they take somebody on. They want to make sure you have the ability to meet any clawbacks and they go through the exercise with a fine-tooth comb to make sure that everybody that works with them are good partners.

“The reward is that as the market leader in business energy supply, the British Gas brand is so prevalent that to take it to a customer that is already with British Gas and retain them is of course an easy path to winning a customer account. If you haven’t got a British Gas account, you have to move



Simon Payne

them onto one of the other suppliers. This is key for us.”

Reputation

Payne believes the management team’s reputation went a long way to securing the British Gas deal. “They gave us a test

account and we showed them just how powerful we were in the marketplace and how much business we could turn to them,” he added. “We already have a critical mass of business. We are currently doing in excess of £10 million worth of energy

on an annual basis which was enormously attractive to them. In addition, our MD John Haw’s pedigree at Gamma and mine through Cable Telecom, V Networks and the Fidelity Group, together with the guarantees we have been able to put in



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place has enabled the whole thing to come together."

In the 18 months since launch, Fidelity Energy's track record has been impressive with 86 ICT partners signed up and now marketing and selling energy services to their customers. But Payne warns against complacency and the importance of brand protection and ethical selling in the energy supply market. "The attraction is the speed in turning an opportunity into cash," he commented. "But you can't pay out upfront without the fear of clawback and of course the energy companies are naturally cautious with anybody they pay upfront amounts to, so we need to make sure they have the ability to recover the cash should it be necessary."

"There is quite a lot of fraud in the game, bad practise and miss-selling. All the OFGEM reports highlight that there are people who will do anything to make a fast buck and worry about any clawbacks later. Our trust of the channel and the pedigree we have makes a massive difference. We are working with credible people and existing customers. We are not door knocking, we are not out to get a deal at any cost, we are working with people who are endorsing their brand, adding value and taking care of their brand."

"Partners can't be out there ripping profits out of a situation and upsetting customers, because if a customer won't pay the energy company they won't pay the telecoms company because they see it all as being part of the same thing. That's where the problems start coming in, so brand protection is critical."

Some partners have already made more profits selling energy than they make in telecoms

It's for these reasons that Payne and his team have put background processes in place to make sure partner deals go through smoothly. "We realise that there are complexities in the energy market," explained Payne. "It's not as simple as we often make it look. There's lots of things that might happen that make the deal difficult to get through. We don't bother our partners with the background components, we just pull out all the stops to get every single deal connected as fast as possible and make sure the cash gets paid."

Pedigree

"The pedigree of the people we have in the business that have come in with energy experience has been critical to making sure that we preserve and connect every single customer that we get signed. There are many other energy brokers out there that have a ratio of less than 50 per cent in securing a successful connection, and ours is sitting north of 97 per cent."

"There will always be a few that fall out of bed, but generally it's a case of baby sitting the deal to get it over the line. Turning deals into cash for a lot of people is where the

challenge is and we have the team to meet it."

Payne is convinced the key to success in selling energy is the existing relationships ICT resellers have with customers and penetrating the iron wall built around directors by company receptionists and office managers. "Most customers say 'yeah we get ten calls a day from energy brokers and we're not interested'. It's the standard response and it's often at the receptionist level that you get knocked back. But if you have the listening ear of the director it's a piece of cake, because some of the time we are able to save people as much as 50 per cent. For companies that have got £20-30,000 a year on their energy bills that can have a massive impact on the bottom line and it's happening a lot. On average we are saving people 20 per cent on gas and 16.7 per cent on electricity. If we can get the customer's bills from them, we reckon we can do a deal almost every time."

Energy prices do fluctuate which, according to Payne, underlines the importance of Fidelity Energy's recently completed portal which provides real-time prices from all of the major energy companies.

"I was at my son's school the other day and the bursar showed me his energy bill and, using our portal, I got 44 quotes back from 14 different energy suppliers while I was sitting there and showed him that on a three year deal I could save him 18.5 per cent on his annual gas spend of £29,949. That's almost £17k which would pay for a lot of sports equipment or books!" ■

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Vonage pushes into UK

US-based cloud comms giant Vonage has swung its gaze onto the UK reseller channel and linked up with DMSL to drive forward a decisive partner recruitment campaign via the distributor's 300-plus reseller base.

The man at the forefront of Vonage UK's resolute channel building campaign is Managing Director Simon Burckhardt who aims to add more numbers to the company's already impressive set of financial figures and highly populated customer base. In 2015 Vonage generated revenues of \$895 million and boasts more than 70,000 business clients and nearly two million residential customers, all served by its 1,700 people working in global offices. Founded in 2001, Vonage was one of the original providers of residential VoIP services but in 2013 the company pivoted its strategy towards businesses, targeting a range of organisations from single person companies to enterprises with multiple locations.

"Vonage has near iconic brand awareness in the US and has embarked on a strategy to strengthen its presence in the UK," said Burckhardt. "This includes growing our reseller channel. The partnership with DMSL gives us an opportunity to immediately extend the distribution of our cloud

solutions by working with its 300-plus resellers. Our focus is on small businesses, offering them the readily accessible features they need, fast provisioning and an intuitive plug-and-play set up.

"These features include mobile and desktop apps, call recording and conference calling. Today, with the evolution of technology, businesses also require a communications system that allows an increasingly mobile and distributed workforce to maintain a business presence and to be productive any time, anywhere. Employees are no longer tied to the office, and UC enables them to work from any device with clear reliable connectivity and access to the same information and functionality as if they were in the office."

Vonage's acquisition of Nexmo was its springboard into contextual communications, bringing new CPaaS (Communications Platform as a Service) capabilities that are now being leveraged to the full advantage of channel partners and end users, says Burckhardt. The Nexmo API Platform provides tools



Simon Burckhardt

for voice, messaging and phone verification services, allowing developers to embed contextual and programmable communications into mobile apps, websites and business systems. This enables enterprises to more easily communicate relevant information to their customers in real-time, anywhere in the world via text messaging, chat, social media and voice.

"Vonage envisions the future of business communications as a fusion of UCaaS and CPaaS, enabling greater mobility,

productivity and collaboration among employees while helping businesses to stay more closely connected to their customers," commented Burckhardt.

Experience that counts

He joined Vonage in 2012, the latest move in a career that includes other leadership roles in international telecoms companies, namely Telefonica, BT and MTS, based in various locations from Qatar to Moscow and the Czech Republic. He also founded and ran a small business called Route 30 and worked as a board advisor to Cambridge-based start-

up Voipex and Dutch-based Simbrella, a mobile commerce firm. Burckhardt also brings experience in the mobile marketing and CRM sectors. "I'm passionate about how technology can facilitate businesses, particularly through cloud-based services," he enthused. "By creating a complete solution that considers the business need for mobility, video and software integration with voice as a platform, we can deliver enhanced mobility and productivity for employees where location and device become irrelevant."

Burckhardt's immediate priority is to push Vonage's portfolio deep into the UK via the build-out of a reseller channel based on mutually beneficial partnerships. "Vonage chose DMSL as a partner for its ability to identify, recruit and engage with its nationwide network of resellers who understand the value of cloud communications," he explained. "Our partners in the channel will help us to not only meet the needs of small businesses but also manage customer relationships as our reach grows in the UK market.

"In turn, together with DMSL we are providing a one-stop shop for our partners. Those selling cloud services in the past needed to work with multiple providers depending on whether they wanted to offer a quick-to-provision simple voice service with BYOD, a larger multi-location solution over a private MPLS network, or cloud services beyond voice, such as virtual desktop and virtual server offerings. Vonage is able to provide our partners, and their customers, with all of those services." ■



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NIX COMMUNICATIONS GROUP ACQUIRES OPUS TELECOM AND PHIPPS COMMUNICATIONS IN A MULTI MILLION POUND DEAL

Ambitious, award-winning telecoms company, NIX Communications Group, has purchased Opus Telecom Ltd and its subsidiary Phipps Communications Ltd in deals which are set to double the size of the company and take its turnover to nearly £12 million a year.



This deal is great news for our customers who will enjoy access to the same quality of service that they've come to expect from Opus and Phipps



Mark Castle



We are set to embark on many more acquisitions in the coming years, so I would be very interested in hearing from any telecoms companies thinking of selling their base



Nick Zammit

NIX Director, Nick Zammit, said: "The first half of 2016 has seen yet more success for us, and the NIX brand is building fast. Completing on our first two acquisitions has made us stronger than ever. We have also just finalised our purchase of a large commercial building in Romsey, Hampshire, which we plan to turn into the first NIX Business Centre. This will be a hub for start-up and small businesses, helping them to hit the ground running. NIX will provide all telecoms, business calls, line rentals and a super-fast 100MG lease line for each room, for a fixed fee each month and all with no commitment. This will just take the NIX brand to another level."

The two acquisitions mark an important step in NIX's history as Nick Zammit intends that these are the first of many. He said: "We are

set to embark on many more acquisitions in the coming years, so I would be very interested in hearing from any telecoms companies thinking of selling their base. You'll be assured of a sensible discussion and a 'no churn' offering."

Managing Director of OPUS and Phipps Communications, Mark Castle, has always had a good relationship with Nick Zammit, and they have remained in contact with each other since 1996 when they worked together. He said: "This deal is great news for our customers who will enjoy access to the same quality of service that they've come to expect from Opus and Phipps, with the added reassurance that we have the backing of a larger organisation with additional skills and expertise."

Nick Zammit added: "The key to

the NIX success story is our approach to customers, providing them with a solution that gives them an edge over their competitors. Every member of the NIX team is passionate about making customers, not sales, and this is what businesses love about us. We have been named Unify's top reseller, hitting the top spot for the third year running. We are smashing records and building a brand like no other company in the sector."

NIX is always on the look-out for high calibre staff, as these are fundamental to the company's continuing success. Nick Zammit added: "I would urge anyone in the telecoms sector who is thinking of a career move to get in touch; if you're a dynamic, self-starter, passionate about delivering the best service, I'd love to hear from you."

"The NIX family, as we describe ourselves, have deep rooted loyalty to the business and love the work ethic of the company and our plans to be the best. We look after our staff well, we recognise each individual's skill set and we don't take people for granted. We operate a 'work hard play hard' attitude so it's a fun place to spend your days."



Call me, Nick Zammit (Senior Partner) on 0800 193 7700 today to discuss the possibilities of selling your base to NIX.

CHANNEL DIAMONDS LINE UP

On October 13th the great and the good of the ICT industry will gather for the most glamorous, exciting and fun packed evening on the 2016 calendar – The Comms National Awards finals night!

This year, the CN Awards finals night returns to the lavish ballroom at London's Hilton on Park Lane Hotel and as ever, the hospitality will be first class.

The Comms National Awards is recognised as the evening channel people gather to celebrate excellence, network with industry friends and truly enjoy themselvesso don't miss it, there's still time to book your table or place at the event now by calling Sophie Timms on 01895 454 476.



Nine takes top position again as headline sponsor



Mark Saunders

LEADING service provider, Nine Wholesale, is delighted to reprise its headline sponsorship of the Comms National Awards at The Hilton, Park Lane on Thursday 13th October.



According to Nine Group's Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, renewing their sponsorship of the awards for a fourth year was "a straightforward decision which reinforces our commitment to the channel and our love of a great night out".

The standard of entries was truly exceptional last year, so the winners will have had to work extremely hard to achieve success this year and Saunders stated, "I look forward to meeting and heartily congratulating them all. This is a truly memorable evening, reflecting the innovation, excellence and energy in our sector, with no doubt many well-known characters taking to the stage, as well as some welcome newbies."

Nine Wholesale also sponsors a special award to recognise outstanding customer service, which was won last year by Lily Coms. This award is presented to the reseller who can truly demonstrate that everything in their business is led by the customer's perspective and how they have remodelled and transformed their business to achieve this.

"The availability of just about any information on line has finally enabled the age of the customer," said Saunders. "Our award can only be secured if the customer recognises the excellence of the service delivered, not the reseller who advertises it. Personalised customer engagement and messaging are now essential, while marketing teams who continue to broadcast indiscriminately across random media channels should consider themselves irrelevant, if not obsolete."

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celebrate alongside other world class communications' providers.

"We want to provide our customers with the best unified communications solutions on offer. The key to this is finding the right partners to work with and the appropriate companies to acquire so that we are at the forefront of industry innovations. We are excited to have secured a further £20 million to invest in the right acquisitions this year.

"Now is a good time to come together to celebrate our successes, share knowledge and meet each other face to face. Our own growth would not have been possible without our partners many of whom are up for awards. We wish all of the nominees' good luck and look forward to meeting and talking more."

ALEX CLIFFE, COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR,
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"Marston's Telecoms is delighted to be sponsoring the IoT/Wireless category at this year's Comms National Awards. As an emerging business ourselves, we're proud to be supporting an award

category which celebrates such a fast growing industry. With so much innovative technology coming from the IoT and Wireless markets, we're looking forward to finding out which of the finalists will be successful on the night.

"Our own success to date is down to our channel resellers and the strong relationships that we've built. The Comms National Awards is a fantastic opportunity to celebrate these kind of achievements and we're thrilled to be part of an event that truly recognises excellence in the channel. We wish the very best of luck to all of the finalists and we look forward to celebrating everyone's achievements on the night!"

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Tech trends show that dig



On digitalisation, where technology leads, channel firms must follow and build business models for the future. Here, Comms Visionaries discuss the primary catalysts for going digital, the goals, challenges and opportunities, and the gulf that will open between digital and non-digital businesses.

Digitalisation is starting to deliver and businesses are experiencing a great transformation across the board. According to Lorrin White, Managing Director at Bamboo Technology Group, the primary goals for business transformation should be to relieve pain points and help enable opportunities. "Digital transformation is fundamentally about doing or achieving more from less," she said. "The benefits are clear, whether the aim is to achieve more revenue from more efficient operations, cost reduction, stretching geographic and industry reach or extending the capacity for digital channel business."

Automating traditional manual workflows is one aspect of digitalisation that is being undertaken at Bamboo. This doesn't mean changing business models, rather an opportunity to look at the culling of multiple manual platforms. "While you still run the same process you can remove the room for error, refocus the resource onto more partnership centric activities and create a unique service proposition," she added. "Taking a business from manual systems

of record to automated systems of innovation is a core part of our strategy as we press forward into new markets. We must be able to demonstrate the benefits in-house to ensure our people truly understand the opportunities it creates."

When pursuing a digital strategy one big challenge is the justification of investment in new digitalisation against the maintenance of old modes of operation, pointed out White. "IT decision makers need to look at where savings can be made in culling legacy systems, repetition and nuance reporting in order to redirect those funds to digitalisation budgets," she added. "But with enterprise businesses citing IT leadership, IT security and data management as their top challenges for the coming years, skills, support and strategy will need to come first – and strategic leadership will be fundamental to the pace of change within those companies."

The challenge of digitalisation that faces business leaders should first be addressed by looking at customers, believes White. "We all operate customer journeys that involve huge amounts



Lorrin White

Digital transformation is fundamentally about doing or achieving more from less

of time, require attention to detail, demand quality and need to be auditable," she explained. "With all this in mind, we simply have to ask, how easy it for our customers to do business with us? Can we integrate our business around our customers? Do we share relevant dashboards and alerts to provide transparency? Do we offer the best possible customer experience? If not, where

can we improve and how can digitalisation help?"

Clearly, digital transformation isn't limited to improving internal phone systems or simply re-mapping the way a business communicates with its customers. However, from the customer's point of view these are fundamental steps to making measurable improvements, observes Charles Aylwin, Director of

Channel and Public Sector at 8x8. "We work with a lot of businesses that want to radically change the way that their company works for the better," he said. "That includes making the way they work more efficient, saving costs and empowering their people with new tools. They're all aiming to enable their organisations to be more competitive and agile."

Aylwin agrees that the starting point for digitalisation is understanding what the customer is trying to achieve. "Often they recognise that their existing ways of working are holding them back, and that the tools they're using are part of the reason for this, along with time honoured 'we've always done it this way' processes," he explained. "Through our partners we're able to have conversations with companies of all sizes about what's possible and how technology can enable them to communicate and collaborate in ways that are appropriate for the world they're now facing."

For many, the status quo isn't a viable strategic option so 8x8 plans, together with customers, how to reduce the risks associated with introducing a new strategy.

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Digitalisation is everything

"The fear of change is one of the most common barriers, but happily we can show that this isn't the reality," added Aylwin. "The trick is to tackle the perception head on, map out what the changes will look like and how these deliver the vision customers want to implement. One of the fundamental aspects is to give them an agile and flexible environment that allows them to adapt to the changes they're seeing inside and outside their own business. We're seeing this across all sectors. For example, we're supporting local councils with their digital strategies as well as SMEs and corporate customers aiming to re-wire how they interact with their internal and external audiences."

Automation

Digital transformation is about achieving increased efficiency while stimulating creativity in the workplace, and the drive towards automation is very real, observed James Hennah, Sales Director for Channel and Carriers at BT Wholesale, who also noted that the IoT is in its infancy but clearly going to have a



Charles Aylwin

"The fear of change is one of the most common barriers."

major impact on business strategy. "The fundamental platforms have to be ready for that," he stated. "How does any business prepare for this kind of future? Yes, there are cloud-based apps to help improve workflow, increase communications through messaging and even share documents, but in the scheme of transformation they seem nothing more than a short-term solution. If the goal of transformation is to reduce costs while improving efficiencies, accountability and accuracy, then the goal should be to continue to build more robust and secure networks and applications, rather than simply assume that web apps equal transformation."

The biggest challenge faced by companies wanting to pursue a digital strategy is cultural, according to Hennah. "How do you get everyone on the same page? You need a directive to come from the top down so that it becomes a strategy with proper funding," he added. "If you don't, you end up with a half-baked transformation driven by various managers with vested interests. It's about choosing the right technology to solve specific business problems and to meet business goals, not choose the technology and shoe horn it into various departments because it's a 'cool tech to use'. Transformation is about moving the business forward. The technology is an enabler. Deciding on the direction and which technologies fit best is always a challenge, but not an insurmountable one."



IT TAKES VISION TO BE A LEADER

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The primary goal of digital transformation is to deliver real value to the business and the customer, noted Stephen Warburton, Managing Director of Indirect Channels at Zen. "The word 'transform' should be used carefully," he stated. "Change can be transformational but it's more of an evolution than a revolution. Typically, a business gradually moves to a different way of operating that steadily delivers new sources of revenue, opens up new markets, creates an opportunity to innovate and differentiate and delivers improvements in operational efficiency. Digital transformation can increase margins and, most importantly, lead to

a better user experience. But for many companies this isn't trivial and doesn't happen overnight."

Warburton reiterated that investments in IT can sometimes be seen as a



James Hennah

"Deciding on the direction and which technologies fit best is always a challenge, but not an insurmountable one."

'nice to have' rather than an enabler that will deliver real business benefits. "Despite many success stories of businesses that have increased sales, reduced operating costs, improved margin and increased customer satisfaction through IT innovation, it shouldn't be taken for granted that such investments will sail through," he added. "Another key challenge is education. Many businesses are not aware of how to take advantage of new technologies. Technology can sometimes seem intimidating, and some businesses don't know where to start. I also think there is a challenge with understanding user and customer expectations. Continued on page 48



Hospitality sponsors



Continued from page 47

They are changing quickly, with their demands increasing exponentially. Those businesses that don't recognise this and change accordingly face the real risk of being left behind."

Enterprise digitalisation is about changing or tweaking a business model to ensure that the opportunities of selling via the Internet are fully leveraged, and that traditional go to market models aren't taken over by new entrants with digital-only strategies, believes Richard Bligh, Chief Operating

Officer at Gamma. "In an increasingly competitive market where competition is hot, telecoms providers must find new ways to increase growth and profitability, and digitisation can help address this," he stated.

Bligh cited a recent study (McKinsey – 2015 Telecom IT Diagnostic) that found a strong correlation between profit margin and five select areas of IT: Robust customer analytics, digitisation of order management, self-service customer relationship management, a simplified IT application landscape

and automation of IT infrastructure management. The study found that telecoms providers with digital capabilities in these five areas boast a profit margin of 43 per cent, while those with less digitisation have a profit margin of 21 per cent (on average).

"Measurable goals are key to successful digital transformation," stated Bligh. "If a digital go to market strategy is not implemented correctly with solid metrics in place for measuring success, it's easy to lose sight of your goals along the way. A key aim of moving towards a digital strategy is making businesses easier to buy from and ensuring that the fulfilment of services is streamlined, from the point of order to billing, self-care customer service and support tools."

Going digital is different for every organisation and presents unique challenges for each in terms of defining their strategy, acquiring the right skills and talent, setting the processes and delivering innovation. "The foundation of any digitalisation strategy should be a full and proper understanding of the customer base and how they want to interact with your business," commented Bligh. "Digital savvy customers expect more. They want to be self-sufficient, have access to information anywhere at any time, and be able to contact you 24/7 from home, work, or wherever they may be. And they expect compelling, seamless and integrated experiences across all communications channels. Consistency is key. That said, while more and more people are embracing digital, giving customers a choice is vital to guard against isolating those still in favour of more traditional methods."

Acquiring the right skills and processes to go digital is an important building block, particularly for those who are not digital natives. To implement a successful digital strategy, companies should fully embrace the idea of a transformation that extends across all parts of the organisation. This means establishing rapid decision making and escalation processes to match the digital way of working and exploring the use of new standards for contract elements and terms and conditions.

Achieving buy-in

"Some employees may, unsurprisingly, feel threatened by the impact of digitalisation," added Bligh. "It's important that these concerns are addressed. Much like the requirement to understand your customers' needs, listening to and taking on board staff concerns is key to getting their buy-in and not leaving them behind. It's all well and good having a strategy defined, digital resources in place and processes agreed, but without the buy-in from existing staff, digital success is unlikely."

Business leaders should also make sense of enterprise

digitalisation by assessing the success of the digital-only businesses around them and working out how they can adapt their own model to fit the needs and wants of their market, advised Bligh. Such astute observations will help organisations to re-imagine their operations and processes, and build on strategies based on the customers' perspective. Darren Hilton, Director of Partner Services at Timico Partner Services, commented: "The key is listening and reacting to customer demands as they change the way they want to consume products," he stated. "They want instant access to information by browsing to relevant content, maybe visiting a shop to view a product, making their own informed decision and then researching back online to find a deal with the best value for money. The power is in the hands of the consumer. They are spoilt and expect instant access to all we have to offer.

"You have to digitally transform your business to remain agile and relevant and ultimately win the customer from your competition. A small start-up has access to all of the tools that a large

JOINING UP THE BUSINESS DOTS



ENTERPRISE digitalisation is an unstoppable wave of technological advancement that is rebooting the future of work. At Daisy, we call it 'joining a business's dots'. If businesses don't get their digital strategy right they risk getting everything wrong. Great digital businesses put technology right at the heart of what they do, and then work outwards. They challenge

everything about the way they do things, see the bigger picture and understand it's not just about what they make or sell, it's about the data that process generates.

Think of great businesses like Boeing or GE. They're both great engineering names. They're both manufacturers with a global pedigree. But now they sell jet engines as a service. Airlines never actually own one. They just rent. It's the same with Tesla and cars. You don't really own your Tesla, everything is upgraded as part of a service contract. Batteries are replaced when they're tired. You wake up one morning and it's a self-drive car. And every drive you make enables Tesla to map the self-drive world. And what about Uber? It's not a 'thing', it's just a platform with micro sensors that tie together the great forces of digitalisation – cloud, mobile, social and Big Data analytics. It's capable of changing any industry, not just the place we book a ride.

Tinkering at the edges won't cut it. Making a few tweaks to existing processes and products won't scratch the surface. Businesses need to tune into the fact that digitalisation is the only thing that will give them the agility and resilience to operate in tomorrow's business context.

Nathan Marke, Chief Digital Officer, Daisy Group



Richard Bligh

"The foundation of any digitalisation strategy should be a full and proper understanding of the customer base and how they want to interact with your business."



Darren Hilton

"Any size of business has access to infrastructure and cloud-based applications with minimal up-front costs or lengthy delays for installation, which lowers the barrier to entry."

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enterprise has – instantly. Any size of business has access to infrastructure and cloud-based applications with minimal up-front costs or lengthy delays for installation, which massively lowers the barrier to entry and allows them to compete in any market. There are some key areas that a business needs to focus on to achieve digital fluency and unless these are addressed it will be difficult to achieve the agility required to serve consumers in a fast-paced transaction environment.”

These challenges include legacy systems – having to operate within the confinements of a clunky system that cannot easily adapt to new products or processes. And having multiple systems that don't talk to each other or share data won't provide the customer with a seamless experience that is personalised to them, which is what they expect. “It is vital to transform to a hybrid infrastructure that enables customers to manage their data across traditional on-site hardware and private and public cloud,” added Hilton. “Customers want access to their data and in turn gain insights which will enable companies to keep up with and stay ahead of the competition. If you can't offer robust, secure, affordable and easy to access storage for data analytics to your customers, you are behind the curve.”

As we have seen, digital tools improve collaboration, promote greater operational efficiency and harness more of an organisation's data for strategic advantage. While the term 'enterprise digitalisation' does capture these trends, the goals of the business are the same as they have always been, according

to Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business. “The key is for organisations to get the best business value from digital strategies and ultimately better serve their customers,” she said. “This means that new technology must help consolidate existing investments, make more of their expanding and increasingly global workforce and remain flexible for whatever further technological changes or new customer demands come down the line.

“Digital technologies like the cloud have led to a massive increase in the speed at which resellers can start offering new services. But technologies like these are reliant on a fast and reliable Internet connection to be successful. More businesses are connecting remote workers based at different locations and accessing IT and phone systems based out of the office, so they are increasingly reliant on the network to deliver the next generation of services.”

There are a range of technologies that are promising exciting opportunities for the channel to drive new revenues from digitalisation, believes



“We're seeing increasingly complex IP VPN projects being introduced to us by channel partners, which shows that businesses want access to information quickly and securely.”

Tempest. “Technologies like Next Generation IP VPN are helping to meet the challenges of real-time applications by allowing partners to offer more tools and flexibility to their customers,” she added. “The move to IP is giving enterprises the agility that is essential for doing business and harness the 'power of now' to respond effectively to new customer demands and market influences that can now span the globe in a matter of seconds.”

Entanet's experience of workplace digitalisation reflects Tempest's observations, and is centred around business customers moving everything to the cloud, principally for ease and speed of access and to improve customer service. “A consequence of this is that businesses can provide a better overall customer experience which makes them more competitive in their respective markets,” stated Darren Farnden, Head of Marketing, Entanet.

Key drivers

“The driver behind this is that we're all used to having access to information at the tap of a fingertip. In the business environment this is even more important. Speed to market isn't just about releasing products or services in a timely fashion, it's also about how quickly you can provide a service to a customer. We're seeing increasingly complex IP VPN projects being introduced to us by our channel partners, which clearly demonstrates that businesses want access to information quickly and securely.

“Organisations must also ensure that the connectivity they adopt is suitable for the needs of their digital strategy. For some, this will mean a

complex solution involving virtual private networks and Ethernet connectivity, while for others a business grade broadband connection will be sufficient. It's important for channel resellers to recognise these differences and design solutions that meet the specific needs of each individual customer.”

Data security is one of the greatest challenges that companies undergoing digitalisation will face, believes Farnden, an issue that will become even more important with the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). “Unless a company is in the business of providing hosting, it's unlikely that it will be able to serve all of its own data, a problem that is directly proportional to the company's size,” he said. “Instead, it'll need to hand over its data to machinery owned and maintained by a third party. The consequence of these challenges is that businesses need to work with a solution provider – and in turn a reseller's service provider

– that has the credentials, experience, longevity and trustworthiness enough to inspire confidence.”

Paul Taylor, Sales Director at Voiceflex, has witnessed the growth of digitalisation across all forms of customer interface, and most notable is the move away from voice communication to WebRTC applications. “Extending the digital process to the front end customer facing function will require different skills to retain and grow the company,” he commented. “The major problem is staff buying into the process. We all still need good people, but the way they are deployed is very different in the digital age. Their interaction with other staff has and will continue to change.”

The industry and technology issues discussed in this article, and many more, will be explored and debated during this year's gold standard Comms Vision Convention. To register your interest in attending the event please visit www.commsvision.com TeleWare on technology, p50

PARTNERING STRATEGIES EVOLVE



WE ARE finding that having the right partners in place is just as important as having the right platform available, whether on-premise or in the cloud. In fact, the partner element of the equation is probably the most critical driver behind our growth in the mid-market. We have invested significantly in product development and acquisition for the mid-market, where call recording is not only important as a tick-box feature but often carries particular requirements around encryption, PCI compliance, on-premise management and storage that a generic hosted offering can't always accommodate. We are also seeing more sophisticated needs like Workforce Optimisation and Quality Metrics come to the fore as customers seek to improve performance. Our established partners get this, and as the market evolves so does our partnering strategy.

James Emm, joint CEO, Oak Innovation



Millar talks technology

Assessing the various ways to master and monetise new and emerging technologies must become routine among comms and IT resellers, says Paul Millar, Chief Innovation Officer at TeleWare. Here, he highlights the steps he is taking to address areas such as the public cloud, data analytics, nurturing innovation, machine learning and Artificial Intelligence.

One of the main threats to established comms and IT channels is the cloud and the ability for customers to self-serve what they need to run their business, according to Millar. Everything – email, storage, CRM, and now voice services – is becoming more widely available in the cloud, including PSTN connectivity, whether Skype for Business included inside Office 365 or from other suppliers utilising WebRTC and other Over-the-top (OTT) suppliers, such as Whatsapp, observed Millar. “The expertise of established comms and IT channel businesses still plays a vital role in building the right cloud infrastructure and services, so they need to utilise their knowledge in a way that complements and enhances these cloud services to deliver what each business needs,” he said.

Public cloud platforms such as Microsoft Azure, Amazon AWS, IBM Watson and HP Havenondemand allow businesses to bring best of breed services together to create new and exciting products, streamline processes and make big improvements to how they deal with end customers and partners. “They also benefit employees, giving them the best tools to do their job,” added Millar.

TeleWare is in the process of moving all of its internal



Paul Millar

The future opportunity is to drive the data and insight from emerging technologies

services (email, CRM, Sharepoint, support system etc) up into the public cloud to allow 24/7 access to the things people need to do. “It also means employees can work wherever they are, on any device they want, which enhances the customer’s experience and facilitates a better work life balance,” explained Millar. “From a business continuity point of view, these new advances enable businesses to offer higher levels of support and customer interaction, and makes them more resilient to challenges.”

Being dynamic, curious and collaborative are three of TeleWare’s values. The company encourages

colleagues to explore areas of interest outside of their ‘business as usual’ responsibilities and to find ways in which they can innovate within the business, whether that be in product, technology, business process or any other area of the company. “We have Innovation Friday afternoons where everyone can investigate new technologies, build prototypes, map process change and form collaboration sessions,” said Millar. “We want to encourage employees to do something a bit different.”

Innovation platform

TeleWare is implementing a full end-to-end Innovation platform that allows ideas to

be shared and collaborated on throughout the working week, which can then feed into Innovation sessions on Friday. “The idea is that these will then feed into the product pipeline and business improvement process, which will undoubtedly benefit our channel partners and customers,” added Millar. “TeleWare is also looking to build further connections with its channel partners by demonstrating and installing prototypes into their own innovation spaces to combine and enhance joint efforts.”

Technological impact

Data analytics and machine learning/AI are real emerging technologies that are going to have a major impact on how we work and live, according to Millar. “People have been talking about Big Data but not necessarily always delivering the insight and learning that can help businesses grow and improve, as well as providing a far better service,” he added. “We collect and store a huge amount of data and have been providing insights to clients for many years. But, as we start doing more specific data analysis and visualisation there are even more insights that we can find. We can then explore these with our customers and partners.

“The future opportunity is to leverage the data and insight from these emerging technologies to drive greater business benefits and then

look to automate processes and communication channels. The customer can therefore receive the best possible customer experience, making the customer (and their supplier) stand out from the competition.”

TeleWare is building systems and processes in its own private cloud, but also integrating with public cloud services to deliver the best possible solutions that a hybrid model can bring. “These new services do bring technical challenges which need to be overcome, but they are allowing us to very quickly try, test and confirm whether different technologies and services can bring the real benefits we envisage,” commented Millar. “It also allows us to innovate and fail fast without the fear of costs spiralling and time being lost on projects that don’t then deliver.”

TeleWare is also investigating how Bots can change the way in which it works and operates, again giving greater levels of information and data, at the right time, to customers, partners and employees. “A lot of this can be built on the back of data analytics, machine learning and AI,” said Millar. “The challenge is finding the best way to deliver this to the customer so they can have real-time interaction at the times they want and need it, rather than being limited to defined time windows.” ■



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Luminet courts channel

Luminet CEO Sasha Williamson's new tactics mark a fresh approach to channel partnerships founded on a combination of vision, capability and determination.

Williamson's prevailing narrative indicates that he is clearly moving his business towards the channel to expand Luminet's routes to market via partners and wholesale. His outlook shows that he has not only seen what is possible growth-wise via partnerships but also the potential advantages to be gained from heterogeneous networks. "We want to be the leaders in intelligent managed services, pioneering a new approach to telecoms," he said. "We see a huge opportunity in heterogeneous networks and developing a neural host strategy."

In support of his statement Williamson also showed a determination to build on a new partnership with CCS that will see Luminet develop one of the first self-organising networks in a Tier One global city. "We see this as an industry game-changer in how mobile operators can scale with the ongoing increase in mobile data demand in urban areas," stated Williamson.

At this point the discussion moves from tactical logic and intent to capabilities and propositions. "Our big opportunity is to scale with larger partners and provide systems support for automation and sustainability," explained

Williamson. "Our most popular channel products include co-location and business Internet services. We have recently launched the Fibre Air product, a wireless business Internet service that can be installed in as little as five working days. Partners reselling traditional fibre leased lines typically have to wait around 90 days for installation. With Fibre Air they can offer customers up to 2GB symmetrical broadband Internet connectivity almost straight away, which means they can immediately start billing."

He emerges as a figure in tune with techno-power and its potential to transform businesses while at the same time advancing Luminet's strategic cause. "We're driving our market penetration, developing new routes to market for wholesale and increasing our geographical presence," he emphasised.

Insights into Williamson's strategic thoughts recall past experiences that are very much in play today. "My career started in bulk purchasing for major European telecoms users and since then I have worked with a number of successful telcos including Broadband4U, Primus, Worldcom and ETT (now GTT)," he said. "Luminet is my most recent venture and my cross-functional experience in



Sasha Williamson

telecoms has helped me in this current role."

Luminet started life as Urban WiMax in 2007, an intelligent managed services provider offering organisations connectivity, communications, computing and security services. It was founded by Williamson and a management team that had strong experience within the telecoms and IT industries, holding key executive and technical roles in companies such as Telewest, ETT, CitiGroup, Orange and BT.

Investment

"From the outset we had an impressive 61 per cent CAGR," noted Williamson. "We have since weathered an economic crash and in May 2015 announced our rebrand to Luminet in line with an investment of £2.15 million through Santander's Breakthrough programme. Our turnover has

grown every year since our inception and the funding enabled us to continue to innovate and develop our connectivity solution."

The financing from Santander enabled Luminet to accelerate its growth and develop a new product portfolio, including a LLU network and enhanced Fixed Wireless Access infrastructure. "We also offer intelligent PaaS value added services," said Williamson. "And provide services such as Insight, optimisation and control of any applications on any connectivity services. We pride ourselves on our 100 per cent SLA service for cloud and mission critical services, as well as the visibility and control we offer on any application on any connectivity with our intelligent PaaS."

Williamson says he has found an exciting course, one where

a customer-centric culture permeates every aspect of the business. "Luminet currently has 550-plus customers and 70 partnerships," he added. "We have 50-80 per cent capacity in our data centres and 100 per cent core network uptime. We employ 28 members of staff in our central London office and are growing at a fantastic rate of 27 per cent per year. We align and empower our staff to the customer journey relationship and our transactional interaction, which is rated across four key measures at each stage. This has resulted in an improvement in our NPS score of nine to 42 over the last three years." ■

Just a minute with Sasha Williamson...

Role model: Richard Branson. He is the ultimate figurehead in going from zero to hero

What talent do you wish you had? To make sure that everyone on my team is stronger, more experienced and better than me

Your strengths and what could you work on? I have strength of vision, energy and self-discipline, but they always need working on

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I held 6,000 parties in six nightclubs between 1990-95: Funk, hip hop and jazz

What do you fear the most? When the plumb line of integrity isn't straight

One example of something you have overcome: Others telling me you can't do it

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



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Distributors are having

Software and cloud based communications is an undeniable mega-trend sweeping the ITC landscape. Enterprises are moving spend away from traditional hardware and customers are attracted to the zero-upfront infrastructure investments and rapid speed-to-market that hosted and software comms solutions enable.

In this on-demand or subscription-based world, is there a need for the classic distribution role as a 'bank' and a 'warehouse'? What is their future value to vendors and their reseller customers?

The future appears not to be doom and gloom for according to a survey carried out by the Global Technological Distribution Council, more than 70% of managed service providers said they are turning to distributors for all types of services and they see the distributor value increasing in the cloud.

The 2016 'PartnerPath State of Partnering' study asked more



than 200 partner respondents where they're leveraging distribution and the return on investment of these efforts. On the high end of the graph, partners were leveraging technical support while, in the

midrange, partners leveraged distribution for programme activation and support, sales training, technical training, technical sales resources and sales support resources, and cloud services enablement.

On this evidence, coupled with the continued popularity of secure legacy hardware solutions, it would appear that distributors will adapt and survive and our contributors to this month's Kaleidoscope concur.



MIRIAM MURPHY
AVNET TECHNOLOGY
SOLUTIONS

“ There is a shift towards next-generation and supporting technologies. While cloud, mobility, security and enterprise networking have been elements of solutions for some time, now they are driving demand in their own right. Opportunities arising through the growth of Internet of Things, have led Avnet to create a solutions specialist approach to help partners evolve their businesses to align with this shift. Initiatives such as Avnet's Cloud Marketplace will continue to change the model of distribution. Incorporating comprehensive cloud solutions from global cloud providers and a variety of flexible payment models, Avnet's Cloud Marketplace fundamentally changes how partners can help end-users become cloud-enabled. ”



NICK SHRAGA
CLOUD 100 & NSN

“ The launch of Cloud 100 has pretty much been our answer to this change in the market place. Moreover, it has been a development that complements NSN's own cloud strategy of moving clients from conventional telephony hardware to off-premise type solutions i.e. hosted telephony, IaaS etc. The financial shift is clearly from Capex to Opex. Rather than paying costs up front and then struggling to digest the costs in time to fully leverage the new technology, businesses can expand or contract as needed. Our model has had to change and adapt but we are now able to offer a full solution, across two brands, whilst keeping the client using cutting edge technology without unwieldy capital expenditure. ”

OK, let's grow

We're all in this world to grow. Here at Total we've been preparing for a better tomorrow, taking a new perspective on growth. We've got a new identity and a fresh spring in our step.

to move with the times



JOHN CARTER
DMSL

“ DMSL has not had to change its business model as it was based on driving recurring services revenues from the outset. This is the way things have been moving for many years, to a sustainable business model based on monthly recurring income. Our role is to bring services and solutions to market, drive new business opportunities for resellers, and support them in fulfilling the requirements of end-user customers. Services-led, subscription-driven business is the way forward and yes, the cloud is forcing many distributors to think and act differently. We will still need product distributors, but the margins on reselling hardware all but disappeared a long time ago. For businesses that have not responded already, it might be too late. ”



RICHARD CARTER
NIMANS

“ Our PBX sales remain in great shape despite coming under increased pressure and the growing influence of the Cloud has triggered a huge rise in demand for IP end points and this will continue to accelerate. Nimans is a bastion of delivery and service excellence which makes us ideally placed to take the whole ITC support process to a dynamic new level – from start to finish. Our end-to-end IP deployment and support solution begins with pre-sales support and proof of concept and goes right through to after sales remote management and configuration of customer’s estates. It includes ‘zero touch’ handset provisioning and also features training workshops and equipment buyback facilities. As the ‘Logistics Engine of the Industry’ Nimans continues to evolve and innovate. ”



WILL MOREY
PRAGMA

“ As Mark Twain said ‘Rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated’ and this is certainly the case in ICT distribution. At Pragma we continue to see very strong growth in both our on-premise hardware and cloud businesses. ICT distribution has constantly adapted over the years and this is just another evolution of how it needs to change to meet the needs of resellers. By focussing on providing the support services, tools and programmes resellers need to win in the market our role is about reseller enablement rather than just classic distribution. With the reseller channel still being the dominant route to market for SME and mid-market technologies we think this business model remains as relevant today as it always has been. ”



DARREN GARLAND
PROVU

“ ProVu has been slowly changing its business model in order to incorporate Cloud technologies and services to sit alongside its traditional Customer Premise Equipment offerings. Despite an increase in demand, a lot of these technologies still require the wrap around services that a value added distributor offers. This plays into ProVu’s hands very nicely. Far sighted vendors realise that certain Cloud based products still need to partner with good distributors in order to manage the channel, create awareness and provide training and support for their products at a local level. Cloud technologies will play an ever increasing role in the communications industry, the key for any distributor to remain relevant is to offering supporting services to compliment these products. ”



LEE WILSON
SQUARE 1

“ IDC figures for Q1 this year showed that spending on cloud infrastructure accounted for a third of all IT spending. This will lead to new opportunities for distribution in hyper-convergence solutions as more people move to a software centralised architecture and in storage, as well as still offering opportunities for networking requirements and connectivity solutions. There will be a massive growth in VOIP solutions as PSTN and ISDN lines are phased out and resellers will still require support for cloud-related services. Many also still need distributors to help fill the technical gaps they might have and also to help them by taking on relationship-brokering services with other providers of resellers of cloud services. The distribution model is not dead yet! ”



MICHAEL LLOYD
NUVOLA DISTRIBUTION

“ There is no doubt the major change in the UC sector is cloud. From Nuvola’s viewpoint we have grabbed this opportunity and launched various products and services to meet these demands. We see the changes in our sector as huge opportunities. We are constantly hearing of a high demand for ‘Everything as a Service’ along with a consumption based pricing models. Resellers who are ‘born-in-the-cloud’ and others that are migrating and building their own services and cloud environments all require support and we are working with them in selling a combination of products and services, alongside the Internet of Things. All this combined is fuelling unprecedented change in the market and at Nuvola we’re riding the UC wave! ”

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CityFibre builds team COLT scores hire hat-trick



Martin Kemp

CITYFIBRE'S influence in the public sector will be more strongly felt following the appointment of Martin Kemp as Head of Public Sector engagement. For the past three years he operated as BT Client Partner within the public sector running a key partnership contract, a role that followed a stint as BT Group's Business Development Director supporting the BDUK rollouts in 12 UK regions. Prior to that he spent 10 years in carrier sales within BT Wholesale working with some of BT's largest customers.

"The opportunity that CityFibre's existing fibre footprint and network build approach present to the public sector are significant," he said. "Being part of bringing that opportunity to life and seeing towns and cities across the UK reap the benefits made my decision to join CityFibre very easy."

Also joining CityFibre is Paul Tanner as new Head of Pre-sales. He moved from Virgin Media Business where he was Pre-sales Manager for Business Network Services, a national role leading a team of Cisco LAN consultants specialising in collaboration, data centre and routing/switching. Prior to this Tanner was Pre-sales Manager for Business Markets. Previously he filled a Project Engineering role at Telewest, was a Planning Manager for General Cable Group and undertook various roles at Mercury Communications and BT.

Tanner said: "I was attracted to CityFibre by its fresh approach to market opportunities, its can-do attitude, flexible and intelligent network, ability to meet partners' needs and the buzz I got from meeting the passionate team."



Paul Tanner



Tom Regent

COLT has bolstered its executive line-up with a trio of key hires including the appointment of Tom Regent as Chief Commercial Officer. His remit is to lead

Colt's global sales, pre-sales and marketing teams. Regent joins from BT Global Services where he held a number of senior roles, most recently acting as President, Global Banking and Financial Markets. Prior to that he was President of Sales and Marketing, responsible for worldwide sales operations, indirect channels and marketing. Regent said: "Colt is implementing a strategy to tap into the demand for mission critical high bandwidth across Europe and Asia. I will help to drive this transformation."

In another key hire, Paula Cogan has joined Colt as VP, Enterprise and Partner Sales Europe, having previously worked at Verizon Partner Solutions as Regional VP EMEA & LATAM. Tim Passingham is also joining Colt as VP Wholesale Sales Europe, moving from Level 3 where he held a Senior VP role heading up a large team.

Also on the move...



Nikki Chamberlain

COMMS-CARE (an Ingram Micro company) has boosted its marketing expertise with the appointment of Nikki Chamberlain as Marketing Manager. She brings almost 20 years experience and was formerly Marketing

Director at financial services firm Smart Financial. Prior roles include marketing positions at Advanced Legal, Oceanico Group and JMC IT. Chamberlain said: "My experience across a range of sectors will help bring a new way of thinking to support Comms-care's growth plans."

ULTRACOMMS has appointed Stuart Forrest as Channel Manager and Liza Taylor as Business Development Manager. Forrest joins from Noble Amcat where he was Channel Manager and brings



Stuart Forrest

15 years experience in customer contact technology. Taylor moves from Unify where she was Business Development Manager with a focus on large clients in the finance sector. Derwyn Jones, CEO of Ultracomms, said: "With the

integration of omni-channel and interaction analytics technology as well as the recent PCI DSS level 1 certification, these appointments will help us sustain growth for the business."

Product boss joins Virtual1



Neil Wilson

VIRTUAL1'S newly appointed Product and Marketing Manager Neil Wilson will initially prioritise the development of the company's IaaS products and 1Portal. He will also head-up Virtual1's marketing team.

Wilson

brings 10-plus years product marketing and management experience and joins from Alternative Networks following a 14 year stint at the company, most recently responsible for the product marketing of its Device to Data Centre proposition, including Unified Comms, mobility, connectivity and cloud. He was responsible for the launch and development of Alternative's customer management portal called Synapse.

Wilson said: "It's great to have joined Virtual1. I really believe in the direction the company is taking, both in London and nationally."

OLIVER Oswin's account management and deal winning skills have been rewarded with a promotion to the newly created role of New Business Director at STL Communications. "Comms is moving towards hosted and my team will help businesses understand the opportunities that this brings," he said.

sipsynergy gets Day and Fitton

SIPSYNERGY has appointed Steve Day as Sales Director and Ged Fitton as COO. These hires come hot on the heels of Tom Kelly's appointment as Chairman and Toby Gold's instatement as CEO following a



Ged Fitton

£2.75m investment from YFM Equity Partners. Day, who formerly held senior sales roles at Westcon and Inclarity, is responsible for driving channel sales for hosted UCaaS. Fitton joins from Cisco and will manage all aspects of sipsynergy's operations, services and customer support functions.

He said: "sipsynergy has taken collaboration architecture from Cisco and added incremental functionality that helps channel partners target the SMB marketplace with a hosted UC proposition."

This white label offering, based on Cisco's Hosted Cloud Solution, integrates back-end business processes into a management portal that helps partners to transition to an annuity based UC-as-a-Service model.



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Gamma Ball Rally V brings total raised to over £400k

100 channel partners came together for Gamma Ball Rally V to raise money for two charities, Action Through Enterprise (ATE) and SpecialEffect, taking the total amount raised in Gamma Ball history to over £400,000.

Registrations for Gamma Ball Rally V opened in May and spaces were filled within just 24 hours; setting the bar for an unforgettable three days of car-based fun, channel bonding and charity fundraising.

DAY 1

This year's Gamma Ball Ralliers met at a banger racing track in Dover where they kicked things off with a best dressed competition. The pressure was really on this year for the participating teams to give it their all and it was clear that many of them had. There were a number of impressive car themes and creative fancy dress outfits, including an Elvis trio, Harry Potter and friends, Pokemons, and more Mr Ts than you can shake a stick at.

The teams then took to the track with their £500 bangers to test out their precision driving skills, followed by the 'Need for Speed' challenge which saw the Ralliers trying out SpecialEffect's eye control gaming technology.

Once refuelled with a spot of track-side lunch, it was off in convoy to France by Le Shuttle and on to Brussels for the first overnight stay. After a long and fun-filled day of challenges the teams were able to enjoy some downtime while taking in the sights of Brussels and sampling some local beers...

DAY 2

The next day the teams drove from Brussels to the legendary Nurburgring racing circuit in Germany, where they spent a sunny afternoon competing in a series of physical and mental team challenges.

The Ralliers were then able

to take their cars around the famed Nurburgring circuit. It was a daunting experience, but everyone seemed to get round unscathed in amongst the performance cars!

Continuing the trip to the City of Bonn, the Ralliers were treated to drinks on board a boat which took them along the River Rhine, allowing them to take in the city by water.

DAY 3

The final day saw the cars take on the Rhine River Valley Ramble treasure hunt, many still dressed in all their fancy dress glory. After spending the day navigating their way around the Rhine Valley, some of the cars were pushed to their brink. But this didn't deter The Ralligators as they managed to befriend some helpful locals who kindly rescued them by tractor and towed them back to the hotel.

The Gamma Ball Rally gala dinner and charity auction was the focus of the final evening, which was held in the outskirts of Frankfurt. The evening kicked off with the competition scores and the much anticipated announcement of the Gamma Ball Rally V winners:

3rd place: The S Team (Serium)

2nd place: Totally Misguided Superheros (TMS)

1st place: The 'E' Team (Eze Talk)

Spirit of the rally: Viva Max Vegas (Max Telecom)

The auction was hosted by celebrity comedienne, Jo Caulfield who did a fantastic job of keeping the bids coming in and the laughter flowing, while entertaining

the audience with her cut-throat wit and close to the mark observations.

It's during the final evening of the rally that the majority of the money is raised, with Gamma's generous channel partners bidding on some amazing donated items – everything from watches and iPhones to holiday houses, golfing days and flying experiences.

After the final amount raised and winners were announced, there was just one thing left to do before the teams made their way back home – celebrate!

Dean Ison, Director at Max Telecom (aka Viva Max Vegas, Spirit of the Rally winners) commented: "I'd like to congratulate the Gamma team on another fantastic rally. I can just imagine the time and effort required to make something like that run so smoothly, well they nailed it. It was our fourth Gamma Ball Rally and we loved every minute; taking home the Spirit of the Rally award was the icing on the cake. It's a privilege to have been involved in helping raise £400,000 for two exceptionally worthy causes."

Daryl Pile, Channel Managing Director at Gamma added: "I'd like to thank everyone who helped make this year's rally a success including our sponsors; Broadsoft, Polycom, Genband and Akixi, as well and everyone who's generously donated - this wouldn't be possible without you. The Gamma Ball Rally is all about raising well-needed funds for our charities, Action Through Enterprise and SpecialEffect. I'm blown away by how much money we've raised and humbled by the big difference it will make to these two worthy causes."



The 4 Team - 1st place (4 Com)



Totally Misguided Superheros - 2nd place (TMS)



The S Team - 3rd place (Serium)



Viva Max Vegas - Spirit of the Rally (Max Telecom)



Best dressed - The E Team (Eze Talk)



Gamma Ball Rally V gala dinner and charity auction

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