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Government sets out fibre-5G aims

THE future look of the UK comms landscape came into sharper focus last month when the Government set out plans to transform the nation's infrastructure.

SPECIAL REPORT

New proposals to speed up the roll out of fibre are 'vital' to UK competitiveness, according to the Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (FTIR) published last month.

The FTIR forms part of the Government's long-term Industrial Strategy and calls for radical action to ensure that the majority of the population has access to 5G and that 15 million premises are connected to full fibre broadband by 2025.

The ultimate goal is for full fibre coverage across the UK by 2033 and 5G deployment to the majority of the country by 2027. Figures indicate that the UK currently has 4% full fibre connections, lagging behind Spain (71%), Portugal (89%) and France (28%).

"Without change full fibre broadband networks will at best only ever reach three quarters of the country, and it would take more than 20 years to do so," said DCMS Secretary of State Jeremy Wright (pictured).

"The Review also indicates that 5G offers the potential for an expansion of the telecommunications market with opportunities for existing players and new entrants.

"This radical new blueprint for the future of telecoms in this country will increase competition and investment in full fibre broadband, create more commercial opportunities and make it easier and cheaper to roll out infrastructure for 5G."

For more on this story and industry reaction see page 31

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

CHANGE is afoot as full fibre and 5G become the comms sector rule following the Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (FTIR) published on July 23rd. It is perhaps the first coherent strategy to get the UK up to speed. According to figures cited by the Government the UK's full fibre connections

currently stand at a woeful four per cent which, when you consider Spain has 71 per cent, Portugal 89 per cent and France 28 per cent, is nothing to shout about. But what comes over loud and clear is that something has gone wrong and the Government's answer is a decisive 'how to put it right' response rather than a 'who's to blame' salvo.

Some would argue strongly that the Government itself should be fending off incoming fire for not doing anything sooner, along with other major influential players such as Ofcom and Openreach, as they were so stuck, as in quicksand, in a fragmented approach to the UK's connectivity infrastructure which was unfit for purpose – but for which ultimately no one organisation can justly be held responsible. Therefore we should not waste time playing the blame game when urgent work and catching up needs to be achieved quickly if we are to truly realise Digital Britain.

Thankfully, the FTIR has ushered in a new coherent strategy with a single vision, clear goals and shared responsibilities between the Government, Ofcom and the comms industry, working as an integrated group to deliver full fibre broadband coverage across all of the UK by 2033 and bring 5G access to the majority of the population by 2025. Now's the time for true leaders among all stakeholders to make their mark. But what will this integrated effort look like in practice? We believe it's a challenge and opportunity that will define the future role of the channel and forms a key theme at this year's Comms Vision Convention (see page 32).

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Nicol set for English push

COMMSWORLD aims to near-triple the size of its dark fibre estate by connecting to more than 20 UK cities including Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and London.

The Edinburgh-based comms provider is extending the reach of its national optical core network following access deals to long distance fibre networks from CityFibre and Zayo.

Under the contracts, which run for 12 and 10 years respectively, Commsworld will add over 2,000kms of dark fibre to its existing 750km of on-off-net metro Ethernet tails in what is the largest investment of its kind in the company's history.

Commsworld CEO Ricky Nicol said: "This network expansion takes us from a predominantly Scottish-centric provider to a UK one, and is a milestone in our long-term strategy to take the business to that UK level, opening up many more possibilities for us to transform the amount of business we will do south of the border.

"Previously outside of Scotland we've used fibre networks owned and managed by others, but this development means we have full control and the bandwidth available is only deter-



Ricky Nicol

mined by the equipment we use on the end of the fibre.

"Working with our SI partners and in conjunction with G-Cloud 10 and other framework accreditations gives us the opportunity to significantly grow revenues across England."

Nicol also noted that the DWDM network Commsworld will build to light the fibre will be capable of four terabits per second from the outset.

Commsworld will open another 30 PoPs, mainly in data centre facilities across the UK as it targets new business in the private and public sectors.

The deal sees Commsworld bring 10 of CityFibre's gigabit cities on-net and delivers on-net access to Zayo's London metro network with the option to leverage its subsea links to the USA and mainland Europe.

Damovo's sold off to Eli Global

DAISY founder and Chairman Matt Riley and PE investor partner Oakley Capital Private Equity II have sold Damovo to M&A specialist Eli Global. Riley acquired a majority stake in Damovo in January 2015.

Since then the firm has consolidated from separate country operations into one group and acquired three businesses.

Damovo now employs more than 500 staff in 13 locations across Europe, Asia-Pacific and Latin America, serving customers in more than 120 countries.

It holds high level accreditations with Avaya, Cisco, Microsoft and Mitel.

As part of the acquisition the current management team of CEO Glen Williams, Executive Chairman Matthew Riley and CFO Stuart Hall will be leaving the business. MD for DACH and Poland Carl Muhlner becomes Group CEO.



Matt Riley

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COMMENT: ENGAGEMENT MATTERS



Richard Carter

LOW rates of unemployment make it vital to retain and develop high calibre staff and place them at the heart of everything you do. Engaged and happy people mean happy customers which inspires business growth. To meet the demands of an ever-changing world it's vital to truly put the customer experience first and here at Nimans we

fully embrace this ethos. We've just placed this year's entry into the annual National Engagement Awards, an event where we've enjoyed some success in the past.

We truly recognise that our staff are intrinsic to delivering success and key to differentiate us. So a few years ago we decided to develop and implement an innovative sales strategy that would engage and enhance the skill set and put the customer at the heart of what we do. The push to strive for excellence and support of our people has led to many developments across Nimans – from company-wide strategies to more bespoke training and development through our in-house academy. We have several managers who have commenced their ILM diploma in management. This is a nationally recognised qualification taking 18 months of study and course work.

In addition we are now holding monthly leadership round tables on a range of subjects from motivation through to recruitment. These provide a fantastic opportunity for our management team to share ideas and best practice. We are also researching and developing new sessions around Emotional Intelligence, currently in the advanced stages of development. We have a mission to serve the customer and believe that, to a large extent, engagement trumps strategy.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

• Exclusive CEO Olivier Breittmayer put to bed any idea of a merger last month when he sealed a deal with new owner Permira (p26).

Swyx in merger as Centile's pocketed

GERMAN UC vendor Swyx has merged with Voiceworks parent company Within Reach Group (WRG) based in The Netherlands and also acquired French UC provider Centile.

The deal was backed by PE business Waterland which acquired Swyx in January.

The combined group serves circa two million end users via more than 1,400 resellers and service providers.

Swyx CEO and co-founder Ralf Ebbinghaus stated: "With a combined revenue of 130m euros and 500 employees across 12 European countries, the three companies are creating a new force in the European market from which even more synergies will emerge.

"The investments give us the power to innovate further in the highly dynamic IP-based communications market."

Stijn Nijhuis, CEO and co-founder of Voiceworks, stated: "Swyx, Voiceworks and Centile grow their businesses through a large network of resellers and service providers.

"This gives the combined company an immediate strong market position in Europe with a solid base in The Netherlands, Germany and France."



Ralf Ebbinghaus

Bertrand Pourcelot, Director General of Centile, added: "This enables us to become a stronger player in the UCaaS market and expand the UCaaS portfolio we already offer partners."

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Services drive SCC revenues



James Rigby

IT GROUP SCC registered its fifth consecutive year of record earnings in EMEA for the year ending 31st March 2018, reporting £1.8bn turnover, up 9% across the region, and EBIT of £27.7m representing year-on-year 10% growth.

The operations in France and the UK continue to drive the majority of group turnover (96%) and profitability (94%).

A strong UK performance in services aided by new data centres in Birmingham and Hampshire helped spur growth.

SCC CEO James Rigby said: "There is now a need for all businesses, whoever they are

or whatever they do, to digitise their operations and outsourcing that requirement is an effective way to manage the continual investment needed for growth.

"We have invested in recent years via our cloud services and data centres in anticipation of that demand and expect to continue our current performance levels in the coming years."

Areas of investment highlighted by Rigby include AI and cognitive computing. He also emphasised the possibility of capability-based acquisitions.

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

Vision snapped up

COMMUNICATE Better's presence in the south west region will be more strongly felt following the acquisition of Wales-based mobile services provider Vision Communications for an undisclosed sum.

The Vision brand, management and staff will be retained with the product portfolio enhanced by a wider range of telephony, IT and vehicle telematics services offered by Hull HQ'd Communicate Better.

Its CEO Wayne Cartwright said: "The acquisition spreads our reach across Wales and the south west of England and represents a significant increase in



Wayne Cartwright

the number of mobile connections, with the potential to grow the business further.

"We plan to complete additional purchases this year which will contribute to our year-on-year growth figures."

Cartwright is targeting £10m revenues this financial year.

NEWS ROUNDUP

IT SERVICES provider KCOM is targeting the enterprise cloud contact centre market following its accreditation as an Amazon Connect Partner, building on its APN Premier Consulting Partner status. Stephen Long, EVP of Enterprise at KCOM, noted that the firm was particularly attracted to Amazon Connect's scalability and market traction.

"This accreditation gives KCOM the ability to offer customers bespoke contact centres in the cloud and tailor technologies to their specific needs," he said.

WATCHGUARD is targeting the SMB sector with cloud-based multi-factor authentication (MFA) to meet demand for less password-heavy systems.

"We know that a massive portion of data breaches involve lost credentials, and since cyber criminals target organisations of any size MFA is now a prerequisite for all businesses," said Alex Cagnoni, Director of Authentication at WatchGuard. "In the absence of MFA cyber criminals can utilise a variety of techniques to acquire usernames and passwords and steal data."

DMSL MD John Carter claims a beefed up Internet access service offered by the distributor dovetails neatly with rising demand for SaaS and public cloud services, providing a foundation for VoIP, cloud services and recurring revenues. "Almost every business is now 100% dependent on their Internet access," he stated. The company is offering a new BTnet service which comes with a 100% availability SLA, Cisco Meraki WiFi, security options and speeds of up to 10Gbps. "This gives resellers an opportunity to enable transformation for their SMB customers and move towards more sustainable and profitable business models," he added.



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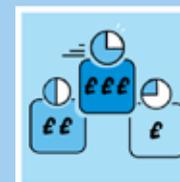


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COMMENT: A FLAWED CONDITION



Itret Latif

AS of 1st October 2018 a new Ofcom rule will ban CPs from charging for caller display facilities (which enable the screening of nuisance calls), and the service must be provided 'by default', unless proven to be not 'technically feasible or economically viable' (General Condition C6). Under these new

rules the displayed telephone numbers must be valid, dialable and uniquely identify the caller. Providers will be required to identify and block calls with invalid or non-dialable numbers, stopping them reaching consumers.

However, it has emerged that the ban on charging for default-provided caller display is only applicable to CPs that have contracts with end customers, while wholesale providers of these services such as Openreach are not impacted in the same way. This peculiarity enabled Openreach to publish on 28th June 2018 an Access Charge Change Notice increasing the caller display charge by 320 per cent to £1.44 from 1st September 2018, one month before the Ofcom charging ban takes effect.

FCS members are alarmed by the prospect of having to absorb these unplanned large percentage increases. For most FCS CPs this translates to a loss making situation and will leave some with six figure financial deficits that will be difficult to absorb. Currently, there does not seem to be any recourse to challenge Openreach or to pass the charges on to the end customer.

FCS members agree that customers should be protected from nuisance calls but feel that it is illogical and uneconomical to put the burden solely on the retailer CPs. Therefore, we call on Ofcom to look again at the economic implications of its decision, and in particular the significant charge increase by Openreach. We also call on Ofcom to instruct the whole supply chain to either not charge or allow all CPs to charge.

Itret Latif, FCS Interim CEO and Deputy Chairman

SSE kicks off next project



Colin Sempill

SSE Enterprise Telecoms plans to unbundle 177 BT exchanges and support Three UK's 5G roll out with fibre connectivity in a phased project that will run over two years.

The move brings more than 180,000 new UK business post-codes into play for SSE Enterprise Telecoms, doubling its network reach.

"Legacy networks are coming under more strain as the demands placed on them potentially outweigh their capabilities," said MD Colin Sempill.

"This roll out will guarantee 100Gbps services, putting the UK on the front foot to be a pioneering digital economy and making use of new technologies like 5G. Networks will underpin the connected society that many anticipate with 5G.

"It's a significant investment, enabling customers, prospects, MNOs and service providers to benefit from the enhanced network footprint."

Three UK has signed a deal with SSE Enterprise Telecoms to use connectivity from the 177 unbundled exchanges and for support in its network expansion bid. Three UK CTO Bryn Jones said: "High capacity networks will be the foundation on which 5G is built."

Batches of the new exchanges will be released over the two year period and become available to quote and order via SSE Enterprise Telecoms' online price comparison engine called Livequote.

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

NEWS ROUNDUP

THE strategic direction of Exertis will be determined and governed by incoming MD Tim Griffin (pictured) who joins the distributor as Divisional MD of DCC Technology (part of parent company DCC) and MD of the Exertis Group, reporting to DCC CEO Donal Murphy. Prior to his appointment Griffin was CEO and GM for Dell EMC UK & Ireland. During his ten year stint at Dell he was also charged with developing business in the Asia Pacific region and held other roles with worldwide remits. Griffin is also a Non Exec' Director for the Welsh Rugby Union.



PARAGON Group has bolstered its UK business with the acquisition of Imprimus which becomes part of Paragon Customer Communications. Imprimus operates from locations at Redruth and Dartford and was formerly known as Stralfors UK. It generates annual turnover of circa £14m and the deal boosts Paragon Group's revenues to over 700m euros. Paragon has a presence in 15 European countries and supplies more than 40 countries.

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Richard Thompson

SIMPLE doesn't always have to mean basic. If anything, simple is what 99 per cent of the population prefers when it comes to their telecommunications. A no jargon and no nonsense approach to doing things that just work when they need it to. This is how many of our partners succeed, by focusing on what they are good at rather than trying to do too many things at once, making them a popular option.

The most important weapon to have in your bag is the simplest but most effective: Ensuring that you have a strong relationship with your Account Manager (if you're in sales) or client. This is vital and not something that can be bought or sold. Trust takes time to build, therefore your word is your bond. If you recall, my column in June touched on customer centricity and putting them at the heart of what your business does. By sticking to this method you will ensure that you are putting yourselves ahead of the game as you have something money cannot buy. The mutual respect of your customer.

Here's an example of how not to gain respect. You get hundreds of calls or LinkedIn In-mails all claiming that they are approaching you because they've done their research and seen that you might be a senior decision maker who could benefit from a new product or solution. But when you look beneath the surface (usually you don't have to look that hard) you'll see that it's all style and no substance, and that they've not researched you or your company at all. This is what I would call basic.

So it's important to remember that relationships and reputations can take a lifetime to build and only seconds to break. Make sure that you're always switched on and know what your customer is thinking. How? It's simple, just ask them.

Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Nasser nets security biz



Charles Nasser

CLARANET'S capabilities in the security arena have been significantly extended with the acquisition of Cambridge-based consultancy NotSoSecure.

The deal follows last year's acquisition of SEC-1 and the opening of a Security Operations Centre in Portugal.

NotSoSecure specialises in penetration testing for networks, web and mobile apps, and has offices in San Francisco and India. Its clients include global organisations such as government agencies, FTSE 250 players and Fortune 500 firms.

As a Claranet owned company NotSoSecure aims to grow its US business and expand its footprint in Australia and Asia.

The company's founders Dan Haagman and Sumit Siddharth will remain with the business.

Claranet Chief Exec' Charles Nasser commented: "This acquisition forms part of our vision to enhance the security services and expertise that we offer to our customers, as well as gain access to new global markets such as the US and Australia."

Siddharth commented: "The risk of cyber attacks to organisations around the world has grown exponentially. However, this has not been matched by an increase in training and knowledge and, as a result, there is now a severe global skills shortage in cyber security.

"With Claranet's backing and experience of breaking into new territories we are in a strong position to build our service portfolio and seize market share in this rapidly growing and evolving industry."

NEWS ROUNDUP

THE headlines from this year's Unify Partner Conference (which attracted 200-plus partners) staged in Berlin last month include figures that show the Atos owned company generated 63% of product revenue through the channel, 85% in the UK, and its top 25% of partners more than doubled their business through Unify in the last year. Unify also revealed portfolio updates, new capabilities with APIs, Circuit integration with OpenScape Business, a simplified pricing model, simpler service bundles, tools to increase the speed and throughput of quotes, and enhanced partner technical, sales and commercial support via Partner Connect.

WHOLESALE comms provider Entanet has rolled out a new partner programme called Thrive!, which is underpinned by commitments to give resellers what they need to effectively market, sell and support the firm's connectivity services. The scheme aims to match the support requirements of each partner in areas ranging from white label marketing resources through to pre-sales bid support. The programme also gives partners a springboard into the full fibre market backed up by CityFibre which acquired Entanet a year ago.

“ Banish the on-boarding burden ”

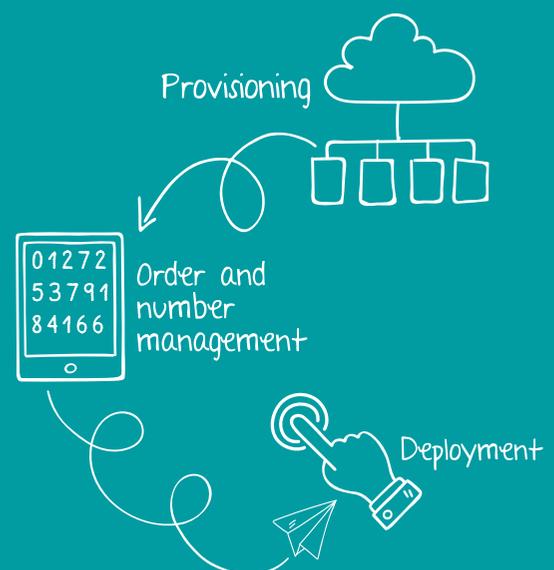
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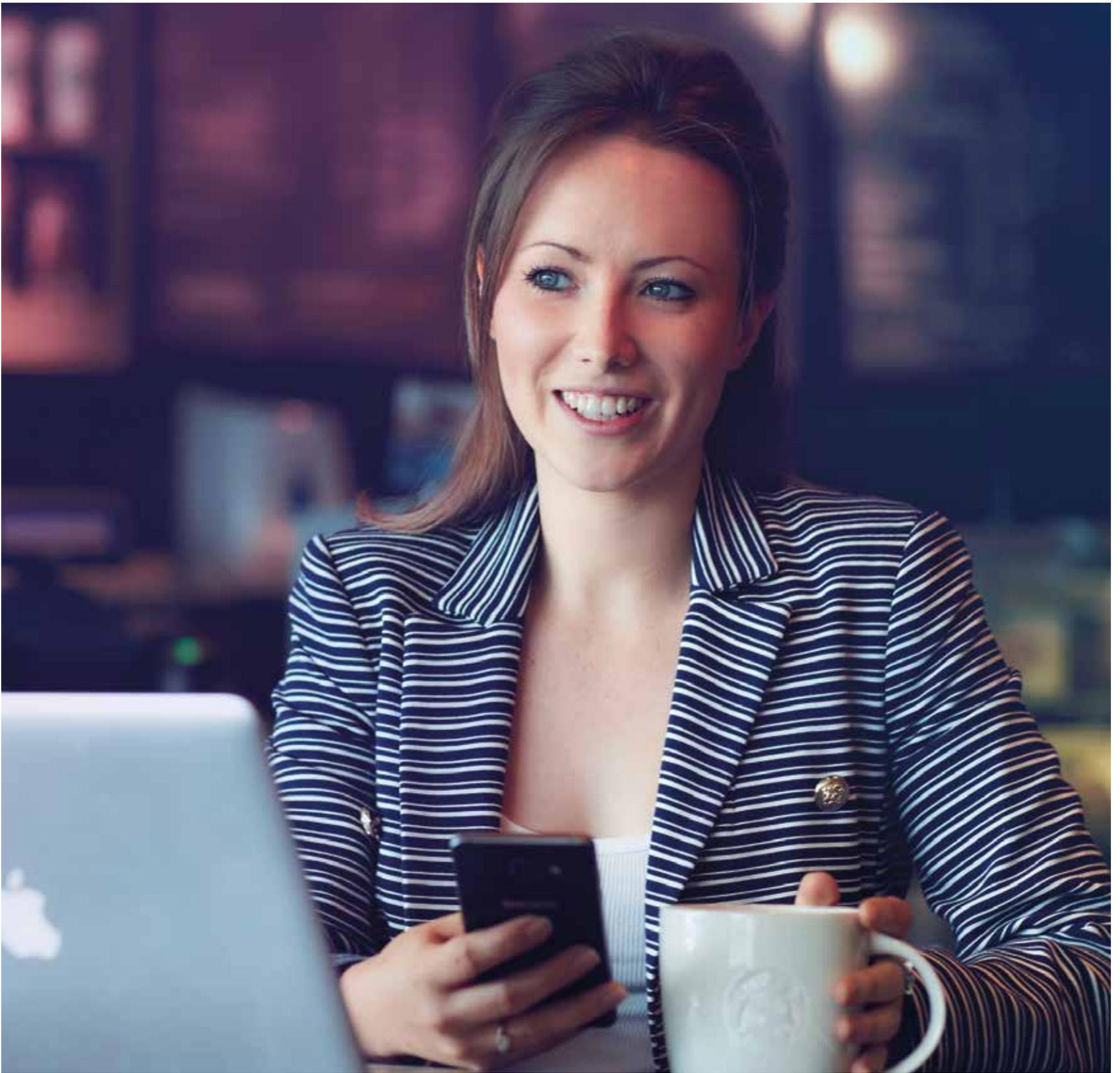
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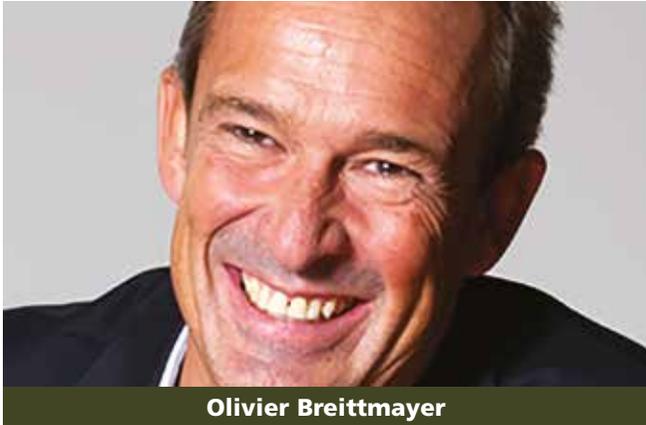
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Breittmayer seals PE deal



Olivier Breittmayer

EXCLUSIVE Group shunned consolidation approaches from fellow VADs opting instead to remain independent under new owner PE company Permira, having agreed a major investment transaction last month.

Exclusive aims to become the world's largest global specialist VAD in cyber and cloud transformation, and is gunning for \$10bn annual revenues.

Exclusive Group CEO Olivier Breittmayer stated: "Cyber security and cloud are the leading business priorities in this age of digital transformation, both as separate disciplines and even more so joined together as a co-dependent whole.

"Both sectors are becoming increasingly complex, and both suffer from a huge lack of skills

and knowledge. The industry needs a VAD that can fill this gap and we aim to do that."

Michail Zekkos, who is a Partner within the Technology Team at Permira, commented on the investment deal: "Enterprise cloud and cyber security will continue to rapidly converge, creating a tremendous market opportunity for Exclusive Group to enable that transition while positioning its channel partners at the forefront.

"Preserving the entrepreneurial spirit and independence of the business while continuing to innovate with speed and at scale will be key."

Full interview – page 26

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

Nimans notes UC sales hike

AN UPTICK in the performance of Nimans' Major Accounts division is a sign of the distributor's growing influence in the UC, IT and end point arena and also reflects the strategic vision of Colin McGregor who spearheads the business unit.

He was formerly MD of Tech Data (Azlan) and took charge of Nimans' Major Accounts operation six months ago, a move that helped to catalyse annual sales by 48%.

According to McGregor the sales hike is not attributable to a simple 'wallet shift' as Nimans' Compendium IP end point management solution has enabled resellers to more easily secure UC deals, he claims. Yet amid these advances McGregor has

identified an important shortfall in resellers' approach to making the most of the UC opportunities they face.

"With UC implementations partners are leaving 20-30% of revenue on the table in terms of headsets and other devices, which form the final and most important link in audio performance," stated McGregor.

"Millions of pounds can be spent on systems and infrastructure but cheap headsets undermine everything else. It's one of the biggest surprises I've seen.

"Not only are resellers allowing their customers to buy online, worse still their competitors can come in and quote on headsets and get their feet under the table."



Colin McGregor

New law in mobile bill limits

MOBILE resellers have been urged to comply with upcoming Mobile Bill Limit legislation that comes into force on October 1st.

Billing company Aurora has emphasised that the new rules allow customers to specify a pre-agreed bill limit which if exceeded means the comms provider becomes responsible for the excess costs.

"This legislation brings multiple issues throughout the channel and resellers need to ensure their billing platform is equipped to cope with the complexities, or they could find their business non-compliant and having to absorb extensive revenue and margin loss," warned Aurora MD Derek Watson.

"Resellers must talk to their billing provider to understand what is being done to prepare for this legislation."

For its part Aurora has deployed 'intelligent billing' technology in its Affinity platform to help resellers manage their estate and billing revenue exposure. The company is also running a series of webinars for resellers focused on how they can get to grips with the upcoming legislation, along with training and support.

New channel event brings mobile opportunities

DAISY Wholesale and Zest4 have confirmed their support for a new channel event focused on helping mobile, comms and IT resellers of all sizes profit from the fast growing mobile services market.

Margin in Mobile launched by Comms Dealer publisher BPL Business Media complements the successful Margin in Voice & Data symposium and will be staged at the Northampton Marriot Hotel on March 21st.

According to Daisy Wholesale MD Terry O'Brien Margin



Terry O'Brien

in Mobile is a 'long overdue' must-attend channel highlight.

"I'm right behind this event," he enthused. "Our mobile solu-



Mandy Fazelynia

tion has been one of our greatest successes. Mobile access is increasingly critical and businesses want mobility solutions

at the centre of their approach. The channel cannot miss out on this significant opportunity."

It is estimated that by 2025 there will be 100 billion connected devices with IoT connections receiving a rocket boost from 5G.

Zest4 MD Mandy Fazelynia believes that now is the time for resellers to ensure that their mobile communications and IoT strategies are fit for purpose and poised to drive growth.

"As a true IoT MVNO we are at the heart of this new sec-

tor and already helping partners to implement successful mobile and IoT strategies," she stated.

"We'll be on hand to share how we can help channel partners spot these opportunities and create sales campaigns to win those deals."

Margin in Mobile 2019 will include an educational seminar programme, managed meetings, a networking evening dinner and overnight accommodation. Qualified reseller directors will be able to attend free of charge. www.margin-in-mobile.co.uk



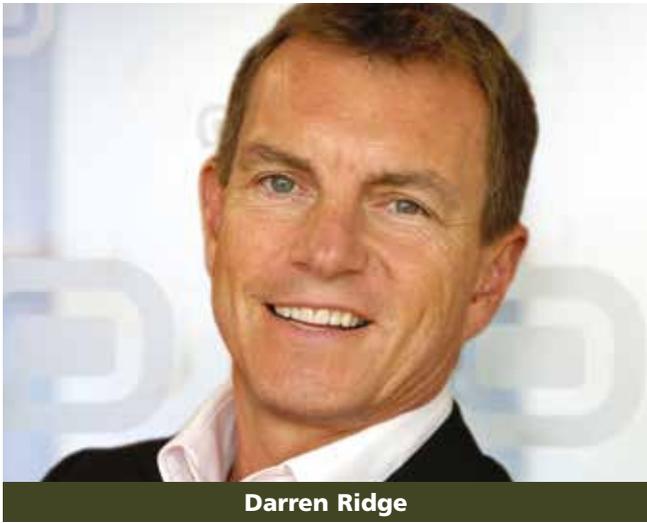
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Sony secures IoT ally in UK



Darren Ridge

SONY Mobile Communications has struck an exclusive deal with Onecom that sees the Whiteley-based comms provider operate as Sony's UK IoT partner.

Onecom will supply Sony's tracking solutions and devices and support them through its own in-house developed IoT platform which is connected to 500 partner networks across 200 countries.

The technology partners will also collaborate on the development and support of smart connected devices and cross vertical applications including business, infrastructure, transport and the public sector.

The first roll out is an indoor positioning service that tracks assets and people in real-time. It combines hardware, software,

a cloud-based user application and analytics.

Onecom CEO Darren Ridge said: "We are already seeing the benefits in innovation and productivity that come with the deployment of IoT technology, yet we are only scratching the surface of the virtually limitless possibilities it will bring."

Johan Svenér, VP, Sony Mobile Communications IoT Business Group Europe, commented: "Our tracking solution has mainly focused on the healthcare segment, but it has potential to add value in a variety of different businesses."

Onecom's own range of IoT solutions are designed for indoor and outdoor asset tracking, lone worker protection and camera telematics.

Fibre alliance formed

THE future role out of full fibre via a wholesale-only model has been supported by a Europe-wide alliance of providers including CityFibre, Deutsche Glasfaser, Open Fiber, Reykjavikur and SIRO among other signatories.

They have joined forces to accelerate the build and uptake of full fibre services across Europe by profiling the benefits of the wholesale-only build model and challenging

what they claim is the misuse of 'fibre' in consumer advertising across the continent.

Senior leaders from operators and reps from the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications and the FTTH Council Europe met in Rome to discuss the issues.

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch said: "Wholesale only has been at the heart of CityFibre's strategy and we welcome collaboration with our alliance partners."

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Mitel forges Westcon link



Jeremy Butt

MITEL'S shift to the cloud is gathering pace following a deal that sees Westcon-Comstor become the vendor's sole pan-international distributor for its communications and collaboration portfolio across the EMEA and South Pacific markets.

The move builds on Mitel's link-up with Westcon-Comstor in the German market announced late January this year.

"Together with a new global partner programme, Mitel is leveraging the strengths of distribution through a smaller number of distributors holding inventory, profiling through to pre-sales, and offering technical

support and professional services," said Jeremy Butt, SVP International, Mitel.

"To drive Mitel's and channel partners' growth and success in a rapidly changing and competitive landscape, the speed and simplicity of our go-to-market model is essential.

"Through our partnership with Westcon, Mitel resellers will be able to take advantage of our UCC solutions and Westcon's service to better support customers on their digital transformation journey."

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Tupman hails record trading

LDC's investment in Connect Managed Services underscores the role of private equity in building reseller businesses as the London-based UC provider posted record revenues of £21m in its latest financial year, up from £13.3m the previous year.

Total EBITDA increased by 77% to £2.3m from £1.3m in 2016. Trading for the first quarter of 2018 is up 84%.

In 2014 LDC supported a management buyout which sparked a buy-and-build strategy with three acquisitions completed to date – Amazon Connect specialist CoolHarbour, the assets of UVN's US-based technical and engineering support teams, and contact centre business PC-1 which strengthened Connect's Cisco capabilities.

CEO Alex Tupman said: "Partnering with LDC has given us the resource and expertise to laser focus on executing a clear growth plan, helping to scale our business through investment in research and development, along with pursuing a targeted programme of acquisitions.

"We're now a business of international scale with a platform for further expansion after achieving a record year."

LDC Portfolio Director Chris Coulton added: "Connect has increased its overseas reach and presence while firmly establishing itself as a key player in the UK market."

Tupman was formerly ATC Group CEO and led the MBO at Connect to build a £100m managed services business.



Alex Tupman

Fidelity's powerful in energy



John Haw

A MATERIAL contract secured by Fidelity Energy last month has taken the company over the one billion kilowatt of energy under management milestone just three years after launch.

Under the leadership of MD John Haw the energy service company set up in 2015 now has two billion kilowatts under management spread across its 259 channel partners.

Haw stated: "This milestone highlights the growth that the channel is seeing in energy, facilitated by our portal, systems and back office team that has worked hard to build our automated platform that allows partners to find the best deal in the market for their customers."

In late June Fidelity Energy was crowned a regional champion in The Energy Live Consultancy Awards (TELCA), scooping the London and South East gong.

Baur: We are a technology solutions business

RESELLERS must embrace subscription-based service models to prosper in the new digital age, according to Mike Baur, CEO of ScanSource.

As the UK Government announced its full fibre and 5G roll out strategy to enable faster, more reliable connectivity, ScanSource's co-founder told channel partners his business is going through a paradigm change to embrace the opportunities greater bandwidth brings.

Speaking at the company's partner conference held at the



Mike Baur

McLaren Technology Centre in Woking, Surrey, and citing research carried out across 1,000 customers, Baur said part-

ners must be prepared to adapt to new channel models or risk losing customers.

"The question you must be asking yourself is... what is the future of the channel? How do I move from capex to opex? Solutions as a service is the new model and subscription based selling is the future," he said.

ScanSource has built a \$4bn business across 40 countries based on a traditional distribution model but, as Baur stressed, this will now change based on customer demand.

"We are making the biggest change in our business for 40 years. We are no longer a distributor, we are a technology solutions business," he added.

Baur said his company will be ramping up its services portfolio to embrace recurring revenue models across areas such as connectivity and cloud, mobility, payments, SaaS, managed services and IoT.

"Research suggests that our partners will be more successful by delivering solutions," commented Baur.

There are also plans for the Cloud Solutions team to help customers with business transformations. The team, led by Paul Emery, Vice President of Cloud Solutions and Services, Europe, will help resellers understand customer lifecycle management and to become recurring revenue businesses, thereby increasing exit values.

ScanSource's cloud connectivity portfolio has recently been boosted following the acquisition of UK technology services distributor Intelisys Global.



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NEWS ROUNDUP

OPENREACH has joined forces with Huawei and Nokia to advance its Fibre First programme and the national rollout of FTTP technology which is targeted to reach three million UK homes and businesses by the end of 2020. Huawei and Nokia are contracted to support Openreach's exchange based equipment with new electronics that will act as a digital gateway, managing and translating high speed data signals between customers' premises and the wider network.

CLOUDCELL Technologies has signed a connectivity deal with Gamma enabling it to press ahead with growth plans in its key construction, events, transport and enterprise markets and also



embark on a channel campaign. Following the deal Cloudcell has bolstered its team and launched marketing initiatives. Cloudcell MD Kevin Boyle (pictured) said: "We are now positioned to grow our share of the connectivity market and forge new reseller relationships to deliver enterprise grade, fully managed connectivity to a wider range of customers."

Akixi reveals key updates



Bart Delgado

IN A COMPANY update Crawley-based Akixi has signposted the launch later this year of a new omnichannel analytics and reporting service called Akixi 3000. It builds on the existing 2000 platform and future releases will include social media and SMS integration and analytics.

Akixi MD Bart Delgado commented: "Bringing our analytics to an omnichannel environment increases the insight that businesses can capture from their day-to-day processes.

"Alongside the product development side of the business we are also investing significantly to improve our customer engagement initiatives."

Delgado noted that Akixi has boosted its online resources with video tutorials and is encouraging user feedback.

Also in the pipeline are wall-board dial improvements that combine multiple reports into a single view, and a new mobile app for monitoring and managing ACD agent functionality.

"Akixi's services will be integrated with the BroadSoft Hub which combines BroadSoft's UC-One and Team-One with cloud applications such as Office 365, Salesforce and Twitter into one view," added Delgado.

Akixi was established in 2008 and last year witnessed a 44% year-on-year revenue hike.

It has over 3,000 client sites and monitors 98,000 extensions globally. Its services are compatible with the BroadSoft, Unify and Panasonic platforms.

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Excalibur inks Sensata deal

SWINDON-based Excalibur Communications's acquisition of local IT services company Sensata bolsters its ambition to become a dominant regional force in the provision of business IT and connectivity, and comes hot on the heels of Excalibur's IT business division notching up a record quarter.

Sensata designs, installs and supports IT networks for SMEs in the Swindon area and is Excalibur's third IT company acquisition in 18 months.

Sensata founders Christopher and Janet Griffin will remain working with Excalibur and all staff join Excalibur's HQ team at Arclite House.

Excalibur CEO Peter Boucher commented: "This acquisi-



Peter Boucher

tion, in particular, accelerates the growth and opportunities for us in our home town."

Chris Griffin commented on the deal: "It was important for Sensata to secure an agreement that would provide security for our staff and continuity of service for our customers."

Peter Boucher interview – p22



WHITELEY-based Onecom bagged its eighth Vodafone Total Communications Partner award last month, cementing its position as the largest partner in the operator's UK Partner Programme. Onecom has held the network's top award, previously known as Platinum Partner of the Year, since its first outing in 2011. Onecom CEO Darren Ridge said: "To win this for the eighth year is a tremendous achievement and a tribute to the work and dedication of Onecom staff around the UK." Onecom operates from 10 regional offices and manages over 325,000 mobile connections. Pictured: Onecom co-owners Aaron Brown (left) and Darren Ridge with awards host actress and comedian Sally Phillips.

EACS bags IT firm Sentronex

FAST rising MSP EACS has acquired London-based IT and managed services business Sentronex. The financials of the deal were not disclosed.

The acquisition is expected to boost EACS's revenues to circa £30m this year and follows an 18 month expansion spurt during which the MSP has grown over 25%.

As well as boosting customer numbers the acquisition broadens EACS's managed services portfolio while bringing Sentronex's customers into



Kevin Timms

the scope of EACS's cloud and business consultancy portfolio.

Sentronex began its commercial life in 2005 and is best known for providing FCA regulated organisations with DR and IT professional services.

"We will work to bring these businesses together quickly, but our clients will be able to benefit from the combined capability immediately," stated EACS CEO Kevin Timms.

Outgoing Sentronex CEO Mark Parnell-Hopkinson noted: "Sentronex customers gain an important level of scale and breadth of service provision."

EACS was founded in 1994 and holds Gold partner status with Citrix, Microsoft, NetApp and Dell, and is a Sophos Platinum partner.



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NEWS ROUNDUP

JUST Telecomms has entered the MVNO market following a link-up with France-based comms service provider Centile. Just Telecomms, part of Lincolnshire-based Just Utilities, is using the ISTRA Cloud platform to deliver integrated FMC services to SMEs. Founder and Director Richard Powell said: "FMC's time has come, it can now be a truly seamless experience." See page 50

OAK Innovation and ResDiary (developer of a restaurant reservation system) have joined forces to create ResConnect, a piece of middleware that enables restaurants to make the most of data through telephony integration. Oak CTO Phillip Reynolds said: "ResConnect makes it easy to identify, capture and update new phone numbers in a few clicks. By maintaining more accurate contact information restaurants can improve customer loyalty and reduce no-shows."

CLOUD distributor Giacom's partnership with Mission Labs enables resellers to access the SaaS-based business phone system CloudTalk via Giacom's Cloud Market. CloudTalk is exclusive to Giacom and aimed at the SME market. It integrates with CRM systems including Nimble which was launched earlier this year on the Giacom Cloud Market.

EXPONENTIAL-E has secured positions within G-Cloud 10 Digital Marketplace, covering the Cloud Hosting, Cloud Software and Cloud Support categories. Afshin Attari, Director of Public Sector at Exponential-e, said: "We have developed cloud-based services for the public sector market as a whole. The balance between robust services and cost is particularly vital in healthcare, as regulations for information access and sharing have changed post-GDPR."

Hinch offers a role model



Maddie Hinch circled by 9 Group partners with Emily Harris far left

A GATHERING of 9 Group's elite partners hit the heights last month when they were invited to a luncheon at London's Shard with England and Great Britain women's hockey goalkeeper Maddie Hinch.

Rated as the world's number one female goalkeeper for the past two years, Hinch is one of four sports ambassadors who have agreed to work with 9 in the lead up to the 2020 Olympics in line with the company's 'Free to Perform' brand identity.

Hinch was the star of the GB team that secured a gold medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics, saving all four penalties in the shootout with The Netherlands.

"I just knew where they were going to place their shots. It's all in the preparation," recalled the 29-year-old who, before the shootout began, pulled out a little black book with notes on the opposition.

"It was intended to psyche them out," she told 9's Partner Director Adam Cathcart, who relished his role as sports interviewer for the day.

Sussex born Hinch will reveal more insights into her successful career and the big match tactics she employs as a star guest at the Comms National Awards on October 11th, where 9 will be headline sponsor for the sixth year running.

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ITS closes round of financing

ITS Technology Group is poised to extend the reach of its full fibre infrastructure following additional investment by Maven Capital Partners.

This latest round includes finance from the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund and other private shareholders.

Investments will be made in new networks and the expansion of key networks in Bristol, Hereford, London, Nottingham and Tameside.

ITS CEO Daren Baythorpe said: "Since taking the reins my focus has been to continue our roll out of ultrafast digital infrastructure at pace."

Baythorpe confirmed that ITS will adhere to its 'dig once' approach, working with local authorities and landowners in metro and rural areas to reuse infrastructure, thereby reducing the costs and shortening timescales when building new full fibre networks.

The Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund project is supported financially by the European Union.

"We are delighted to have Maddie on board as part of our team of sporting brand ambassadors," said Marketing Director Mark Saunders. "Maddie is a winner and inspirational role model who personifies our 'Free to Perform' ethos."

Also present at the event was Emily Harris, England field hockey junior international and Great Britain junior ice hockey international, who was coached in her early days by 9 Sales Director Ryan Cathcart, brother of Adam. Both Cathcarts are accomplished ice hockey players.



DAISY Wholesale showcased its One and Only Convergence Solution to resellers at Portsmouth's Spinnaker Tower. Over 50 delegates descended on View Deck 2 of the tower to hear Daisy outline opportunities around a range of solutions and its soon-to-be-launched Sales Academy. Sales Director Garry Growsns said: "By combining some of our best of breed services into an integrated solution suitable for all types and size of businesses, supported by a sales and marketing educational programme, we help partners to take advantage of the opportunities that the convergence of the IT and communications arenas present."

NEWS ROUNDUP

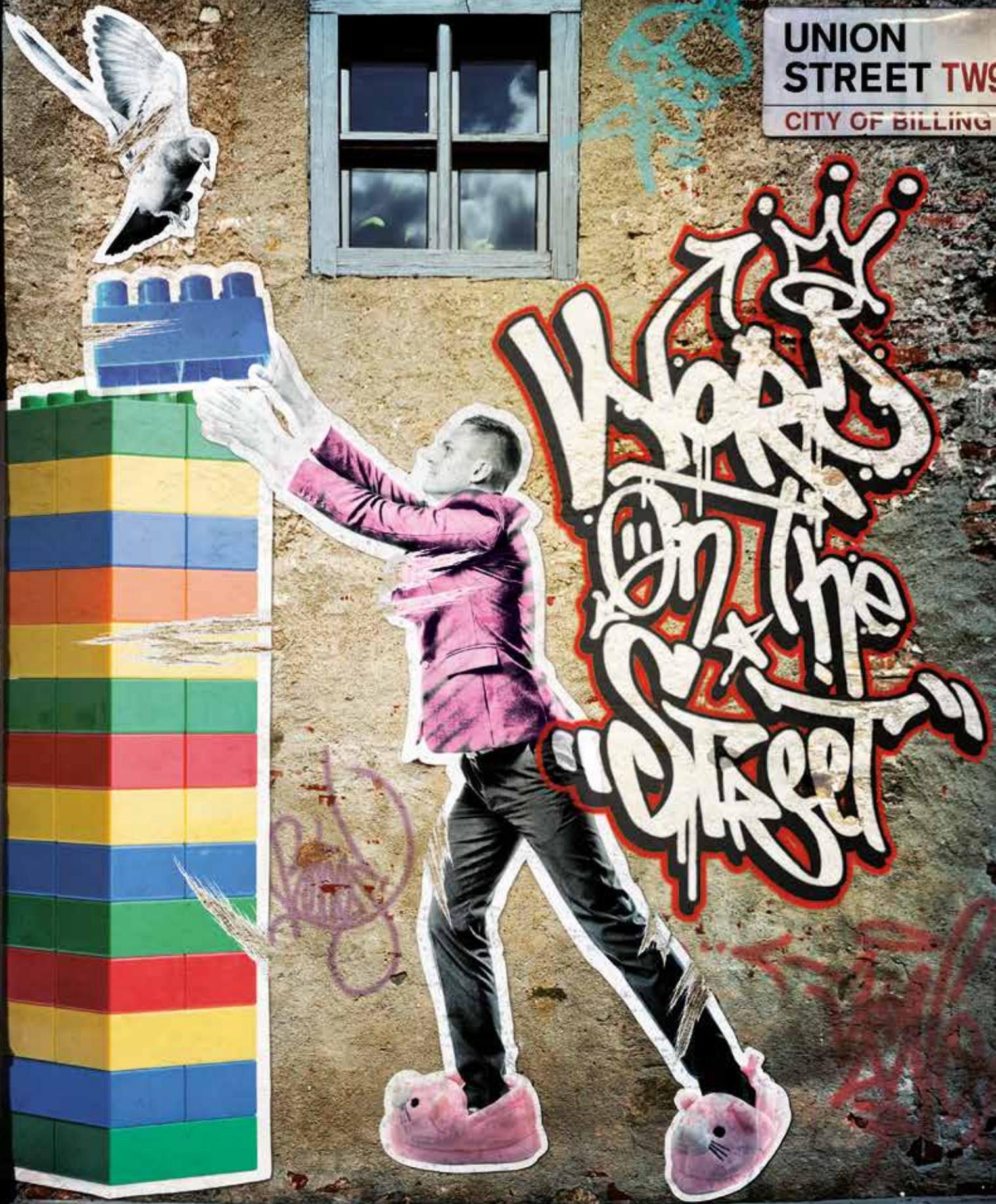
PLANTRONICS has completed its \$2bn acquisition of Polycom creating a new force in the market for UC&C end points. Plantronics expects the acquisition to be immediately accretive to Non-GAAP earnings per share and believes it can achieve annual run-rate cost synergies of \$75m within 12 months. Interview with Joe Burton, President and CEO, Plantronics – page 24

FIDELITY Energy was crowned a regional champion in The Energy Live Consultancy Awards, scooping the London and South East gong. The event was held at the Honourable Artillery Company show ground in central London and drew more than 450 attendees. Fidelity Energy was shortlisted in three award categories.

JUST 60% of employees in financial services firms have fit-for-purpose processes and technology in place to capture, record and retrieve real-time business comms. The remainder risk non-compliance with Article 16 of MiFID II, warned TeleWare whose research uncovered these figures. CEO Steve Haworth said: "With MiFID II and GDPR coming into force, and with some contradictory requirements when it comes to the recording of personal data, it's critical that firms make the necessary investments in technology and infrastructure to be compliant."

DISTRIBUTOR Westcon-Comstor has launched a hosted UCaaS solution based on IP Office, offering global coverage from data centres in 21 countries. The core service includes SIP trunks, hosting, carrier services, bundled minutes, billing and a customer management portal (with a white label option). It supports hybrid cloud deployments and has a contact centre option.

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THE launch of Exponential-e's Cloud Management Platform enables companies to manage a multi-cloud environment via one interface, offering visibility and control of the cloud, says the firm. "Businesses can create, visualise and link multi-cloud environments, enabling companies to change and migrate services between cloud platforms depending on the applications' requirements," said Jonathan Bridges, Chief Innovation Officer. "This brings agility and speed to both internally and externally-facing services. If businesses think that an application would perform better on a different service, with the click of a button they are able to migrate it."

WREXHAM-based Pace Telecom marked its 25th anniversary with the opening of remodelled offices by the Secretary of State for Wales Alan Cairns. CEO Jamie Hughes stated: "2018 is a pivotal year for us. As well as the new services and offices we are recruiting new staff and pursuing an acquisition strategy to augment our skill set with complementary technologies and services." See page 46

NEW figures from Vodafone UK on its channel performance show significant growth in the partnerships and alliances mobile base, double digit growth in fixed, a tenfold increase in partners selling One Net and a fourfold hike in One Net Business sales. Helen Freestone, Director of Partnerships and Alliances, revealed these figures when she addressed more than 70 partner organisations at the network operator's annual Partner Conference staged last month. "As the marketplace continues to throw new competitors into the mix, there is more of a need to work together and nurture a successful partnership," she commented.

Exertis nails merger plan



James Ward

EXERTIS has revamped its enterprise strategy with the integration of Hammer in a move designed to broaden the vendor portfolio and deliver greater access to professional services.

The new business division bears the combined 'Exertis Hammer' brand name and is led by MD James Ward who reports to Paul Bryan, Exertis UK MD.

"The customer focus will see Exertis Hammer concentrate on vertical markets and Exertis' enterprise division focus on VARs," stated Ward, who was previously Hammer MD.

"This is an opportunity to refocus on our customers and core strengths with better utilisation of our complete enterprise skill sets.

"Furthermore, with the financial strength and support of our parent company we aim to capitalise on the foundations we have built in Hammer's overseas operations."

Exertis acquired the server and storage distributor in October 2016 for circa £38.3m.

The deal bolstered Exertis' enterprise portfolio and capabilities in the mid and higher range server and storage market.

At the time of its acquisition Hammer operated from offices in the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands. It employed 165 staff, served circa 1,000 VARs, CSPs and SIs, with sales of £155m for the year ended

31st January 2016. Key vendors include Dell, Intel, Netapp, Seagate and Western Digital.

Bryan commented: "With the integration of the Hammer and Exertis enterprise commercial and sales teams we will offer an enhanced vendor portfolio and extended professional services wrap.

"With his experience and pedigree James is the ideal person to lead our enterprise business in the UK and across Europe where Hammer already has established operations in several countries."

Exclusive bags Irish distributor

EXCLUSIVE Group has opened a new front in its global expansion campaign with the acquisition of Irish distributor The NextGen Group.

Exclusive CEO Olivier Breittmayer said: "This is a strong strategic move. Ireland is an important tech centre for large global enterprises and integration partners."

The NextGen Group was formed in 2009 and has offices in Dublin and Wexford. It provides network, security and digital solutions and offers services and training capabilities.

The NextGen management team will take leadership roles in the new Exclusive Networks Ireland business.

Gerry Sheldrick, who is The NextGen Group's Country Manager, stated: "Our two companies share a common outlook and Exclusive Group's global reach and resources open up new opportunities for NextGen's reseller partners." See page 26

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) is hoping to increase its membership via a condition within the Government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme which asks whether applying comms providers belong to a recognised industry trade body. If not, references from a customer and supplier must be obtained as part of the registration process. In response to this requirement the ITP has rolled out a package to help comms providers more easily apply for vouchers and also qualify for ITP member advantages.

HPE's pledge to make its GreenLake Flex Capacity services available to the channel has emerged into market reality following a collaboration with distributor Westcoast. HPE promised to roll out its new on-prem infrastructure consumption model at its Global Partner Summit in July. The model is claimed by HPE to slash average compute infrastructure capacity costs by up to 38%. Technology Solutions Director at Westcoast Paul Harman stated: "We've been working with HPE to help shape the offering, review the pre-defined packages and make sure we can deliver it to the channel. We are ready to transact now."

ATOS has acquired US-based IT company Syntel in a \$3.57bn all-cash deal. The acquisition significantly boosts Atos's presence in North America and adds digital capabilities in cloud services, social media, mobile, analytics and automation. Revenue synergies are expected to reach circa \$250m by the end of 2021 with around \$50m operating margin. Syntel has strong relationships with financial services firms as well as companies in the healthcare and retail sectors.



A MEMBER of Nimans' Solutions Support team has completed a charity 16.5 hour golf challenge in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support, helping to raise more than £10,000. Gavin Elly and 11 members of Alderley Edge Golf Club played 72 holes on three golf courses across the north west. "It was a great day and hard work in scorching temperatures, but we easily surpassed our fundraising expectations," said Elly. Pictured: Elly recumbent with the team.



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Energy fits bill for Lykerlor's model

A NEW approach to customer generation is paying off for Lykerlor Business Solutions. Rather than focusing on products, the Essex and Kings Lynn based company markets itself as a 'money saving specialist' across three core areas - Communications, Technology and Energy - and for the latter a partnership with Fidelity Energy is accelerating business wins, as Managing Director Kerris Hawes explained: "We have literally saved businesses of all sizes, thousands of pounds in the past year. Many of our customers have now fixed their energy charges at current rates for the next three to five years and so are protected against expected future price hikes in an extremely volatile market."

Kerris admits that it's not plain sailing convincing new customers to switch energy suppliers, but perseverance has now yielded highly positive results from existing and, latterly, new clients.

"Success in this industry can be measured on number of bills generated, conversion rate of those opportunities and how much you earn from those deals. Now, we can genuinely say we are successful in all three areas.

"Existing customers were initially eager to learn more about our new energy proposition and we had some early successes. Getting energy bills from totally new prospects was a different matter. People in telecoms trying to sell cheaper minutes and line rental

to business customers will understand the difficulty and the negative response from people bombarded with calls and emails every day. Energy isn't a technical sale so in-depth training isn't necessary, but an understanding of the energy market and what triggers price rises is essential when persuading potential customers of the benefits of locking into longer-term contracts.

"We have persevered and eventually found the way to break new ground and haven't looked back since. Some customers have the perception that switching suppliers is hassle and that they will lose service during the switch from one supplier to another. Convincing them otherwise can prove difficult - and in some cases impossible - but it can be done. Ultimately, it comes down to the trust developed between customer and broker."

Kerris is full of praise for the support her team has received from Fidelity in getting deals over the line.

"The Fidelity team were always available with advice and assistance in closing deals and that was a great help, particularly in the early days. There can be negativity surrounding energy brokers, but with Fidelity's help and guidance and simple processes, customers are very quickly able to understand the benefits of using an independent energy broker and become very receptive to switching."



King's Lynn Town FC are a recent client win for Lykerlor, which has also recently agreed to sponsor the club for the next three years. Pictured are the football club's Chairman Stephen Cleeve, player Harry Limb, Lykerlor Business Solutions Managing Director Kerris Hawes and Lykerlor Chairman Nolan Braterman.

TTG sets out growth plan



Jonathan Marsden

THE Technology Group (TTG) last month lifted the lid on plans to develop voice AI technology as a key feature of its five year growth vision revealed to staff during a conference at local venue The Light Cinema.

The Leeds-based company is working with IBM, Google and Amazon to integrate AI into telephone systems in a strategy that forms part of a broader plan to more than treble turnover from £4m to £15m and double headcount to 65 by 2022.

TTG MD Jonathan Marsden reaffirmed his commitment to making more acquisitions, furthering a buy-and-build process that kicked off last year with the

purchase of Exchange Comms. TTG also wants to open offices internationally to support more than 400 businesses worldwide. The firm operates out of four offices in the UK.

"We have a clear and achievable five year business plan," commented Marsden. "We've launched our own private hosted VoIP platform and business mobile network. The next step is to develop voice AI solutions for the business comms market. We see enormous potential with this technology across a range of industries."

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Expansion fund won by Oriium

LEEDS-based cloud services provider Oriium has secured a seven figure funding package from Allied Irish Bank (GB) to pursue organic growth and expansion via acquisition.

Oriium began its commercial life in 2007, established by MD Chris Kiaie from his Harrogate home. The business now employs 70 people and witnessed a hike in turnover from £2.8m in 2015 to more than £11m this year.

Kiaie stated: "The investment will enable us to support our growth and provides a platform to identify and pursue acquisition opportunities."

Oriium Chairman Ryan McCarr added: "Three years ago Chris and I laid out our strategy to build a data management and applications business that generated revenues in excess of £10m per annum. We have achieved those ambitions."



Chris Kiaie

Cisco's UK digital cash boost

CISCO has pledged \$100m to spur digital innovation in the UK and as part of its promise has linked up with University College London to open one of the world's largest Artificial Intelligence research centres.

Prime Minister Theresa May said: "The decision by Cisco to make such a significant commitment to digital innovation across the UK is welcome news and is a vote of confidence in our Modern Industrial Strategy.

"I particularly welcome the new AI research centre in part-



Chuck Robbins

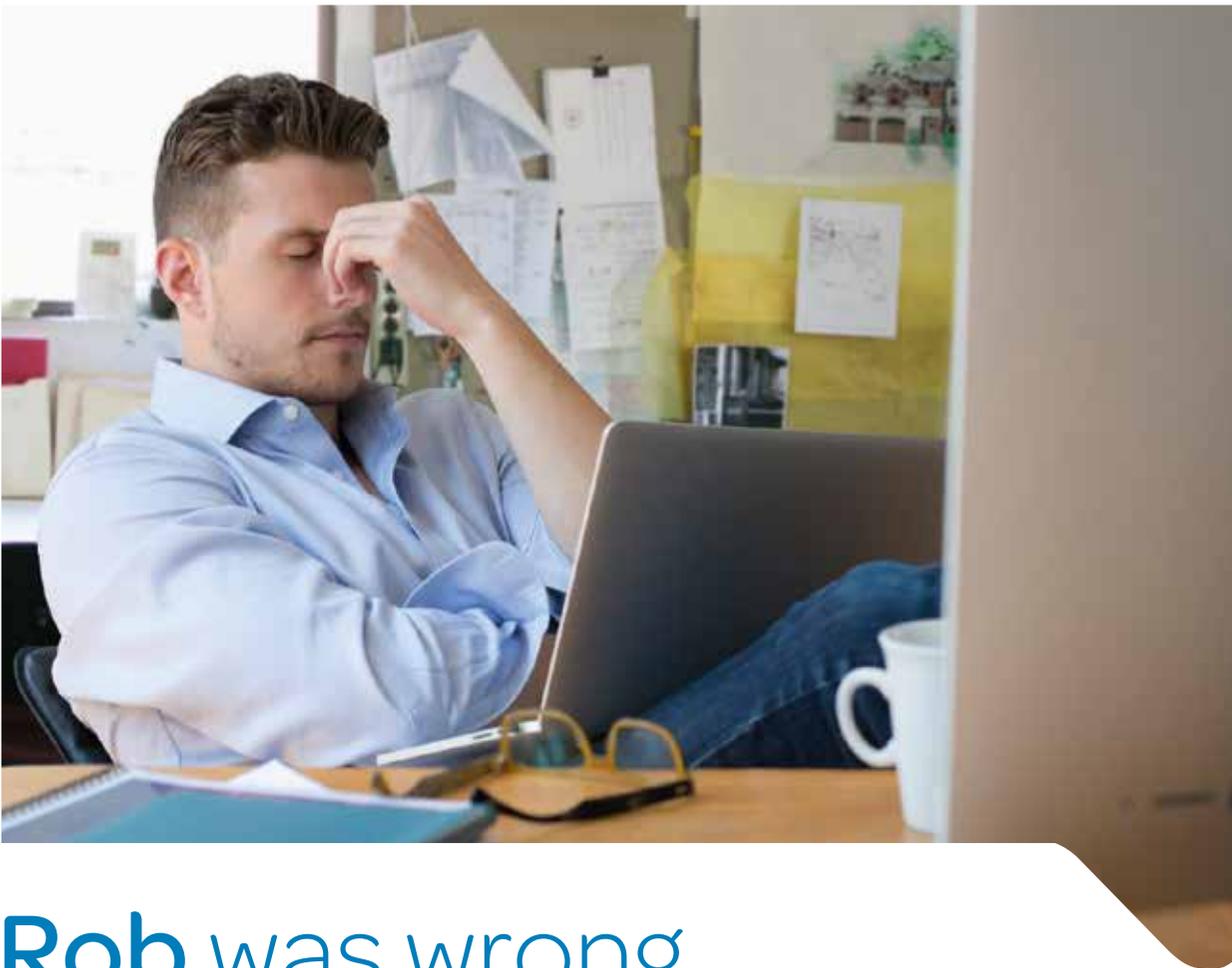
nership with UCL. Research has shown that AI could add £232bn to the UK economy by 2030 and

developments like this will help with our ambition to put the UK at the forefront of the AI and data revolution."

Cisco Chairman and CEO Chuck Robbins stated: "Technology is permeating everything we do, not only opening up new markets, but creating more opportunities for individuals, businesses and countries. Cisco is committed to driving innovation in the UK and to our partnership with the Government through our Country Digital Acceleration programme."

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Boucher's bid for growth

Excalibur Communications CEO Peter Boucher has promised to 'expand and strengthen the company' following the MBO he led in May. Here's how...

No sooner had Boucher completed an MBO at Excalibur (funded by Santander bank debt) than he set about making plans to double the size of the business within three to five years. His chief aims are to drive organic growth and seek additional acquisitions on the back of a record breaking trading period. Excalibur currently generates £8 million turnover, has 60 staff and over 4,000 customers located across the south and south west region, primarily SMEs and 40 schools served through a separate division called Techs4Education.

Although Excalibur's roots are in mobile the company has more than doubled the size of its non-mobile revenues, which now represent 40 per cent of the business. "This includes IT managed services, cloud services and hosted VoIP offerings," explained Boucher. "We have also increased our focus on connectivity and signed an exclusive agreement with CityFibre to provide ultrafast business services in Swindon and nationwide."

Boucher is aiming for an equal balance of revenues across Excalibur's full range of services. "We will get there by taking one year at a time and having a total focus on maximising customer and staff satisfaction," he stated. "We have also set aside a £1 million bonus incentive pot to be shared equally between our staff as we execute this



Peter Boucher

Organic growth is important, but we are also motivated by more IT and connectivity acquisitions

plan. This will be triggered at various growth milestones."

The company has a long standing relationship with Vodafone and is a Total Communications Partner. It also has relationships with EE/BT, Gamma, Virtual1, Google and Microsoft. "Our role is to deliver customised solutions for our customers, often with multiple vendors and to provide a consistently high service experience," said Boucher. "Customer

expectations will be more demanding and the ability to differentiate via integrated solutions and best in class service will be more important than ever.

Priorities

"A key priority is to maintain current levels of growth with an increased focus on cross selling our mobile customers into fixed line and IT. With ultrafast and reliable connectivity, how people collaborate at

work will continue to be enriched by the merging of all platforms into a single interface. They will have an integrated platform where voice, text and video will be truly interchangeable. We've been trialling a number of different solutions for customers for the past couple of years with success."

Who better to ensure Excalibur achieves its prime goals than Boucher? His previous experience

includes leading the global market launch of 3G for Vodafone where he saw the transformation from a voice centric business to one that is now driven by data. Looking further back, Boucher's career began with a number of sales and marketing roles at GSK, Kraft and Unilever before moving into technology during the dotcom boom, including a spell at a start-up called Self Trade. "This led to 11 years at Vodafone working both globally and in

n steams ahead

the UK," recalled Boucher. "In my last role at Vodafone we moved beyond pure mobile and introduced UC (Vodafone OneNet) and acquired Cable&Wireless."

A stint in private equity followed, running the largest private hire firm in London, Addison Lee. At this time he was also a Non Exec Director at Excalibur before taking over the CEO role from James Phipps in April this year. "I was appointed with a clear ambition to harness what James had achieved and continue to expand and strengthen the company," said Boucher. "Organic growth is important but we are also motivated by more IT and connectivity acquisitions that are a good fit. This year we acquired Techs4Education and Sensata."

Key buys

Phipps took over Excalibur in 2009 as CEO and made a number of acquisitions including First Call, Bridge and Emnico, adding scale and expertise. Two years prior to Phipps' appointment Excalibur had diversified into IT solutions and services for SMEs. Rewind the clock back further to 1992 and we reach the year the company was founded by Gary Wetherall as a franchisee of the Mobile Phone Centre selling phones to consumers through retail outlets. In 2000 Wetherall merged his business with another franchisee, Nick Simpson, to create Excalibur Communications. Five years later the company transitioned from being a consumer phone company into a B2B mobile comms specialist.

Today, the market has moved forward in leaps and bounds and Boucher says that after

many years of hype, full unified communications and cloud services are now truly mainstream and the backbone of most of Excalibur's sales conversations. "This wasn't the case two or three years ago when customers were still investing in legacy systems," he said. "There is also a move from customers to rationalise their suppliers. They want to buy more services from one place and new technologies enable this integration. For example, the explosion of connected devices and the IoT is already starting to be an important opportunity for Excalibur."

Among Boucher's raft of strategies is a proven plan to own the process of staff recruitment. "Finding, developing and retaining the right type of people to grow the business is one of our primary challenges," he explained. "Recruiting people that understand sales and service across a broad offering can be a challenge. As a Sunday Times top 100 Employer that over-invests in training and culture, we have shown that it's better to build and develop your own team rather than hire expensive 'big guns'."

Also on target is Boucher's longer term goal which he will never lose sight of and to which he has given ambition a free rein. "We have successfully completed year one of a five year plan for growth," he confirmed. "The strategy for expansion is to drive organic growth by investing in sales and service, broaden our product offering to existing customers, execute bolt-on acquisitions, develop partnerships and continue to invest in our people as our biggest asset." ■

Just a minute with Peter Boucher...

Role model: General Slim, an impressive leader who completed one of the most daring and effective feats of WW2

What talent do you wish you had? Patience

Name three ideal dinner guests: Henry VIII to understand if he was as nasty as portrayed by historians; Millicent Fawcett, one of my distant forebears, to see how she stuck to a cause for her whole life; and James Corden because he makes me laugh

What do you fear most? Running out of time

Industry bugbear? Acronyms: We need more focus on explaining the benefits in a way customers understand

Tell us something about yourself we don't know? For a brief spell I was a private detective

Top tip for resellers: 'Be different or be damned'

One thing you could not do without in your job? My black book: It keeps all my thoughts in one place and still works better than any other system I have found

Best piece of advice you have been given? Everyone should get sales experience because every job involves sales to some degree

Your greatest strength? Understanding new ideas quickly and being able to communicate them simply

The biggest risk you have taken? Leaving large corporates and working for equity and not income

One example of something you have overcome? Working in Hungary: It's one of the hardest languages to learn

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Burton maps path for mer

The acquisition of Polycom by Plantronics is an apotheosis, a moment for Plantronics to assert pre-eminence in the global marketplace. And at this time, perhaps more than any other, the first obligation of CEO and President Joe Burton is to be a true leader, a source of reassurance, vision, strategic direction and to know what lies ahead. He cuts the mustard in all of these...

Plantronics has emerged from the deal predictably strengthened, and according to Burton it is not the coming together of two big industry players that counts most, but the influence of a greater, more impactful entity catalysed out of the merger. "It is rare for two industry leaders to come together and be fundamentally bigger than the sum of their parts, but that is what Plantronics is today," claimed Burton. "We are focused on unlocking human potential on the individual's terms and becoming the end-to-end human collaboration experience provider, putting the person back in the middle. We will deliver a step-change in the user experience as the cloud UC market continues to grow."

Burton always believed that when Plantronics swooped on fellow industry giant Polycom the global UC market would be in more need of its services. Therefore he undoubtedly faces his greatest opportunity to serve the interests of partners and users, and this involves innovation. "We currently hold more than 700 patents with devices and services that are widely used for collaboration," he stated. "The software expertise we've built up over the past five years, coupled with the additional hardware



Joe Burton

I get most excited about the ability to walk into a conference room and things just magically work together

and video capabilities from our combined forces with Polycom, will continue to drive the cornerstones of our business in data analytics and will be a major key to enabling significant growth in the months and years ahead."

Hence Plantronics's intensifying efforts to tap into the rich seam of information gathered by its headsets. "Every company is swimming in raw communications

data, but it's not helpful to anyone if it's hidden or can't be understood," added Burton. "Over the past ten years headsets have evolved into a wearable computer of sorts – the headset knows an awful lot. It knows when I'm talking, or if we're both talking and interrupting each other. It knows the noisiest places in the office or where there might be wireless interference. We're learning more about that kind of data and using it to inform

our analytics platforms and solutions so we can ultimately provide our customers with the same knowledge and, for example, extend that level of information to video and open office seating."

Innovation at source

Plantronics was established in California in 1961 by two airline pilots with a founding mission to invent an alternative to heavy and uncomfortable long haul commercial aviation headsets.

Notably, a Plantronics headset was used by Neil Armstrong as he stepped onto the Moon. The company was also an early UC innovator. When the first versions of Microsoft OCS were appearing it realised the power of UC and the role of headsets in the user experience. "We built a fast growing business as the industry shifted to Unified Communications," explained Burton. "For example, in 2007 before the introduction of the iPhone the story we



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erged tech giants

were telling was about the desk phone or PC. Now, the story is about the desk phone, the PC, the mobile device, the tablet and the audio conferencing unit – and soon, immersive video.

"This isn't new to us. With the addition of Polycom we can now address all the opportunities for our customers. But it's a constant challenge to make sure that our technology continues to maintain that 'human first' priority. Features are wonderful, but they still need to be consumed through a piece of hardware that customers not only want but need to use. That's where we come in. We're constantly talking to our customers to learn about what's working for them, what's not, and how we can develop and improve upon their experiences. We even use our own offices as a test lab of sorts to study how megatrends influence how we work or how noise impacts our customers' businesses."

Polycom and Plantronics have historically pursued parallel paths in the communications and collaboration industry, and both companies began to serve the same customers through common routes to market and with similar alliance partners. "It made sense to combine forces to provide better experiences for our customers, to create new business propositions for our partners and to build value for our shareholders by engaging new markets for people, their workspaces and the places they work," stated Burton. "We believe that we're stronger and better together and will deliver a strategy that spans the range of

communications experiences with devices, software, analytics and services.

"As part of the integration process we are assessing the changes we need to make. Some may happen from the outset while others will evolve over time. One of the most exciting opportunities that we see in the new company is to share best practices across our entire business. For example, Plantronics has wanted to enter the services business for some time and this provides the best chance to do that quickly and successfully. Polycom already has a successful Care Services, Managed Services and Professional Services operation and in this we will become more integrated."

Collaboration

Burton joined Plantronics as SVP of Engineering and CTO in 2011 and he has a long history of creating opportunities to help drive direction and innovation, latterly immersed in how people communicate and collaborate today. "We've moved from considering how we can use technology to connect, to how technology serves our need to connect naturally in every kind of environment, whether we're on the move, in a huddle room, a conference room or at our desk," he stated.

"On one side, we now have higher expectations than ever for the technology in our business environments. At the same time, the move to the cloud for collaboration – with multiple cloud platforms to choose from, to mix and match – puts even more pressure on the intersection of our needs with the technology and how to make

sense of the communications chaos. And the people who have to manage all this are similarly confounded by provisioning, updating and enabling all the piece parts.

"So we're maintaining our focus on transforming the UCC ecosystem in major ways. What I get the most excited about, especially when I think about the great potential that Plantronics and Polycom share, is the ability to walk into a conference room or a collaboration space and things just magically work together. That's part of the beauty of Plantronics and Polycom joining forces. We're able to make those innovations a reality because we already create the hardware that facilitates seamless collaboration. I can't wait to reveal what we're working on right now that continues to deliver on this history of innovation." ■

Joe Burton's top leadership tips...

PAY attention to the small things, they matter, especially when it involves the people in your organisation. Also, don't let curiosity and imagination get lost. Embrace change and reflect regularly on your wins and losses and understand there is something to learn even when things don't go as planned. The overarching lesson I've learned about mistakes is to not let them define you, but instead acknowledge that life is always surprising. And rather than dwell on mistakes, be curious about them. It's an opportunity to learn and grow as a person and a leader.

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Breittmayer targets high

Exclusive Group CEO Olivier Breittmayer put to bed any idea of a merger last month when he sealed a major investment transaction with new owner Permira and set his sights on a \$10 billion revenue target in the cloud and cyber security markets.

To have merged with another major VAD would have thrown a spanner into Exclusive's growth plans, strategy and culture. And in decisively shunning the approaches of wide eyed suitors Breittmayer underscored and preserved his own independent vision and the strong character of Exclusive's trademark proposition. "Rather than dilute our distinctive value oriented approach by consolidating with other VAD players we opted for an investment partner that understands our mission and will work with us to achieve our ambition," he said. "The Permira investment enables Exclusive Group to extend its vision and, crucially, create the world's largest global specialist VAD in cyber and cloud transformation."

During the last three years Exclusive Group has grown from an EMEA-wide business to a global organisation trading with more than 13,000 resellers, employing over 1,600 staff and generating revenues of 1.75 billion euros in its 2017 financial year, up 38 per cent on the previous year and ahead of target. For a decade Exclusive has doubled annual revenues every two years and Breittmayer is gunning for \$10 billion in the coming years as he pursues organic and acquisitive growth based on a fundamental proposition that was first broached in 2005.

"Back then I was CEO at an IT VAD in France called Techniland," commented Breittmayer. "At that time the distribution industry had not evolved in two decades before I started thinking about the concept of 'exclusivity'. In other words, working with vendors who used us as their sole, exclusive distributor. We quickly convinced our first two vendors to drop their other VADs and trust in us alone to focus on their business, allowing them to focus on us. We chose a new name, Exclusive Networks, and became successful with this revolutionary approach."

Expansion

Having got the idea of 'exclusivity' accepted Breittmayer expanded the concept to a 'one contact – many connections' proposition. Global expansion followed through a mix of acquisitions and new office openings across EMEA, Australasia, Asia and North America. "In hindsight I would have maintained exclusivity for longer with certain vendors, and fought for it with more passion," commented Breittmayer.

"The facts speak for themselves – where we've kept exclusivity we've delivered higher growth."

Breittmayer also affirmed the important role played by the UK as a springboard for technology companies, either when expanding into EMEA or launching new functions,



Olivier Breittmayer

In hindsight I would have maintained exclusivity for longer with certain vendors, and fought for it with more passion

models or products. "So it's important we remain relevant here," he added. "The UK really sets the tone for the rest of the company, particularly as launching new vendors and products is more important than ever. The UK is also a significant innovator in terms of value added services development.

Many of our PASSport services are designed and market tested here including our forthcoming range of managed and cloud-based services. The UK is both our biggest and most innovative market. It must remain so, not only in our planning for tomorrow but also the day after tomorrow."

Exclusive adopted its 'day after tomorrow' mentality to focus more sharply on achievable strategic opportunities. "This has been a liberating experience for business leaders across the organisation as we concentrate on evolving our model to one of exploration and exploitation," explained



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growth markets his way

Breittmayer. "Exploration refers to markets where we act as a disruptive force, using new technologies that enable channel partners to stay relevant while acting as an accelerator for vendors seeking rapid market entry and penetration. Exploitation recognises the potential for consolidating and extending the market position for more mature brands using a different blend of tactics in defined segments of cyber security and cloud transformation."

The cyber security and cloud transformation sectors are becoming increasingly complex and both suffer from a lack of skills and knowledge. "The industry needs a VAD that can meet

this challenge and we aim to do that," commented Breittmayer. "It is critically important that resellers and SIs remain relevant and that means developing an understanding and skill set around cloud. This extends beyond merely articulating cloud-based solution propositions. Resellers and SIs must be able to accommodate the changing trends in IT consumption from hardware to software and from upfront procurement to a variety of payment and ownership models. This is why they need a specialist to help."

Breittmayer expects the cyber security and cloud markets to remain hotbeds of innovative and disruptive

new technologies. He says the likes of Blockchain, AI, the IoT and OT (Operational Technology) are all materially significant to the evolution of the cyber security and cloud transformation markets.

New paradigms

"Specifically, the maturation of these technology paradigms will take automation to unprecedented levels and have a revolutionary effect on how organisations trade, engage with customers and deliver shareholder value," stated Breittmayer. "There are a number of market segments where we intend to enhance our portfolio in order to maximise choice and wallet share. This may vary between global regions."

To better organise and facilitate its global expansion Exclusive evolved over time into a value added services and technologies group with four VAD divisions – Exclusive Networks, focused on cyber security; BigTec, the cloud transformation business; ITEC Exclusive Global Services which specialises in global project management, logistics and implementation; and the leasing and financing services arm called Exclusive Capital. The complete offering was formalised on a global scale in 2017 and includes professional and support services.

"We believe Exclusive Group has a distinctive approach in terms of value add and our commitment to skills,

knowledge and engineering resources on a global scale," said Breittmayer. "But we also place a strong emphasis on local relationships, making life easier for partners and enabling them to transact faster on bigger and better deals by calling on our one-stop-shop specialism.

"Distribution is a 'people' business. That's what drew me to focus on this area of the market. And I have always had a passion for the IT industry, it's so fast-paced and always evolving with new business models and disruptive technology. This is the case in cyber security and cloud transformation, the two most significant markets in IT that also happen to be inexorably linked." ■

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Investment on the rise

Smaller resellers have caught the eye of private equity investors keen to broaden their scope and build on successes achieved with larger players, explains Knight CF founders and Directors Adam Zoldan and Paul Billingham.



Adam Zoldan and Paul Billingham

The comms sector has captured the attention of more investors than ever with deal activity at its highest tempo and a significant upshift in win-win scenarios becoming available to smaller resellers. "We have seen over several years private equity invest in a range of ICT resellers, and the vast majority of deals have been successful for vendors and investors," said Billingham. "The likes of XLN, Node4, Pulsant and Six Degrees are on their second or third round of institutional investment; and many others like Southern Communications, GCI, 4net, Arrow Communications and Sabio have shown significant growth since taking on private equity investment for the first time."

Private equity is attracted to the ICT sector for a number of reasons, the main ones being the high levels of recurring revenues, strong cash generation and entrepreneurial management teams. "While organic growth is often challenging the fragmented nature of the sector creates multiple M&A opportunities that can accelerate growth and give investors the returns that

they are looking for," added Zoldan. "At the same time, private equity is being seen as an increasingly attractive option to business owners because it allows founders to realise some capital from their business without selling out completely, and gives management teams an opportunity to gain an equity interest that they may not otherwise have had. Private equity also brings a financial partner that can assist with professionalising a business and deliver added financial firepower for M&A."

Despite potential political risks to the UK economy, Knight sees no sign of institutional interest in the sector waning, and impressive valuations are still being achieved from investors. "In a more recent development, a number of the mid-market private equity houses – those investing between £10 million and £50 million on a deal – are raising new funds that allow them to invest at the £2 million to £10 million level," said Billingham. "Both North Edge Capital and Palatine Private Equity have recently launched new funds aimed at smaller investment opportunities to compete with the likes of NVM, YFM and Foresight at the lower

We receive numerous enquiries from institutional investors and funders seeking new opportunities to invest in the ICT sector

end of where private equity would traditionally invest."

Another even smaller fund, fund:tmt (Zoldan and Billingham sit on its Advisory Board), has been raised specifically for the telecoms, media and technology sector and can offer funding of between £500k and £1 million to business owners looking to release some equity, fund acquisitions or purely for development capital. "ICT business owners can also explore a range of debt or quasi-debt options as another alternative for funding of their businesses," noted Zoldan. "For exactly the same reasons as private equity are interested in the sector, debt providers are also seeing the opportunity to fund solid businesses with good cashflows and relatively secure revenues."

According to Billingham and Zoldan they have never seen a more varied and

interesting range of options for businesses of all sizes in the comms sector in terms of funding for growth, equity release or M&A. "More and more clients we talk to are interested in what their options are over and above a traditional trade sale," stated Billingham.

Opportunities

"It is also a testament to the industry that we receive numerous enquiries from institutional investors and funders seeking new opportunities to invest in the ICT sector. They have seen the success of their peers investing in this space and recognise that the opportunities far outweigh and risks."

Declines in traditional voice solutions are a concern for institutional investors, but the growth potential of hosted voice and cloud solutions in general, supported by the range of M&A opportunities

offered by the industry, is attractive enough for private equity to compete with trade buyers from a valuation perspective, observed Zoldan. "It should go without saying that while there is an increasing range of options for ICT business owners, it is those that are well prepared and can provide good financial and management information that will be of most interest to potential funders," he added.

"As they are unlikely to have much industry experience, funders will be more demanding than trade buyers when it comes to due diligence and information requirements, so preparation is key. Given the complex nature of this type of funding it is also essential that a business has the right advisors alongside them to assist in securing different options and navigate them through the more complex transaction process." ■



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Targets set to bring UK's infrastructure totally up to speed

The Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (FTIR) published last month strongly emphasised that running copper and fibre networks in parallel is 'costly and inefficient'. The report set out plans for full fibre coverage across the UK by 2033 and 5G deployment to the majority of the country by 2027. The switchover process will be industry-led and coordinated with Ofcom. The watchdog will also reform regulation to allow unrestricted access to Openreach ducts and poles for residential and business use, including essential mobile infrastructure. Sharon White, Ofcom Chief Executive, said: "The Government and Ofcom are working together and with industry to help ensure people and businesses get the broadband and mobile they need for the 21st century."

CityFibre's Director of Strategy Mark Collins stated: "The Government's plans to deliver nationwide full fibre include a welcome commitment to creating a level playing field, ensuring greater transparency from the incumbent and delivering a stable regulatory environment for investment. However, it is critical that the consumer is at the heart of this opportunity from the start. This is the key to unlocking demand. That means avoiding price rises, ensuring switching between networks is simple and ending years of misleading



Sharon White

'fake fibre' advertising. We now need to see the Government and Ofcom push these plans through."

Long-term strategy

Key measures proposed in the Government's national long-term strategy for UK telecoms include mandatory full fibre broadband for all new build homes and prioritising hard-to-reach rural areas. Also proposed are reforms to the regulatory environment; a new nationwide framework that will reduce the cost, time and disruption caused by street works by standardising the approach across the country; and greater access to spectrum for 5G services.

The Government report predicts a more converged telecoms sector as the synergies between fixed fibre networks and 5G are realised, and that operators with an interest in both will hold a strategic advantage. The Review also noted that the legal separation of BT

and Openreach may not go far enough to deliver the Government's targets, promising to consider 'all additional measures' should that be the case.

In response to the FTIR, Openreach noted that the economics of building digital infrastructure 'remain challenging for everyone' and called for a review of the current business rates regime to stimulate the whole sector. And on the close monitoring of BT and Openreach by the Government and Ofcom an Openreach spokesperson said: "We're determined to be the dependable partner for Government, the industry and our 600 wholesale customers as we work to bolster Britain's position as a global digital leader."

Glide Business Director of Sales, Marketing and Product James Warner also welcomed the Government's commitment to full fibre but added a note of timely realism. "Setting a date to incentivise the move to full fibre makes sense as long as it is realistic and takes into consideration that cost and location is still a barrier for many," he stated. "For those businesses that suffer poor connectivity today we need to do more. Partners need to look for suppliers that offer innovative ways of getting the best access to their customers. Meanwhile, the Government should continue to take steps to democratise access to full fibre with initiatives such as the Gigabit Voucher Scheme."

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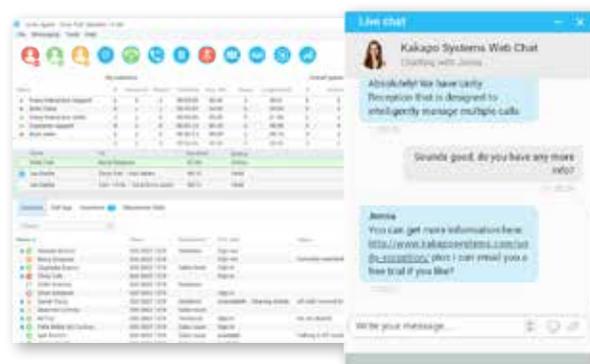
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The big industry question

from Digital Britain?

Are you ready to profit from the all-digital transformation? Comms Vision 2018 explores the new realities of Digital Britain, their potential impact on the channel and how to be a leader as new infrastructure and ICT technologies take hold.

This year's Comms Vision Convention staged at the world famous Gleneagles Hotel (7-9th November) will establish a strategic sense of what Digital Britain really means for delegates and the channel as a whole, and clear a pathway towards new cross-industry revenue opportunities catalysed by the targets set in the Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (FTIR) published last month and innovations in technologies around UC&C and Contact Centres. In its report the Government threw its weight behind full fibre and 5G services as the *de facto* infrastructure for the whole of the UK, and Comms Vision will consider what lies ahead as the industry evolves, and discuss how the channel can unlock new revenue streams as the UK becomes a world leader in digital communications.

Comms Vision will also assess the hurdles faced by the industry as we move towards Digital Britain – including the potential impact arising from the post-WLR world and BT's switch to all-IP in 2025 – and explore how the comms sector should prepare for the opportunities ahead and why collaboration between the industry, Government and regulator will be key. Comms Vision will also discuss the broader themes of digital transformation and how digital technology is disrupting business models across Britain at a time of unprecedented interconnectivity.

Where next? Devising a strategy to capture value while navigating the Digital Britain obstacle course will be a priority. As the migration to Digital Britain continues to disrupt traditional models we will consider why channel players need a digital strategy and discuss the core strategic components and elements that will have the most positive impact on capturing value and future business success. As part of this, digital enablement

offers an opportunity to radically change the customer landscape and drive change. Against this backdrop we will discuss where Digital ranks in the buyer's decision structure, how they are likely to engage with suppliers in the future, and how the expectations placed on ICT providers are shifting.

Now is the time for business leaders in the channel to make their mark. But the characteristics that will define successful CEOs of the future are evolving. Effective leadership will undoubtedly function as an important catalyst for revenue creation, therefore Comms Vision will explore the key leadership issues that top level executives should be considering in their Digital Future planning, and highlight some of the practical actions that can be taken now to help ensure long-term success. We also consider the characteristics that organisations should expect of their CEOs in the digital defined future.

Leadership priorities

A key leadership imperative will be to ensure that organisations are fit for purpose and able to go the Digital Distance and make the most of tomorrow through partnerships. Digital Britain provides an unprecedented opportunity to reshape IT and communications, but how can channel partnerships continue to create the conditions for growth and underpin future customer requirements at a time of historic disruption? We explore the impact of this question, and other factors, on how the Customer and Channel Partnering landscape is likely to evolve and the significance of this to partners.

Now is the time for business leaders in the channel to make their mark

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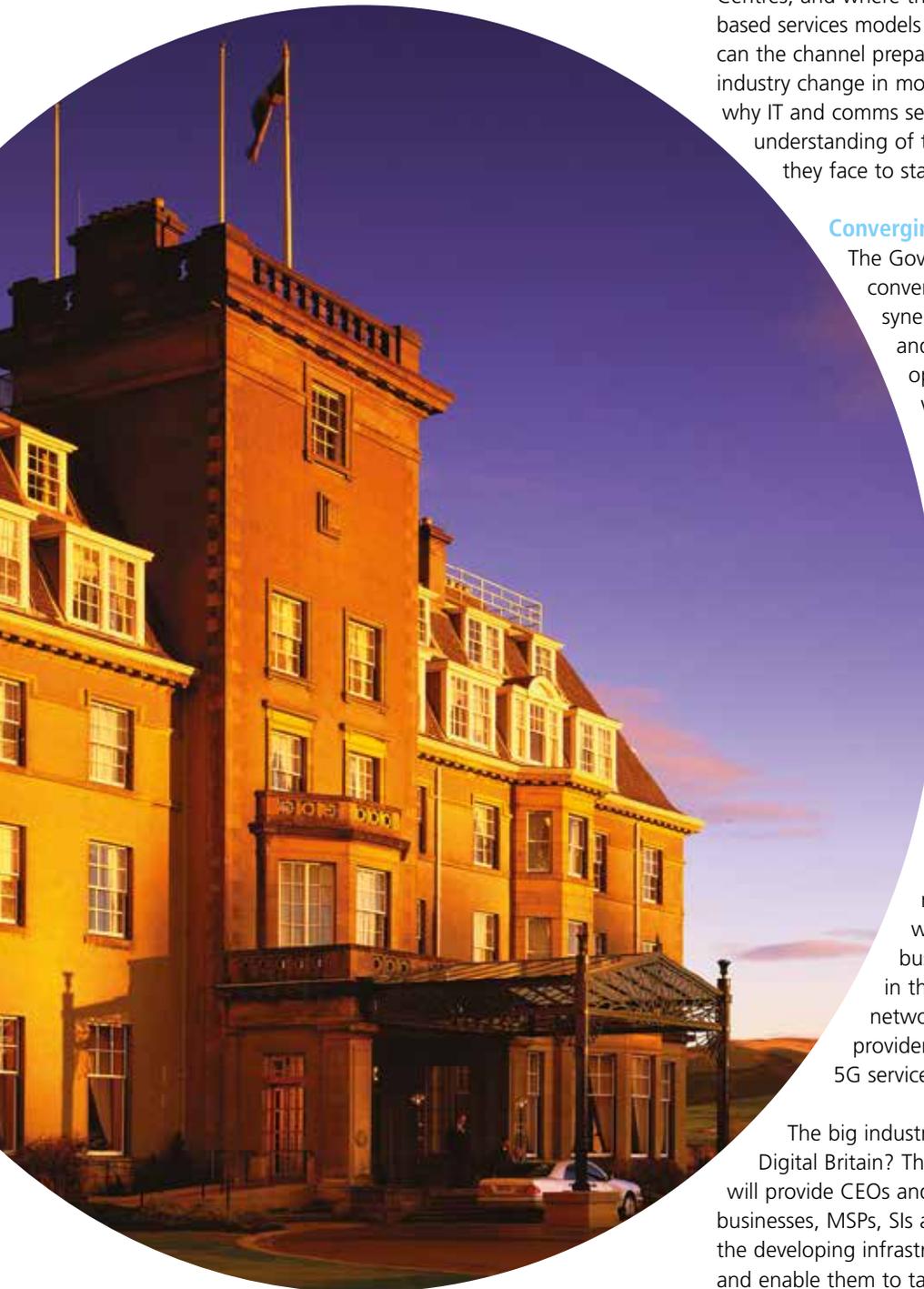


on today: How to profit

Reimagining business communications in the Digital Age also means harnessing breakthrough networks, fully understanding innovations in voice and data services and developing channel empowerment. At this

time of massive disruption we will also explore how technological innovations are reshaping the digital communications landscape where data reigns supreme in key markets like UC, Collaboration and Contact Centres, and where the shift to cloud and rise of opex-based services models extends across the board. How can the channel prepare for what could be the biggest industry change in more than a generation? We highlight why IT and comms service providers will require a full understanding of the opportunities and challenges they face to stay ahead in their key markets.

COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. Places are limited and by invitation: If you would like to join us this year, please register your interest to attend at www.commsvision.com



Gleneagles Hotel: Destination Digital Britain – where business leaders meet tomorrow’s opportunities.

Converging sector

The Government’s FTIR points to a more converged telecoms sector due to the synergies between fixed fibre networks and 5G. According to the report, operators with an interest in both will hold a strategic advantage at a time when 5G offers the potential for an expansion of the telecoms market. Therefore an important theme at Comms Vision this year will be reimagining mobile networks and mastering tomorrow’s mobile experience.

We will address the top questions about the future of business mobile and develop an understanding of new areas such as the impact of 5G on the mobile experience, the extent to which narrowband IoT and low power connectivity will catalyse new ‘connected’ markets, and we will also consider the potential business opportunities for the channel in the emerging 5G and IoT enabled network landscape, and how ICT providers with a play in both full fibre and 5G services may hold the competitive edge.

The big industry question now: How to profit from Digital Britain? This year’s Comms Vision Convention will provide CEOs and MDs at the helm of ICT reseller businesses, MSPs, SIs and VARs with an understanding of the developing infrastructure, voice and data ecosystem, and enable them to take the strategic action required to prepare their organisations to thrive on the pathway to Digital Britain.

Special Feature: A leader with true Vision – page 34

Devising a strategy to capture value while navigating the Digital Britain obstacle course will be a priority

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Intersection of digitalisation catalyses fast growth

Who will hold the most power in the comms channel today and tomorrow and knock spots off their competition? Those who embrace the digital revolution and show outstanding leadership, according to Comms Vision Platinum sponsor Andrew Taylor, CEO at Gamma.

Taylor took up the reigns as Gamma CEO in May this year with a clear view of how he would go about building on the company's growth to date under the stewardship of former Chief Executive Bob Falconer who retired in April. "Customers care about the easiest way to engage with their clients and suppliers and digital is becoming the best medium to do this," commented Taylor. "Digital to Gamma means looking at how we can best communicate and support our channel partners. We have embarked on our own digital transformation project to ensure we are providing the right tools and technology to our staff so they can be productive and efficient in their roles. We have also digitised our entire OSS and BSS and given partners the tools and knowledge to be successful via the Gamma Portal, Academy and Accelerate."

The question asked by many is how far digital should extend across businesses but Taylor has long considered digital transformation and what it really means for organisations. "For all the different benefits of DX, the changing demands of customers is a key driver for organisations to up their digital game," he added. "One of the significant changes in customer behaviour is their preference to buy products and services online. Gamma sees this as an opportunity to deliver digital services that are flexible, customer focused and will support our partners' ability to acquire new customers, cross-sell and up-sell."

Taylor discerns that ICT buyers are now seeking the best value and flexibility from their supplier of communications and applications. "This requirement will be met by an

expansion of the portfolio that Gamma provides, such as cloud IT applications and more flexible network services such as SD-WAN, enabling partners to consume these services via a single integrated portal," he added.

Taylor also noted that Gamma has developed a strong route to market with Horizon and will enhance the solution with UC. He plans to introduce the first UC offering later this year in 'simple packages' such as collaboration or audio conferencing add-ons. "We have also recognised the need to provide a compliant call recording and a PCI solution on our voice services," added Taylor. "This is an important focus for our development team over the coming months."

Mobility matters

If ICT resellers want to progress they must also seize with open arms the solutions that enable workers to be mobile. Taylor says the rise of the mobile worker and their growing significance is fast becoming a market-defining dynamic. "Staff are spending much more time away from their office or primary workspace than ever before and need the ability to use their business applications on the move," he stated. "For businesses, enabling mobile working is an increasingly vital strategic objective that they need to achieve to be successful and grow."

The mobility trend has reshaped the way customers buy business communications, even in the SMB market, noted Taylor. "Instead of picking a single product to fulfil a requirement, businesses want a solution that solves a variety of challenges," he added. "The key for partners is to add new solutions that offer a tangible value while

For suppliers to drive real growth in their business they need great digital assets and capabilities

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tion and true leadership

also putting themselves in a good position to cross-sell another product or add to the solution with products such as Connect, our fixed and mobile offering."

In preparing for these scenarios partners should first assess their approach to customers, advised Taylor. "Is it a product or solution sell?" he said. "If you are just trying to sell a product, adapt that to a solution sell. And finding the best way to communicate with customers on all stages of their journey is key. Providing mediums like desktop sharing models, video conferencing, live chat as well as having staff that can sit face-to-face with a customer will provide a well rounded and efficient approach to customer acquisition. The strength of the channel is also its diversity and level of local customer knowledge. This is where they will compete against the larger US IT players."

Partner value

Long-term success in the channel depends on a lot more than product. Partners that listen to their customers, understand how their business operates, the problems they have, and can solve those problems are the ones that will thrive, reaffirmed Taylor. "The partner's value is in selecting product elements to build a rounded and tailored solution that relieves pain points," he added.

Taylor is therefore set on pushing control and resources to partners as a fundamental component of their future success. "It's about us supporting the channel, which has led to a sharper focus on the service wrap we deliver around all of our products, both in traditional and digital methods," he added. "We've developed our partner portals including Gamma Academy and Accelerate



to become self-serve tools, empowering partners to upskill their staff and develop their marketing strategies with modern techniques. A better service wrap from us means partners can deliver a better experience to their customers."

Like Gamma's evolving services portfolio Taylor's industry experience is also all-encompassing in both mature and emerging markets at home and internationally. During the past ten years he was CEO at a number of fast growing public and private companies including Intec Telecom, Digicel and most latterly Nomad Digital. He also ran Alcatel-Lucent in the UK&I and was General Manager of BT Germany, BT Mobile and BT Calls & Lines during his eight year stint at the telco. "I have spent the last 22 years working across most aspects of the communications and IT sector, giving me a strong foundation for my position at Gamma as we seek to design and execute a long-term sustainable digital growth strategy," he commented. "The decision to take the role was a no-brainer."

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The changing demands of customers is a key driver for organisations to up their digital game

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Severity downplayed

Large sections of the comms sector continue to reduce VoIP security threat levels to 'moderate' and sit on their hands in the face of unprecedented belligerent attacks, according to Ollie Clutterbuck, Head of Product Architecture at 9 Group who says any withdrawal from the severity of the issue is an urgent industry challenge.



Ollie Clutterbuck

The communications industry in general has perhaps never before failed so much to act on a matter of importance as critical as VoIP security, according to Clutterbuck, who too often sees resellers and ITSPs fail to make the security grade. "It is far too easy now for a malicious user to obtain software that takes all the complexity out of attacking peoples' systems," he commented. "It is clear that the frequency and sophistication of attacks is increasing. You have to accept that at some point you are going to get attacked but it's up to you, your customers and your service provider to make sure you have done as much as possible to mitigate this attack."

Clutterbuck noted that the same failures are repeated over and over again – poorly secured phone systems, weak voicemail security and user error. "The good news is that these are easy to fix," he stated. "Use strong passwords when securing phone systems and don't

use the same password on all systems; restrict access for phone system management to known IP addresses; lock down SIP access to only your ITSP (this isn't always possible with remote workers so consider non standard ports and if possible a session boarder controller); use strong PIN access for voicemail; if possible don't allow external access; don't allow users to dial out from voicemail; don't let users share passwords and where possible do not give users any SIP credentials. You also need to make sure your ITSP is protecting your customers' security from within their own network."

On ITSP security there are certain points to look out for, pointed out Clutterbuck. "Make sure they have a regular security programme and are employing external penetration testers to find vulnerabilities in their network," he added. "Check they monitor for malicious activities and can offer fraud detection and mitigation, such as call spend limits, including the cutting of live calls and employing

the use of AI for spotting unusual call activity."

According to Clutterbuck, resellers often make the assumption that their upstream provider will handle security on their behalf, but the majority of fraudulent activity originates from phone systems or a lack of network security so an ITSP would be unable to have any influence on such cases. "Where security is in the hands of the service provider don't make any assumptions, but do ask questions and make sure your provider is looking after your customers' security," he stated. "Recent regulations have increased penalties for the loss or misuse of personal data, enough to sink a well established company, so do not leave this in the hands of others."

Main barriers

Cost and time are the main barriers to effective security, observed Clutterbuck, but for resellers basic security need not cost too much and can often be included as part of the installation process. "For ITSPs though the cost of securing and monitoring

Not to invest in network resilience and security is nothing less than negligence

a network can be significant, and it should be," stated Clutterbuck. "As ITSPs we are responsible for the security of hundreds of thousands of users' communications and this should not be undertaken lightly. With open source technologies the barrier to becoming an ITSP is far lower and we have seen hundreds of smaller service providers pop up over the past five years.

"However, being able to register a phone and make a call is only a small part of the whole piece. Network resilience, and of course security, take expertise and money. To not invest in them amounts to nothing less than negligence. As a reseller,

do your due diligence on your providers and make sure they are investing in their product beyond the basic telephony elements."

In terms of VoIP security, the integration of mobile devices will be a key shift over the next five years, believes Clutterbuck. "We will see business telephony switch from the desktop phone to softphones and mobile clients, where VoIP is heavily integrated with the native dialler," he explained. "This puts security very much in the hands of the user. Another interesting development is the use of machine learning to create AI for mining through large quantities of data. And we are seeing the emergence of IoT and its integration with telephony, whether it be location detection to change a user's availability, or motion sensors that text the user when someone enters their house, which needs to have security at its core when these systems are designed.

"Security versus usability has always been the trade off. With increased security comes a worsening user experience, so our job is to keep that balance, protect customers and provide a rich and engaging user experience at a time when integration is becoming key and still emerging as a requirement. Yes people are doing CRM integration, but I'm talking about integrating with your car, or your home, integrating with Facebook or WhatsApp. The way we communicate is evolving and we need to be looking to the future and how we can get a user's communication system to integrate seamlessly with their everyday life – effortlessly and securely." ■



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O'Hagan marches toward

With 2017 turnover reaching £27 million, channel-only data network provider Virtual1 is rapidly accelerating towards revenues of £35 million this year under the stewardship of its founder and CEO Tom O'Hagan. Not bad for a guy who left school at 16.

We meet at Virtual1's plush headquarters in the City of London, a far cry from the kitchen of a rented flat in Wandsworth where O'Hagan started his entrepreneurial journey 11 years ago. The genial CEO is as approachable, enthusiastic and honest talking as he was then – despite a hangover from hell. "We had our annual company kick off last night and I'm a bit fragile to be honest!" he confesses.

The event takes place at the end of each financial year and gives management the chance to share with staff accomplishments of the year gone by, to present their vision for the year ahead and to celebrate as a team. Fuzzy headed or not, O'Hagan soon gets into his stride when asked to explain how Virtual1 has grown so quickly to become the fifth largest network provider in the UK and its future path, which now includes going head-to-head with the UK carrier market.

"The headline financials are that we closed the year off on £27 million and this year we're expected to grow to £35 million, so, we're recruiting another 30 people this year in all areas," he said. "We've completely restructured our sales team. John Walters is now looking after our reseller teams, selling managed services into the channel community



Tom O'Hagan

Having a national network and a strong software capability has opened up a new carrier market to us

and Simon Durrant is now heading up our service provider and carrier division serving big, global, international carriers and the tier 2 service provider market. It's exciting that we can now take on the big carriers. Also, Neil Wilson is heading up all products and marketing

for us, so we're building a significant team under him. He now owns the Cloud and Access products and that's exciting because we haven't done that before."

This has all come about following the completion of Virtual1's software driven

national network early this year, utilising some of the £10 million in funds provided by private equity investor BGF. "Effectively, we've built the fifth largest network in the UK in about nine months," commented O'Hagan. "Our CTO James Hickman and his team

have done an amazing job. We are fast becoming a software company that happens to own a fantastic network. We've got a big software team now across our portal, salesforce and our SDN platform. That's really what's making us different in the marketplace because



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we've automated all of the provisioning processes.

"We've got all the APIs in place. Partners can manage their network services through a single pane of glass and this means there is a great opportunity for us and our channel partners to help win business away from the traditional network providers."

Virtual1 was established as a channel-only business and O'Hagan is almost offended when questioned if any of his company's focus will now drift away from the channel towards global carrier sales. "No, not at all," he stated. "That's very much why we've split the sales team into two. So, we've got absolute focus on both sectors and a strong proposition into both of those markets, and with Neil looking after products we've got a clearly defined product set for the markets that we want to go into and those we are already in. Historically, we come from the channel. We're good at helping organisations come on that journey, away from voice into cloud or data into cloud or voice into data. Having a national network and a strong software capability has opened a new carrier market to us that historically wasn't available with just an aggregator model."

Making it simple for resellers to sell data network solutions and understanding their day-to-day issues remains at the core of Virtual1's ethos, as O'Hagan stressed. "We launched our MPLS pricing on our partner portal last year," he said. "It means you can go online and build a data network quote in the time it takes you to make a cup of tea. When you

come back it's done. All the diagrams are there for you. You can build all of the routing protocols online with the different ports, you can build the topology and you can place the order. It means one of our partners can sit in front of a big multi-site UK business and say, 'I can solve this problem for you in minutes'. It's helping them to win business. We've also introduced a network health check, so partners can go on to one of their circuits and within 10 seconds they can look at the health of the whole network all the way through the infrastructure – every single protocol.

Key investments

"We've spent a lot of money and time establishing what our partner's supply chain looks like. For example, we've built the SIP exchange where we connect into all the major SIP providers in the UK. And we've completed the UC exchange, enabling us to bring the UC providers on Net too. This gives resellers the ability to sell an Internet circuit to their client and as soon as that's in, they can sell the rest of their portfolio to them, because they can sell them SIP, Unified Comms, and Cloud Services and we're enabling all that for them. It's complex behind the scenes, but what we're doing is making the complex extremely simple. That's the key to unlocking everything."

O'Hagan comes from the school of entrepreneurs that has found success without business qualifications by understanding his market and being passionate about people succeeding. His overflowing awards cabinet is testament to that. He was Comms National Awards Entrepreneur of the Year

for 2017 and at the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards this spring Virtual1 picked up four awards including Best Company to Work For. He clearly has an instinct for recruiting people that buy into his vision and firmly believes in empowering them.

"If I believe in people, I let them get on with it," he stated. "It's about empowering them. We're creating a big family and people feel special to be a part of it. That's the secret sauce. When somebody says, 'Where was the best place you've ever worked?', I want them to say, 'Virtual1'. I get such a buzz out of all of my teammates – that's what drives me."

Just a minute with Tom O'Hagan...

Role model: My father: He came from nothing to achieve significant business success

What talent do you wish you had? To be fluent in Spanish

What do you fear most? Failure

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who made a real difference to people both personally and in business

How do you relax when not working? Spending time with my family, playing golf and watching England play rugby

Best piece of advice you have been given? Go with your gut and never give up

Your greatest career achievement? I am still on that journey

The biggest risk you have taken? Selling my house and leaving my job at Telstra to start Virtual1



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The knowledge factor

If business optimisation and providing a sublime customer experience is the endgame then failing to embrace data analytics is to dice with certain failure.

To disregard the rise of data analytics across all channels is tantamount to sitting on your hands, King Canute-like, and drowning in the tide. "Too many organisations continue to focus on their formal call centre and pay little attention to other front line roles and communication channels – email, webchat, social media, customer portals etc," stated Oak Innovation joint CEO Phil Reynolds. "The ability to collect data from multiple channels, interpret data using technologies like sentiment analysis and deliver high quality business intelligence will be critical."

Business intelligence is key to better decision making and gaining a competitive edge, but how that data is organised and accessed is another matter. "Today, most organisations have a number of stand-alone systems to monitor specific aspects of their business," added Reynolds. "They provide an insight into performance but fall short of offering a complete view. A more comprehensive approach is required, extending to a greater number of roles and a wider range of media channels. Get it right, and the installed base migration opportunity is significant."

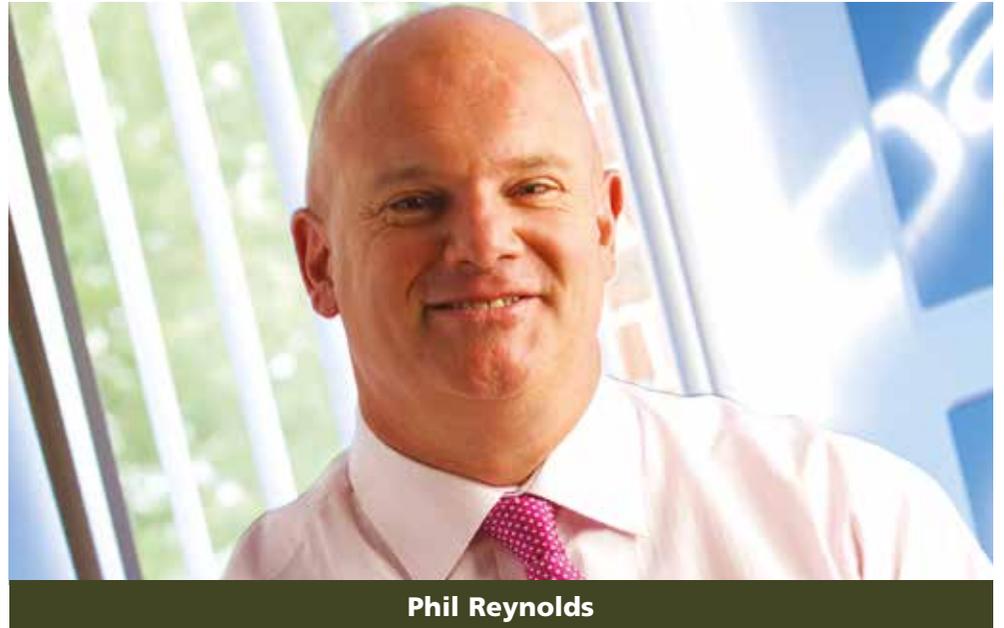
To deliver on the promise, resellers need a deep

understanding of the customers' business and their requirements. This means perfecting a discovery process when defining opportunities and matching these with appropriate solutions. "Vendors need to provide a flexible suite of management tools that can integrate with the customer's chosen IT frameworks and deliver business intelligence," added Reynolds. "This may necessitate access to custom development resources to complete a solution."

Integration

Oak is focused on call recording, quality measurement, call analytics, CRM integration and most recently payment automation. Once considered as separate applications, they increasingly operate as a suite of communication management tools that integrate with the customers' infrastructure to provide business intelligence. "Awareness of speech analytics, sentiment analysis and omnichannel reporting is on the rise," noted Reynolds. "Businesses are asking about these capabilities but few are buying. We expect a significant shift over the next two to three years."

Reynolds' message is that more needs to be done to broaden the scope of analytics and on that point he is taking decisive action. It is a dynamic that Akixi



Phil Reynolds

Managing Director Bart Delgado is also addressing. "Analysts are in broad agreement that the size of the digital universe will double every two years at least," he observed. "The key to business success lies in transforming this data into actionable insight. There are a number of ways to unlock BI potential, starting with the ability for companies to rapidly analyse data at the

Get it right, and the installed base migration opportunity is significant

point of delivery and at scale. Today's world of pay-as-you-go services makes it possible for anyone to benefit from analytics services. They are no longer reserved for large enterprises with formal call centres and big budgets."

Delgado reaffirmed that successful analytics requires a full understanding of the

customer which means asking the right questions. "You need to understand business challenges and objectives and then present the analytics that will help them overcome those challenges," he stated. "What is the cost of an abandoned order to their business? As soon as you know their average deal size and assign monetary value to their calls, you can really begin to demonstrate tangible benefits. It is about identifying the relevant analytics for the customer's business and demonstrating the benefits."

Every business and every aspect of its operations needs analytics, believes Tony Ford, Operations Director at Marston's Telecoms. "The elements of analytics that are on the rise are predictive analysis and visually aided telemetry," he said. "Visual telemetry of real-time monitoring supported by big data analytical engines is making reactive support a distant problem."

He gave an insight into how Marston's prioritises the

measurement of its activities and why analytics is so important for the business. "It is the only way to remain agile and slender in an over bloated, over stretched margin critical sector," he stated. "Our strategy remains focused on performance and our people, but without excellent reporting and analytics we would never be able to operate at the level we do. Greater knowledge of capacity and capability enables us to pass critical savings to our customers which in turn allows them to drive greater sales."

"Our BI data is derived from many different sources – Epos, footfall, weather, major events for example – and our analytical diagnosis is vast and complex requiring an intelligent understanding. In other areas we use AI for analysing machine data and making basic decisions on predictive life spans of CPE and other devices. Machine learning analytics is on our radar screen. We are developing software to interface into our estate to understand more about what we don't know today." ■



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Now in their 17th year, the Comms National Awards is the ICT channel's most respected and coveted prize and now's the time to power up your involvement.

Sponsored by 9 Group for the sixth successive year and independently judged by a panel of industry experts, The Comms National Awards recognises quality across the channel spectrum with awards in both reseller (customer solutions) and vendor (service to the channel) categories. We will again also acknowledge the contribution made to the ICT channel by one special individual who will be presented with the

illustrious Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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A WORD FROM OUR SPONSORS...

Business Category



Justin Blaine

Channel Sales Manager

NTA

"NTA is proud to yet again be a sponsor at this year's Comms National Awards. The awards are recognised as one of the most prestigious within in our industry and this year we are sponsoring the Business Awards Category. There are a number of new awards in this category including 'Best New Innovation' and 'Best Business Growth' to recognise enterprising and forward-thinking businesses in our community which we endorse wholeheartedly.

"All of the NTA staff would like to take this opportunity to wish all entrants in all categories the very best of luck. The CN Award finals night is a highlight of the industry calendar and we look forward to seeing channel friends and colleagues and celebrating success on the night."

Vertical Market Solution Category



Vincent Disneur

Head of Sales & Marketing

Union Street

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

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Shaun Bodsworth

Managing director

Inform Billing

"The Comms National Awards are the industry's most prestigious and hotly contested awards, recognising excellence across the ICT industry. After experiencing the tremendous impact winning one of these converted awards has had on our business – much greater and further reaching than we could have imagined - we are proud to be supporting this year's event as a hospitality sponsor.

On behalf of Inform Billing, I would like to wish all entrants the very best of luck and we look forward to what will no doubt be an extremely fun and enjoyable night!"

Enterprise Reseller of the Year



Charles Aylwin

Director of Channel

8x8

"At 8x8, we're delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards again this year. The evening is always a great celebration of the best our industry has to offer. It's also a fantastic recognition of the true excellence in communications, whether rewarding vendor solutions, resellers, innovative technology or outstanding customer service. The channel is essential to the continued growth of our industry and at 8x8 we will continue our rapid expansion with the unrivalled expertise of our channel partners. We want to wish the best of luck to everyone that has entered and we're looking forward to celebrating on the night!"

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Alp Kostem

Head of Channel Sales

Exponential-e

"Exponential-e is delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards again this year! We see great value in these events and we're really excited to be attending. The Channel Community is a huge part of Exponential-e's make up and the fastest growing business unit internally year on year so it makes absolute sense to sponsor one of the biggest channel events of the year.

"This event shows recognition to those hard-working teams, companies and some outstanding individuals who truly deserve to be rewarded. It would definitely be worth entering and, on behalf of myself and the team at Exponential-e, we wish the very best of luck to all this year's entrants."

Reseller of the Year – SME



Garry Gowns

Sales Director

Daisy Wholesale

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

Sponsors



Has VoIP security become

It is ironic that one of the comms industry's most important issues is barely talked about and largely not understood – VoIP security. How, by any interpretation, can that be good for customers? Here, four champions of security respond...

Comms resellers and service providers who fail to meet the growing demands of the telephony security threat landscape are so lacking as to be almost complicit, especially in the light of new regulatory and compliance demands, according to Simwood founder and CEO Simon Woodhead. "Apathy and arrogance from CPs remains the primary issue," he stated. "Telling someone how much they've already lost is not protection, it is risk limitation having already profited. We focus on prevention which requires us to invest and forgo profit on compromised customers, which feels the honourable way to do business."

But to contain threats – even for those who care most and see the risk – is a tough challenge. "Sadly, so much service provision at carrier level is me-too and magic



Carl Boraman

VoIP fraud sours a relationship, destroys trust and leads to costly disputes, which drives up churn and increases bad debt.

boxes," claimed Woodhead. "So for resellers seeking an answer to VoIP security 'intent' should be their number one consideration. Why is the carrier offering me this feature? Are they doing the minimum possible in order to contain their own risk? Or do they genuinely care about a CP's end users and their prosperity? Some may choose to dance with the devil for other reasons. Others will hopefully see through the hype."

VoIP security is not a 'solution', and anyone offering it as an up-sell on service is demonstrating poor intent, according to Woodhead. "If a car manufacture made door locks an optional extra or talked about their 'extraordinary security' while giving all buyers the same set of keys people would see through it," he said. "CPs definitely need *caveat emptor* to see through the bull and really get a handle on intent."

Simwood works increasingly with security critical clients such as financial institutions and since the advent of GDPR and the Cambridge Analytics issue Woodhead has noted a big uptick in demand for Transport Layer Security (TLS) and Session Description Protocol Security Descriptions (SDS). "We provide these at wholesale level," he said. "However, the value of fraud measures to CPs in the channel or the pursuit of them remains disappointing.



Simon Woodhead

Apathy from CPs is the primary issue. Telling someone how much they've already lost is not protection.

We feel strongly that this would change if end users (business and domestic) were more educated about the risks. Our book 'Speaking up on Telephony Risks' aims to do this."

Responsibility

Resellers are looking to drive sales, increase revenues and deliver a great customer experience, so within the tools they get from VanillaIP as a service provider security measures must feature strongly, according to its Sales Director Iain Sinnott. "In terms of VoIP security, and especially supporting resellers in the SMB sector, we need to take responsibility for the device security, the access security, the integrity of the calls and the commercial risk wherever possible," he explained. "Customers

and resellers need to focus on this issue, turn to their service providers and demand solutions that are robust, but without reducing the flexibility that makes cloud services and consumption on demand so attractive."

According to Sinnott the future of VoIP is self-service and security must be in the DNA of the solution, not a fringe defence mechanism put up to deal with the hackers. "Service providers need to consider security in every element of every product they release within the VoIP portfolio," he reaffirmed. "The industry big boys, the carriers and major brands, should be doing more to get the end customers talking about this element of modern communications.

"Those of us investing heavily in security need the customer to recognise the value of the effort and expenditure, otherwise those who play Russian Roulette with customers' security have the commercial advantage. However, compliance helps us – it focuses everyone's minds on security with the threat of action from regulatory bodies, and that means people will attach value to the security services our development teams spend time creating."

Security has become something of a 'cover all' term for the prevention and management of toll fraud risks, data security and GDPR etc, says Sinnott, who argues a strong case for greater education about the matter. "Information is key, and unless a sales person feels well enough informed they may not bring security up as a key point in the sales process, which does neither party any good," he added.

"Service providers need to be clear and upfront and make security a focused element in partner training. It is their moral duty. If you can demonstrate the steps you take to protect customers it makes you trusted and clients look with greater care at every cheap deal. If the reseller is expected to carry too much responsibility they are not being looked after as well as they might. Resellers will always play a role in security and must follow



a comms sector scandal?

deployment guidelines, but the platform owners should do the heavy lifting here.”

Toll fraud can quickly become big enough to kibosh a small SMB customer, and if they default the burden of debt moves to the reseller. To combat these threats VanillalP leverages three related areas of its cloud management ecosystem (Uboss) – managing the access security, restricting the availability of channels per extension and running a live rating system linked to an extension level credit lock. “By taking responsibility for the performance of this combined approach we can limit the customer’s and reseller’s financial exposure to effectively an excess like any insurance policy,” added Sinnott.

The cost of fraud continues to eat into already stressed profit margins with the average fraud attack on SIP trunks typically costing £10-15k, with some bigger attacks costing CSPs £200k over a single weekend, observed Carl Boraman, Director of Strategic Alliances at Tollring. “The transition to VoIP and the migration from analogue to SIP means VoIP fraud will potentially increase,” he stated. “It is already a multi-billion-pound business and its financial impact is more than double that of credit card fraud.”

Modern customers entrust the safety of their information and even their company to their networks and reseller partners. If they don’t protect their clients they will lose their trust and a poor reputation could be more harmful to a brand than any fine. “VoIP fraud sours a relationship,



Iain Sinnott

SPs need to consider security in every element of every product they release within the VoIP portfolio, and make security a focused element in partner training.

destroys trust and leads to costly disputes, which drives up churn and increases bad debt,” said Boraman. “But the combination of a poor customer experience and increased churn does focus minds on tackling the problem. We are finally seeing a shift in reseller attitude towards understanding and preventing fraud as they are realising that it also impacts them.”

The ability to spot attacks in advance and address the moving nature of VoIP fraud before it happens is the key to shutting down this highly lucrative method of generating money, observed Boraman. “For example, fraudsters are creating smaller and more frequent ‘pick-pocket’ style hits across multiple end customers simultaneously,” he added. “They use robo-diallers to make high volumes of very short calls, typically 15-25 seconds, to multiple destinations that go unnoticed. This type of fraud is hard to spot and stop in a timely fashion unless you use real-time call profiling, call

pattern behaviour monitoring and analytics as part of the fraud management system. Carriers need to use technology that spots the first ‘test’ call attempt made by the fraudster, regardless of the call durations, and take action to block further attempts.”

Firing line

Every business is facing a host of new threats such as these and it is the providers, vendors and their resellers that are in the firing line. “It’s up to us to mitigate some of the risks,” commented Boraman. “It’s not just about storing the right data, it is also about testing for resilience and being constantly vigilant in preparing for attacks. Traditionally, carriers have managed fraud on behalf of the reseller and their customer behind the scenes. Future market developments will be about empowering resellers to see more and do more by giving them direct access to the fraud management tools, and training them on how to protect their customers and apply anti-fraud measures.

“A more collaborative relationship between customers, resellers and providers on individual thresholds, rules and limits is essential in the fight against fraud. Security should be at the heart of a proposition and there needs to be a strong alignment between the vendor, customer and supplier. With machine learning and AI, combined with big data and crowd sourcing of key information from carriers around the world, we can become proactive in the fight against fraud.”

Although a source of misery for all those impacted, the containment of toll fraud has nonetheless improved over recent years, observed Firstcom Europe Group CTO Adam Crisp. “But where there’s a will there’s a way, so businesses must protect their communications infrastructure,” he stated. “On VoIP call security, information is present in calls with spoken voice or DTMF data and this should be protected. Data can be processed (switching equipment could be

vulnerable to hackers), stored (think information in call recordings) and transmitted (think about VoIP media streams running over the public Internet and eavesdropping). Moreover, GDPR defines ‘processed’ to mean processed, stored and transmitted, so any business not protecting their VoIP calls in all three categories is in breach.”

In terms of compliance and GDPR, the customer owns the data and the service provider and channel partners are processors, pointed out Crisp. “Although both parties are potentially liable, the customer is in control of how they procure their telephony and therefore whether or not they choose a secure service,” he stated. “Channel partners and service providers must make their customers aware about which service they are choosing. This could be done by publishing a service data privacy policy which shows the customer where data exists. There’s now a clear compliance reason to implement call security and protection systems, and customers must deploy them.”



Adam Crisp

Where there’s a will there’s a way, so businesses must protect their communications infrastructure.



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Hughes sets the Pace

Wrexham-based Pace Telecom began its commercial life 25 years ago in Hughes' back bedroom supported by a second-hand fax, a 'clapped out' car and the purchasing might of a £50 note. Its founding mission was to purvey photocopying machines but the incorporation of mobile phones soon followed. Come 1998 when the mobile market shifted towards pay-as-you-go Pace Telecom was operating out of seven outlets – then Hughes set about repositioning the business. "We became a licenced fixed line communications supplier," he stated. "In 2002 we were the first WLR provider in Wales."

Four years later Pace Telecom set down the acquisition trail and snapped up 18 telecoms businesses over a three year period. In 2012 Hughes saw that SIP would become the standard for UK telecommunications and launched his first cloud offering in 2014. "During the last six years we invested over £1 million to prepare our business as a go-to place for everything SIP and hosted UCC," he added. "Within the next three to five years we aim to treble turnover and increase our workforce to over 100 people. We have spent the last seven months converting our offices into a state of the art technology hub and we're poised to target more acquisitions later this year."

For three years Pace Telecom has worked with France-based comms provider Centile and developed its own infrastructure across a number of data centres. According to Hughes the



Jamie Hughes flanked by the Mayor and Mayoress of Wrexham

With 25 years in the comms market under his belt Pace Telecom CEO Jamie Hughes has embarked on another expansion period with acquisitions and channel development dominant aspects of his growth strategy.

company's comms platform is an open invitation to any customer to exploit the cloud and its many advantages.

Cloud migration

"We have been migrating customers from PSTN to SIP and Pace Cloud for two years," he explained. "Pace Cloud is our own unified communications platform and 20 per cent of existing customers have already migrated. With the full bundle now live we should see a further uplift in migration."

Pace Cloud offers basic PBX to presence, instant messaging, video collaboration, screen sharing, call reporting, call recording, CRM integration and fixed

mobile convergence. The solution serves customers with two users through to 500 and is said to be 'infinitely' scalable, providing a foundation for Pace Telecom to extend its portfolio into IT services and managing customer transitions from premise-based servers into the cloud. Notably, the company's role as a digital champion was recognised last month by Secretary of State for Wales Alan Cairns who opened its remodelled offices.

The extent and thoroughness of Pace Telecom's preparations and future planning raises the question of how many resellers will struggle on the digital stage. "With the ISDN switch-

off in mind many of our competitors are finding themselves in the same position we occupied six years ago," commented Hughes. "Resellers that lag the market will run up against hurdles. Perhaps the challenges will be insurmountable for them unless they have a robust SIP and hosted UCC offering. Without that it will be more difficult to survive."

"Pace Telecom's primary growth strategy has always been via our partner channel and acquisitions. Over the coming two years this will be accelerated as we acquire smaller businesses wanting to offer customers more than their current capacity and abilities allow." ■

Just a minute with Jamie Hughes...

Role model: Richard Branson: He's innovative and one step ahead of the field

What talent do you wish you had? More patience

What do you fear the most? Getting left behind by technology, so I am always forward thinking

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

Top tip for resellers? Be agile, listen to customers and prepare for the future

One example of something you have overcome: Preparing for IP and SIP meant overcoming big technological changes which involved working on infrastructure and staff development

Biggest career achievements: Winning a Best Business in Wales award, visiting Downing Street as a business ambassador, and employing a talented team, over a quarter of which have been with Pace Telecom for 10-plus years

Your strengths and what could you work on? I have enthusiasm, creativity and an ability to spot trends, but I could work on giving more attention to detail

Name three ideal dinner guests: Donald Trump to tell him what I think; my idol Richard Branson; and Boris Johnson to also tell him what I think

What's the best piece of advice you have ever been given? Always have a strategy

How would you like to be remembered? As hard working, willing to give everything a go, and had fun

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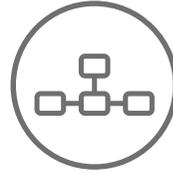
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Toll fraud remains the £1.2

In 2013 the Communications Fraud Control Association's (CFCA) Telecoms Fraud Survey reported that:

- Global communications fraud was estimated to be in excess of \$46 billion
- Over \$8 Billion was attributed to the hacking of both traditional and IP telephone systems
- The UK is the third most targeted country in the world
- Toll-Fraud in the UK costs businesses £1.2 billion each year.

Five years on, is toll fraud still a threat to you and your customer's business? Well yes, according to Exeter based comms reseller Taurus. They say hackers are now circumventing the standard best-practice approach to secure systems and that by compromising a business' local network a hacker can now program a handset to place fraudulent calls. These calls can be routed over BT's network with an override code, so they cannot be blocked via normal measures and then generate large bills. This would be difficult to detect and prevent via established telephone system security practices.

But surely this is a legacy issue and state of the art VoIP phones cannot be compromised? Well no, according to IT software specialist ipswitch. They say that with VoIP technology, once one extension has been compromised, extra channels can be replicated to make many simultaneous calls, running up large bills extremely quickly. Hackers often aim these calls at a premium-rate number, the kind used for things like sex chat, which somewhat surprisingly, still exists. Cuba, Somalia, Bosnia, Estonia, and Latvia are particular sources of this fraud.

This type of attack generally happens at night or on a weekend, and a business that does not have the proper monitoring in place can be hit with hundreds of thousands of pounds in bills come Monday morning. There are currently no laws requiring reimbursement by the service provider for fraud, as there are for credit card fraud, but large carriers do often reimburse for fraudulent use of this kind. This can be a big consideration when choosing a VoIP provider.



CLIFFORD NORTON
CHANNEL TELECOM

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

Toll Fraud can affect analogue, digital or IP based systems. It can take a matter of minutes for hackers to gain full access to a system using advanced software that works through firewalls and around password protection.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

We offer a Toll Fraud Protection service which applies an automatic network call bar on any phone number that uses over £500 in any 24-hour period. All partners who have Toll Fraud Protection will not be liable for any fees accumulated from fraudulent calls.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

We inform partners of any fraud notices as soon as we are advised, including recently used contact details and nature of enquiry.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

We work with the Telecommunications UK Fraud Forum (TUFF) and the FCS, who did launch a fraud networking forum some time ago, but it never really took off. I think external agencies could do a lot more to address what is a massive issue for the industry.



JAMES SHRAGA
FIDELITY GROUP

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

Customers on legacy systems are still at risk, and the 'if it's not broke don't fix it' mentality can end up costing a business thousands when fraud hits. With fast-paced technology changes, this will always be the case.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

Working with leading network suppliers and building a resilient billing platform, we have mitigated risks of potential fraud for our customers. With 24/7/365 customer support, we deploy fast and necessary stops to any abnormal call charge alerts through our Anvil billing platform.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

At the beginning of the sales process, we make customers aware of the expense and effect toll fraud can have on their business. We include a fraud cap on call traffic to ensure this is shut down before the business is affected.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

We work with our suppliers to make sure we have the necessary actions in place, and through constant development, make sure our billing platform is robust and capable of mitigating risk as much as possible.



MARK JOHNSON
9 GROUP

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

Hacking and identity theft fraud remain prevailing threats to PBX, number translation and IP services.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

Rigorous security on remote access features and firewall management, network level security including voice mail barring at CPS and line level, monitoring 365 with usage capping where appropriate and generally communicating best practice to reduce the risks.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

Security is a regular topic in both our e-casts and other communications to channel partners, we present exceptional call reporting as a value-added service alerting all customers to the risk of unauthorised access.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

Our Fraud Team shares intelligence Network Fraud Teams and Police Cyber Crime Departments and we encourage reporting of all incidents to Action Fraud. We will refer PRS cases to Phonepay Plus and we are partners and sponsors of the Federation of Communication Services (FCS).



JOHN MCKINDLAND
NIMANS

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

Yes, it's still a threat and a growing threat despite appearing to drift off some people's radar. Legacy products in particular can be prone to attack.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

Some brands have their own products which alert any unauthorised activity and we are actively helping resellers to protect their customers through support and advice.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

There's plenty of general awareness in the channel and some resellers have first-hand experience of it. Our work is on-going as part of a continual process of support and education.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

We engage between system manufacturers and resellers to ensure they are fully equipped in the battle against Toll Fraud.



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COLIN WOODS
SOUTH WEST COMMS

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

Havoc caused by hackers is increasing and while ransomware and malware attacks steal the headlines, toll fraud plays a significant part. Not only that but the speed at which punitive charges rack up means it can be a corporate killer.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

All our lines and minutes customers are covered by our FMS policy which limits their liability to £750.00. We can offer this because we have people on hand 24 x7 to stop any instance within minutes of it happening.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

We deliver messages detailing how to secure a telephone system and protect businesses against toll fraud via e-shots, bill enclosures, social media and information on our website. We also publish white papers and case studies warning of the danger.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

We work with our chosen carriers to ensure that we offer the best protection available. In addition, we only install SIP with SBCs and layer 5 firewalls.



CARL BORMAN
TOLLRING

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

Toll fraud remains a growing and ever-changing problem for carriers and resellers. Monetary damages are already more than double that of credit card fraud (estimated £25.5bn per/year globally) and new techniques mean that it is becoming even harder to protect against.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

Tollring has developed a VoIP fraud management system for carriers and resellers, that utilises advanced machine learning and AI to fully protect customers from every type of telecoms fraud, automatically spotting and blocking attacks in real-time.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

We're educating people on the real cost and impact of fraud on customers and how they can make a difference. Fraud causes costly disputes, damages trust and sours relationships. Working together to prevent fraud will reduce churn and boost customer loyalty.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

Tollring works with a number of anti-fraud organisations in the UK, such as TUFF, as well as working globally with other cyber security organisations, such as FRS Labs, to collectively tackle the problem.



VINCENT DISNEUR
UNION STREET

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

It continues to be very damaging. Liability rests with the consumer rather than with the reseller but, despite this, our partners report that they'll usually feel obliged to contribute to mitigate the customer's loss and preserve their goodwill.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

As a provider of billing and provisioning solutions, we have developed our aBILlity platform to automatically check for unusual calling patterns and charge rates as CDRs are imported and rated. Billing staff are notified immediately if suspicious activity is detected.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

We advise resellers to import CDRs as soon as they're available so that fraud can be detected and halted promptly. The customer may not be thrilled, but they should be grateful that you've raised the alarm and stopped the fraud.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

We engage with FCS and the Telecommunications UK Fraud Forum (TUFF). aBILlity is automatically populated with TUFF's list of known fraudulent numbers and will alert users if a call to one of these is detected.



DAVID DADDS
VANILLA IP

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

Toll fraud is a proven way for organised crime to make money and carriers offer no bill protection, so it is very much a live challenge but whilst the actual hack is where their skill lies, limiting our financial exposure represents a critical step.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

Preventing all hacks is a dream scenario but we do work hard on security. Our credit locking system means that against the call rating process we can disable extensions in a near live process and back that with a contracted maximum bill under £75.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

We tell all resellers to tell all their customers about toll fraud and help them set their credit lock daily call value limits in the Uboss management portal. For a reseller it also protects them from other types of fraud including fake businesses on soft phones.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

Organisations like FCS, ITSPA and Tuff that have looked at tackling this problem, but ultimately the responsibility should sit with the carriers and platform owners who provide the service. Ofcom should force the responsibility on providers not acting.



PAUL TAYLOR
VOICEFLEX

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

Toll fraud is still a threat; the cost of fraud on a single site can be thousands of pounds and the customer is responsible for the calls and must pay the bill.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

We have implemented an award-winning fraud detection platform Advanced Behavior Based Analysis (ABBA) <https://www.voiceflex.com/Fraud>. We lost a court case on fraud some years ago, since then we make sure we are always protected.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

Education is key, we run webinars, send e-shots and, most importantly, we stop the fraud at source. By advising the customer what has happened, they can then secure the network. With 'on the job learning' they can hopefully use the skills to secure all their customers' networks.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

Anything that helps the awareness of fraud is always welcome. Unfortunately, we will never stop fraudulent attempts. All that's required is a few simple steps to secure the network.



JENNY GORE
NSN

IS TOLL FRAUD STILL A THREAT?

Absolutely yes. Fraudsters are clever and evolving. Many of our customers still use traditional PBX systems with standard voicemail pin codes. With international use as standard now, fraud detection is increasingly difficult to prevent.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO PROTECT CUSTOMERS?

We constantly monitor lines for abnormal spend patterns, we implement international call monitoring. We recently introduced a fraud management feature on SIP and encouraged customers to upgrade their firewalls to further prevent hacking.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRO-ACTIVELY?

We keep in regular contact with our customers via monthly emails to update them on potential risks, including the evolving dangers of Toll Fraud. For our customers using older PBX systems we explain the dangers on not changing Pins/ Passwords regularly.

WHAT EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ARE HELPING?

Gamma are fantastic at updating the channel with any fraud alerts and provide the channel with the most up to date advice enabling us to pass it onto our customers.

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Powell: Does fixed line st

Just Telecomms CEO Richard Powell's grand project shows the depth of his conviction in a mobile-first future and strong belief in the power of the channel model to deliver it.

A good industry question might be to ask on what does Powell's mobile mission have in common with fuel, alarms and central heating. Read on... To keep his financial tank topped up while at college Powell worked as a petrol station attendant in between study time. The job had its attractions – meeting people (which he enjoyed) and some of those chance meeters are still in touch today – so he continued to tend the forecourt after finishing college and would programme a BBC Micro Model B with some success in the evenings. Then one day he'd had his fill. "I woke up one morning and thought this is not the job I dreamed of as a boy," said Powell. "I wanted to do something with real purpose. It was time to make things happen."

At 22 Powell holstered the nozzle for the last time and went back to college where he achieved a number of electronics qualifications. "I became a computer engineer in the mid-1980s and started my first computer business in 1990, which didn't work out," he recalled. "That experience taught me many helpful lessons. I then set up a burglar alarm company in 1995 with friends. After it went public in 1997 it was time for the next venture, Heat Assured, a central heating servicing company and the precursor to Just Telecomms. We originally focused on gas, electricity and telephone brokerage,



Richard Powell

I wanted to do something with real purpose. It was time to make things happen

but became a telephone business due to our passion to do a better job than our existing telecoms supplier which was failing us and our customers miserably."

On call for comms

Powell and his business partners then set up Just Utilities with the trading name Just Telecomms, under which they offered telephony

services and also took on other energy suppliers to become a true broker rather than an introducer. "It was a good job we did, as about 14 months later our supplier Enron became the biggest bankruptcy the world had ever seen," said Powell. "Tough times followed but we kept at it by keeping our customers happy, building the business, and now we

are an MVNO with our own exchange capabilities."

Becoming an MVNO is the latest in a string of company milestones which include the addition of phone lines and becoming one of the first wholesale line providers in 2001. "I was nervous about doing what was then called Calls and Access," noted Powell. "None of

the big boys were doing it. We saw it as a way to have full credit control as we were using dialler boxes in those days. As none of the larger telcos appeared to be interested we thought there must be a catch as we were so far ahead of the market. Fortunately, there was no snag."

Five years later Powell saw the potential of VoIP and began to white label certain products but they weren't his and they didn't fit the company's aspiration to move into mobile. "The biggest step change was the launch of our new platform using Centile's technology, which has been proven in Nordic countries and packaged to allow us to offer something exciting to the UK market," said Powell. "We have added our mobile brand with full phone system functionality without having to rely on an app, so it's a true FMC solution."

Just Telecomms currently operates in the SME market but in launching as a FMC MVNO Powell hopes to attract more corporate accounts. "However, we don't intend to abandon the market we operate in, our platform has something to offer everyone, from the sole trader to the multi-national," said Powell. "The industry has long talked about UC but we are only now unifying voice communications for the masses. We are offering full PBX functionality on mobile devices without compromise, treating a mobile phone



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like an IP device on GSM. Our priorities are to get the product embedded in our organisation and recruit channel partners."

The channel is where Powell expects to see the most growth, driven by enabling other resellers and MSPs to offer full FMC hosted on a business grade mobile network. "Just Telecomms will continue to retail its own offering but also develop a channel as the quickest way to sell seats and get market penetration," stated Powell. "The partnerships forged with Centile and Transatel are key here. We will be as hands on or hands off as our resellers require, offering a bureau billing service and first

Within five years we will be purely channel focused

line support. Within five years we will be purely channel focused. In building the right team and giving the correct training at the right time we have an excellent chance of realising our aspirations, and they are big."

Powell plans to increase staff numbers by 20, all dedicated to supporting the Our Telecom product during the next 18 to 24 months and in anticipation of double digit growth over the coming three years. "The hosted PBX was our core bread and butter and the shift into mobility is a natural evolution," added Powell. "We are creating a new market and our biggest opportunity is to talk to end users and match

technology to their preferred way of working. This surely revolves around a mobile phone supported by an app. It is a paradigm shift.

"Big organisations such as PwC are going all-mobile. This is an interesting trend and has significant implications for the products we offer, the handsets we support, and the financing route and support skills we are adopting. Gigabit Ethernet handsets were important a few months ago, but now we are considering how much we even need PoE switches or IP desk phones. Perhaps we will see banks of GSM handsets going to site if they achieve the same outcome and work with fixed and mobile numbers."

Potential market shifts such as these are reflected in how Just Telecomms has evolved over the past three years. In this period Powell formed the aforementioned partnerships with Centile and Transatel which proved transformational and he bid farewell to the company's co-founder who retired. "Having started a new chapter we are removing the silos that housed landline and mobile for years," said Powell. "Technically this was a steep learning curve and much money has been spent getting the technicians on board and up to speed. Our target markets will be dictated by our resellers and I am looking forward to seeing where this approach will take the business. The only real need is for the users to be in areas where our SIMs can get coverage, which is why we selected Transatel to access the EE network. Having said that, we can use a picocell to offer sites in GSM black spots – so the market is big!" ■

Just a minute with Richard Powell...

Role model: My wife, Lisa. She has integrity and a work ethic and energy that is unparalleled. Our 10 year old daughter goes to school for a rest and I go to the office to recover

What talent do you wish you had? To be multi-lingual

Name three ideal dinner guests: Nelson Mandela, a remarkable man; Alexander Graham Bell to show him how his work has revolutionised the modern world; and Donald Trump to get to know the real man

Industry bugbear? Too much complexity

Tell us something about yourself we don't know? I am a school governor. Every child should have the opportunity to reach their potential

Top tip for resellers: Now's the time to act and get into FMC and UC

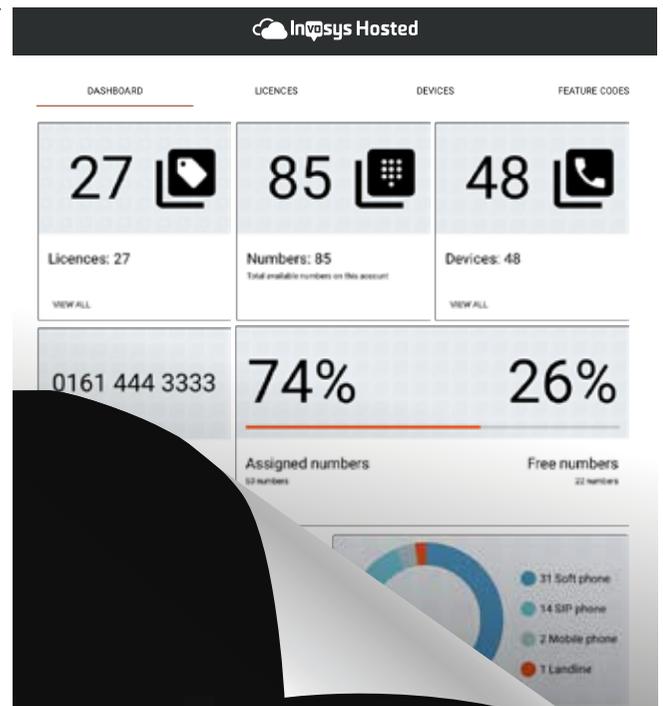
One thing you could not do without in your job? The support of my family

In hindsight: I would have looked at implementing FMC and selling via our own channel earlier

The biggest risk you have taken? Having children: There is too much scope to mess up. My children have turned out brilliantly, I am proud of all three of them

One example of something you have overcome? Failure: It offers more opportunities to learn and is just another building block on the road to success

How do you relax? To travel, anywhere, anytime. Central and Eastern Europe are my favourite places



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NGC's regional push



Steve Tipper (left) welcomes Alex Stephens

THE appointment of mobile sales exec Alex Stephens by NGC Networks kicks off a recruitment campaign to populate the company's new office in Bury. The Wakefield headquartered comms provider seeks to add nine more heads to strengthen its presence in the north west region. The hiring spree is led by Head of Mobile Steve Tipper whose first signing, Stephens, held previous sales roles with Vodafone, EE and O2.

NGC Networks Director Nikki Guest said: "Our new Greater Manchester office is part of a strategy to grow our customer base in the north west. We look forward to welcoming a number of new faces over the coming months as we build our regional presence."

Commenting on his new role Stephens said: "I intend to put my experience to good use by helping companies to identify the right network for their workforce. NGC Networks' partnerships with three networks means I'm well placed to deliver on this."

NGC is on target to hit £6 million turnover this financial year, representing a 15 per cent year-on-year increase. The company is listed in the 2018 Northern Tech 100 league table of fastest growing tech firms.

Morris joins Olive as CFO



Brett Morris

OLIVE Communications has appointed Brett Morris as Chief Financial Officer. He brings experience in fundraising, M&A and value creation spanning investment banking and private equity.

Latterly Morris held roles at Capricorn Capital Partners, a multi-asset private equity fund focused on digital media businesses; and Sandbox Partners, an investor and operator with a focus on technology led education organisations operating SaaS business models. From 2012-2016 Morris was Group Chief Financial Officer at Catalis SE, a Frankfurt listed holding company with interests in multi-national technology services businesses. He said: "My experience in building effective funding structures combined with my knowledge of leading finance functions in 'as-a-service' technology businesses aligns with the Olive trajectory."

Also on the move...



Andy Marsden

DONCASTER-based Connectus Group, established early this year, has appointed Andy Marsden as Business Development Director. Marsden stated: "I've been watching Connectus's growth since the buyout of Eximus in February.

I like the company's ethos and hunger for expansion. I can't wait to speak with the local business community to help them and their workforce work faster and smarter." Connectus Chairman Paul Ruocco said: "Andy will bring an abundance of business experience to the table which will benefit us and our customers."

BETA Distribution's acquisition of digital signage business ContentWall in June and subsequent formation of an AV services division has been followed up with the appointment of Mike



Cunningham-Clayton

Cunningham-Clayton as Head of AV. He brings 24 years AV industry experience to the role and was formerly General Manager of Displays at distributor Exertis which he joined when Medium was acquired by

Exertis in 2016. Beta Managing Director Steve Soper commented: "Mike is a long standing and well respected figure in the AV industry. He will bring a level of knowledge and expertise that we have long recognised we needed."

Casari heads Yealink in UK



Joe Casari

THE appointment of Joe Casari as Yealink's first UK Head signals a ramping up of the Chinese phone maker's growth ambitions. "There is huge potential to grow the Yealink business in the UK and

Ireland," commented Casari. "My role is to accelerate double digit growth."

Prior to his appointment Casari was Head of Samsung Unified Communications UK&I at Nimans. He joined the distributor in January this year after a spell working as an independent consultant. Previous roles include an Account Directorship at QA and leadership roles at Promethean including Head of International Alliances.

"We will focus on the two key areas of end points and video conferencing," added Casari. "We will also look to strengthen our relationship with Microsoft around its Teams and Skype for Business collaboration platforms."

STL's Heather Sharp has been promoted to the new role of Customer Champion following a year working as a credit controller. MD Brendon Cross said: "This new position is a significant investment in customer service and will support the key role played by our customer service team."

Double hire to bolster Tollring



Dora Torrejon



Anne Woollett

TOLLRING has appointed Dora Torrejon as Regional Account Manager. She joins from Akixi and brings eight years industry experience to the role. Also recruited is Anne Woollett, pulled in as Senior Marketing Executive who boasts over ten years channel and technology marketing experience with IPCortex. Tollring is also seeking to hire training specialists. "These appointments support Tollring's sales growth, which has seen the number of cloud end points increase by 218 per cent in the past year," said CEO Tony Martino. "It's no accident that we have increased headcount by over 50 per cent within the last 18 months."

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