



How purpose-led  
MSP Utilize makes a  
bigger impact p14

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3,500 people p26



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Read more about the highly commended Strategic Partner Programme overleaf. We wish you all health, happiness and prosperity for the year ahead. To our loyal Partners – we look forward to continued success in the year to come! And don't worry, we won't tell anyone about that cancelled gym membership come March...

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# Strategic (adj)

Planning activities and actions to achieve long term goals and objectives.

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**GIACOM.**

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### Comms People

This month's  
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# Time for MSPs to optimise growth

**NEW IT Europa research has drilled down on the critical factors behind the runaway success of leading MSPs that generate more growth than their peers.**

## SPECIAL REPORT

Comms Dealer sister company IT Europa recently researched more than 1,400 UK MSPs to quantify what the 50 highest performers are doing right.

The study found that outperformers in the top 50 cohort are capturing a performance premium based on their approaches to a trio of growth accelerators.

“We identified many factors that contribute to growth,” said IT Europa Editorial Director Will Garside. “But the three

that stand out are a focus on cross and upselling, a substantial cyber security portfolio and an embrace of service delivery over simple products or projects.

“In our detailed analysis, another crucial element consistently stood out – the critical role of culture in the growth and development of MSPs.”

The IT Europa High Growth 50 report shows that the top MSPs are witnessing an average year-on-year increase of 39%, which is more than three times that of the wider European mar-

ket (12%) and nearly quadruple of UK-only firms (10%).

“These high performing MSPs are raising the bar,” added Garside. “This is the year for all MSPs to up their game.”

The report’s publication sets the scene for the inaugural IT Europa Growth Forum where a community of ambitious MSPs will take part in knowledge sharing and opportunity discovery (6th-7th March, The Grove Hotel, Hertfordshire). To find out how to participate visit <https://itegrowthforum.com>

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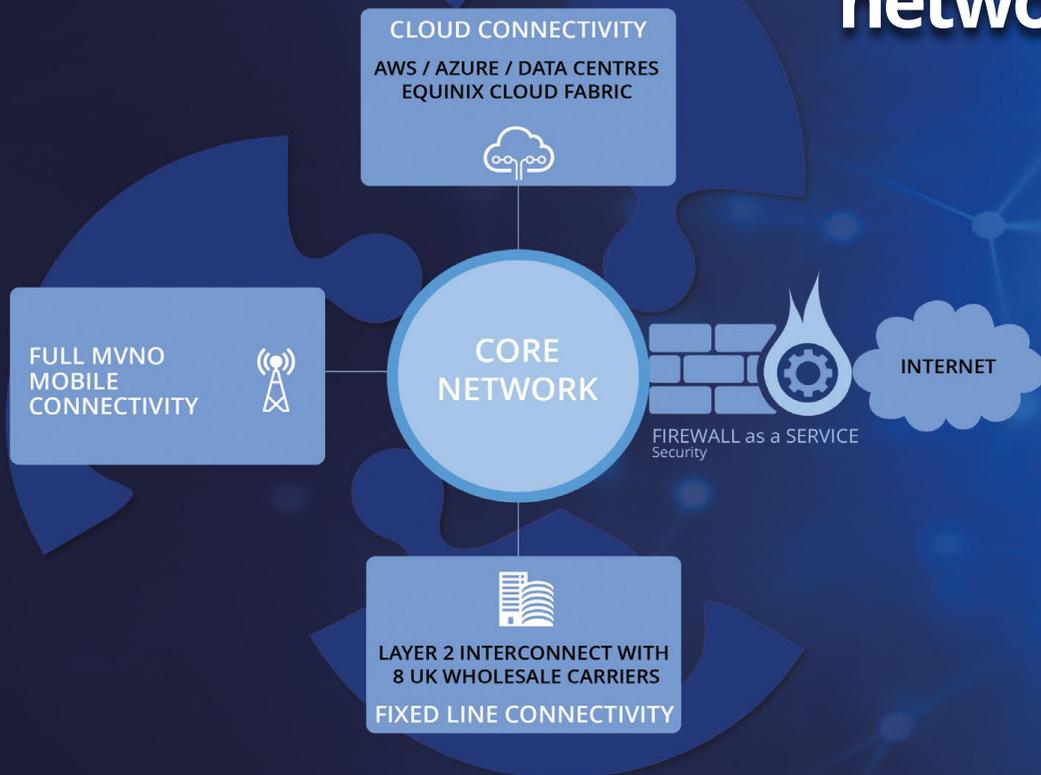
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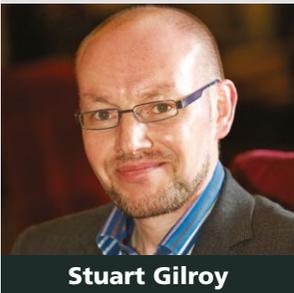
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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

MSPs and resellers are being divided along a clear line of difference through their attitudes towards ESG. And the division is growing by the day with those taking positive action on the issue elevating their status and more likely to secure their long-term future (like Utilize – see page 14). I'll

continue to go on about this subject as it's quite important, and because too many resellers and MSPs think ESG has nothing to do with them as they are not a big company.

Larger channel organisations are taking a lead on ESG – and while many resellers think the scale of the big boys enables them to take action on the macro-issues, the truth is that ESG is a leveller that's relevant to every channel company no matter their size.

The importance of getting to grips with ESG – Net Zero in particular – is reflected in a new initiative launched by TD Synnex (see opposite page). Such projects overcome the question – how do I start? – and help to remove excuses that support the status quo rather than catalyse constructive steps forward.

It's likely that the ICT distribution sector will become a key enabler of progress on ESG in the channel. Last month we highlighted the big strides made by Weston-Comstor in this area. And on page 22 in this month's issue we spotlight how collaboration between B Corps in the channel could create an ecosystem of like-minded businesses that prefer to trade with each other based on their ESG credentials. Such trading networks will certainly extend to end user organisations that are also ESG minded.

So, a new model is emerging with ESG at its core that could ultimately unite all companies in the channel, and end users, that share a common ESG goal.

Yes, selling products and hitting numbers is vitally important – but it would be a miscalculation not to embrace ESG this year because the time will come when the numbers won't add up without it.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Ekco boosts UK presence with key buy



Bluecube CEO James Hawker and Jonathan Crowe

DUBLIN-based Ekco's UK presence has more than doubled following the acquisition of IT and cybersecurity firm Bluecube. The deal also takes Ekco's revenues beyond €150m and establishes the cloud company as a key player in the UK MSP space.

The transaction is Ekco's fourth in the past 12 months and its largest to date, adding Bluecube's SOC in Milton Keynes along with enhanced critical recovery capabilities.

Ekco co-founder and COO Jonathan Crowe said: "Organisations throughout the country lean heavily on their MSP to

underpin IT services with security, efficiencies and expertise. These are business critical functions and, with this deal, we are able to expand our services."

In October last year Corten Capital-backed Ekco acquired Waterford-based Radius, which provides end-to-end IT services for SMBs.

The Radius deal was preceded by the acquisitions of xTEN (which specialises in Azure and SQL Server) and iSYSTEMS (an MSP with expertise in public cloud migrations).

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NEWS ROUNDUP

FOLLOWING a trial period with key channel partners TalkTalk Wholesale Services has rolled out a more collaborative partner programme that also aims to overcome the challenge of bringing new products to market faster. The programme is structured on a points-based system with tailored support split across three tiers – Pro, Power and Power+. Each level provides commercial incentives, product and marketing support, training and education along with personalised consultancy. "By putting our network in partners' hands and enabling deeper levels of collaboration we're helping to unlock new opportunities and accelerate their customer journeys," said Paul Smith, Chief Sales Officer. "Another key benefit of the programme is the reduced time to market when launching new products."



Paul Smith

# TD Synnex rolls out Net Zero Academy for channel

TD SYNnex is rolling out a three day course to help its partners (and any other channel company) assess Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions and set out a plan to take their business towards Net Zero carbon.

The launch of the Net Zero Academy consists of two days spent in the classroom at TD Synnex's offices in Basingstoke and a further day of home or office-based learning and assessment. The course will be accredited by the Institute of Environmental Management

and Assessment (IEMA) and delivered by consultancy firm Arete Zero Carbon.

Sophia Haywood-Atkinson, Business Unit Director, Services UK, TD Synnex, said: "The Net Zero Academy will give channel partners a quick and effective way to acquire the knowledge they need to take ownership of their responsibility to reduce their carbon emissions.

"It will equip them to make a proper carbon assessment of their own business and set out a realistic plan to reduce emis-



Sophia Haywood-Atkinson

sions – based on recognised industry standards – and move towards Net Zero."

Haywood-Atkinson also noted that a growing number of environmentally aware customers are looking much harder at the commitment of their suppliers to sustainability.

"Regulations and directives such as the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and the NHS PPN 06/21 directive, for example, are starting to come into force," she added. "Businesses that do not

meet these requirements could find themselves at a significant competitive disadvantage."

Dr Stephen Finnegan, MD, Arete Zero Carbon, commented: "There is a real need for IT channel companies to get an understanding of where they are with their carbon footprint and exactly how far they need to travel to achieve Net Zero.

"It's something that all IT businesses will need to do very soon. As well as being the right thing to do, it will increasingly make commercial sense."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

FLUIDONE'S strategy to invest in regional IT MSPs and create a branch network has taken another step forward with the acquisition of Brighton-based IT MSP Computer and Network Consultants (CNC). The deal follows the acquisitions of Highlander Computing Solutions in January last year and projectfive three months later. The CNC investment expands FluidOne's Business IT Centre of Excellence to £37m revenue with 1,100 customers, 164 employees and five branch offices led from Highlander's Sheffield HQ.

MSP Node4 is targeting the SME telco market with a cloud-based telephony and collaboration solution based on Cisco's Webex. It provides out-of-the-box call centre functionality and a validated Microsoft Teams application. The launch of Node4 Calling with Webex also includes Cisco's Group Call Management functionality as standard. Richard Buxton, Collaboration Practice Director, Node4, commented: "The launch represents the latest chapter in our evolving partnership with Cisco and builds on our status as an accredited Webex Calling Service Provider and Premier Certified Cisco Partner."

BDR Group has added Colchester-based YTS to its acquisition tally, making four deals in 2023 and bolstering its Colchester hub. Colchester is home to 3C and Loop which were also snapped up by BDR last year. This month BDR opens new offices in the town. BDR MD Malek Rahimi commented: "With several multi-million-pound business wins in 2023 alongside an active M&A pipeline, BDR Group will continue to expand and build towards its £100m goal." BDR Group has circa 200 staff, is headquartered in Stratford-upon-Avon and operates out of four business hubs.

THE acquisition of Carlisle-based business communications company Gemini by Global 4 marks a 'significant milestone' according to Global 4 CEO Carl Barnett. The deal expands Horsham-located Global 4's market presence to the north and broadens its product portfolio. "The synergies between our organisations will result in greater value for clients," stated Barnett. "Gemini also allows us to establish a northern presence, supporting our growth nationwide." Gemini MD David Labram commented: "The alignment of company values and a shared vision to grow fast provides a great opportunity for both businesses."

# IT bosses set for AI spend

NEARLY all tech leaders believe AI is 'mandatory' in cloud environments and need the help of MSPs to implement it.

That's according to research by security vendor Dynatrace which says 83% of IT bosses are looking to increase their investments in AI across all areas of their business to improve productivity, automate tasks, reduce costs and keep pace with the competition.

"But 93% are concerned AI could be used for non-approved uses as employees become more accustomed to using tools such as ChatGPT," stated Michael Allen, VP Partner Sales Worldwide, Dynatrace.

"This underscores the need for the channel to deliver services that help customers to accelerate their AI adoption strategies with greater confidence and reduced risk."

Allen also noted that customers are alert to the risks of moving too quickly and handing over control to AI or an automated process before sufficient guard rails are in place.

"Channel partners have an opportunity to add value and unlock new revenue by helping customers to establish these controls," he added.



Michael Allen

The research also showed that 82% of technology leaders say AI will be critical to security threat detection, investigation and response.

NEWS ROUNDUP

TOLLRING is poised to roll out an AI-driven cloud call recording solution this month. The company claims to have commoditised AI automation through its provision of platform agnostic compliance call recording and intelligent automated analysis of calls. Initially delivered on Session Border Controllers for IP networks, Microsoft Teams and Cisco BroadWorks, the solution (called Record AI) will be made accessible to all users within an organisation, not just those in a contact centre. Record AI will be available to service providers via a subscription model with the option to white label.

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# Giacom scales MS cloud portfolio with intY deal

CLOUD marketplace provider Giacom has snapped up UK Microsoft cloud services provider intY from ScanSource.

The deal, which includes intY's UK revenues, partners and business operations, scales Giacom's Microsoft cloud capabilities in the rapidly evolving cloud services market and strengthens its position as a major provider of Microsoft licensing to the SMB focused UK channel. The acquisition also presents a significant cross-sell opportunity.



Terry O'Brien

intY's 1,500 partners will join Giacom's ecosystem and gain access to a range of curated products and services including cloud, communications, hardware and billing solutions.

"The acquisition strengthens Giacom's market position," commented Terry O'Brien, CEO. "The integration of intY's expertise and capabilities will augment our ability to support partners in this critical growth sector of the market, while further establishing Giacom as a key provider for Microsoft

cloud services to the SMB focused UK channel."

Marcus Ollenbittel, SVP, Digital Distribution, Europe, intY, added: "Giacom is a business that intY has long admired as a best-of-breed UK focused peer that shares our commitment to working exclusively through the channel.

"We look forward to the transformative impact this acquisition will have on our ability to not only support our partners but to add increasing value to them."

# Things are looking up

A better way to look at connectivity.

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find out  
more.

Sky Products and services subject to availability and location.

# Portal boost from Giacom

GIACOM'S Vodafone partners have gained what is said to be 'unprecedented control' following the launch of the Giacom Cloud Market for Vodafone Business portal.

The self-service portal automates repetitive manual processes, integrates with Vodafone's mobile management systems and enables partners to navigate customer onboarding, service provisioning and in-life management of Vodafone mobile services.

"This has been developed by Giacom to offer a comprehensive partner journey encompassing everything from generating quotes to creating and dispatching contracts, to facilitating connections with Vodafone," commented Andrew Wilford, Giacom's Managing Director – Mobile.

"Partners can support customers with in-life management features including options to adjust services, apply discounts, add or remove bolt-ons, re-sign contracts and do SIM swaps."

Wilford also noted that the portal reduces order processing times, saying that the re-signing of 10 or more connections, which previously took up to 10 days to process, is now completed in under an hour, with the order placed on the same day the contract is signed.

"Mobile services represent one of the most lucrative revenue streams for comms resellers and MSPs," added Wilford. "Cloud Market for Vodafone Business streamlines the provisioning and admin of mobile services, ensuring a productive and efficient route to market for our distribution partners."



Andrew Wilford

# TTWS backs The Big Goal

TALKTALK Wholesale Services (TTWS) has signed up to The Big Goal initiative which officially launched at St George's Park in October.

The project is led by the Street Soccer Foundation (headline sponsored by Giacom and media sponsored by Comms Dealer) and aims to prevent 1,600 young people from slipping through the net – the same number of holes in a full-size football net.

The scheme gives teams from the UK ICT industry an opportunity to play each other in a national five-a-side tournament, with the finals taking place at St George's Park next summer. Each team's entry fee also means they become the sponsor of a Street Soccer Academy locally, which helps struggling young people in the area to gain confidence and learn work skills in an inspiring football environment.

With more than 100,000 young people aged between 16 and 24 identifying as homeless, action must be taken to ensure they can thrive and make a positive impact on society, believes TTWS MD Tom O'Hagan.

"Having so many young people without a home, no matter



Tom O'Hagan

the reason, is unacceptable," he stated. "We're proud to be part of The Big Goal, helping to provide mentorship and work experience opportunities alongside a fundraising football match.

"This will support the aim to help young people find safe housing and employment, building their confidence and skills to change their lives for the better."

Participants will take part in a 10-week personal development programme, run by The Street Soccer Foundation, that combines football coaching, mindset training and soft skills development, to help young people improve their lifestyles.

For more information on the project visit [www.thebiggoal.co.uk](http://www.thebiggoal.co.uk) – and see page 10

## NEWS ROUNDUP

OPENREACH'S full fibre network is now available to 12.5 million UK premises, marking the half-way point in its nationwide plan to reach 25 million homes and businesses by the end of 2026. Openreach plans to reach up to 30 million premises before 2031. More than four million homes and businesses have connected to the network with Openreach growing its full fibre base by over 30,000 new orders every week. Openreach CEO Clive Selley said: "From a standing start just a few years ago we've now made this technology available to 12.5 million premises and counting, and we're building faster than any operator I'm aware of in Europe."

FLOTEK Group's acquisition campaign has hit double figures with the purchase of IT and comms company Orbiss. Truro-based Orbiss marks Flotek's tenth deal and strengthens its presence in the south west, increases headcount to 72 employees and boosts revenue to £8.5m. The transaction also signals Flotek's entrance into the hospitality sector bringing Best Western and Holiday Inn as clients.

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# Countdown to 2025

**With just two years to go until all landlines as we know them will be disconnected, the Great British Switch Off is looming large, writes Matt Dexter, Head of Business Partnerships, Openreach, who says it's time to put the pedal to the floor in the drive for All IP.**

**A**s we race towards the last days of the old analogue PSTN platform it feels like we still have a mountain to climb with just under nine million analogue lines over our network left to convert to digital alternatives. The good news is that we're now churning through these legacy lines at the rapid rate of around 80,000 a week. That's a thousand customers migrating off the WLR network every two hours. Much of this has been turbo charged by full fibre networks, not least by Openreach, where we've now built to 12.5 million premises – halfway to our 25 million target for December 2026 – and we continue at a rate of around 60,000 new premises passed every week. That's another home or business passed with ultrafast, gigabit-capable broadband every ten seconds.

Providing a further boost is stop-sell for more than 530 priority exchanges where, having built our full fibre network to a majority of premises, we're no longer

selling WLR products. That's around five million end user customers who will now be moving to full fibre based digital-only services, with a further three million premises under notice for stop-sell across another 340 plus exchange areas.

Back in September we extended this process, announcing a UK wide stop-sell of WLR so that end user customers who are switching, upgrading or re-grading their service where FTTP isn't available yet can still be upgraded to an All-IP alternative such as SOGEA (Single Order Generic Ethernet Access).

What is also positive is that industry is finally waking up to the need to switch, with recent industry research by Zen indicating that almost all of business leaders (97 per cent) asked are aware that PSTN and ISDN products will disappear in 2025. More than half are also already using cloud-based solutions to integrate their communications channels. The not so good



**Matt Dexter**

news is that the increased awareness hasn't spurred more businesses to actually do anything about it. A third of those businesses in Zen's research admitted they're still using ISDN, with just one in five saying they have an alternative solution ready.

#### Overcoming inertia

Part of this inertia is clearly down to some businesses feeling the pinch with the rising cost of living leading to nervousness in investing in new digital platforms like cloud-based comms. But equally worrying is the revelation that around one in ten businesses are aware of the stop-sell, but just don't know their next steps, with SMEs seemingly more at risk. Zen's research also revealed that nearly half of the businesses surveyed say that

the next possible point of contract renewal/termination with their traditional telephone supplier is more than three years away, with around eight per cent needing to wait more than six years. The danger here is that once the switch-off date comes around a significant number of businesses will be spending money on legacy communications systems that just won't work.

But what steps does a reseller need to take to move to ALL IP and help nudge their own customer base towards a digital future? If you buy directly from Openreach and don't have your own Openreach LLU/Access Locate Network you will need to decide who you are going to buy through. You will have a broadband and

minute provider, and that would be the best place to start if you have not been proactively engaged by them to date. Most of the larger players in the channel will now be either working closely with Openreach or their wholesaler to be able to support 'washes' of resellers' bases so they can understand what connectivity assets they have and which of those can move to either FTTP or SOGEA.

The majority of our customers are proactively looking to migrate their customers and are providing their partners with everything they need to know, such as Gamma's Make the Switch campaign or the Copper to Fibre Hub created by TalkTalk Business to help their partners know where to go and what to do. Another important consideration is rationalising your base – and asking the question... do you still use everything you have in the ground? There's a good chance that when you open the curtain on your WLR base that some of what you are billing for will be no longer needed. Trimming the fat here will allow you to make cost savings and ease the pressure of change on your customers.

It's not just networks that are evolving, the way we work is also changing. This is another reason for acting now and getting ahead of the curve. Furthermore, the trend towards remote or hybrid working continues to grow. Meanwhile, companies continue to diversify the communications they use, increasing their reliance on video call and web chat. Clearly, there's no time to waste in migrating your customers to All IP. ■

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# The Big Goal's deadline!

**T**he deadline has been set for founder members to sign up for the first intake of The Big Goal, the Giacom sponsored industry initiative aiming to help homeless and disadvantaged young people in the UK. Extra time is ticking away, and the final whistle will blow on January 15th, so there's only a few days left for your company to sign up for the programme's inaugural tournament and secure sponsorship of a Street Soccer Foundation academy in your area.

So, what would participation in The Big Goal mean to your business? Firstly, it will give your team members the chance to play in a high quality five-a-side football tournament with regional heats taking place at football league venues in the north and south. The finals will be staged at St George's Park – the home of England Football next summer. More importantly, your company's



**Aidan Piper**

entry fee will fund a Street Soccer Foundation Academy (SSF) in your area. This means you could 'adopt' a group of 10 to 15 young people facing homelessness or an uncertain future. This will help them improve their physical and mental health and build and achieve their life goals.

Through the contacts the SSF enjoys with leading clubs across the country, companies can link up with the charity foundations of

senior clubs in the football pyramid. As one example, founder member Welcomm Communications will be running an academy in association with the Leicester City Foundation. "This is a great initiative for us as we'll be helping disadvantaged young people in our area and the hook up with the Leicester City Foundation creates a wonderful profile for our commitment," said CEO Aidan Piper.

Giacom sponsored academies are already up and running via the Tigers Trust (Hull City) and Foundation 92 (Salford City) and young people participating have already benefited from being part of a team by playing in the Football for Good tournament staged at the London Stadium last month. "This was an incredible day for the teams," said Neil Cavill, Head of Projects at Giacom. "Some of these young people have never been out of their home city and to play football

at such an iconic venue was an experience they will never forget."

Thirty-seven teams from 26 ICT companies have now signed up for The Big Goal, namely: Giacom, TalkTalk, Daisy Communications, Daisy Corporate Services, Vapour Cloud, Ocean Telecom, Fifteen Group, Rydal Group, Jola, NT Voice & Data, Intec, Focus Group, Gamma, Global 4, Inform Billing, Spectrum/Lantern Tech, BDR Group, OneCom, Wavenet, Sky Business, Zen Zero, Dataquest, Elite Group, Welcomm Communications, Virgin Media and CityFibre. ■

**To become a Founding Member before the January 15th deadline, sign up here: [www.thebiggoal.co.uk](http://www.thebiggoal.co.uk).**

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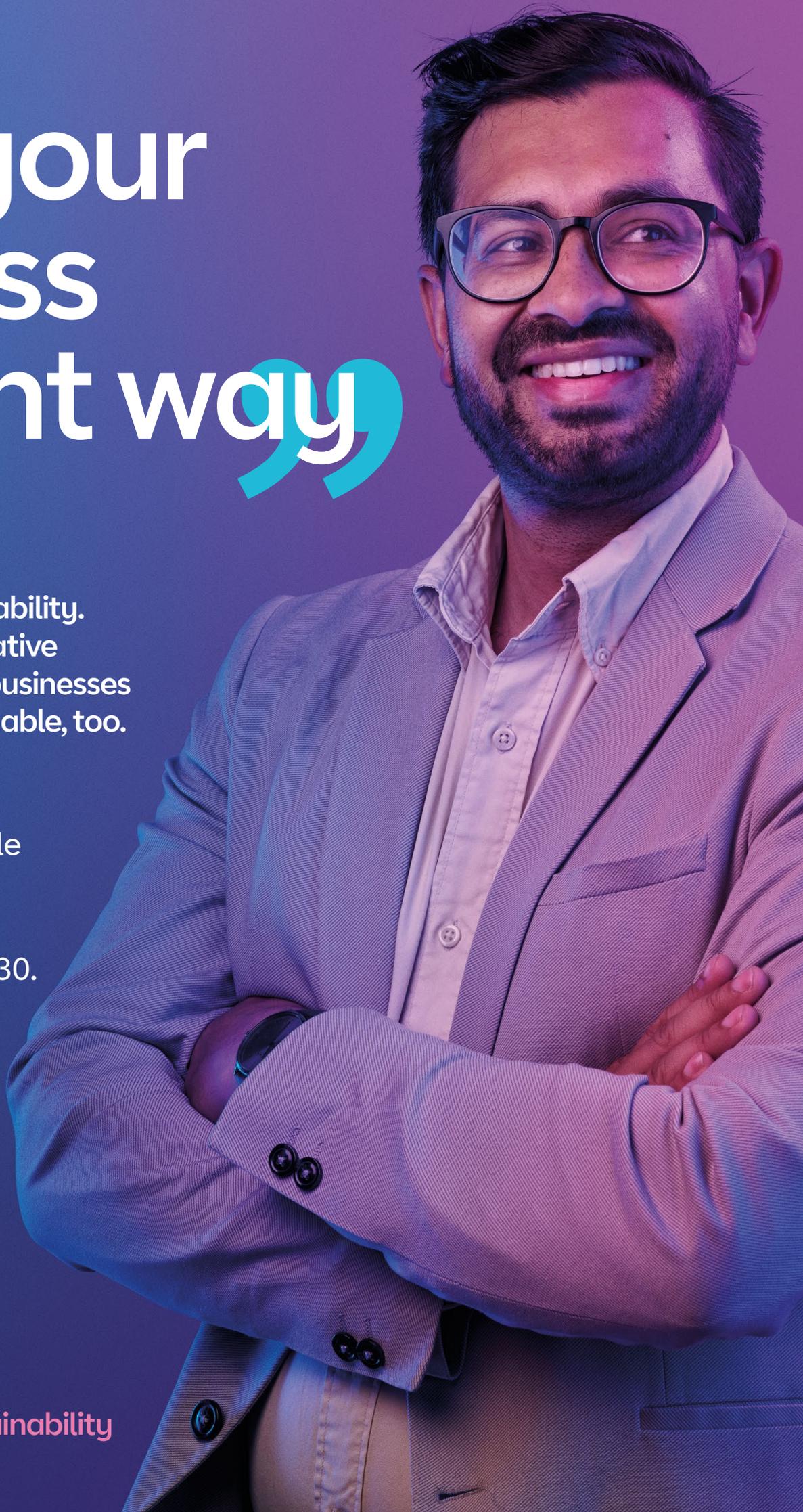
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# Betts adds zest to Vizst

The TECHNEDs-backed three-way merger of ITSB, Quad Vision and Data Integration (a division of B2B technology provider DXC Technology) in late 2021 created a single entity operating under the Vizst Technology brand headed up by CEO Richard Betts. Here, he provides a business update and shares insights into his growth strategy.

**W**hen Vizst Technology began its commercial life TECHNEDs execs Simon Mewett and Iain McKenzie joined the business as Non-Executive Director and Chairman respectively. Both are founders of the PE firm. "Myself and Iain identified the opportunity to create a new cloud technology provider that drew on the strengths of three existing businesses," commented Betts. "Each company brings its own value, multiple skillsets and multi-sector experience."

Vizst Technology has 45 employees, was certified as a Great Place to Work in November, operates out of offices in Poole, London and Newbury and reported £10.1 million revenue for its latest financial year. "We're aiming for year-on-year organic growth," added

Betts, who has earned acclaim in the B2B software and tech sector for his talent in converting businesses into profit-yielding entities.

According to Betts, one key to success resides in the company's focus on its employees and recruitment strategies. "A business is only as good as the employees we have in place," he stated. "Over the last year we've not only grown our internal skill set through progression plans and training, but we've introduced new roles to the business which will be vital to our continued success."

Betts stresses that his primary focus is to ensure a nurturing environment for all employees, regardless of their roles. "We have added value across the board, from senior sales to our technical teams and HR, aligning everyone with our business strategy and instilling in them



Richard Betts

## We're not interested in the shiny new toy. Instead, we focus on what is going to solve a problem for customers

a clear understanding of their individual contributions to the company's growth," he added.

### Key differentiator

Betts also noted that a strong differentiation point is Vizst Technology's broad range of services providing multiple benefits to different organisations. As well as targeting new business, Betts has doubled down on 'looking at the white space' in his customer base and cross-selling an extended service offering. "A focus for us continues to be the

cross-sell of our services while strengthening relationships with customers," he added. "We have a good opportunity to show those clients what else we can do by offering expertise under one umbrella with no need to outsource different suppliers. We ensure we are top of our game for key vendors and equipped with the knowledge and skills to deliver value."

Despite Vizst's growth, Betts is not one to rest on his laurels. He is always exploring new avenues and

strategies to enhance Vizst's offerings, especially in the realm of cyber security. "As an IT and cyber security MSP we are constantly reviewing how we can increase our capabilities in this space," he explained. "We're not interested in the shiny new toy, instead, we focus on what is going to solve a problem for our customers and deliver the best results. Our latest 7-stage initiative brings to life every element of the cyber security landscape that customers should be considering, and provides supporting assets and resources to demonstrate the value of these for their ecosystem."

Betts noted that he intends to bolster Vizst's cyber security capabilities having integrated SOC services. "Our SOC services will ensure we deliver the right level of security support to all of our customers," he added.

Reflecting on the MSP market, Betts offers the following advice to firms seeking long-term growth. "The MSP space is crowded with a lot of businesses stating similar messages," he said. "It's very easy to talk the talk but following through is where you will really differentiate yourself as an MSP."

According to Betts, and in a nutshell, the value provided by Vizst Technology lies in strategic thinking, creative development and seamless rollouts. "By becoming an extension of our customers' IT teams we're integrated into the decision making process from the beginning," he added. "We work with them to solve their problems in a cost-effective and pain-free way." ■

# Fidelity Energy partners with ProVu Communications

Leading UK energy consultancy Fidelity Energy, and ProVu Communications, the UK's leading comms, data & security distributor, are excited to announce their strategic partnership aimed at empowering their resellers to tap into the burgeoning energy market and support their customers with their business energy needs.

Fidelity Energy is a UK-based energy consultancy and utility broker who specialise in helping businesses procure energy, reduce costs, and implement sustainable solutions. Committed to championing renewables and supporting businesses on their path to achieving net-zero goals, Fidelity Energy offers a diverse array of services. From green energy procurement to the integration of Solar PV panels and electric vehicle (EV) charging points, the company stands at the forefront of providing innovative and environmentally

conscious solutions.

Fidelity Energy Sales Director, Sean Dixon, said, "We are thrilled to partner with ProVu Communications and extend our services to their resellers. Customers across the UK need assistance with managing their energy. ProVu has a far-reaching partner base who are already trusted advisors to thousands of UK businesses. With our partnership they can fulfil this role for an additional product, which all their customers already use.

A lot of our core values align with those of ProVu Communications, which is a great foundation for any partnership. Our channel partners have achieved remarkable success integrating energy into their existing portfolios. We are confident in our ability to assist ProVu Communications resellers in elevating their offerings and tapping into a fresh revenue

stream from their established customer base.

The potential for this partnership is really exciting and we look forward to what it can bring."

The discontinuation of PSTN/ISDN will cause disruptions, prompting numerous resellers, both existing and new, to seek opportunities to open discussions with their customers. Fidelity Energy offers their partners the means to safeguard their current customer base against competitors, strengthen their relationships, and bolster customer loyalty.

ProVu Communications Group Sales Director, Craig Herrett, shared his insights on the partnership, saying, "We are delighted to announce our new partnership with Fidelity Energy. We're always looking for new ways to help support our partners customer bases and grow their margins,



Sean Dixon, Fidelity Energy Sales Director



Craig Herrett, ProVu Communications Group Sales Director

Fidelity Energy's offering provides just that. In a few simple steps, Channel Partners can enhance their offering with no investment and fantastic returns. With the back-up of ProVu Communications support, we encourage partners to speak to us about just how easy it is to tap into this growing market.

With the upcoming switch off, utilising this partnership will help our resellers to stand out against their competitors. Adding energy procurement on its own is a big draw, but through the diverse range of renewable products, Fidelity Energy will also equip our

resellers with the solutions needed to meet the growing demand for sustainable energy solutions.

By offering energy alongside our existing portfolio, we will empower our resellers to become a one-stop shop for their customers, enhancing their overall value proposition."

For additional information regarding an energy partnership with Fidelity Energy and the potential opportunities for your customers or resellers, please don't hesitate to contact our team at [partners@fidelity-energy.co.uk](mailto:partners@fidelity-energy.co.uk).



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# Purpose-led MSP thrives on

**Organisational culture and operational excellence are best optimised through a purpose-led combination of teamwork and a values driven strategy, according to Utilize Managing Director Guy Hocking who is on a mission to not only empower Utilize people, but communities too.**

**E**mbedding purpose into every aspect of a business will bring the biggest impacts, believes Hocking. True to his word, he has enabled Utilize people to set the stage for the MSP's next phase of growth with a staunch commitment to ESG, D&I and people development underpinning his strategic approach – all three just as critical to future success as differentiation through cutting edge products and services. "It all boils down to our people," stated Hocking. "Our focus and investments are channelled towards them, their wellbeing and culture, training, mentoring and having the best tools. Our aim is to foster a culture that enables staff to cultivate a growth oriented mindset. Work hard, stay true to your values and anything is possible."

Hocking says Utilize's culture underpins a company-wide desire for mutual success that, importantly, informs staff recruitment strategies

aimed at individuals with similar values. "I have found building a successful team around me to be the most rewarding part of my role," added Hocking.

However, a block to progress for many MSPs is the skills gap, and Hocking pointed especially to the urgent need for more skilled personnel in the technology sector – a challenge that Utilize is stepping up to address. "As a technology company we have a huge role to play," he said. "We not only want to encourage more employees to come and work for us, we want to attract more people into the technology sector. We're deeply committed to local apprenticeship programmes and we have an award winning programme of our own. Additionally, we maintain a strong involvement with local colleges."

Utilize, which has offices in London and Essex, also aligns itself with the UN's Sustainable Development



Guy Hocking

**Tackling sustainability challenges isn't optional for us. Customers and prospects are asking for it. The next generation of talent are demanding it. We must have the answers to these questions**

Goals, channelling its efforts predominantly through the Ingram Micro Trust X community. "Working alongside over 25 other technology businesses in the community we actively support a number of key goals, including tackling climate action, creating decent work opportunities, fostering economic growth, promoting good health and wellbeing, and advocating gender equality," said Hocking.

He drew attention to Utilize's current ambition to help the

Trust X community develop a tool to measure its carbon footprint and establish accurate and verified SBTi targets for each business. "As a community, our objective is to devise concrete actions that we can put into practice within our own businesses," added Hocking. "Collectively, we aim to make a positive and lasting impact on sustainability. This is a significant part of Utilize's corporate philosophy.

"Tackling sustainability challenges isn't optional for us. Customers and

prospects are asking for it. The next generation of talent are demanding it. We must have the answers to these questions and most importantly, we must contribute to positive change."

**Team building**

On taking the reins as Managing Director in 2017, Hocking quickly set about building a new leadership team, making important investments and drawing up an ambitious plan to significantly increase the business's prospects based



# on people power

on his key values. Six years into the project, Hocking forecasts year-end revenues to be circa £21 million, up from £18 million, with big gains made through organic growth – but he also has his eye on acquisitions. Hocking attributes, in large part, Utilize's impressive £3 million hike in organic growth to people power,

**Our aim is to foster a culture that enables staff to cultivate a growth oriented mindset. Work hard, stay true to your values and anything is possible**

which is charging up following an increase in headcount from 111 to 135 in the past 12 months.

### Transformational tech

His strategy of course extends beyond nurturing a purpose-led workforce with similar values applied to cementing long-term client relationships. "From a customer standpoint, our purpose revolves around equipping every business with the technology they need to thrive and succeed," explained Hocking. "This involves assisting customers to deploy transformative technology and helping them to achieve their goals."

This strategy is largely underpinned by strong cyber security measures built into systems and services. "We're baking cyber security into our offerings so that we know we're secure by design," added Hocking. "While this inherently complex process involves integrating security into our operations, we believe it's the most effective

approach towards becoming a secure MSP and protecting our customers."

Hocking reiterated that while cyber security is a primary concern it's not the sole focus. "We also strive for

efficiency, both internally and for our customers," he added. "We achieve this through process automation and software solutions. As a Sage business partner we use a range of software that not only fosters innovation for our customers but also generates many efficiencies.

"Data Intelligence is another key strategy for us. By cleansing and surfacing data we empower business leaders to make well-informed and accurate decisions. We leverage tools like Power BI and we're also well on the way to incorporating AI into these services." ■

### Hocking's top tips...

**THE MSP market is intensely competitive, so gain an advantage by investing time in understanding your customers and speaking their language. Be clear about your mission and execute efficiently – not just doing it well, but the best you can be. And if an opportunity arises to carve a niche, differentiate or add significant value to your customer, move heaven and earth to make it happen.**

### Just a minute with Guy Hocking...

**Role model:** Satya Nadella: The transformation that has taken place within Microsoft during his tenure is phenomenal. And Arsene Wenger: I'm a big Villa fan, but what he did for Arsenal and football in general is incredible. The science, insights and disciplines he brought formed the foundations of the modern game.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I have an unhealthy addiction to salt and vinegar Discos.

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** I'm fiercely competitive, but that can be my weakness too.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Thom Yorke, I could listen to him for hours. Abraham Lincoln, he might teach us a thing or two! And Jimmy Carr to keep us all laughing.

**Biggest career achievement:** Having the privilege of heading up an amazing team for the past six years. It's been a hell of a journey to this point, and I am looking forward to what comes next.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** Living in the Swiss Alps – climbing, running, skiing, eating cheese and ham.

**Best advice you have been given:** Work hard and most importantly enjoy the journey.

**Today's top three leadership priorities?** Talent, sustainability and AI.

**Industry bugbear:** The lack of gender equality in our sector. I'd love to attract more women into the industry.

**In hindsight:** I would have read more books because knowledge is power and I feel like I am playing catch-up.

**How do you relax?** I run, climb or spend time watching my boys playing football or rugby.

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## Automation, Streamlining AI: The Pillars of Efficiency

**A**s leaders, we should be asking ourselves "What do I need to do to improve efficiency, whilst providing an exceptional experience for my customers and team?" to ensure we're always working on initiatives that deliver the greatest value. With rising costs and more competition in the sector than ever before, how can you remove the headaches and inefficiencies to dramatically improve performance?

to 35%, or £15k per year per support technician.

By diving into your systems and processes, or finding a technology partner that can help, you can strategically identify what you can automate, instead of opting for a 'spray and pray' approach, for greater time and cost savings. Automating repetitive tasks like order processing, invoice and PO generation, and service case



**"AI isn't about replacing people but helping them work smarter."**

*Michelle Livingstone, CEO Layer Systems*

Many assume that having lots of systems will guarantee efficiency, but more isn't always better. Quick fixes are rarely the solution. They often create silos, duplication of work, data inaccuracy, poor adoption, and frustrated users. A strong software ecosystem can make a world of difference, from reduced operational costs to increased CSAT scores. It's not just about choosing the right software and how those platforms interact, but also leveraging the power of automation, AI, and intelligent decision-making.

creation/closure frees up your teams to focus on value-added activities like cross-selling, proactive account management and using insights to improve business operations further.

Businesses that embrace AI have experienced a 32-35% increase in customer and employee retention, sustainability, and innovation (IDC, 2023). AI isn't about replacing people but helping them work smarter: quickly identifying patterns, analysing customer sentiment, and producing high-converting communications, but do you have the accurate and relevant data for it to learn from?

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# AI opportunity beckons

**Here, Tim Britt, Director of Sales & Channel EMEA, Dropbox Business, outlines what's needed for the channel to accelerate the AI opportunity both responsibly and strategically.**

**T**o say that AI has captured the imagination like no other technology would be to greatly understate its potential impact, believes Britt. He says the channel has entered into a new era and cited a survey by Dialpad in which nearly half of respondents had received enquiries from vendors about using AI in their business. "It's no surprise when AI can supercharge the ability to manage complex multi-vendor ecosystems," he stated. "AI gives us the ability to automate routine processes and find what we need faster."

Britt also pointed to research by Economist Impact (sponsored by Dropbox) which found that of those who already use AI and automation tools in their work, 79 per cent are more productive. "Ultimately, AI adoption will become the dividing line between the companies that get ahead versus those that are left behind," added Britt.

"However, businesses need to ensure that the models they're investing in adhere to upcoming regulation, as well as their own business

values. They need to make sure they're deploying AI in the right areas of the business to drive the most impact. This is where channel partners can play an important role. Partners need to offer customers hands on support throughout this journey by acting as valuable consultants."

To do this, Britt says partners should keep three vital steps in mind. Firstly, he says resellers would be well advised to encourage customers to plan ahead. "AI has captured everyone's attention and companies are racing to integrate it into their offerings," he stated. "But despite wanting to move fast, businesses must take a thoughtful approach. Here, resellers can support customers by building tailored plans that set up the technology for long-term success. AI has the potential to truly change how we work for the better, but only when it's used in a purposeful and appropriate way."

Britt also noted that AI is not a fix-all, and as companies look to the future they need to take a hard look at where AI will drive the most impact. "They need to think about how it will integrate with



Tim Britt

**Ultimately, AI adoption will become the dividing line between the companies that get ahead versus those that are left behind**

employees, their existing systems, the company's security requirements and legislation," he added. "Doing so will enable customers to deploy AI with a powerful and targeted approach that brings them closer to their objectives."

#### Guidance

The second key step advocated by Britt revolves around guiding customers to the right AI solutions. "A deep understanding of the customer and the AI-powered solutions on offer is essential," he added. "Partners need to pinpoint where these solutions will be the most powerful as well as the challenges that their customers might need to navigate. Those that do this successfully will help customers navigate the increasingly crowded market. Those that leverage a more

personalised use of AI can really make a difference."

The third priority is to adopt AI responsibly, noted Britt. He referenced last month's UK AI Safety Summit as a reminder to us all that AI must be used responsibly. "Because of this, companies must keep the use of AI in line with their core business values," commented Britt. "In this new era of AI the commitment to values is more important than ever before.

"When we launched our latest AI-powered products we also published our own set of AI principles. As we develop our AI offerings these principles will serve as constant benchmarks for our teams to demonstrate our dedication to exploring AI responsibly. Businesses looking to embrace AI should do the same."

Guidelines will vary depending on the organisation, and before creating their own, businesses should study best practices around the world and across their industry, believes Britt. "Then, through the lens of their company values, they should ask themselves why they are embracing AI and understand the positive impact that they hope it will have on their teams, customers, industry and larger communities," he commented.

"Guiding customers to this point will put them in the best possible position to start their AI journey. And as trusted advisors along the way, channel partners can position themselves as educational experts when it comes to unlocking the exciting and positive benefits of AI." ■



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# Make 2024 the year you harness neurodiversity

**Support to Win CEO and neurodiversity (ND) champion Julie Mills urges channel leaders to kick-start an ND initiative this year by simply focusing on just one of three areas – education, internal communications or recruitment.**

**M**ore comms businesses than ever are aware of neurodiversity, which is fantastic news, but as an industry we still have lots of work to do. That's why I'm laying down a challenge to every kind of company in the channel – from the biggest CSP to the smallest reseller – to make one change that brings you closer to becoming a neuro-inclusive workplace.

Committing to this goal is a great idea for any business looking to make their mark in 2024. And ND-friendly companies can expect to get the maximum in-work value and satisfaction from all of their existing staff, plus access to a massive and largely untapped tech talent pool. But despite these huge benefits, the sad reality is that only a minority have achieved this so far.

Therefore the vast majority are potentially failing to hire the next Bill Gates or Elon Musk into their workforce! So start now and capitalise on a competitive advantage that puts you ahead of the pack in terms of staff recruitment and retention. That's before we get onto righting the wrong of failing to accommodate existing employees who could otherwise thrive in their roles.



Julie Mills

## Start now and capitalise on a competitive advantage that puts you ahead of the pack in terms of recruitment and retention

As I've said before, becoming an ND-friendly workplace takes more than putting up posters around the office or hashtags on social media. But it isn't rocket science either. So here's three areas of improvement comms businesses could explore in the year ahead. Just pick one and do it...

### Education

It's one thing to be aware of neurodiversity, and something else to be knowledgeable about it. Think what a

difference it could make to educate all your staff on what ND is and how it applies to the workplace. An education programme helps promote an understanding of ND that everyone shares and is sensitive to, removing stigma and creating a safe space for your ND employees to disclose.

### Internal communications

Better internal communications can play a crucial role in making businesses more

neuro-inclusive. Clearer, more concise and direct communications helps everyone understand expectations, tasks and processes, allows for more flexible and customised approaches to work, and creates effective employee feedback channels.

### Recruitment

While my two previous suggestions focus on existing staff, this third improvement area addresses new staff opportunities. Review your

recruitment process from the perspective of someone with ND. Look at everything from how positions are described and advertised, all the way to how you manage the interview process and onboard new personnel.

You could easily make neurodiversity a goal for your business this year, treat everyone fairly, maximise your people strategy and create a win-win situation for everyone associated with your company and brand. ■



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4<sup>th</sup> July 2024, Regents Park [www.channel-champions.com](http://www.channel-champions.com)

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# Channel trio aim to drive

Putting more purposeful goals into practice is a daunting challenge for any business and the first question always asked is... where do you start? Here, we spotlight three certified B Corps in the channel and their pursuit of meaningful growth journeys, and highlight how greater collaboration between like-minded organisations could catalyse a wave of positive change across the industry.

**S**ustainability trail blazers IDNET, Fluid IT and Zen are paving the way for greater cross-industry collaboration amongst B Corporations, setting a benchmark for responsible business partnerships in the channel and catalysing a growing movement of companies dedicated to reshaping the industry's future. For the record, B Corp certification is conferred by B Lab (a global non-profit organisation) to companies that meet high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.

The five pillars of B Corporation accreditation are governance, workers, community, environment and customers. And our three Net Zero leaders earned B Corp status by adhering

to stringent ethical and sustainable practices around these important categories.

It is a fact that cross-industry collaboration among B Corporations will have many benefits, including the ability to create innovative and sustainable products, share knowledge and resources, and set new standards for responsible business practices. Within telecoms, the focus to date has been around the sharing of knowledge and resources with a drive towards responsible business practices.

But instances of product innovation are seen in other industries, providing an example to the comms sector of what can be achieved through more purposeful collaboration. One example is the Patagonia and Bureo



A donation by IDNET helped to open an IT room at a school in rural Ghana

## For channel businesses to successfully play their part in creating a more purposeful industry a broad scope of meaningful action needs to be pursued

collaboration on a line of hats made from recycled fishing nets. Another is Ben & Jerry's collaboration with Greyston Bakery – a B Corp that provides employment opportunities to individual who face barriers to employment – to create a line of ice cream flavours that

feature Greyston Bakery's brownies. Shared synergies such as these are a beacon to how innovation in the comms sector could evolve, and IDNET, Fluid IT and Zen aim to turn up the volume on their B Corp message, having shown that it is possible to be successful in the channel

while still prioritising ethical and sustainable practices.

### Role models

These three B Corporations are focusing on key areas that help them achieve and retain their B Corp status and continue to be a force for good that other businesses

# positive change

in the channel can learn from. IDNET, Fluid IT and Zen are heavily involved in their communities and support nominated charities through monetary donations, telecommunications equipment and professional support. Fluid IT also provides a 15 per cent discount on all

## It is a fact that cross-industry collaboration among B Corporations will have many benefits

engineering hours provided to charities, and 35 per cent of its revenues come from fellow B Corporations. All three have forged links with local schools and colleges, encouraging the consideration of careers in technology, and IDNET takes this a step further with its support of local community radio project for Hitchin Town FC fans.

### Customer experience

Attention to customer service and reliability also sets B Corporations apart. Zen's 'How To' YouTube channel and 'Help Us' pages were developed after feedback from customers revealed a need for more self-serve capabilities. And supported by Zen resources and collateral, IDNET's free telecoms switch off audit process helps signpost business customers through the switch off journey, with the aim of finding a painless route to ensuring their businesses can continue to operate smoothly in changing times.

Another trait shared by IDNET, Fluid IT and Zen is their readiness to always try and source goods and

services from other ethical companies, and undertake regular supplier reviews. Proactive examples of supplier changes at IDNET in the last few years have been a change of business bank and energy supplier. Furthermore, as part of this supplier review process, IDNET has received certified evidence from their two largest data centre suppliers that they use

100 per cent renewable energy sources, something Zen also lays claim to.

Fluid IT pays special attention to the impact of its spend and the behaviour of its supply chain. It has worked hard to involve and engage suppliers in the B Corp community, buying from B Corps where possible because they know they share many of the same values and will treat other stakeholders in the way they aspire to. They particularly seek to work with Living Wage suppliers and look for repairability, recyclability and serviceability in the hardware manufacturers they choose. Fluid IT also buys locally from independent businesses.

Being part of the B Corp community has resulted in improvements made to people policies, recruitment practices and office facilities, as well as personal development programs for these businesses. At IDNET, for example, there is no unnecessary hierarchy or management tiers, with the company organised into those who make the technology work and those who are entirely focused

on customers (support, retention and acquisition). Going through the B Corp certification process helped IDNET benchmark its personnel management practices against topics such as the payment of a living wage, staff benefits, employee health and safety, plus professional development opportunities. These businesses outperform industry benchmarks on the likes of employee attrition rates. Overall, staff tend to stay with B Corps for longer, with a high percentage of staff at these companies serving for 10-plus years.

### Realising full potential

Fluid IT has a particular focus on helping individuals realise their potential. It works with ex-offenders, ex-addicts, refugees, candidates from youth engagement charities, and more, and supports them through apprenticeships to employment. Fluid IT has a partner that provides expert counselling to all team members with challenging backgrounds and all staff can request counselling support, which Fluid pays for, and allows them to undertake counselling during the working week. Fluid IT is deliberate about promoting internally, and much of its leadership team joined as apprentices over 10 years ago. The current CEO began as a work experience candidate.

For channel businesses to successfully play their part in creating a more purposeful industry, a broad scope of meaningful action needs to be pursued, with strong commitments to becoming a B Corporation prioritised alongside close collaboration with similar organisations to drive momentum. ■

## Does FCA regulation change put your business at risk?

The transition from traditional transactional relationships has been ongoing for over 10 years. The switch from either direct sale of PBX systems or the leasing of the same to the customer has meant that the channel no longer benefits from large cash-flow injections.

Of course this has an adverse effect on both the reseller and the lease company. A proportion of the channel are still utilising leasing to support the provision of hosted solutions to their customers. This seems to be counter-intuitive to the lease company as the proportion of the cost that is incurred at the start of the contract is minimal.

In the PBX world an accepted position was that the solution would be valued at £1,000 per user/handset. This formula works when providing a PBX on site, perpetual licences on the PBX, handsets, perpetual licences on the handsets and significant professional services/implementation.

But in the provision of cloud based solutions, arguably in the majority of models the up-front costs are limited to desktop handsets and ancillary connectivity equipment. Perpetual licences have been replaced with ongoing subscriptions.

This has not stopped the reseller demanding upwards of £1,000 per user/handset from the lessor, with that company happy to support as they have seen the size of the telecoms market reduce significantly and they still want to transact.

For the lease company the golden

rule is that they should not, knowingly, be financing future services to be delivered. The reasoning for this simple, under contract law a customer does not have to pay for a service it is not being delivered, therefore putting the lease company at significant performance risk. Should therefore a lease be entered into for a hosted solution at £1,000 per user/handset the reality is this includes future services to be provided.

Are the lease companies therefore knowingly party to risk that these contracts carry or is the financial services sector not understanding the technology provided? It could be one or the other, or a combination of the two.

What does this mean in reality for the reseller? At the least it reflects a high amount of risk in the future business model of the reseller. The majority of lease companies that support the channel are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and a significant change is about to come into force: Consumer Duty where it is vital that the customer receives fair value. The question to be asked is does the financing of small quantities of hardware at over £1,000 per user/handset deliver fair value for the customer?

It is time for the reseller to start future proofing their business and look at alternative ways in which they can generate cash-flow from customer contracts on a fair value basis. Liquid Subscriptions allows resellers to reduce risk within their business model whilst offering customers fair contracts and generating cash-flow to cover cost of sales at the inception of the agreement.

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# Grow through network m

**Embedding a mix and match network model enables resellers and distributors to not only meet the many requirements, challenges and opportunities of a changing marketplace but define its future too, according to Cellhire Managing Director Matt Bennett.**

**R**ealigning portfolio strategies to sharpen competitive positioning and open doorways to new opportunities is a growing priority for channel businesses, and a key consideration in this, believes Bennett, is the revenue potential offered through what he calls 'network mix and match'. "In the ever evolving landscape of telecoms, mobile solution resellers play a pivotal role in delivering network services to a wide range of customers," he stated. "For wholesalers, offering a single network can seem like an obvious choice as it presents greater simplicity compared to managing the tariffs and offers of multiple networks. However, what many resellers in the channel soon experience is a number of challenges, including limited differentiation of their service leading to the inevitable threat of customer churn."

Bennett noted that today, mobile customers' desire

for a personalised and reliable solution can be more important than paying the cheapest rate, as inconsistent mobile connectivity can lead to customer frustration and dissatisfaction. "The result is inevitable harm to the business through lost revenue," he added. "But a mix and match approach provides options across multiple MNOs enabling mobile resellers to build solutions that meet customer requirements."

The challenges mobile wholesalers face when offering single network solutions are many and varied, highlighted Bennett. "With a limited network portfolio, single network resellers are constrained by the range of solutions at their disposal," he reiterated. "Resellers are limited in their ability to cater to diverse customer needs, preferences and budgets. In return, their customers choose to look elsewhere for their preferred pricing and coverage. Therefore, single



Matt Bennett

**By embracing mix and match solutions, distributors and resellers alike are not only adapting to the changing needs of the industry but actively shaping its future**

network solutions lead to a competitive disadvantage."

#### Choice matters

According to Bennett, multi-network distributors hold a distinct advantage by offering a variety of choices. "Customers appreciate the flexibility to be able

to utilise several networks and to customise their plans," he added. "Single network resellers must convince customers that their solitary offering is the ideal fit, which can be a difficult conversation. But the most prominent challenge is the difficulty in scaling

business opportunity with a single network offering. Expanding a business can be a frustrating endeavour for single network resellers. Should they wish to add new services, they may need to engage with additional network providers, a process which uses a mass of time

# Mix and match

and resource. Scaling up becomes an uphill battle. For those suppliers who choose to the one network approach, the challenges are undeniable, which is why a multiple network approach is reshaping the industry."

Bennett explained that multiple network solutions involve the provision of

## Many industries have customers for multiple network solutions

various mobile network options to the customer base, where each SIM card is intelligently assigned to the MNO that offers the most robust local coverage for the user's designated location.

"This strategy not only addresses the limitations faced by traditional single-choice resellers but also encourages them to meet the increased demands of today's customers with reliable connectivity and a better service," he added. "Multiple networks enable resellers to tailor their offerings to individual customer needs, resulting in a streamlining of operations with much less need for customers to seek coverage from multiple sources, leaving the reseller with additional opportunities."

Many industries and sectors include potential customers for multiple network solutions, pointed out Bennett. He broadly categorises them into two main groups – field workforces and businesses with multiple locations. In terms of tailored connectivity for field-based workers, the relevant industries

include healthcare, delivery companies, real estate, film and TV, trade shows and expositions, catering services, construction and cleaning companies. "In many industries, field-based workers are a crucial part of the workforce," added Bennett. "They work away from the traditional office settings and face individual

connectivity challenges. Finding a single network that can effectively

cater to the different needs of field-based teams, which may be spread across various locations and regions, is a difficult task.

### Customisation

"But offering multiple networks allows businesses to customise their connectivity solutions based on the specific requirements of each field team or location, ensuring the teams stay connected and productive in their often dynamic work environments. Businesses can now ensure their field-based workforce has access to connectivity solutions that empower them to work effectively in changing situations and a wide range of locations. This approach enhances productivity, communication and overall job performance for field-based teams."

Turning to opportunities associated with diverse workforce locations, the key industries include banking, hospitality, construction, service providers, healthcare, manufacturing and retail. In these verticals, many organisations employ a workforce with varying location-based roles,

including office-based and travelling teams that often require different connectivity solutions. "Travelling teams need consistent coverage across their operating locations, while office-based teams require optimal coverage at their premises," stated Bennett. "Furthermore, field sales teams may be divided into regions, each with its own unique connectivity needs.

"The answer to these challenges is a multiple network solution that caters to the needs of businesses with dispersed workforces. This approach allows organisations to customise their connectivity solutions based on the specific requirements of each team or location, ensuring that every situation is adequately addressed. The outcome is that businesses in various industries can now ensure that their diverse workforce with different location-based roles has access to the connectivity solutions best suited to their specific needs. The result is an enhanced user experience, employee efficiency and overall service satisfaction."

Bennett claims that the industry is undergoing a transformative shift, led by the adaptive concept of mix and match. "By embracing mix and match solutions, distributors and resellers alike are not only adapting to the changing needs of the industry but actively shaping its future," he added. "The approach is not merely a response to challenges, it's a gateway to new possibilities, offering resellers and their customers the flexibility, connectivity and choice needed to thrive in the digital era." ■

## Act Now! Why Time Is Running Out To Prove PCI Compliance 'Innocence'

It's not just the PSTN copper line switch-off which is looming large. Another important deadline is even closer!

Do you know there are just several months before major changes come into force around payment card information (PCI) protection? With regulations changing in just several months.

Many organisations are unaware and unprepared for the radical changes they need to introduce around how they operate with PCI. From March 2024 they will need to prove their innocence by providing real-life data and proof of their compliance, rather than simply verbally defending any guilt that has been implicated.

Our partners and their customers all need to know that PCI compliance is changing and understand how it is focusing on strengthening the protection of payment card information. PCI 4.0 is moving to an evidence-based model where a customer has to prove they are fully compliant rather than just verbally indicating they are.

In most cases, the existing 'Pause and Resume' model - where credit card details are not recorded when taking payments over the telephone - simply isn't fit for purpose.

Fines already run into millions of pounds depending on the size of a company and the scale of any breach.

### Huge Swing

Pause and Resume was never a perfect solution anyway. It is notoriously unreliable and adopting manual procedures isn't perfect either - as human error can occur when pressing buttons and pausing recordings.

There are many holes in the sequence of events that can put compliance seriously at risk. Call and contact centre staff are still hearing details, they might be keying it into another system or writing it down to double-check it's correct. Equally, the person giving their card details risk being overheard.

The whole PCI compliance issue is about what's in scope. There's a massive amount to consider because if you are using Teams or Webex to take that call that's on the desktop of a PC so now your PC's and the entire network is in scope along with your physical handsets and wider buildings. There's so much PCI auditors need to look at and assess.

From March 2024 it will no longer be good enough just to say, "you have a process". You and your organisation will need to prove it and provide evidence. It will potentially become a huge operational issue for businesses.

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The time to act is now. Be prepared for the changes that are being implemented for PCI in March 2024. Don't wait any longer.

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# Incoming CPO has the bi

Former Sage, HSBC and Sony executive Erna de Ruijter-Quist joined Westcon-Comstor as its first Chief People Officer in October last year, also bringing experience from time at Virgin Media, Liberty Global and GE Capital. Now, she's on a mission to empower 3,500-plus people around the world to innovate, learn and grow. Here's how...

**T**he Chief People Officer role is new to Westcon-Comstor, how are you going to make it your own?

It's both exciting and daunting to step into a role that didn't exist before. Being a member of the Executive Leadership Team and leading a team of HR professionals globally, my leadership style and experience will certainly influence the dynamic and the way Westcon-Comstor is run. While I plan to make the role of CPO my own in some ways, and either build from scratch, strengthen or change the HR capabilities the organisation needs in order to be successful, I also intend to nurture the great aspects that already exist.

**What are your strategies for driving greater levels of employee engagement?**

I see HR as the enabler, the facilitator, the challenger, with employee engagement being owned by every single colleague and line manager. I will be looking to explore ways to enable people managers in particular to create an environment where each individual in their teams can be at their best and feel a sense of strong personal connection. We want our people to feel connected to our brand, our values, our strategic ambition, the work we do and why we do it. A sense



Erna de Ruijter-Quist

**For me, leadership is mostly about managing relationships, being authentic, building trust, showing vulnerability and knowing your craft**

of connection with other colleagues, our vendors, partners, customers, and the communities in which we operate is also important.

**What priorities are you focusing on right now?**

I have worked in transport, electronics, banking, telecommunications and software. This variety and adaptability has been an advantage, and my priority is to fully absorb myself and learn more about

the business and industry, connecting with as many different people across the organisation as I can to determine what Westcon-Comstor needs from HR in the years to come. I will shape the people strategy from there. It's early days, but so far everyone I have spoken to talks about the highly supportive people-focused environment and the strength of our leadership. I'm also a realist and know that there will always be colleagues who

have less positive experiences. As I come to learn about those experiences, it will be my job to listen and address pain-points as much as I can.

**How will you take a lead on embedding a culture of DEI?**

We have a DEI strategy in place which is also part of our broader ESG strategy. I will be looking to further develop it and I have already started to engage with several people on the topic

to see what needs to happen to drive it forward. Pro-active senior sponsorship will be key, and I know from having discussed this with David Grant, Westcon-Comstor's CEO, that we will be working alongside each other.

**How do you plan to implement programmes around innovation, internal mobility and learning?**

This partially comes back to our culture. Innovation is one of our values and Westcon-Comstor is reshaping technology distribution for a new era in which the focus will be on providing increasingly complex solutions. Innovation is about being super-curious and not taking 'no' for an answer. It's about maximising potential and creating a safe space where colleagues can experiment, trying out new ways of working and thinking (and acting) outside the box. A culture that fosters innovation is one where experimenting and not getting it always right is accepted as part of the learning curve.

We already have a strong Learning and Development platform in place and I plan to continue to drive the learning and development and internal mobility agenda. The pace at which technology is advancing and the world is evolving means we will

# It between her teeth

have to help our colleagues to keep pace. Learning agility will be key. It's early days to say exactly how I will do that and what programmes I may implement, but these are focus areas for sure.

## How will you help drive the sustainability agenda at Westcon-Comstor as the business works towards Net Zero by 2050?

A large part will be to fully educate myself more deeply about our ESG plans in more depth, having only just joined the business. I'm already in conversation with Kevin Brzezinski, our Chief Sustainability Officer, to explore our partnership in this space. ESG and DEI go hand in hand. My role will be to engage more than 3,500 colleagues with the topic and what each and every one of them can do in their role to contribute to Westcon-Comstor's Net Zero ambition, as well as becoming advocates for a circular economy outside of work.

## More generally, have you seen that one kind of 'difference' or diverse group may be prioritised over another?

Diversity is not a simple topic. If it was, all companies would have already nailed it. Do I see more and more companies educating themselves and taking this topic more seriously and taking more deliberate action? Yes. And we need to keep going. When a company says 'we are diverse and inclusive' – but have no neurodiversity strategy for example – I personally would not judge that statement too quickly. I would seek to understand where they are on their journey first. Neurodiversity may be next on the agenda

for them. A healthy dose of realism and pragmatism on what's possible needs to be considered. Making progress is key.

## What have been your career experiences in terms of being female?

I've had a fair share of judgments thrown at me, not just from the business world, but also from the communities where I have lived. Anything from, 'you're a woman so you won't make it far in this

## HR is the enabler, the facilitator, the challenger, with employee engagement being owned by every single colleague and line manager

company'; to, 'when are you having children?'; to, 'Oh no, you're one of those career women are you?'; to, why can't you come to our mums-go-for-lunch group? On your business travels again!'. I've not let such remarks define me and always pursued my own path and happiness. I have mostly had amazing support, great managers encouraging me and giving me opportunities, mentors in and outside of work, a partner and family who have supported me. These are the experiences that have shaped me.

When I gave birth to twins, my husband stepped back from paid work and stayed at home to look after the children while I went back to work. It's been good for our children to experience a less typical family set up. I

simply say that in our family things are a little different than most, and that I hope in years to come this would become more typical.

## What's the key to building and leading successful teams?

There are several things I pay attention to: Don't just hire for the job, hire for complementing the team and the company. Pay attention to both functional experience, as well as for mindset, character and

people leadership capabilities. Look for learning agility. Invest in dedicated team time, both work-related team time and off-work team time. Investing

time in building personal connections is key. Work on what's below the surface. And if you are in a position of leadership, know when you should lead and when you should allow your team to lead.

Be visible, be approachable, stay grounded – and be human first and foremost. Learn to debate and handle conflict within the team, but commit and speak with one voice 'to the outside' so that you own the message, collectively. It's important to be clear on the intent, or purpose of a team, why the team exists and what it is seeking to achieve. For me, leadership is mostly about managing relationships, being authentic, building trust, showing vulnerability and knowing your craft. Actions speak louder than words.

## What are today's leadership priorities?

A big priority for leaders today is to learn to lead in the unknown. Leading in an increasingly fast-changing, unpredictable environment is hard. Keeping perspective and focus, paying attention to the stuff that will really make a difference and distilling out the noise is important. The ability to constantly adapt and course-correct is important; and managing a non-linear landscape is not easy, let alone doing so when leaders are expected to have a view on just about everything. Enabling and empowering teams to operate in an uncertain world is becoming an increasingly important part of leadership.

## What is your biggest career achievement?

To build a fulfilling career in HR, working with some major international companies and supporting thousands of colleagues along the way.

## In your career what would you have done differently with the benefit of hindsight?

I wouldn't want it any other way. Has it been easy? No, not always. Has it been fun? No, not always, but mostly it has been! Embracing all experiences has made me the person and HR professional I am today. I'm passionate about HR, people and change, and my growth mindset pushes me to be better. Of course I beat myself up at times when things don't go as planned and I feel responsible. But no regrets, only learning.

## What talent do you wish you had?

Teleportation skills. Travelling is nice, but it's tiring.

## What motivates you the most?

When someone tells me that something I told them, a piece of advice or perspective that I'd once given, has been life-changing for them.

## Tell us something about yourself we don't know

I love animals and have a mini-menagerie at home, including four cats, two dogs, two rabbits, a terrapin and various reptiles.

## What are your greatest strengths, and what could you work on?

People say I create trust, am approachable, direct and on-point. When a decision is made, or a direction set, I'm there living it and loving it. But I do need to look over my shoulder to make sure others, who may take a little longer to get there, can join the journey too.

## One example of something you've overcome

Finding confidence, and finding my voice.

## Were you destined to become CPO of a major company?

When I started out working for TIP Group, renting out lorries across Europe, I didn't have the slightest idea that holding a CPO role was on my path. The role of a CPO wasn't purposefully my ambition. I have never been motivated by job titles or leadership seniority. For me, it's about whatever makes me fulfilled. Every role has a value and people should be proud of what they do. I always focus on being the best I can be and mastering my craft. That mindset has enabled me to have the career I have enjoyed to date. And who knows what's still to come. ■



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# How channel firms are

**This month's Kaleidoscope feature provides a snapshot of opportunities and challenges facing channel businesses this year, and is a quick reference to where business leaders are focusing their efforts and forecasting growth, along with a cautionary note or two.**



**IAN ROWAN**  
COUNTRY MANAGER  
UK&I, WILDIX

This year, most growth is expected to come from vertical solutions that allow partners to maximise their revenues by focusing on specialist niche markets. The challenge will be understanding these markets at a level that instils confidence in buyers. It had been a challenge for many partners to switch from their previous business models, but during the last year, it seems that the objections to change have been overcome with external factors such as high interest rates encouraging partners to explore different marketing strategies. Partners have also shown their desire to adopt more of the services we offer, such as international SIP and HWaaS, as their main offerings.



**DAVID WATTS,**  
MD UK&I  
TD SYNnex

We are cautiously optimistic for 2024 but also expect any recovery to be gradual and to remain sensitive to external factors. Once again, cloud and security will be key areas of growth and AI will have more of an influence. We'll continue to see greater interest in partnering and ecosystems with more partners looking to demonstrate the positive steps they are taking to reduce their carbon impact and to be more sustainable. This is in addition to ensuring that the technology they put forward can meet the sustainability expectations of their customers.



**PETE TOMLINSON**  
CEO, WINDSOR  
TELECOM

Windsor grew by over a quarter in 2023, delivering some of our largest projects. SMEs are increasingly adopting new ways of working and serving customers using technology that was previously the domain of large enterprises, be that voice, video, social messaging, productivity and reporting tools for better hybrid working or dealing with security and compliance issues. The vendor community is also innovating, now putting AI, integrations and usability at the heart of their roadmaps with the convergence of software, comms and IT.



**ANDREW DICKINSON**  
FOUNDER, JOLA

Our target was to sign 120 new partners in FY23, which we exceeded within six months. We have helped partners build significant recurring mobile data revenues, with 90-plus per cent of orders coming from their existing customers. The impending switch to all-IP is a catalyst for resellers to add mobile data to their portfolio as 4G/5G remains the only viable alternative to single PSTN lines. Some of our partners have won huge deals that are contributing to a steadily growing run rate. Traditional calls and lines businesses are valued at 8-10x EBITDA whereas mobile data businesses are still transacting at over 20x.



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# ...e revving up for 2024



**ANDY JONES**  
CRO, TELXL

SMEs are recognising that the opportunity to displace larger competitors lies in the quality of customer experience provided. Having the support mechanisms and tools to deliver exceptional experiences across the mediums that customers expect is now imperative. So we have built a UK-based team of sales, product development and support specialists to deliver a toolkit for the channel. There remains an opportunity to educate this segment through a more consultative approach so that both established and informal contact centres can empower agents and team leaders.



**JAY BALL**  
CEO, FLOTEK

Our 2024 focus is integrating our acquisitions. We aim to add £5 million in revenue and are well-placed to capitalise on opportunities arising from smaller firms seeking exits before 2025. Our optimism stems from the promising investment climate within our target markets. Potential roadblocks include the difficulty in securing funding for acquisitions, which has become more challenging over the past 18 months, and the demands on our time and resources as we grow. In 2024, I believe telco firms that have yet to incorporate IT services into their offerings may face challenges in both customer retention and growth.



**SOHINI RATHATHA**  
CEO, REDSQUID

The acquisitions of Covue and ACR Networks, alongside strides in becoming more sustainable, have enhanced our services and reinforced our commitment to ESG and CSR. Looking ahead we aim to enhance the market by introducing cutting-edge technologies with the implementation of AI, while ensuring the best customer experience is met. Our optimism is sky high, but there will be challenges both for Redsquid and the channel. We see collaboration and embracing innovation as the pathway to setting new industry standards with a sustainable mindset.



**RYAN MARTIN,**  
INDIRECT SALES  
MANAGER  
ANS GROUP

Finding the right talent will continue to be a challenge. Skills and expertise are the new currency and 2024 will see the rise of real strategic partnerships. With the PSTN switch-off, FTTP and persistent talk around AI driving customers to look deeper at what is available to them, we've seen an appetite for digital transformation services in the channel. Partners should immerse themselves in new markets like cloud, security, and digital to bring more value to their business and customers. Since launching the ANS Partner Programme in 2023 it has gathered significant pace. We will continue to develop this.

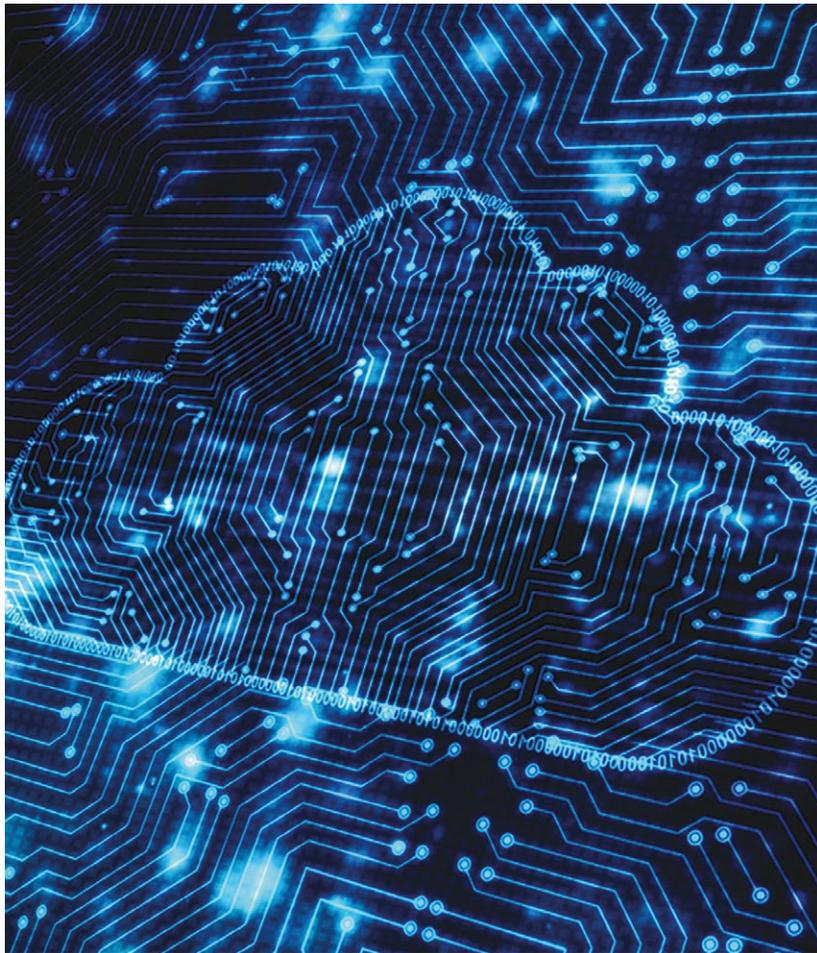


**DAN PROCTOR**  
DIRECTOR, B2B APM

Last year we were able to construct a financial vehicle that provides scalable, future-proofed and cost-effective solutions to maximising cash-flow for the channel. We are now scaling up and our key objectives for 2024 includes the launch of a digital platform. The economy will be more challenging this year. The Insolvency Service reports a rise in company insolvencies and a continuation of this trend will cause the whole channel difficulties. A big opportunity lies in embracing the green agenda and providing sustainable, long-term solutions.



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**IAN CLEAVER**  
MD, CONNECT365

Our biggest achievement in 2023 was formalising our reseller channel. We aim to increase from eight resellers to 30 by the end of 2024 and can't see any roadblocks. The biggest opportunity for Connect365 is that we have found a gap in the market. We have big plans and aim to double our turnover and profit in one year.



**DAVE HUTTON**  
CHIEF GROWTH OFFICER, FOURNET

For FourNet, 2023 has been a year of growth, strategic acquisitions and enhanced services. In April, we bought Nowcomm to enhance our cyber security and network infrastructure offering to customers and we ended the year with the acquisition of global network specialists O1T, giving us the ability to provide our critical infrastructure customers with end-to-end fully resilient network connectivity. Our enlarged business has new skills, expertise and services, and we have switched from being technology-led to CX-led through our customer experience team and their data-driven, outcome-led diagnostics. These changes put us in a great position to take on new opportunities in 2024.



**HARRY BOWLBY**  
MD, SPITFIRE

The pressure is on for businesses to act now and make the shift to all-IP, so in 2024 we will be talking about the PSTN switch off. This remains a significant opportunity as we can make this shift seamless and without disruption for businesses. 2024 is also about establishing our One Network solution in the UK, and delivering first class connectivity, better security and flexible and innovative billing plans, to SME, enterprise and IoT customers. We don't anticipate any major roadblocks.



**JAMES SHRAGA**  
SALES DIRECTOR  
FIDELITY GROUP

Our 2023 standouts were bringing payment solutions to the channel and residential VoIP solutions for new channel partners. We have also benefited from customers investing in network resilience and stronger remote collaborative working. In the year ahead we will develop into new markets with two new channel-focused products – a SaaS workflow, contract and product management platform, and an IoT connectivity management system. But we must be wary of global uncertainty and economic conditions. The big switch-off continues to drive opportunities, while software solutions and self-management continue to be a major driver for our channel and their customers.



**MALEK RAHIMI**  
MD, BDR GROUP

Our objectives for 2024 include replicating the success of our 2023 acquisition strategy and expanding our market presence. I am optimistic but recognise that the business landscape is dynamic and presents challenges. Potential roadblocks could include economic uncertainties, regulatory changes and unforeseen disruptions – especially with the PSTN Switch Off fast approaching (which we are prepared for). The ongoing evolution of remote work, the rise of 5G, and the increasing reliance on robust cyber security measures also present significant opportunities. BDR will explore partnerships and collaborations to stay at the forefront of industry trends.



**JAMIE HUGHES**  
UK SALES DIRECTOR  
EVOLVE IP

During 2023 we have continued with integrations and further specialised in verticals on an international scale. We are also seeing a continued demand for hardware such as handsets and headsets as end users across a range of sectors look to upgrade their technologies. In the pipeline in 2024 we have a Fixed Mobile Convergence and a PCI compliance solution. From March, PCI 4.0 is moving to an evidence-based model and we have pre-empted this and have a specific solution designed to address the changes in regulations. Sustainability will also be a constant topic for us.

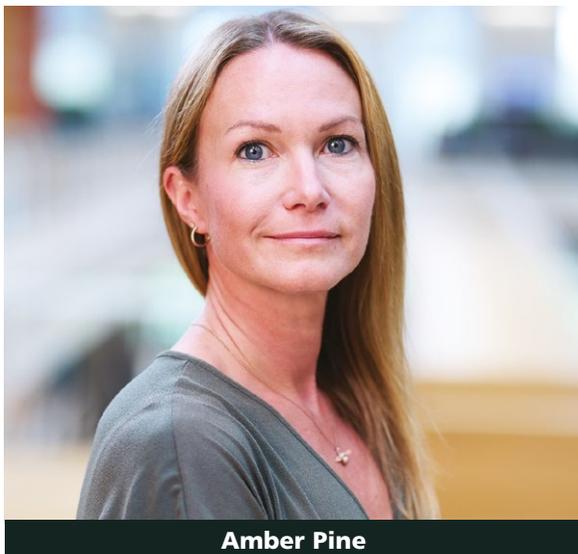


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# Pine branches out



Amber Pine

SKY'S connectivity strategy is to be led by newly appointed Managing Director of Connectivity Amber Pine. The position expands her prior role heading up Sky Broadband to include Sky Mobile under a combined team. She has extensive experience in senior leadership roles across Sky Broadband and Sky TV, most recently as Managing Director of the Broadband team as well as Commercial Director roles for Sky TV, including Sky Glass. She's also led on marketing, commercial and propositions for Sky Sports, Sky Cinema, Sky Store, as well as Sky's entertainment channels. Pine commented: "The

connectivity market is at a critical juncture with the roll out and take up of full fibre and 5G. In tandem, people are consuming more bandwidth and data than ever before which means delivering best-in-class technology and a seamless connectivity experience is crucial."

## Also on the move...

PATRICK Zammit has stepped into the Chief Operating Officer role at TD Synnex.

He was previously President for Europe since 2017 and assumed executive responsibility for Asia Pacific and Japan in 2021. "Patrick has consistently empowered his team to innovate and transform our go-to-market

business model by harnessing the power of data and digital," said CEO Rich Hume. "His model of servant leadership has allowed for the incubation of new ideas not only to grow business, but also to ensure that we are responsible corporate citizens committed to making our planet a better place for our co-workers and our communities."



Patrick Zammit

RINGCENTRAL'S founder and Executive Chairman Vlad Shmunis has stepped back into the CEO role following the resignation of Tarek Robbiati. He will remain Chairman of the Board.

"We are at a tremendous inflection point in our industry and it is critical that our product and innovation strategy drives all that we do and is closely aligned with how we go to market," stated Shmunis. "We have a clear roadmap with a large and untapped market opportunity ahead of us."

Rob Theis, Lead Independent Director, RingCentral, added: "Vlad has overseen

the company's growth from inception to a leading SaaS provider with over \$2.2 billion in revenue. We are confident that he will be effective in his return as CEO."



Vlad Shmunis

THE appointment of Robb Reck as Pax8's Chief Trust and Security Officer (CTSO) is expected to strengthen links with MSPs, vendors and customers by further advancing the security measures of the Pax8 Marketplace. "With an impressive 25 years of experience in the IT space Robb brings invaluable expertise to Pax8," stated Scott Chasin, CTO. Prior to joining Pax8 Reck led security operations for multiple enterprises in the financial services, banking and software sectors. His most recent role was Chief Trust Officer at Red Canary, a managed detection and response (MDR) provider. Reck added: "We can positively impact the MSP industry worldwide to not only make them more effective but to help deliver a more trustworthy environment for customers."



Robb Reck



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A smiling woman with long brown hair is holding a large blue sign with white text. The sign reads "even greater opportunities for resellers!". In the background, there are blurred images of other people in an office setting.

even greater  
opportunities  
for resellers!



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If you would like to find out more about the Strategic Partner Programme please contact

**Adam Cathcart**

Managing Director, Onecom Partners



**07734 972566**



**[adam.cathcart@onecompartners.co.uk](mailto:adam.cathcart@onecompartners.co.uk)**