



Doye sets out plans to continue ramping up boxxe p6

Wardell makes key move to Business Systems as CEO p14



VOL 28 ISSUE 10 MARCH 2024 www.comms-dealer.com

anvil
0800 048 4848

ADVERTISEMENT

comms dealer

Workflow management
Billing solutions
Quality assurance
anvilhub.com

ADVERTISEMENT

THE HEARTBEAT OF THE UK ICT INDUSTRY

MAKING LIFE SIMPLER FOR OUR PARTNERS. **GIACOM.**

- 3-4**
News roundup
Catch up with the Editor's news picks

- 16**
Interview
TelcoSwitch CEO talks priorities

- 18**
Market focus
Transformation in the billing sector

- 30**
Profile
Wanstor builds on pillars of proactivity

- 32**
Interview
Redsquid set to push ESG agenda

- 38**
Comms People
This month's movers and shakers



Resellers urged to target CCaaS

THERE is a clear and growing requirement for ICT providers to swing their gaze onto the contact centre space which remains one of the industry's major untapped markets despite its high potential, according to experts in the field.

SPECIAL REPORT

The CCaaS market represents one of the largest opportunities for the channel to exploit but a Comms Dealer survey of reseller and MSP business leaders found that just 2.5% defined their main occupation as a contact centre provider.

Furthermore, CCaaS market potential becomes even more attractive for resellers and MSPs when combined with a UC proposition, noted

Intermedia's EMEA Sales Director Philippe du Fou. "Partners that have added CCaaS to the UC solution are seeing their revenue double or triple," he commented.

du Fou has also witnessed a 'plethora' of voice-only or basic UC solutions that could be elevated by an omnichannel contact centre offering.

"There is still a perception among many resellers and MSPs that contact centre is too big and complex," he

added. "However, cloud contact centre makes this much simpler to understand, sell and install than ever before."

Daniel Lloyd, Channel Director, Cirrus, believes that contact centre trends should make more resellers consider CCaaS as a core specialism. "By specialising in CCaaS resellers can act as strategic partners for businesses looking to enhance their customer engagement strategies," he stated.

See pages 26-29

Visit b2bapm.com

LIQUID SUBSCRIPTIONS
Cash-flow injections for subscription businesses

Margin
20th June 2024
Forest of Arden, Midlands

The ICT Channel conference and networking event

www.margin.events

HEADLINE SPONSOR
GIACOM

CHANNEL CHAMPIONS
4th July 2024, Regents Park

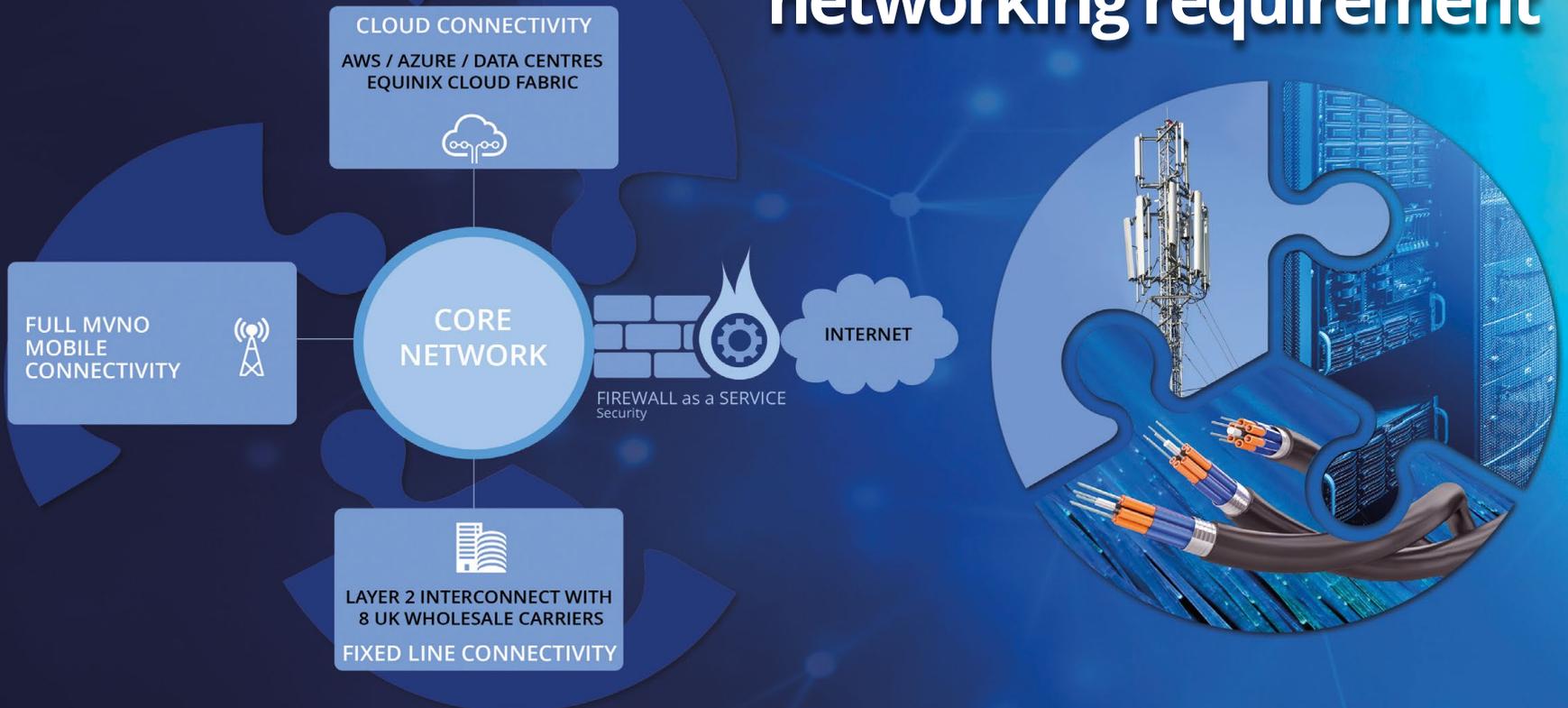
Are your teams Channel Champions?

www.channel-champions.com

onecom PARTNERS | Delivering a comprehensive range of Voice, Mobile and Connectivity solutions for Partners. | hello@onecompartners.co.uk | 0800 068 5939

[www.spitfire.co.uk/
onenetwork/](http://www.spitfire.co.uk/onenetwork/)

Spitfire's One Network solution for any mobile, fixed line and cloud networking requirement



One Network

Spitfire's One Network combines mobile, fixed line and cloud connectivity in a secure, private network. All components are under Spitfire's control at layer 2, leading to full accountability for the entire data journey.

It's the kind of simple, reliable solution that makes sense. One network, one supplier, one bill, one contract, one contact.

Your dedicated Account Manager can provide consultation on any elements you wish to use for your own unique wide area networking requirements whether connecting offices, data centres or IoT devices.

Key Benefits

- Avoid public internet traversal
- Avoid need for encryption
- MPLS Private Networks available
- Fixed or dynamic IP addresses
- Private APN available

 One Network™

Sales 020 7501 3333 • Partner Services 020 7501 3150
Innovative • Flexible • Reliable • Supportive • Cost Effective

Welcome comment



Stuart Gilroy

CLICK here to find out more... These days there's no getting away from clicking online before selecting options. And a successful digital experience today is all about pressing the right buttons. We click with the Internet, it's personal, it's under our skin

and we trust it – so we purchase online. In the real world, people buy from people when they click, that's the trust and experience they want. The same goes for job seekers who prefer to work for a company that clicks with them, that reflects their values, before selecting a career option.

Today, it's all about the experience of personal synchronisation, and this is being scaled up to a company level – where companies buy from companies, and companies partner with organisations based on an audible click between them. It's the sound of self and inter-company affirmation, the reinforcement of held values, outlooks and purpose. In the business environment, this development is organic, self-perpetuating, growing in prominence and redefining the customer and employee experience – all driven and cohered by positive actions taken around ESG, the new cornerstone of trust, corporate identity and clickability.

ESG's magnetic pull is strengthening as a foundation of trust and loyalty across society and supply chains, simply because companies and people who prioritise ESG are naturally drawn together – they click. Take Redsquid which last month became a B Corp (see pages 4 and 32). It foresees the emergence of a B Corp community in the channel and will measure and evaluate the partners it works with based on their practices. I highlighted this trend long before now – and frankly have been criticised for over-egging it – but it really is worth reassessing your wavelength and long-term clickability.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

To keep up to date with the latest channel news, as it happens, visit www.comms-dealer.com daily

Gamma's hot on Coolwave



Daryl Pile

GAMMA'S acquisition of international SMS and voice services provider Coolwave Communications significantly bolsters its global presence and provides a boost to its voice services portfolio.

Gamma currently delivers UK communication services to a number of UCaaS, CPaaS and CCaaS providers as well as hyperscalers, and the Coolwave deal boosts its provision of voice services in 100-plus countries. The acquisition also underpins Gamma's SIP, Microsoft Direct Routing and Operator Connect propositions as the company continues to expand internationally.

Gamma Business MD Daryl Pile commented: "We now deliver a range of internationally available services to over 400 existing customers. This will enable us to expand existing relationships and drive new ones, accelerating growth in the global voice services market."

Mike Mills, who is Director of Service Providers, Gamma, commented: "The acquisition aligns with our strategy to expand our global footprint while enhancing our competitive position."

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

Editor's picks

LDC-backed Onecom's IT managed services strategy has been significantly strengthened by the acquisition of Excalibur Communications, its eleventh transaction since 2020. Excalibur is especially notable for its UC and mobile capability and long-standing partnerships with Vodafone and Gamma plus Microsoft Gold Partner status. "The inclusion of Excalibur into the Onecom family extends our service offerings and underpins our commitment to deliver comprehensive managed IT and communication solutions across the UK," stated Onecom CEO Martin Flick.

SCC's Microsoft and UC&C portfolio has received a boost following its acquisition of voice and collaboration solution provider Resonate – its third acquisition in the past year. Resonate was established in 2015 and has grown 25% year-on-year. The business employs 150 people across Europe and India. "Resonate's expertise in Microsoft Teams and purpose-built management tools are a welcome addition to our portfolio," commented SCC EMEA CEO James Rigby. "The chance to acquire the Teams expertise of Resonate was compelling."



Powering informed decisions

Inform Analytics powers Telecoms and IT resellers to easily identify trends, reduce risks, increase profitability and drive informed decisions.

See what we can do for you

01332 92 70 70
info@informanalytics.co.uk
www.informanalytics.co.uk



Editor's picks

CISCO Gold Partner ITGL has been acquired by Conscia, a European provider of IT infrastructure, cybersecurity and cloud. The move spearheads Denmark-based Conscia's entry into the UK and Ireland. Conscia is also a Cisco Gold Partner and employs circa 1,020 people across six countries serving more than 1,000 customers, including five out of the six top Nordic banks and three out of every four hospitals in the Netherlands. The deal gives ITGL customers access to enhanced cybersecurity and managed service offerings. ITGL has offices in Portsmouth and Oxford, a headcount of 70 and delivers collaboration, networking and cybersecurity solutions across the UK and Ireland. Its acquisition is Conscia's 17th in seven geographic markets over 10 years. Conscia CEO Erik Bertman stated: "The UK has a strong and expansive technology ecosystem and is one of the largest markets in Europe. Through ITGL we are well placed to contribute to the region's IT infrastructure growth and digital transformation."

FOCUS Group's influence in the south west region has been strengthened through the acquisition of Bristol-based cloud comms and mobile firm Pinnacle. With a track record of cross-selling IT, mobile and fixed line services Pinnacle provides significant growth potential augmented by the integration of Focus Group's products and specialisms, according to the company's Regional Director Brian Lodge. "Pinnacle's product range complements Focus Group's offerings in telecoms, IT and mobile solutions, while its expertise in UC technology presents additional opportunities for synergies and innovation," he commented.

FLOTEK Group's acquisition campaign convoy has rolled into north Wales with a majority share purchase in OES, a cybersecurity, managed print and web development business that is especially strong in the legal sector. The deal adds £3.1m turnover, pushing group revenues to £10.5m, and builds on Flotek's Chester office acquired last year. Flotek CEO Jay Ball stated: "This acquisition boosts our growth and visibility in the area and, crucially, allows Flotek to enter the managed print and web business while developing our provision for the legal market." The deal also adds 22 staff, taking group headcount to 80-plus. This is Flotek's second investment acquisition and follows the inclusion of Hampshire-based Flexinet early last year.

Redsquid in B Corp gain

REDSQUID has joined a progressive group of ESG champions having achieved B Corporation certification following a two year campaign to improve the company's policies and practices on various aspects of sustainability and social responsibility.

The Hertfordshire-based MSP underwent an assessment process that evaluated its performance across five areas (governance, workers, customers, community and environment) scoring 93.6 points, well above the 80 needed to secure certification.

B Corporations balance purpose and profit and raise the bar on social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability, and are legally required to consider the impact of their decisions on all stakeholders including workers, customers, suppliers, the community and the environment.

"This certification is a recognition of our commitment to create a positive impact for our stakeholders and to align our purpose and profits," stated CEO Sohini Raithatha.

"Being a B Corporation will help us to attract and retain



Sohini Raithatha

the best talent, enhance our reputation and trust with customers and partners, while driving innovation and growth in our industry."

See page 32 for the full story

Exec update

FORMER CAE Technology Services Head Of Marketing Louise Mahrra has joined Logicalis as UK&I Marketing Director. She brings more than 20 years experience and has a strong background in strategic marketing with a proven track record of driving business growth. "Opportunity lies in humanising how we approach marketing within the channel," she stated. "Instead of focusing solely on technical specifications there's immense potential in crafting emotive storytelling that resonates on a deeper level with customers." More marketing insights on page 10

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

comms dealer

Editor: **Stuart Gilroy**
sgilroy@bpl-business.com 07712 781 102

Editorial Director: **Nigel Sergent**
nsergent@bpl-business.com 07712 781 106

Deputy Editor: **Greg Denholm**
gdenholm@bpl-business.com 07853 184 471

Managing Director: **Michael O'Brien**
mobrien@bpl-business.com 01895 454 444

Sales Director: **Simon Turton**
sturton@bpl-business.com 07759 731 134

Business Development Manager: **Heather Miles**
hmiles@bpl-business.com 07955 313 700

Production: **Frank Voeten**
fvoeten@bpl-business.com

Circulation: info@bpl-business.com

ISSN 1366-5243

bpl. | A BPL Business Publication

BPL Limited
The Market House, High Street, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 1JN
T: 01895 454 444

Subscriptions

Subscription rates for 12 issues:
UK, £65; Overseas: £80 (incl p&p)
Back issues can be obtained:
UK £6 (incl p&p), Overseas £10 each (incl p&p)
For subscriptions:
please email info@bpl-business.com

Views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the publishers. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the express written permission of the publishers.

All trademarks acknowledged. Photographs and artwork submitted for publication accepted only on the understanding that the Editor is not liable for their safekeeping.

© 2024 BPL Business Media Limited.
Printed by Pensord Limited



Making The Future of Work Better for Everyone.

Powering Channel Partners by providing expert technical advice and next-level partner management. Using the leading unified communication technology services, so you can focus on what matters...

- Save Time & Increase Productivity
- Reduce Spend & Streamline Services
- Deliver Excellent Customer Service

CONTACT US



evolveip.uk

sales@evolveip.uk

0292 002 0380



Supercharge your backhaul connectivity

Tap into our big data highway for lightning fast speeds



Get a quote

enquiries@neosnetworks.com

Doye ramps up boxxe

York-based IT services business boxxe significantly boosted its corporate market play with the acquisition of Total Computers in January. Here, boxxe CEO Phil Doye shares his strategic vision and action plans following the deal, along with insights into his personal growth journey.

How did you get into the IT business?

I left school at 16 to pursue an apprenticeship in electronics, became disillusioned then went to university. Two terms into a degree in Computer Science and Management Science at Keele I decided that it wasn't for me and dropped out. I then began what I hoped would be a lucrative career as an equity trader in the city with Smith NewCourt (later acquired by Merrill Lynch) but was fired for some very dubious reasons (another story!).

At 19, and with an already chequered career, it seemed sales would have to be the route for me and I found a telesales job with a local office and computers supplies company. I left in 1990 to set up on my own as Kelway Computer Supplies and the rest is history.

When was boxxe established?

Software Box, as it was known when formed in 1987, was among a group of companies founded by

people who had all worked for a Microsoft licensing specialist in York. I acquired the business in 2019 when revenues sat at £135 million with 150 people. At the end of 2023 revenue had grown to £440 million with 205 people. Excluding our most recent acquisition of Total Computers we expect boxxe to be around £500 million in 2024.

What's your strategy?

We have a simple strategy based on a broad portfolio of solutions and services that ensure we are relevant to the majority of IT spend in our customers. We are already strong in public sector and are at the start of what we hope will become a significant corporate business. The acquisition of Total gives us a great platform.

What are your immediate priorities?

Having acquired Total the immediate goal is to integrate quickly and create a business that has the financial strength, talent and ambition to accelerate growth across all areas.



Phil Doye

At 19, and with an already chequered career, it seemed sales would have to be the route for me

We will continue to target acquisitions both to scale and bring in specialisations in areas we are weak in.

Which trends interest you most right now?

AI is hugely significant. But we need to keep a closer eye on a trend in our largest competitors growing in size. We need to close that gap to stay relevant to customers and partners.

Where is your biggest opportunity?

Digital transformation is only just getting started and businesses like boxxe are constantly presented with new opportunities to exploit. I want boxxe to be seen as a market leader in this

space which will not be easy as the biggest are getting bigger and they have the deepest pockets to invest.

What's your recipe for leadership success?

Being honest about today's challenges with our whole organisation and making sure all our people are motivated to meeting them. We have to know what our customers want, keep our competitors close and know what they are doing. Finally, surround yourself with great people and remove those that are not contributing.

In hindsight, what would you have done differently?

I would never have taken investment into Kelway from

Core Capital in 2006. The relationship soured and was horrendous until they exited in 2014. Their investment simply acquired shares from me and provided no new funds to the business.

Your biggest achievement?

I'm constantly dissatisfied with the status quo and always looking for the next puzzle to solve. This approach has led to many achievements but the downside is that I never fully appreciate them as I immediately move on to something else.

Best piece of advice you have been given?

If someone in your business causes you not to sleep for two nights in a row they need to leave.

One example of something you've overcome

I am naturally an introvert so learning to network was hard but essential to any success I have enjoyed.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know

I learned to Paramotor with my son last year.

What's the biggest risk you have taken?

I didn't go through with this, but got very close to buying a 1,300 hectare farm in South Africa to farm Mopane worms. I was dazzled by the Boabab trees and giraffes on the land. Definitely dodged a bullet on that one!

Top tip for resellers

Trust your instincts about what your customers will need from you and be prepared to invest – but always make sure you have enough cash in the bank. Be very careful if you take outside investment. ■



Are your teams Channel Champions

4th July 2024, Regents Park

www.channel-champions.com

HEADLINE SPONSOR



nimans

The 'go to' people for Microsoft Teams Certified solutions

Headsets, Handsets, Audio Conferencing and Meeting rooms solutions.



nimans.net The 'go to' place for Microsoft Teams Certified solutions

5 ways to succeed

Long-term success hinges on taking a holistic approach to five leadership priorities underpinned by strong decision making, customer-centricity, sustainability, strategic resilience and a people first mindset, writes Mark Howarth, Head of Trading Partner Experience, Zen.

1 Navigate the switch off

This is a critical time for our industry. The full fibre roll out will be the last major comms infrastructure development we will see in our lifetime and the copper network switch off is nearly upon us. It will prove a pivotal moment for our industry with fast and reliable broadband services across the whole of the UK being vital in supporting long-term economic prosperity. Failure to adapt is a risk to revenue and can leave you behind. Businesses relying on outdated technology are certain to lose market share. Yet transitioning to VoIP and the other benefits associated with the switch off can be straightforward.

2 Customer service excellence

Another popular topic with the Zen Partner team centres on how customer loyalty and satisfaction can play a massive role in business success. By focusing on your service wrap, understanding and delivering complementary products and services, and delivering moments of magic to your end user, channel partners can build lasting relationships and drive growth.

3 Empower your teams

To achieve customer excellence you must have a highly motivated and engaged team. Zen has always been a people-first business primarily because its founder and CEO, Richard Tang, recognises the critical role that people play in business success. Leaders of channel firms would also benefit from prioritising and engaging more with their teams. This could involve encouraging decision making at all levels and empowering teams to be more innovative and adaptable. Health and wellbeing is another important consideration, so invest in this. It doesn't have to be monetary investment, time resource can go a long way to pulling together a robust health and wellbeing strategy for your people. A healthy and happy workforce is more productive and engaged. As are organisations that promote collaboration

and teamwork in a flexible work environment. Teams that work together and have a feeling they are trusted to get a job done, simply perform better. Also, recognise and reward achievements. Motivated people contribute to success.

4 Prioritise sustainability

Zen has always paid attention to environmental considerations through the years and has intensified its approach to this topic having achieved B Corp certification alongside carbon neutral status. As a B Corp we are legally required to consider the impact of our actions across five key behaviours, including the environment. We have also had our commitments to achieve Net Zero approved by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) in line with their Net Zero standard. This initiative is another positive step on that journey. It's no longer a nice to have and there can be no more excuses for not trying. You can start small: Consider energy efficient solutions, minimise waste and explore renewable energy sources. Could a virtual meeting reduce travel related emissions? Could a switch to energy efficient light bulbs in your office help? Every step counts, and the small steps collectively make an impact. It's also great to see our industry take positive steps towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions, not just directly but throughout the supply chain with recent pledges made by Ofcom and some of the major telecoms companies.

5 Navigate the economy

Strategic planning is crucial in an uncertain economy. So consider service lifetime costs and assess the true cost of a sale. Beyond initial acquisition, consider ongoing support, maintenance and customer satisfaction. Conducting thorough cost analyses can help to inform decision making. And be mindful that a loyal customer base is worth a lot. The high value of strategic planning should also not be underestimated, so diversify revenue streams and be agile in response to economic fluctuations.



Mark Howarth

Zen has always paid attention to environmental considerations and has intensified its approach having achieved B Corp certification alongside carbon neutral status

anvil

One platform to **rule them all.**



**Workflow
management**



**Billing
solutions**



**Quality
Assurance**

Billing | CRM | Sales Management | Workflow | Ticketing | Reporting | Inventory | Compliance



www.anvilhub.com
0800 048 4848

Mahrra drives renaissance

Former CAE Technology Services Head of Marketing Louise Mahrra joined Logicalis as UK&I Marketing Director in January with a mission to create a positive and lasting impact across the business. Here, she articulates the challenges and opportunities facing marketing leaders today, sheds light on the transformative factors that are reshaping marketing and emphasises why a revival of pre-digital human interaction will be key to success. She also provides a strategic masterclass for all channel marketing chiefs to consider.

Why did you take this leadership role?

Logicalis has already made great strides in the transition from its roots as a pure play networking and IT firm into a trusted digital transformation partner. To build on this and grow the business further is a great opportunity. Where CEO Bob Bailkoski wants to take the firm over the next few years is also important. He's clear that the mission is much bigger than selling businesses new technology, rather helping them to harness the potential of digital transformation and grow in a way that benefits people and the wider environment.

Sustainability really matters here. It's also an opportunity for me to make an impact. While I'm proud of what I've achieved in my career so far, I'm ambitious and feel I have a lot more to give.

Could you share insights into your approach?

I've always tried to draw inspiration from other business leaders, and Stephen Covey was one who left a huge impact on me. His book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, is rightly held up



Louise Mahrra

Technology has democratised channel marketing, but it's by humanising B2B marketing, emphasising connections through stories, emotion and personalising experiences that we can leave a lasting impact

as a business staple and I try to live by those habits every day. One 'behaviour' he cites is 'Seek first to understand, then to be understood' – a good mantra

for anyone in their first 90 days in a new leadership role. So my first priority is to fully immerse myself in the company's ethos, feel the culture, absorb its values and

understand its objectives. Building strong relationships with key stakeholders and my own team members will be a major part of that, encouraging collaboration,

creativity and productivity around a shared sense of purpose. This way I can be confident our marketing strategies align with our overarching business goals.

e in human-led marketing

What are your immediate priorities and action points?

Right now I'm conducting a thorough audit of existing marketing initiatives to see if we have any obvious quick areas for improvement and innovation. Data sits at the heart of this, so I plan to create data driven insights and carry out customer and market research to develop a strategic marketing plan with clear KPIs. My focus is also on getting to know our customers and understanding their challenges. Without that, I can't properly anticipate how best to harness technology for their growth. More broadly, I want to look at the company's narrative and the degree to which our vision translates into compelling stories that resonate. Longer-term, we want to solidify our position as the 'Architects of Change', as in, the first potential partner a customer will think about when considering how to redesign their business to win in the digital-first world.

More generally, what are today's marketing and CX priorities?

Part of the challenge is recognising that marketing, brand and CX are not separate things. Rather, CX should be the living manifestation of any brand, and marketing is about raising awareness of the brand to those who are yet to experience it. At best, marketing efforts are wasted when they are telling a different story to the lived experience, and at worst it's a reputational disaster waiting to happen. You have to walk the talk. As such, our marketing and CX priorities revolve around internal alignment, customer mapping and earning

the right to become our customers' trusted advisor.

What does this strategy look like in practice?

In a landscape defined by rapid digital transformation, success hinges on our ability to intimately understand our customers' needs, pain points and aspirations. Internal alignment ensures every department is synchronised towards the singular goal

I decided to take a different, more human approach and never looked back

of delivering exceptional customer experiences. Meticulously mapping the customer journey makes sure this happens, and in turn allows us to anticipate the customers' needs and provide timely, relevant solutions.

Becoming a trusted advisor goes beyond selling them the right products or services, it involves establishing relationships built on trust, reliability and expertise. Customer-led businesses need to know their customers inside out, and be available when they need you. This level of responsiveness and insightfulness not only fosters loyalty, but I'd argue is essential if you want to drive sustainable growth in an ever-evolving market. It's about being people-centric.

To what extent do marketers need to get under the buyer's skin?

B2B buyers conduct around 90 per cent of their own research online and through peer networks, so understanding the challenge faced by buying centres is

crucial. As Gartner puts it, 'The hardest part about B2B solutions isn't selling but buying them'. Marketers need to empathise with the complex environment B2B buyers operate in and provide information and tools that aim to reduce purchase friction. When overwhelmed by complexity and choice the human brain shortcuts to things it knows, as in, brands we recognise and trust, and

people we admire, trust and respect.

That's why building authentic and trusted relationships with your

target audience by showing understanding, empathy and providing valuable resources to navigate the intricate buying journey effectively is so important.

What other drivers are impacting channel marketing?

The big marketing changes in the IT channel stem from a rapidly evolving digital landscape, shifting customer expectations and the emergence of innovative technologies. As customers increasingly expect personalised experiences and seamless interactions, channel marketers need to adapt. This starts with a deeper understanding of customer behaviours, preferences and pain points. In other words, better data. Then the ability to leverage those data driven insights to deliver targeted, relevant messaging. The proliferation of cloud computing, AI and other disruptive technologies requires marketing leaders in the channel to stay agile and innovative. We must embrace emerging trends,

alternative approaches such as account-based marketing and predictive analytics, to effectively engage customers and drive business growth. However, I don't see this as a task for any solitary leader. Marketing leaders know the importance of having the right team around them.

What are the biggest ICT channel marketing challenges?

Perhaps the temptation to be everything to everyone. There's a certain logic in appealing to as many people as possible, alienating no-one to maximise the addressable market. But with that comes major marketing challenges when the market is full of multiple brands that all look and sound the same. A light bulb can illuminate a large room, but using the same energy, a laser can burn a hole. So it's about focus. Being all things to all persons can often result in diluted messaging and minimal achievements. Focusing on a clear identity and specialisation is pivotal.

This clear focus ensures coherent messaging yes, but it's about the product too, and facilitating a customer-led approach to the development and delivery of solutions that will resonate deeply with customers. This requires a concerted effort to focus, resist the urge to cater to every demand and prioritise areas where the company can truly excel, fostering differentiation and sustainable growth in a competitive landscape.

What is the biggest marketing opportunity?

Opportunity lies in humanising how we approach marketing within the channel. Instead of

focusing solely on technical specifications there's immense potential in crafting emotive storytelling that resonates on a deeper level with customers. By flipping the narrative to emphasise useful, relevant and inspiring experiences over mere 'speeds and feeds', marketers can create memorable moments that tap into customers' rational, societal and emotional triggers.

This approach allows for the creation of connections that go beyond transactions, fostering loyalty and advocacy. It's about painting a vivid picture of how products and services positively impact customers' lives, addressing their needs in a way that is not only functional but also deeply meaningful. By embracing the opportunity to infuse emotion and humanisation, and real world experiences into marketing efforts, channel marketers can forge stronger bonds with their audience and differentiate themselves.

How will AI impact channel marketing?

Make no mistake, this is the cusp of the fifth industrial revolution. But I believe we are just starting to scratch the surface with generative AI and most enterprises are only just starting to learn how we can apply it to our lives and jobs as a productivity tool. As marketing automation and behavioural analytics transformed shopping experiences, generative AI will revolutionise channel marketing by enhancing personalisation, creating efficiencies and improving predictive capabilities. Through advanced AI-powered analytics we can analyse vast amounts of data, **Continued on page 12**



Are your teams Channel Champions

4th July 2024, Regents Park

www.channel-champions.com

HEADLINE SPONSOR

GIACOM



DRIVE B2B SALES



Shire Leasing are business finance specialists in the ICT & Telecoms sector, having supported the channel for over 30 years.



Award-winning fintech solutions that make offering finance and lease options simple

01827 302 066

www.shireleasing.co.uk/commsdealer

Finance for business use customers only, subject to credit status, application, terms and conditions. Shire Leasing PLC is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority for certain types of consumer credit lending and credit related activities that are regulated under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000

Continued from page 11
better segment audiences and predict behaviours, so channel marketers can better tailor strategies and messages, maximising relevance and engagement.

Generative AI-powered tools also automate routine tasks, freeing time for strategic initiatives. Real-time insights allow agile adaptation to changing market dynamics. We're witnessing this impact in the evolving makeup of marketing teams, transitioning from creative to scientific roles under the office of the CMO. And as generative AI presents an opportunity for marketers to elevate their efforts in a competitive landscape, human touchpoints become even more valuable.

How can marketing leaders best demonstrate strategic value?

According to McKinsey, The CMO's rapport with the C-suite is crucial in establishing marketing's role as a growth driver. Eighty three per cent of global CEOs consider marketing as a clear driver of growth. Great. But more worryingly, almost one in five CEOs don't see how marketing drives growth – so there is work to be done. Demonstrating ROI through metrics like customer acquisition and retention solidifies marketing's strategic importance, but we also need to keep track of the softer side of marketing, brand loyalty, share of voice as well as share of wallet and brand penetration. Most CEOs know that if you give marketing a seat at the table and make it accountable for delivering measurable growth, that's more likely to happen. Without a seat at the top table, marketing risks becoming window dressing – tactical and directionless.

How are ESG priorities playing out in the marketing sphere?

Whether ESG or sustainability outcomes genuinely sit



Louise Mahrta

at the core of the brand's stated purpose or not, all businesses should be mindful of their external impact which means integrating ESG principles into their brand messaging and communications to address the concerns and ideals of any socially conscious consumer. That doesn't mean greenwashing for the sake of it. The primary role of a marketing leader is to align strategies with broader business objectives, ensuring meaningful contribution to the organisation's mission and values.

That may mean a nuanced approach balancing short-term goals with long-term sustainability and ethical considerations. Embracing purpose driven marketing and aligning with ESG principles can be done in a way that enables businesses to meet consumer expectations while also driving positive social impact and delivering commercial success. But it has to be authentic. Marketers must demonstrate genuine intent. Just putting words on a page for box ticking transparency risks alienating people. Authentic efforts backed by tangible deliverables are essential to making a meaningful impact.

When did your marketing career begin and what's the biggest lesson you've learnt?

I started out doing PR in 1998 when hi tech meant pagers and Telex machines. We had to rely on direct human interactions and relationships. Today, having access to information through Google rather than waiting for tomorrow's papers or next week's trade press, and being one click away from any prospect on LinkedIn, does represent huge progress and has transformed how comms and marketing works, but I think we've lost something. Technology has democratised channel marketing, but it's by humanising B2B marketing, emphasising connections through stories, emotion and personalising experiences that we leave a lasting impact.

Having worked across a number of sectors – global systems integration, manufacturing, health and fitness – I took a job in a small ICT firm and it struck me how soulless, old fashioned and mechanical most companies seemed to be in their approach to marketing and comms. I decided to take a different, more human approach and never looked back.

To advertise in **comms dealer** contact The Sales Team on 07759 731134

Partners scale up growth

Onecom's evolving and high profile collaboration partnership with Vodafone is to ramp up further as the company seeks to build on big gains made by partners in the mobile space last year, according to Onecom Partners Managing Director Adam Cathcart.

As well as Onecom's positively thriving relationship with Vodafone Cathcart also credited partner growth in large part to Onecom Partners' 2023 launch of the Strategic Partnership programme which again leveraged the Vodafone link-up to further support partners looking to exploit the mobile opportunity for the first time, or those wanting to expand their existing mobile business. "In 2023 we saw ambitious businesses engage with mobile opportunities to win new deals, consolidate their bases and optimise usage across their estate," stated



Adam Cathcart

Cathcart. "We are ensuring that partners with an appetite to scale have the tools to succeed."

Cathcart also reported strong growth for partners migrating users to FTTP and SOGEA ahead of the ISDN switch-off, again supported by the Vodafone relationship and the

Strategic Partnership programme which gives partners access to value added services such as managed billing, white labelled support and a marketing concierge.

"The partnership with Vodafone has been highly beneficial for our partners," commented Cathcart.

"We've been able to expand our portfolio and offer commercially competitive solutions. We also work with Vodafone to develop ideas and initiatives to support partner growth, whether it be partner events or marketing support. This not only enhances their competitiveness but ensures they receive robust support and resources to thrive in a competitive marketplace."

Cathcart pointed out that Onecom's relationship with Vodafone supports both dealer and wholesale models, providing partners with a level of flexibility for each customer. The latest evolution in the partnership includes an enhanced five year strategic agreement to deliver mobile airtime, 5G, Internet of Things and digital connectivity solutions. "This has been filtered through to Onecom Partners and enables us to pass through those benefits to our channel," added Cathcart. ■

Open to new and existing partners!

Fidelity Energy
Energising Our Partners

Register now for our Energy Partner Roadshow

With market prices down, now is the best time to sell energy and grow your business. Join us on the road and find out how.

- Valuable industry insights and trend analysis
- Exciting new products and developments
- Sales strategy advice and success stories
- New ways to increase your recurring revenue
- Tips to enhance customer relationships
- Networking and post-event drinks

Don't miss out. Scan below and book your spot.



Manchester
IWM North
23 April, 11:00-17:00

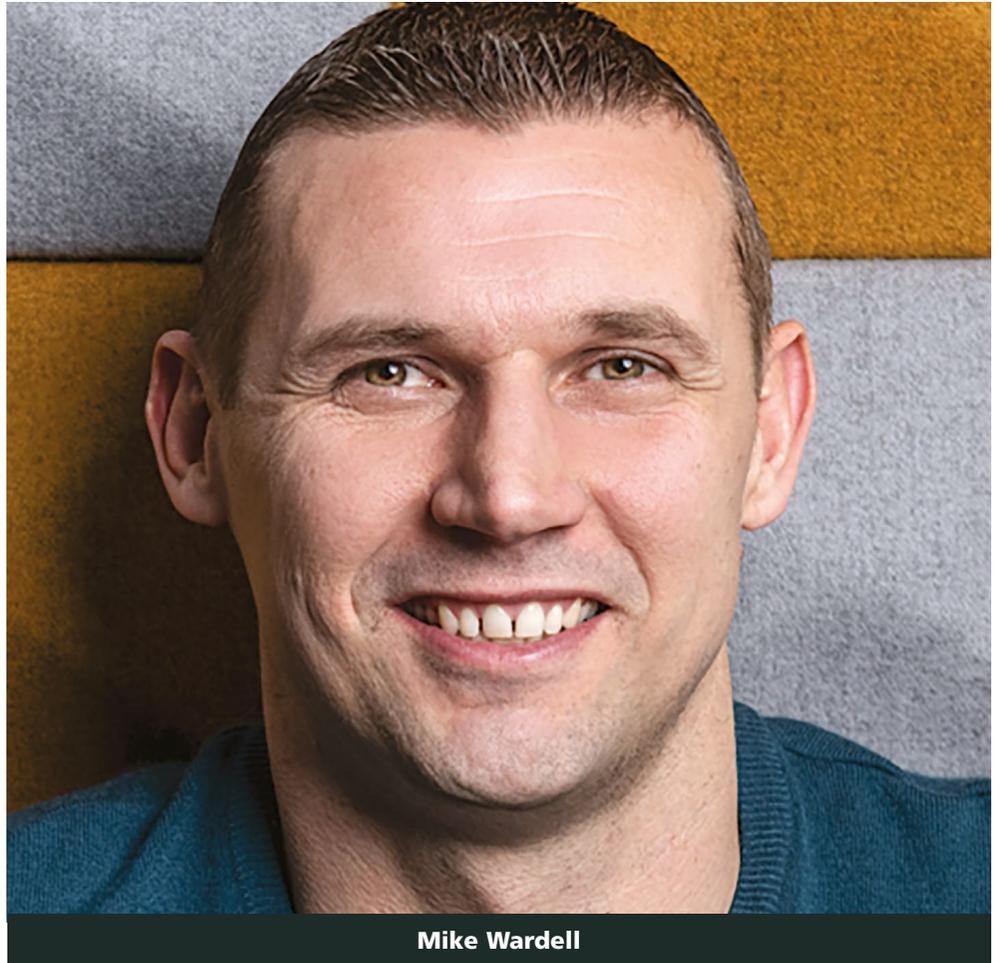


London
Churchill War Rooms
2 May, 11:00-17:00

08000 48 48 00 partners@fidelity-energy.co.uk

Wardell on his key move

When Mike Wardell led Giacom as Chief Exec he masterminded the firm's evolution into a thriving cloud marketplace, growing recurring revenues more than tenfold to over £100 million while orchestrating multiple transactions culminating in its acquisition by DWS (which rebranded as Giacom). Now, as Business Systems' (BSL) new CEO he has embraced a fresh set of opportunities and shares insights into his strategy and long-term vision.



Mike Wardell

London-based Business Systems currently generates over £20 million revenue with a circa 100 headcount. The company mainly supports financial institutions, utilities, insurers, public sector, retail and BPO organisations. In recent years, Business Systems has established itself as a front runner in communications solutions, helping organisations transform their CX strategies.

Why did you take the role of Business Systems CEO?

I was attracted by a great business, an experienced team and a product that meets true market need. It felt like a great opportunity to scale and bring the Wordwatch call recording solution to a broader market.

Wordwatch ingests, manages and delivers legacy and live interaction recordings from any platform. Consolidating this data into a centralised single pane of glass enables businesses to generate more value from their communications data while maintaining compliance.

How will your prior experience come into play?

My experience in transforming a business to fit with market changes will help me guide the team through the evolving IT industry. Previously leading a technology company through various stages of growth has given me exposure to many relevant opportunities. This should help us to fast track our way to executing on our vision.

What was your first priority on joining the company?

My priority was to meet the entire team within the first month. I believe a business shouldn't operate as command and control nor rely on hierarchy, therefore knowing the full team as best I can is the right thing to do. It's also a good way to get to know the organisation and identify areas for improvement.

What changes do you have in mind? And ultimately, in what ways will you make your mark and how quickly?

I'm under two months in, so I aim to understand how things work before jumping in with both feet to make wholesale changes. My focus

Q1 is progressing as planned, setting a positive tone for the year. But we have been quietly going about our business and I want us to be more visible

is on using the collective experience and expertise of our team to build a coherent executable plan. From a personal perspective, I can make an immediate impact with tangible results following shortly after. I am fortunate to join a business with strong foundations and multiple opportunities. Business Systems ended 2023 with good sales momentum and initiated key initiatives

for a solid start this year. Q1 is progressing as planned, setting a positive tone for the year. But we have been quietly going about our business and I want us to be more visible.

What is Business Systems most famous for?

Business Systems is the combination of several businesses and for over 35 years has provided



to BSL as CEO

compliance solutions to top tier banks and financial organisations. Today, 30 per cent of the City's institutions rely on us for their trading operations. Our cloud contact centre solutions have been deployed in some of the largest contact centres in the UK, contributing to the reduction of operating costs and enhancing operational efficiencies. Our goal is to streamline their processes through the application of the right technology, providing ongoing support throughout the solution's lifecycle.

Which new technology areas are on your radar screen?

We track all trends and have a keen interest in AI's impact on the customer experience, particularly around Large Language Models (LLMs). From a customer experience standpoint, LLMs play a pivotal role in reducing non-contact time by partially or fully automating administrative and back office tasks such as writing call notes, conducting Quality Assurance/Quality Management, or managing staff performance. Looking ahead, the implementation of Generative AI and LLMs is expected to progress further with solutions emerging to effectively apply guardrails around generated content.

While not a new technology, transcription is continually advancing in accuracy by applying AI. As the costs associated with transcribing audio decrease the application of this information and analytics can become more widespread. In a similar way to transcription I would expect biometrics use cases to come into scope due to reductions in

processing costs. Meanwhile, we are expanding our portfolio into enterprise grade communications surveillance, incorporating significant elements of AI into compliance. This allows for the flagging of non-compliance and understanding trends, providing clients with the ability to proactively mitigate past, current and future risks, including predicting potential compliance mishaps.

What is your biggest career achievement?

I've built a £100 million revenue company from £6 million in six years, which wouldn't have been possible without a great team. Witnessing this team develop, grow into their roles and, in many cases, continue onto bigger things is my biggest achievement. When you realise what impact you can have on people – both positive and negative – it's a real eye opener. Focusing on helping people is far more rewarding than purely the numbers outcome. Although by developing and building a great team you hopefully get great results!

In your career what would you have done differently?

I entered the world of work with a blinkered view. I didn't have a concept of the different jobs or careers that were available and spent much of my career in a job role that wasn't right for me. It didn't align with what I enjoyed or my skill set, but I thought it was my only option based on what I was good at when at school. I had to learn and make mistakes to progress into more suitable roles. A wider view of the possibilities would have led to different choices sooner. I encourage trying

different roles, be seconded, ask questions and see what's out there. Life is too short – you should do a job you love.

In your view, what are the main areas of transformation in the ICT industry?

Dealing with the digital divide and sustainable AI development are key areas of transformation, along with how we limit environmental impacts by developing more energy efficient data centres and using renewable energy – particularly as consumption continues to grow. Customers and potential recruits increasingly choose companies with sustainable practices. Therefore, leaders should focus on eco-friendly solutions, responsible waste management and promoting diversity and inclusion.

What are today's other top priorities for ICT channel companies?

For all businesses, adapting to evolving work dynamics, especially with the increased digital connectivity between teams and customers as many adopt a hybrid approach, is a priority. Technology plays a key role here, emphasising the importance for ICT businesses not only to sell but also to adopt these changes while recognising the evolving nature of cyber threats that can have a catastrophic impact on organisations.

It is also important to embrace the recurring revenue model given the shift away from traditional one-off revenue streams towards cloud-based services. This all means developing the right skills for the future, therefore effective reskilling of the workforce to meet the evolving landscape is key. ■

NETWORKING EVENT



20th June 2024
Forest of Arden
Midlands

The ICT Channel conference and networking event for UC, Mobile, IoT, Contact Centre Connectivity and Business Services

www.margin.events



SPONSORS



To advertise in **comms** dealer
contact The Sales Team on 07759 731134

Incoming TelcoSwitch CEO

No channel business stands the test of time unless built on the strongest foundations and for incoming TelcoSwitch CEO Howard Stevens that means a people-first culture, a trust-centric team and value-driving technology solutions designed for both today and tomorrow.

In January Stevens picked up the CEO baton from Matt Mansell who retains a position on the TelcoSwitch Board of Directors. Mansell oversaw the CPaaS vendor's launch of the CallSwitch One platform following the acquisition of TelcoSwitch by investor Queen's Park Equity in the summer of 2022. Stevens brings over 20 years executive experience in multi-national high growth environments and spent eight years as SVP & Global Head of Sales at SAP where he was credited with developing telecoms into one of the company's top three fast growth markets. Most recently he was CEO of Vista Private Equity backed Tomia, a provider of roaming and inter-operator connectivity solutions for global carriers. He guided the business towards its acquisition by Lumine Group in 2022.

"My experiences have given me a clear understanding around the importance of building a positive and trust-based internal culture and having that flow into

the various teams," stated Stevens. "I've seen the impacts of culture across organisations of all sizes, from how a positive and open culture can drive a business forward to how an aggressive blame culture will have the opposite effect. Every individual needs to see the impact they are having on the business as a whole, and it is critically important to mentor and engage employees to help them understand where they fit into the journey. This is a make or break priority. With the right attitude and internal culture we can deliver the right approach to our partner community."

Stevens also brings extensive telecoms and commercial knowledge to the table, and his broad vertical market experience and know-how feeds directly into his strategy and vision for TelcoSwitch. "My career has primarily centred around growing revenue streams and building growth environments and I'm bringing these learnings to TelcoSwitch," commented Stevens. "We



Howard Stevens

Experience has given me a clear understanding around the importance of building a positive and trust-based internal culture

need to create a win-win scenario for ourselves, partners and end users."

The company has almost 500 channel partners across varying scales and according to Stevens they have been energised by CallSwitch One, a proprietary platform that is 100 per cent owned-IP. "Helping existing partners transition from our legacy platform to CallSwitch One is an immediate priority," added Stevens. "Partners have been highly receptive to this and their commitment is reflected in a rapid adoption rate, with over half of all

new orders gravitating towards CallSwitch One in the first four months after general release."

New markets

According to Stevens, CallSwitch One also makes TelcoSwitch relevant to important new markets. He attributes its wider appeal to the 'true SaaS nature' of the platform, its scalability, use of public cloud infrastructure and Open APIs. "This gives partners the capability to leverage the platform in a multitude of ways," commented Stevens. "That makes us more relevant to

systems integrators and we're bullish about the capability and relevance of CallSwitch One to that market. We're also building out our wholesale offering, leveraging the Open API framework with encouraging early results from new partners."

To successfully navigate and win in a highly competitive market requires a solution that exceeds industry standards and continues to improve through its roadmap during the customer lifecycle. This way customers are more likely to resign at the end of their contract term. And



talks priorities



He noted that the lines between CCaaS and UCaaS are becoming increasingly blurred with customers expecting more CCaaS features in what was traditionally a UCaaS deployment, including richer analytics, reporting, easily customisable wallboards etc, even in relatively small businesses. Another big trend is the rise of Artificial Intelligence.

"Some vendors are talking up AI capabilities but in practice it's not as rich as the marketing would have you believe," commented Stevens. "It is certainly a trend we're witnessing and we are already leveraging AI in a number of ways including voice transcription, but most importantly our partners aren't beating our door down to deliver more AI functionality. It's the integrations and API capabilities that are driving their sales conversations along with customer needs. I'm very mindful of that."

with the PSTN switch-off looming larger by the day, platforms such as CallSwitch One provide a substantial long-term opportunity for UCaaS providers.

Seamless migrations

"Offering seamless migrations to cloud-native solutions is an appealing alternative that enables partners to capitalise on this huge industry change," added Stevens. "We also see partners who need to consolidate platforms because they either purchased multiple solutions from us in the past, or have adopted other vendors through acquisition and suffer the support headache that brings. So we're focused on high levels of automation."

Also top of mind for Stevens is the subject of leadership, which he says is first and foremost about people. "You need to motivate and retain your key talent and create an environment where people can be creative and feel empowered," he reiterated. "I cannot overstate how important good people and productive teams are to a successful journey. Throughout my eight years at Mobile365 through to SAP, I retained all bar one of my management team as we grew and went through multiple acquisitions. We continued to achieve high levels of success, all built upon trust and honesty between us as a senior leadership team." ■

Just a minute with Howard Stevens...

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

Definitely something commercially facing.

Best piece of advice you have been given:

I have worked with a lot of smart people so nuggets of advice have been plentiful. One that stands out is actually a really bad piece of advice from early in my career. It helped me learn that the reverse is true: 'Don't forget Howard, at the end of the day everyone is just a name on a spreadsheet'.

Name three ideal dinner guests:

Winston Churchill, to gain a better understanding of how to lead under the most extreme pressure – and he's one of the greatest ever Englishmen. The Dalai Lama, to help me understand how to stay calm and respectful, and to help others do the same. And Nelson Mandela, to help me understand how someone can undergo the most extreme prejudice yet maintain a positive outlook on life, believing that you can change anything with enough persistence and positivity.

What could you not do without in your job? A good team and the ability to keep a sense of humour no matter how much pressure you may be under.

How do you relax when not working? I play tennis (badly!), spend family time with my kids and grandchildren, I support Portsmouth FC (to keep me properly grounded), enjoy travelling and socialising.

One example of something you have overcome: I have been very lucky in life, in that I have never had a really serious personal issue to overcome. Long may that continue.

What possession could you not live without? My mobile phone enables day-to-day life.

A Future-Proof Software Strategy

Choosing the best-of-breed software is always the best option, right? Not always. Just because it's the best for some doesn't mean it's the best for you or the nuances of the channel. Whether it's your CRM, billing platform, service desk, or another part of your ecosystem, a strategic approach should always be taken to maximise ROI and set you up for success.



"It's not just about the cost of the software; it's about the potential cost of choosing the wrong software"

*Michelle Livingstone
CEO, Layer Systems*

So, how do you go about choosing the right software? Instead of adopting the shiniest newest tool or the first option on the search engine results, take a step back and assess your needs. What are your business goals? What pain points do you need to address? What functionalities are non-negotiable? Once you have a clear vision, it's time to do your homework. Research different options and read reviews from companies who operate similarly to yours.

Next, consider value. It's not just about the cost of the software; it's about the potential cost of choosing the wrong software. Look beyond the initial price tag and assess the potential value

each solution brings to the table. Will it help you increase efficiency, boost sales, or reduce costs in the long term? Will you need to hire additional staff or a third party to help manage it, or even carry out development work in the future? Remember, saving a few pennies now could end up costing you thousands down the line.

Speaking of costs, beware of hidden expenses. Some providers lure you in with attractive pricing plans, only to hit you with hefty fees for essential features or technical support. Before signing on the dotted line, carefully review the pricing structure and any potential add-on costs.

As your business grows, whether organically or through mergers and acquisitions, your chosen solution should be able to scale with you. Can it accommodate an increased user base? Can it manage sub-companies and multiple sites?

Lastly, don't just focus on features. Always consider the bigger picture. How reliable is the provider? Do they want to understand your challenges and goals? What level of support do they offer? Will they help train and gain buy-in from your team? Do they encourage feedback and continuously improve the solution? Do they understand how the ICT sector operates?

Of course, there are always risks when implementing new software and processes. However, carefully considering your options and choosing a CRM like The Layer, made for telecoms and IT companies, can reduce the risk of wasting time and money. If you'd like to discuss how to unlock new levels of increased efficiency, productivity, and profitability, visit thelayer.com today.

To advertise in **comms**
contact The Sales Team on 07759 731134 **dealer**

Understanding transform

Here, we give clarity on the strategic direction of four billing providers in the channel and how they are meeting the evolving demands of partners and end users, while innovating new routes to creating value in diverse markets and extending the capabilities of their platforms.

Understanding any segment of the ICT channel marketplace demands a clear view of the drivers, technological progressions, business opportunities and the best pathway forwards – perhaps none more so than the ever-evolving and innovative billing space. To help us understand the objectives for this year and beyond of four of the channel's top billers it is helpful to assess the gains they made in 2023 and how these advances play into current strategies. Last year PRD Technologies advanced its objective to optimise infrastructure, especially in the light of today's security challenges (achieving ISO27001 certification for the second year running). The company also migrated to Azure to offer a hybrid environment. Another goal in 2023 was to 'push boundaries' with new developments and extend API libraries and capabilities, plus API integrations with ConnectWise and other third party systems. A big focus this year is to continue driving automation and integrations.

PRD is also assessing how AI can bolster its billing platform, analysing and refining data for improved data collection, processing and billing. "The objective is always to maximise efficiency and cost optimisations,"

stated Simon Adams, Managing Director, PRD Technologies. "Our software aims to eliminate routine tasks, such as data entry via APIs into third party systems. However, we need to learn about how AI can enhance entire end-to-end processes. Billing and invoice processing is one of the most burdensome tasks in many businesses and AI will help streamline procedures."

Diversification

PRD is also focusing on more convergence between market sectors and the growing number of businesses seeking additional revenue streams. "On the channel side we've noticed more diversification," said Adams. "Businesses are branching out and looking for new revenue streams. For example, many telecoms companies are evolving into MSPs by reselling IT security and Microsoft subscriptions. Others are diversifying into new markets, especially UC, fibre broadband and cloud services. We expect these trends to drive requirements in the analytics space over the next year. Meanwhile, businesses are moving towards new ways to refresh, maintain and support workplace devices in line with hybrid working."

In the MSP and fibre space, noted Adams, more businesses are moving away from traditional billing



Simon Adams

Billing and invoice processing is one of the most burdensome tasks in many businesses and AI will help streamline processes

platforms in favour of the invoice functionality of third party software such as Xero, Sage, ConnectWise, AutoTask and Microsoft Dynamics. "These invoicing systems can't process usage data," he added. "Our Intelligent Billing platform fills this gap and performs as a rating engine, generating the

necessary outputs that can be fed into the invoicing solutions. This trend is working its way into telecoms too. As a result, there is a growing associated trend of custom level requirements."

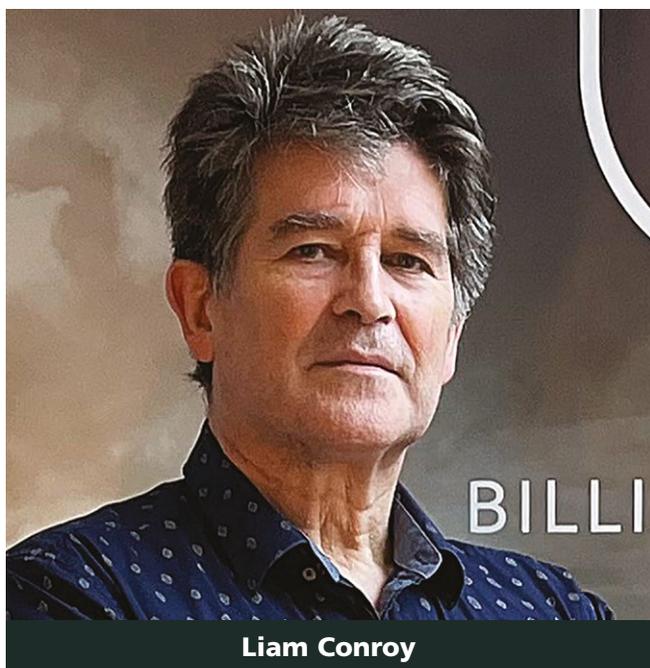
Resellers ultimately need a billing process that is streamlined, accurate and

keeps their data (and their customers' data) safe. As a result, the top three billing requirements include API integration with third party systems, feature-rich functionality and data security. Adams also pointed out that resellers should look at the reporting capabilities of their platform, which he says should ideally offer customised reports based on data from multiple sources that yield actionable intelligence for strategy planning.

"Resellers should not be compromised by limitations in billing software, and the software should be automated to reduce manual work," added Adams. "Resellers can differentiate by being able to offer complex pricing plans, while automated data collection, processing and analysis allows for a speedier, more accurate billing process that eliminates errors, reduces debtor days and increases cash flow. Furthermore, billing can often be brought forward, enabling businesses to issue invoices more quickly. This makes the organisation more agile and better able to respond to opportunities and changes in the market."

Billing firm Crystal ASP also showcased its growth potential in 2023, exceeding revenue goals and extending the reach of its customer

ation in the billing sector



Liam Conroy

Being able to bundle more advanced measures into simple-to-market commercial offerings is the future

base across Ireland and the UK. The company rewrote its billing engine from the ground up enabling it to meet the challenges of post-Brexit billing while reducing the time to bring new products to market. This year Crystal ASP is focused on improving its order-to-cash journey and enhancing its end-to-end service wrap with new levels of automation.

“Automation in billing is a hot topic,” stated Liam Conroy, owner, Crystal ASP. “Must-haves include real-time CDR data imports, availability of unbilled charges and discounts, plus comprehensive APIs and efficient workflows. Platform flexibility is also key... does it have the necessary APIs to allow integration with the pre-existing sales and CRM systems? Is the pricing flexible enough to cope with

market conditions, especially since the pandemic? Over and above traditional monthly billing cycles, daily billing cycles can be important to help maximise cash flow and manage licence anniversaries.”

Advanced bundling

Conroy also noted that traditional measures such as minutes and megabytes are important. However, a billing system’s capability to exploit measures such as man-effort and fractional quantities is already important in the IT arena and set to become even more so. “Being able to bundle these more advanced measures into simple-to-market commercial offerings is the future,” he added.

Billing is inherently linked with all aspects of channel operations, and according to Conroy it should be

‘a given’ that modern billing platforms are able to integrate with multiple business functions and systems. “But to truly realise the potential of integrations, suppliers – both aggregators and carriers – must unify their billing data with the rest of their operational information to allow greater levels of integration,” he added. “Another aspect is the availability of a data warehouse as a business intelligence enabler.

This allows billing to be understood more holistically as part of the overall business dynamic. Other areas, such as marketing and customer relations, will also see significant benefits, delivering more customised messaging and insights to maximise customer satisfaction.”

Conroy said that while AI is being ‘hyped’ and may have the potential to improve aspects of billing, identifying actual use cases is more difficult. “We will continue to explore AI possibilities but our immediate aim is to integrate our billing engine with more UK suppliers and leverage our WFM to streamline order delivery, while improving our data warehouse capabilities to help deliver business intelligence.”

For Giacom, last year was all about two main goals – to reduce the administrative burden on MSPs and optimising APIs. As part of this the company introduced new features and functionality to minimise manual procedures, especially when provisioning services from suppliers and ensuring they were seamlessly added to customers’ accounts ready for billing. More self-service options were also added to customer portals. Meanwhile,

Giacom’s work on APIs is focused on enabling partners to create a more productive and efficient operational environment. “We are prioritising these crucial areas of development this year while enhancing the overall user experience of our software,” stated Ant Molloy, Chief Technical Officer, Giacom. “This includes optimising the user interface and providing more personalised service options.”

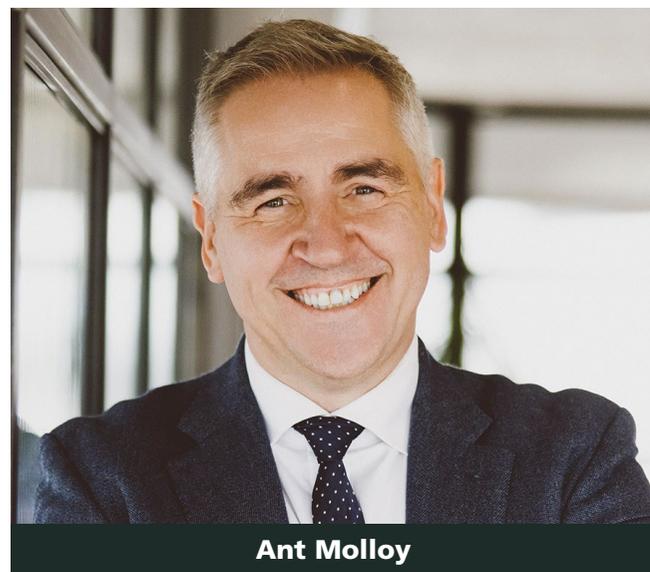
On-demand services

White labelled billing portals can significantly improve the end customer experience by providing a self-service platform where customers can access their billing information, usage data and manage their accounts, observed Molloy. This aligns with consumer expectations of on-demand access to services and

information. Therefore, the end user portal is a big focus area for Giacom, strengthening account management capabilities, usage monitoring, the customer experience and operational efficiency. “This not only improves customer satisfaction by putting control in the hands of the end user but reduces the support burden on MSPs, allowing them to allocate resources more effectively,” added Molloy. “These platforms can also advertise and promote new services directly, thereby boosting cross-selling or upselling strategies.”

Molloy noted that MSPs require billing systems that offer robust support and the flexibility to adapt to a wide range of services, including mobile, cloud and emerging technologies.

Continued on page 20



Ant Molloy

By leveraging advanced billing software for strategic advantage, MSPs can enhance customer engagement, operational efficiency and market responsiveness



Are your teams Channel Champions

4th July 2024, Regents Park

www.channel-champions.com

HEADLINE SPONSOR



Continued from page 19

“Billing systems must provide advanced rating features and accommodate different approaches to billing and service management, including for service bundles and subscriptions,” he added. “This ensures that MSPs can respond to market changes and customer needs effectively. MSPs want to do more with less resource and scale their offerings without increasing overheads. They need tools and features that automate manual tasks, refine operational workflows and provide analytical tools that help partners identify and act on efficiency gains.”

Billing software also provides business intelligence, enabling MSPs to tailor pricing models, bundles and tariffs, which Molloy says is particularly appealing to the SMB sector. “This insight supports the creation of innovative offerings that differentiate MSPs from competitors,” he added. “Moreover, by assisting MSPs in compliance with new and existing regulations, advanced billing solutions allow them to adapt to market changes seamlessly, maintaining uninterrupted service.”

When selecting a billing partner resellers and MSPs would be wise to consider factors critical to their long-term success and operational security, observed Molloy. Key among these are infrastructure and security, consultancy services and development resources. “The billing platform must ensure the security and protection of sensitive billing and customer data against cyber threats, alongside robust infrastructure that prevents system outages or data loss,” he added. “Features such as encryption of sensitive information, secure data storage and disaster recovery capabilities are essential to safeguard business continuity.

“Consultancy services offered by the platform vendor can



Ian McNamara

The main aim of our strategy is to use system intelligence to reduce manual intervention and improve efficiency

also add value by assisting with data management, enhancing profitability and ensuring adherence to best practices. This support can help MSPs optimise their operations and maintain a competitive advantage. In short, by leveraging advanced billing software for strategic advantage, MSPs can enhance customer engagement, operational efficiency and market responsiveness.”

Margin displacement

As the industry transitions from old world technologies to new, most notably with the copper switch-off in 2025, the most salient trend observed by Ian McNamara, Transformation and Quality Director, Anvil, has been the impact of margin displacement when replacing legacy services with modern digital services, and the absolute need to pick up on such instances at source. “Adequately addressing margin displacement mitigates its impact on financial performance,” he stated. “This is a vital

requirement of an intuitive, margin enhancing platform, hence our focus has been on ensuring the billing aspect of our software is fully conversant with the other component parts. Most notably, its contract management system. These software developments will play a major part in helping telecom resellers navigate this evolution while adapting their business models to remain competitive.”

McNamara noted that Anvil’s R&D focus is extending further into enhancing a cradle-to-grave approach to the whole telecommunications sales cycle. “This initiative underscores the need to deliver seamless, cost-effective solutions that streamline operations, enhance customer experience and drive business growth,” he added. “We are doing this by working at network level to provide pass-through automation from the point of order through to the supplier of the service, using automation

technologies and protocols to interface between the respective parties.”

Anvil’s investment aims to reduce the cost of running a business by increasing efficiencies and providing an all-in-one solution for the reseller channel with enhanced analytics. McNamara also pointed to the role of AI in billing, particularly its impact on predictive analytics and automation. “Our strategy is focused on harnessing these capabilities to deliver truly useful information to the end user, and to their customers,” he explained. “These include proactive, rather than reactive alerts on billing trends, churn, margin black-spots and other crucial areas, allowing them to take pre-emptive action and drive business growth. The main aim of our strategy is to use system intelligence to reduce manual intervention and improve efficiency, including laborious tasks such as billing, payment processing and reconciliations. We are also looking to introduce user-centric solutions for end users, ensuring they can easily access and leverage advance analytics and other system capabilities.”

This all builds on the main requirements Anvil is asked by resellers to resolve, such as the provision of a joined-up software infrastructure that enables real-time visibility of order profitability at source, with automation between departments removing the need for expensive auxiliary software packages. Resellers also want to know exactly where they are at all times with every contract in regard to remaining terms and ARPU per product line. And with ever increasing Ofcom regulations and the introduction of One Touch Switching, resellers need to remain compliant by informing their customers of their contractual position on a yearly basis. “Compliance is hugely

important for everyone in the telecommunications arena, but it’s a complicated and misunderstood area that resellers want made easier,” added McNamara.

He says the coming years in the billing space will be characterised by a significant evolution and innovation, with a need to encompass integration, convergence, automation, data analysis and AI. “Overall, the billing software environment, not just in telecoms, is poised for technological advancement based on changing market dynamics and the ever increasing expectations of customers,” he added. “The prevailing demand in other markets is to see the evolution of single solution packages into comprehensive business management platforms.”

Competitive edge

By using a software management platform which incorporates a mature billing system, rather than using a standalone one which doesn’t integrate with other essential packages such as a sales CRM and ticketing system, a reseller can gain a competitive edge through enhanced automation and efficiency gains, believes McNamara. “Such a system automates repetitive tasks through the order-to-bill cycle, minimises errors, reduces operational costs, processes faster, more accurate bill runs, all of which improve cashflow and financial performance,” he added. “Just as important is the true value enhanced analytics and insights bring which should be used to inform strategic decision making and drive business growth. By consolidating data from various sources all housed within the same software package resellers can gain a comprehensive view of their contractual estate, the performance of every area of their company and build lasting customer relationships.” ■

Trend analysis in billing

Tekton Billing Managing Director Harry McKeever on how data analysis is being used to set long-term strategy. He also shares insights on the key trends reshaping ICT sector billing.



Harry McKeever

Tekton Billing's strategic thinking is largely determined by its data analysis which has identified key trends shaping the future of telecoms and IT billing. These include an increased focus on the customer experience. "Our analysis of customer portal logins reveals a 150-plus per cent surge in customers choosing portal-based invoice delivery over email attachments," stated McKeever. "Customers prefer the interactive and insightful nature of self-service and reporting through the portal, as opposed to simple PDF attachments. And from the perspective of resellers, the portal alleviates pressure on their customer service team and ensures enhanced security."

Another big trend pointed out by McKeever is towards convergent billing capabilities. "On average, our partners consume services from six to eight wholesale providers, with the highest network user leveraging 46 suppliers," he added. "We have streamlined the capabilities and experience to make managing multiple supplier relationships easier with a single invoice. Manual reconciliation, especially with a growing

number of suppliers, would be both challenging and time-consuming."

Near real-time billing is another top trend identified by analysis of Tekton Billing's data, which points to growing partner demand for near real-time information and automatic CDR imports to enhance responsiveness, improve cash flow and prevent unexpected surprises. "We've seen a rising trend in partners switching to suppliers that offer more frequent CDR files," added McKeever. "Daily CDRs are no longer the standard."

Strategic integrations are also coming into sharp focus, with Tekton Billing witnessing a rise in traffic across its API framework to supplier networks. This indicates a growing adoption of self-service options and barring requests by customers, often triggered by spend caps. "These integrations improve the customer experience and promote operational efficiencies," stated McKeever. "We will continue to expand our integrations to include more vendors and a wider array of functions."

More broadly, McKeever characterises the top three billing requirements from

The right billing software can drive sales, reduce costs, increase productivity and optimise margins

resellers today as unified billing, complex tariff and rating capabilities and self-service. But when evaluating billing software, resellers and MSPs should look beyond just financial transactions and consider the overall value proposition, advises McKeever.

"A branded self-service customer portal offers a personalised user experience, boosting brand perception and loyalty while reducing the administrative burden on support," he explained. "Real-time reporting and trend analysis provide actionable insights for informed decisions, optimising revenue and operations. By investing in these features, resellers and

MSPs can proactively meet customer demands, enhance efficiency and stand out in a competitive market."

Shift to innovation

From a helicopter perspective, McKeever says the industry is shifting towards more adaptable and innovative billing solutions. Over the next two to three years he forecasts the billing software market to become more flexible, personalised and digitalised. "We expect a rise in unified billing systems that consolidate multiple services to meet the expanding offerings of resellers and MSPs," said McKeever. "This diversification trend also suggests that resellers will increasingly engage with a broader spectrum of

suppliers. We will in turn see an increasing demand for billing providers that are impartial and agnostic toward wholesale suppliers."

According to McKeever, AI has the potential to 'revolutionise' telecoms billing by improving accuracy, reducing human error and increasing margins. "In the immediate term, the value of a good human Billing Manager cannot be overstated and is unlikely to be replaced by AI," he added.

"However, we are exploring practical applications for AI to add value. These include providing insights in reporting and suggestions for margin optimisation, as well as identifying fraudulent activities and triggering fraud detection alerts. In terms of advanced analytics, AI can leverage data analysis and reporting to provide deeper insights into customer data, enabling more personalised and targeted billing. Forward-thinking resellers will utilise their billing platform not only to issue invoices but also to gain valuable commercial intelligence, enhancing their overall business strategy."

It's fair to say that the billing sector is a hotbed of innovation and possibilities, and a primary enabler for channel companies. "Billing remains a key avenue for achieving a significant competitive edge, arguably one of the last avenues for differentiation," added McKeever. "From branded customer portals and convergent billing capabilities to automation and insightful reporting, the right billing software can drive sales, reduce costs, increase productivity and optimise margins." ■



Are your teams Channel Champions

4th July 2024, Regents Park

www.channel-champions.com

HEADLINE SPONSOR
GIACOM

Billing software evolution

Here, Ellie Allseybrook, Business Development Director, Inform Billing, shares insights into what lies at the core of modern day billing solutions and provides a business update on the company's strategic growth plans and progression.



Ellie Allseybrook

Inform Billing's primary objective in 2023 was to solidify its platform ahead of a new growth phase that is expected to double revenues during the coming three to five years. The business is currently witnessing circa 15 per cent year-on-year growth. Inform Billing also gained ISO 9001 and 27001 certification last year and delivered 55 new features and enhancements to its Eclipse billing software, most notably automated MSP billing functionality which simplifies and makes more accurate the reconciliation of MSP services such as licences and back-ups.

"We also spent the year developing and preparing to launch our stand-alone BI solution called Inform Analytics," stated Allseybrook. "We invested in a dedicated team with expertise to deliver accessible Analytics as a Service to the channel."

She noted that the analytics function enables resellers and MSPs to more readily identify trends, reduce risks, increase profitability and drive informed decisions. "We've

built a standard set of dashboards providing off-the-shelf centralised and real-time views of relevant data and can offer fully outsourced business analytics," added Allseybrook. "Resellers and MSPs can access meaningful analytics utilising our analysts and developers, eliminating the need to recruit a dedicated data science team."

According to Allseybrook, the use of analytics will be key to the success of resellers' IP migration strategies and full fibre roll outs ahead of the 2025 switch off, because the analytics dashboard provides real-time visibility, tracks performance and identifies trends, thereby enabling resellers to more effectively formulate and deliver their strategy for migrating legacy services. Allseybrook also pointed out that the analytics solution will ease pressure on resources and profitability for resellers as they prepare for the PSTN shut down.

Also of great interest to Allseybrook is the growing trend towards automation, with technologies such as AI and IFTTT gaining traction.

While call revenues are diminishing, other consumption or usage-based opportunities are evolving

"These developments are indicative of how customer value is shifting, therefore it's imperative that resellers and MSPs have the right capability from their billing provider to take advantage of these shifts as they happen," she added.

Market diversity

As well as having the right capabilities, market reach is also key, therefore Inform Billing is developing partnerships in diverse markets relevant to the subscription economy, opening the door to future opportunities for the channel. "The transition to recurring revenues still plays a big part in generating opportunities for the channel and billing providers need to play their role in enabling resellers to

capitalise on those revenue streams," stated Allseybrook. "While call revenues are diminishing, other consumption or usage-based opportunities are evolving."

In terms of market breadth, Inform Billing has customers spanning traditional telecoms, IT, mobile and IoT as well as utilities, waste management, banking and hospitality, all using its software. It is important to note here that customer feedback from the entire scope of users helps to shape Inform Billing's development pipeline. "Our 2024 product roadmap encompasses a range of updates and feature integrations," added Allseybrook. "Notable additions include multi-factor

authentication, improvements to managing contracts in the platform, enhancements to our end customer portal and the introduction of a mobile app."

Self-service functionality, particularly relating to mobile services, has also evolved from a nice-to-have to an essential requirement for many. Therefore Inform Billing added the ability to monitor unbilled usage, add mobile bars and complete SIM swaps for certain suppliers in 2020 and has now extended integrations to offer a wider range of mobile self-service options with API integration. "Integration in general continues to be a key requirement," said Allseybrook. "Everyone

n in action

Should you get ND accredited?

expects their systems to seamlessly integrate and reduce duplication and manual entry. In response to this ever-increasing demand and as part of our ongoing development, Inform Billing has invested into an API set, enabling customers to build links between other systems and suppliers with our Eclipse platform in a more structured way."

MSP services

Allseybrook also observed that Inform Billing is increasingly seeing the requirement for billing systems to accommodate MSP services ranging from Office 365 and back-up licencing to IaaS as well as voice and data in all-inclusive or unlimited packages. "There is a common theme that these services can easily be billed through accounting or CRM systems, but what these systems will not do is accurately reconcile supplier invoices," she said.

This is why Inform Billing invested in an automated MSP module designed to streamline subscription management and enable effective reconciliation, addressing the challenges of subscriptions, quantity changes and billing processes. Allseybrook says this is just one example of how resellers and MSPs can truly gain a competitive advantage through their billing software, which as a business critical application can reduce resource investment, enable commercial competitiveness, improve cashflow, enhance customer satisfaction and boost profitability.

Furthermore, the growing emphasis on data driven decision making throughout the supply chain has elevated

the market influence of independent billing providers to a new level. "But regardless of functionality in any software application, real value comes from the knowledge and experience of the provider to both pre-empt and adapt to the ever changing market and its emerging needs," commented Allseybrook. "The ability to access this experience and expertise at ease should never be underestimated."

Nor should the impact of independent billing software on company valuations be underrated, noted Allseybrook. "While efficiencies from buying and billing services through the same supplier might be tempting, this may be detrimental in the long-term through potential price increases and exit strategies," she added. "Without independent billing exit routes are narrowed and business values are likely to come under pressure. It's been proven on many occasions that resellers with true control over their customer base, and with billing independent from their network service provider, see a positive and significant impact on the value of their business."

With M&A driving changes in the billing world in recent years, Allseybrook hopes that the market will remain competitive in the time to come. "It is paramount that resellers have legitimate choice in all elements of their supply chain, even more so in the current climate," she stated. "I hope to continue to see billing providers across the industry benefit from new entrants and new offerings in the market." ■

Neurodiversity (ND) champion and Train to Win CEO Julie Mills discusses the high value of ND training and accreditation.

Leaders in tech are embracing ND to create happier, more productive working environments and gain access to a bigger talent pool. As this trend accelerates, we're seeing more businesses align with structured training programmes and even ND-in-the-workplace accreditations like Neurodiversity Smart. The question for those in the comms industry is... are such accreditations worth pursuing?

Priority versus non-urgent

Firstly, I doubt many businesses will view neurodiversity accreditations as an urgent requirement because it isn't stipulated in business tenders. But this may change. I also accept that businesses that do a great job on ND inclusion don't necessarily need an accreditation to prove it. Not being signed up to Stonewall doesn't make you anti-LGBTQ, so failing to have an ND accreditation shouldn't mark you out as a pariah. However, there is no escaping that any respected accreditation – backed up by a robust assessment process – not only increases customer/partner credibility but also makes you a better run organisation.

The hassle factor

Good accreditations aren't tick-box exercises – the entire process enables the adoption of beneficial best practices



Julie Mills

and the opportunity to benchmark against minimum standards. This is key because the whole purpose of neurodiversity inclusion is to increase business performance and unlock human potential. Yes there's a feelgood factor and a moral case for true neurodivergent equality, but the bigger reality is it's a fiercely competitive world out there and this will help you succeed.

That's not to say that gaining an ND accreditation isn't difficult. It will involve everybody and it will consume resources. Everyone needs to buy into this. It may take months and involve changes to practically every aspect of the employee lifecycle from hiring to line managing, how you set up your work environment and manage internal comms.

Ends justify the means

If you're serious about ND inclusion you should seek an ND accreditation. You're ready for the cultural change that will come and better equipped to embrace the values and principles of ND inclusion – as well as the organisational adjustments. If you aren't quite ready I suggest you keep it under review and be prepared to shift your mindset before you get left behind.

No matter where your business is on its ND journey, I hope you're able to support Neurodiversity Celebration Week starting 18th March. Raising awareness among neurotypical staff will help break down barriers and remove stigma, which will be greatly appreciated by your neurodiverse employees, partners and customers. ■

The catalysts driving a rev

Strategic Imperatives
Managing Director Wail Sabbagh discusses the catalysts changing the game for billing specialists and channel partners, and sheds light on how his company is pushing the envelope on all major trends reshaping the ICT billing landscape.



Wail Sabbagh

What were your goals in 2023?

Last year we expanded the Elevate billing and Fibre Cafe platforms, increased our investment in new features and welcomed new talent to the team. We set ambitious targets for Elevate and surpassed one million monthly invoices generated, introduced a major update to our payment automation capabilities and prepared for the launch of our business intelligence engine, Elevate Insight, which follows a multi-million-pound investment and over two years of dedicated development. This AI engine transforms billing data into a strategic resource, driving revenue optimisation, proactive pricing management and predictive modelling.

What are your objectives and priorities this year?

Our merger with X3T earlier this year was transformative, boosting our resources and expertise, accelerating our product roadmap and

strengthening our ability to innovate. Another primary focus this year is to further invest in Elevate's capabilities to address the complexities and scaling requirements of our rapidly evolving market. This includes driving innovation through AI with Elevate Insight as a cornerstone of our strategy. We're committed to transforming how clients leverage data, enabling them to rapidly identify trends, mitigate revenue leaks, optimise pricing strategies and unlock data-driven growth potential.

Which industry trends are defining your strategy?

Several trends are reshaping the billing landscape and directly drive our roadmap, such as the evolution of traditional service providers into MSPs demanding billing flexibility to support digital offerings, innovative bundles and evolving revenue models. This evolution, combined with industry disruptions like the PSTN switch-off and One Touch Switching, is accelerating

AI will shift our view of billing systems from merely back-office utilities to customer-centric sources of business intelligence and competitive advantage

consolidation at an unprecedented pace, creating a complex environment for service providers managing multiple brands and migrating customer bases. Supporting smooth mergers and acquisitions ensures service providers can execute growth strategies without billing disruption.

We also see next generation ISPs seeking seamless automation across the entire lead-to-cash process. They require billing systems with robust APIs for managing tariffs, complex propositions,

invoicing, payments and balance tracking.

Surprisingly, even with the shift away from traditional voice, consumption or usage-based billing has resurged. This renaissance is fuelled by flexible charging models aligned with new digital services and increasing customer demand for pay-as-you-go options. Naturally, subscription billing continues its rapid expansion, driving the need for sophisticated contract management features capable of handling complex subscription models.

What is your biggest opportunity?

Our primary opportunity is strategically expanding Elevate's reach across the diverse channel ecosystem. Traditional billing solutions often fail to meet the complex needs of a diverse channel. This includes Altnets and ISPs seeking seamless platform integration as well as highly acquisitive MSPs with demanding multi-brand and consolidation requirements. Our success with Fibre Café, and the adoption of Elevate by ISPs and MSPs has provided



Are your teams Channel Champions

4th July 2024, Regents Park

www.channel-champions.com

HEADLINE SPONSOR
GIACOM.

olution in billing

us with insights into the billing challenges they face and the opportunities we need to help them realise.

What are the key conclusions from analysis of your billing data?

Our analysis reveals several areas of experimentation within the channel that we believe will drive the next

generation, recurring billing and payment processing. This significantly reduces errors and minimises manual tasks across multiple platforms. Secondly, data-driven insights have become vital for strategic decision making. Resellers need in-depth reporting and intelligent actionable analytics to track sales trends, customer churn,

roadmap to gauge their ability to keep pace with future needs, and assess their scalability and the extent of their future-proofing. Because the channel will also witness greater consolidation and strategic partnerships, billing systems must evolve beyond transactional tools into facilitators of these complex relationships.

The coming years demand a holistic understanding of how billing integrates with the wider partner experience

phase of billing innovation. Firstly, we see a new breed of service providers focusing on niche markets, targeting specific service needs or geographic locations. Success in these specialised segments often demands tailored product offerings and a flexible billing approach.

We also see a rise in what we call micro-subscriptions, where clients experiment with ultra-short durations or services priced on a granular per-week, per-hour or per-minute basis. This places extraordinary demands on billing systems, requiring real-time accuracy and the flexibility to handle dynamic pricing models. Another compelling trend is the growing use of hybrid billing models where providers creatively combine usage-based and subscription pricing elements.

What are the top three billing requirements from resellers and MSPs today?

Firstly, automation and streamlining are paramount. Resellers prioritise systems that automate invoice

profitability and to generate forecasts. Thirdly, agility and adaptability are crucial in a rapidly evolving market. Resellers demand billing solutions flexible enough to introduce new pricing models, handle complex bundles and support diverse subscription options.

What other factors should resellers and MSPs consider when evaluating billing software?

They should evaluate a billing solution's security and compliance posture, focusing on robust encryption, compliance certifications, audit trails and granular access controls – all crucial to protect sensitive financial and customer data. Prioritising the end user experience is also vital, along with choosing a vendor that understands the industry and offers proactive support. Evaluate factors like response times, knowledge of industry-specific requirements, access to resources like a knowledge base, and their overall reputation among existing clients. Consider the provider's innovation

The coming years demand a holistic understanding of how billing integrates with the wider partner experience and fuels data-driven success. Billing providers who grasp this will shape the channel's evolution.

How far will AI ultimately transform billing platforms and the user experience?

AI holds the potential to shift billing's role from merely transactional to strategically insightful. AI-powered billing systems can identify anomalies within transactions, usage patterns and customer behaviour, enabling fraud detection, proactive revenue safeguarding and opportunities to improve services. AI's predictive capabilities can forecast revenue, model resource demand and even anticipate customer churn. Intelligent analysis can reveal untapped markets, underperforming products, or opportunities for personalised product recommendations.

AI will also enable hyper-automation of complex billing processes and shift our view of billing systems from merely back-office utilities to customer-centric sources of business intelligence and competitive advantage. AI is more than a buzzword: It's a foundational philosophy of product development. ■

comms
dealer

Bespoke events



Comms Dealer's bespoke events deliver high-quality engagement with a select group of existing and potential channel partners – A unique opportunity to build reseller communities.

Our bespoke events include:

- Comms Dealer in person roundtables
- Comms Dealer virtual roundtables
- Comms Dealer Educational Webinars

Our events are tailored to your marketing objectives to deliver...



Thought leadership content



Website & Social media traffic and lead gen



Brand exposure and networking



Research and industry insight



Analytics & measurement

Our bespoke events are built on tried and tested media serving a highly-engaged channel community including: Comms Dealer magazine (12.9k monthly readers), Comms Dealer website (7159 average visitors), Weekly e-newsletter (19,089 readers) and over 8,000 Linked-in followers.

Contact us to explore how you can grow your partner community with Comms Dealer bespoke events.

Simon Turton
sturton@bpl-business.com
07759 731 134

To advertise in **comms** dealer
contact The Sales Team on 07759 731134

Prime time for CCaaS

Trends and technology shifts in the contact centre space are creating a high growth opportunity for the channel, so it's prime time for resellers to consider CCaaS as a core specialism, argues Cirrus' Channel Director Daniel Lloyd.

Any examination of advancements in the contact centre market must compel resellers to consider offering CCaaS as a core specialism, according to Lloyd. He is convinced of this for a number of reasons, including the growing demand for scalable, flexible and efficient customer service solutions. "The shift towards digital customer interactions has accelerated," he stated. "By specialising in CCaaS resellers can position themselves as strategic partners for businesses looking to enhance their customer engagement strategies, opening up new revenue streams."

To support his point Lloyd referred to resellers that are developing a valuable niche in the CCaaS market by shifting from simply distributing technology to becoming strategic advisors. "This enables them to offer tailored CCaaS solutions that integrate with existing business systems, such as CRM and ERP, thereby creating a cohesive customer experience across all touchpoints," he added. By combining integrated solutions with analytics,

resellers can also provide insights that go beyond traditional service metrics, such as average handling time, along with predictive analytics that can forecast customer trends and sentiment. "Growth will also come from the integration of AI and advanced analytics to significantly enhance personalisation and operational efficiency," added Lloyd. "For instance, AI can be utilised to develop virtual assistants that not only respond to customer enquiries but also predict future questions and offer solutions proactively, based on the customer's history and patterns of interaction."

Analytics and AI are set to redefine the contact centre market by offering unprecedented customisation, efficiency and proactive service. These technologies are capable of parsing through massive amounts of data to discern trends and insights, leading to optimised customer interactions and the automation of routine inquiries. "I can see a future scenario where a contact centre's AI system identifies a product issue from real-time sentiment analysis of customer interactions across



Daniel Lloyd

The adoption of these technologies is the critical hurdle as companies must balance investment, training and integration into their existing systems

various channels," said Lloyd. "Before the issue escalates, the system automatically initiates a protocol to resolve the problem, notifies affected customers and deploys targeted communication to manage expectations and solutions, all without human intervention."

Seamless experience

Lloyd also noted that the expansion of omnichannel strategies is another area ripe for development, which ensures that customers receive a consistent and seamless experience whether they engage through social media, chat, email or voice

calls. But the challenge of adoption remains crucial. "Companies must not only implement these technologies but also ensure that their staff are well trained to use them," said Lloyd. "The contact centres that can successfully integrate AI and analytics into their operations, and adapt to the omnichannel approach, are likely to see the most robust growth and secure a competitive advantage."

The industry is in the early stages of deploying these technologies in a big way, pointed out Lloyd. But some contact centres are

beginning to deploy AI for basic tasks, such as chatbots for initial customer queries. However, the potential for AI is much greater. "We are only at the start of realising its full capabilities," observed Lloyd. "The future will likely see AI not replacing, but augmenting human agents by handling routine tasks, allowing them to focus on complex and high value interactions. The adoption of these technologies is the critical hurdle right now as companies must balance investment, training and integration into their existing systems."

The key for reseller business leaders to gain a competitive advantage in the contact centre market lies in offering tailored, innovative solutions that address the specific challenges and objectives of their clients, noted Lloyd. This involves staying ahead of the curve in terms of the technology trends discussed in this article, such as AI, machine learning and omnichannel communications, and understanding how these can be applied to enhance customer service. "Building expertise in integrating CCaaS solutions with other business systems to provide a unified customer view is also crucial," stated Lloyd.

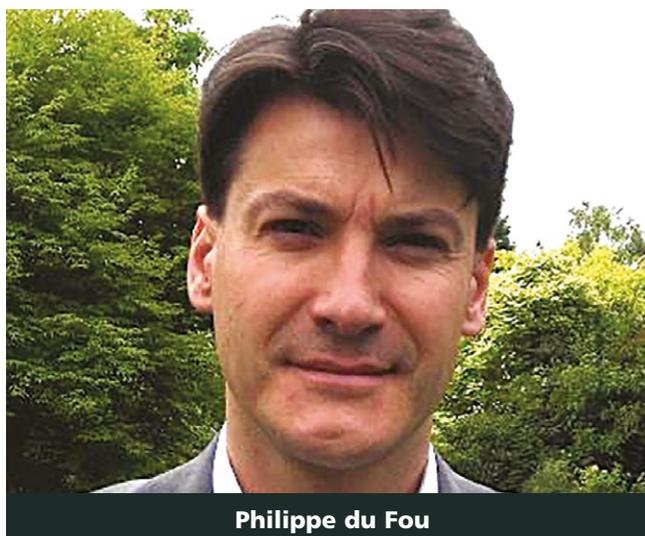
"Additionally, focusing on delivering exceptional customer support and service to their own clients will help resellers differentiate themselves in a crowded market. By positioning themselves as trusted advisors who can help businesses navigate the complexities of modern customer service, resellers can build long-term partnerships and drive significant growth." ■

Closing the UC-contact centre gap drives value

A yawning market gap with significant untapped revenue potential exists for resellers that combine unified comms and contact centre solutions, according to Intermedia's EMEA Sales Director Philippe du Fou. Here, he urges channel companies to embrace the latest technology in digital contact channels, all within reach of SMEs and easier to implement than ever, and lean on vendors for help to understand, scope out and provide contact centre solutions that deliver multiples of value.

Typically, over 20 per cent of Intermedia's business has a contact centre attached to its UC solution which means that circa 80 per cent are yet to catch on – but customer demand will soon change that. "The days are numbered for partners to be just UC or only CC as customers are requesting consolidated solutions," stated du Fou. "Partners that have added CC to the UC solution are seeing their revenue double or triple. By extending their skills to encompass contact centre partners create more strategic customer relationships making it more difficult to displace their offer. The solution is business critical rather than simple telephony that can be easily replaced with an alternative solution. Vendors can help partners develop these skills."

This means that partners can start with no contact centre skills and get involved with the technical implementation, including project planning, establishing call flows, CRM integration and technical training etc. "As long as partner representatives can



Philippe du Fou

understand the basic sales questions and conduct basic customer research to understand the different communication channels being used, solution architects at vendors such as Intermedia can help guide the contact centre discovery process," added du Fou. "The partner has an opportunity to learn on the job at every stage."

Omnichannel opportunity

du Fou is currently seeing a 'plethora' of voice-only or basic UC solutions that could be elevated by an omnichannel contact centre

proposition. "There is still a perception among many resellers and MSPs that contact centre is too big and complex for them," he added. "However, cloud contact centre makes this much simpler to understand, sell and install than ever before.

"We see many voice-only CC solutions being expanded to add webchat, SMS or WhatsApp support because digital channels are needed to address different audiences. While these are common in enterprise few SMBs have leveraged new

ways to communicate even though they are simple additions that add value."

But some SMEs are making the leap from hunt groups with a sprinkle of real-time into true voice CCaaS, observed du Fou. "In many cases this is being done alongside adding digital channels," he added. "AI chatbots are providing a better way to service customers without needing to use up valuable agent time. Customer experience and customer lifetime value are still the key metrics and any tool that can provide insights into this are important – transcription and sentiment analysis provide great insights into this. Meanwhile, automating quality evaluations alongside AI provides access to key information that would once have been lost in buckets of call recording storage never to be heard. Unified archiving across UC and CC, and across all different channels is also a growth area."

While du Fou believes a consolidated UC and contact centre solution will help

partners differentiate and take advantage of broader opportunities, he also noted that every customer's CC requirement is different according to industry verticals and across different customer sizes, which means that most have particular requirements. "Therefore, resellers should ensure they work with a vendor that can support contact centre opportunities and offer the whole digital experience such as SMS, WhatsApp, webchat, email as well as leverage AI for services such as sentiment analysis and call transcription," added du Fou.

He expects to see AI add more value in the near future through real-time sentiment analysis, along with intelligent agentless routing, evaluating interactions and redacting key information from transcriptions – all growth opportunities. "These technologies are more cost-effective for SMEs than ever," he added. "Don't hesitate to look for opportunities at the lower end. This is a growth area that's a lot easier to sell into and a great way to learn the trade on the job." ■



Are your teams Channel Champions

4th July 2024, Regents Park

www.channel-champions.com

HEADLINE SPONSOR

GIACOM

Realising the largely untapped

Partnering to provide tech solutions is the channel's raison d'être but one market opportunity in particular remains largely untapped despite vendor support being readily available. Moreover, we're talking about core comms territory and it's central to most organisations, but still the burgeoning CCaaS market requires pointing up. Here, we explore why this remains the case and highlight the cutting-edge contact centre solutions that are now within reach of UK SMEs and the channel.

The technology challenges facing many organisations today are becoming more complex, but the solutions to resolving some of those operational and customer engagement issues, as well as driving greater value, are trending towards consolidation and simplification, most prominently in the contact centre space where more channel support is on hand than ever before. Yet Andrew Jones, Chief Revenue Officer, TelXL, observes that resellers in the main still consider CCaaS to be a complex solution, and with off-the-shelf options available resellers are generally not making the most of the opportunity, he believes. "Embracing digital transformation must include modernisation of contact centre operations, and that does not have to be complex or expensive," commented Jones.

He also noted that there are circa 5.5 million SMEs in the UK, which make up 99.9 per cent of UK private sector businesses, and 5.47 million of these are classed as small (1 to 49 employees), while 35,900 are classified as medium-sized (50 to 249

employees). In terms of the customer service expectations of these SMEs, convenience, personalisation and a swift response are the top three priorities. "SMEs that rely on legacy technology with limited features will struggle to meet these needs," added Jones. "The focus on contact management and experience is leading to a growing need for MSPs and VARs to widen their portfolio and seek deeper support from vendors."

Growth opportunity

This represents an immediate growth opportunity for the channel, with medium term opportunities residing in automation and AI, believes Jones. He also cited statistics that indicate 52 per cent of customers would pay more for a speedy and efficient customer experience, while organisations that focus on an experience-driven strategy see one and half times more revenue growth year-on-year than those that do not. "The lack of a decent customer experience can be seen everywhere and we, as the collective channel, have a key part to play in addressing this issue," said Jones.

Another research finding highlighted by Jones suggests



Andrew Jones

The lack of a decent customer experience can be seen everywhere, and we, as the channel, have a key part to play in addressing this issue

that nearly half of customer organisations using a CCaaS solution will consider a change in provider this year, prompted by Covid-related contracts approaching a three year end point, arbitrary price increases, vendor lock-ins, maturing cloud technologies, stabilised working practices, cloud evolution and more

customers wanting to work strategically roadmap-wise with a vendor or VAR over a longer time period. "Organisations are increasingly looking at what they want to do as opposed to what they can do based on the tech available," commented Jones. "The vendor partner support

relationship must follow through and stay on the journey with the customer."

Integrated approach

He also underlined that an integrated approach to UC and CC software will form the bedrock of longer-term contracts cemented by a consultative strategy. "The next iteration of cloud contact centre technologies integrate unified communications, contact centre software and back-end systems to bring experts and contact centre agents, regardless of where they're located, together across every channel," he added. "Bridging the gap between UCaaS and CCaaS will enable resellers to more effectively address these markets."

But despite the channel opportunity, Jones says the UK SME market is suffering from a lack of support for large elements of CCaaS capability. "Contact centre technology is not just for large businesses," he emphasised. "SMEs can, and should, benefit from the latest customer interaction capabilities to stay competitive and retain customers. By investing in an agile CCaaS solution, instead of simply looking at



Are your teams Channel Champions

4th July 2024, Regents Park

www.channel-champions.com

HEADLINE SPONSOR
GIACOM

apped CCaaS opportunity



Iain Johnson

The successful resellers are combining expertise with a consultative approach, providing integration services and value added offerings

ways to cut costs SMEs can go from just surviving to thriving. But resellers may need to work a little harder to understand how CCaaS fits within their business and invest in vendor specific training and support."

Reseller and MSP business leaders would be wise to focus on specialisation and differentiation, believes Iain Johnson, Head of Solution Design, FourNet, and in the contact centre space that means doubling down on services such as consulting, customisation, implementation, training and ongoing support. "Successful resellers and MSPs driving value in the CCaaS market are combining specialised expertise with a consultative approach, offering integration services and value added offerings with a customer centric appeal,"

stated Johnson. "By providing comprehensive solutions and support throughout the entire customer lifecycle resellers can add significant value."

Customer demand

According to Johnson, when going out to tender 99 per cent of customers are seeking a CCaaS offering, so there is a big market for resellers and MSPs to address. "Customers are now looking at how cloud-based vendor solutions can help them innovate at pace, test and learn, and measure benefits far more easily," he added. "Customers want a scalable solution that offers flexibility and agility, advanced features and functionality, and which can be deployed quickly compared to traditional on-premise solutions. They also want a partner that can help them on the cloud migration journey."

This all points to big opportunities for ICT providers to enhance their offerings, deepen their expertise and better address the evolving needs of businesses in the contact centre space, which has traditionally been well served by resellers, particularly those with expertise in telecommunications and IT services. "But this market is constantly evolving with the introduction of new technologies such as AI and Machine Learning, bots, speech and text analytics, and sentiment analysis," commented Johnson.

"Resellers and MSPs that can stay abreast and consult with their customers around these advancements can differentiate and drive optimised customer and employee experiences."

In terms of future growth in the contact centre space... that will come from areas like Workforce Engagement Management (WEM) and delivering contextual and personalised customer journeys, says Johnson. "We are already seeing significant adoption and advances in automation, AI and analytics within the contact centre market," he added. "Many organisations have implemented AI-powered chatbots, speech analytics, sentiment analysis and predictive modelling to improve customer service and operational efficiency. However, there is still ample room for growth and innovation, particularly in leveraging AI and analytics to deliver more personalised, proactive and predictive customer experiences."

Customers are also likely to want line of business systems such as CRM solutions,

helpdesk software and analytical tools integrated, and resellers that can offer seamless integration services through their own resources or through partnership relations will deliver added value. "Managed services and support is also growing in importance, moving well beyond just selling license subscriptions," noted Johnson. "A reseller that can easily demonstrate their managed service offering including implementation, monitoring, maintenance and optimisation can add significant value to their customers."

Validating new market opportunities around CCaaS may be a challenge for resource strapped channel companies, but close working relationships between CCaaS providers and channel partners, supported by knowledge sharing initiatives, are essential to unlocking market potential,

delivering value and driving growth. "It is important to build a deep working relationship with vendors and partners to unlock market potential," added Johnson. "Knowledge sharing plays a crucial role and vendors have market insights that resellers and MSPs can tap into. Conversely, resellers can provide feedback to vendors to help shape go-to-market and verticalisation approaches, and ultimately product capability changes. Vendors will also work on co-marketing and demand generation."

Tony Martino, CEO, Tollring, also stressed that channel companies would be wise to develop close working relationships with their CCaaS provider to ensure they understand each element of an application and the product messaging to effectively sell a solution. "Likewise, **Continued on page 31**



Tony Martino

Channel providers have an opportunity to combine UCaaS and CCaaS solutions and differentiate

Measure. Analyse. Empower.

- ✓ Call Reporting
- ✓ Collaboration Analytics
- ✓ Call Recording

Wanstor builds on pillars

A proactivity-first approach to targeted solution building, innovation, CX and organisational culture will continue to ramp up as Wanstor's catalysts for business growth and differentiation, according to CEO Francesca Lukes.

London headquartered IT support and services firm Wanstor began life in 2002 with a mission to advance the principle of 'proactivity' and stand apart from what Lukes describes as 'traditional break-fix maintenance companies'. "We aimed to fix the things we knew would break or fail before they had an impact on end users," stated Lukes. "Our heritage is in the networking and infrastructure space – hence our name being a combination of WAN and storage. However, since then we have grown to become a trusted end to end technology partner with capabilities ranging from end user productivity and automation through to security, data and AI."

The proactive measures adopted by Wanstor have helped generate between 10-20 per cent year-on-year growth over the last few years and revenue is currently sitting at £22 million with circa 240 staff. "The past 12 months have been tougher from a macro-economic perspective but

we're planning to continue the growth trend this year," stated Lukes. "Another big pillar of our leadership strategy is organisational culture. We're working towards becoming recognised as an Outstanding Company to Work For – based on the Best Companies framework – which has involved a big focus on leadership and management approaches, wellbeing and CSR."

Wanstor's springboard for growth and development was largely enabled by a management buyout led by Lukes and COO Manmit Rai two years ago. The move repositioned Wanstor and redirected it more decisively towards the next generation of solutions aligned to specific target markets. The verticals of most importance to Wanstor are hospitality, retail, social enterprise, education and professional services.

"Our key customer base is across these industry groups along with ambitious organisations typically with 250-3,000 employees," added Lukes. "Our depth



Francesca Lukes

This is an exciting time to be in the technology sector. We are on the cusp of a revolution that could have an impact equivalent to, or greater than, the Internet and mobile phones

of specialism within these verticals resonates with customers and we have a strong reputation for providing tailored solutions, bringing experience from different customers around what works best in these target groups. Our proposition development comes from understanding client needs and innovating to develop specific solutions. We also bring our deep client and industry understanding to our partners and help

them tailor propositions to be relevant to actual use cases, while creating solutions that make an impact to our mid-market customer group."

Key investment

Wanstor recently made a big investment in its service management toolset, enabling it to equip its teams with the latest technology and take advantage of opportunities around AI. "This investment allows us to deliver services more

efficiently as well as improve service quality," added Lukes. "Proposition wise, we're investing in and developing our capabilities around security, data and AI and modern workplace. These are our focus areas for growth over the coming years. This is an exciting time to be in the technology sector. We are on the cusp of a revolution that could have an impact equivalent to, or greater than, the Internet and mobile phones.



Are your teams Channel Champions

4th July 2024, Regents Park

www.channel-champions.com

HEADLINE SPONSOR
GIACOM.

of proactivity



She began her career as a technology consultant for Accenture responsible for driving innovation and digital transformation projects into large multi-national organisations. During this time she gained experience in developing and implementing technology strategies for the C-suite and has always been a proactive early adopter of tech and deploying digital tools to change the game in business processes and connecting with customers. "But I am not a techie myself, so I come at challenges from a business and customer experience perspective which I think the tech sector needs to see more of," stated Lukes.

She also noted that being female in the IT and comms industry has been both challenging and rewarding. "I have faced some stereotypes and biases, but I have also found mentors who supported my growth and development," commented Lukes. "Being a woman has helped me to be more empathetic, resilient and creative as a leader. However, I also struggle with imposter syndrome sometimes, especially when I compare myself to other leaders who have different styles or backgrounds. I have learned to embrace my own strengths and values and to recognise the diversity of leadership that exists in this field."

Lukes also pointed out that one of the main challenges facing women in business is that by the time they reach senior leadership positions they are often having to make decisions about balancing work and family life. "The lack of flexible and affordable childcare options leads to women taking

Just a minute with Francesca Lukes...

What talent do you wish you had? My brother and sister are both musically gifted and often perform and write music together. To share that talent with them would bring me a lot of joy – but no such luck!

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? I have a passion for design (experience and service design, UI and interiors) and would love to hone my skills and explore that more at some point in the future.

Best advice you have been given: Lean into challenges and opportunities – and be brave.

How do you relax when not working? Over the last couple of years my great interest has been rowing, but recently I made a transition over to cycling and signed up for a big sportive in Mallorca in April which I am both dreading and excited about.

What could you not do without in your job? Our talented and diverse team of people passionate about customers, tech and service.

longer career breaks, working part-time or opting out of the labour market altogether," commented Lukes. "This not only affects their earnings and pensions, but also their skills, confidence and opportunities. Improving the options that families have around shared parental leave and childcare would give people more choice and flexibility in how they arrange their childcare, and reduce the pressure and stigma that women face as the primary caregivers. This would benefit employees, business and the wider economy, as well as helping to drive greater gender diversity across more senior positions." ■

Continued from page 29

CCaaS providers require input from the channel in terms of where they are having the most success, what the customer profiles look like and the benefits being gained," stated Martino.

"This requires the channel to be less protective of their customer case studies so that providers can understand where they fit into the grand scheme of a solution. Sharing knowledge and enabling information to flow going back and forth will stimulate new creative ways to use the technology."

This flow of information is important because Martino says there is a huge untapped market in informal contact centres where an organisation receives inbound customer calls across multiple departments and calls are transferred from customer-facing teams to other departments. "Channel providers have an opportunity to combine UCaaS and CCaaS solutions and differentiate by helping users to understand how customer-facing teams are performing," he said.

"And with the growth in Microsoft Teams, the informal contact centre becomes increasingly relevant since organisations no longer need sophisticated tools to improve the management of their customer-facing teams. Options are now accessible to every size of organisation, even the smallest enterprise. In addition, the consolidation of the technologies where users are mixing desktop phone systems with Microsoft Phone capabilities means there is an opportunity to bring clarity to customer service levels with analytics and insights across these different technologies."

A big technology area in the contact centre space is of course analytics, delivering business insights to the right people at the right time. Tollring's focus

has been to take the core features available in large and complex call centre solutions and make them accessible to smaller teams, thereby widening the addressable market for channel partners. "The addition of AI makes this data more accessible, more useful and even more insightful," stated Martino. "We can already show that AI-based analytics such as in call recording can have a substantial impact and while it is still early days, the progress of AI over the year ahead will be significant."

AI will also have a big impact across the large contact centre market which is still predominantly on-premise and heavily bespoke, believes Martino. "The shift away from these tried and tested solutions will be difficult and many are still committed to their legacy services. As a result, they are missing out on lots of capabilities that are already out-of-the-box. It is going to be a major game changer in the market and the growth in AI technologies will force people to reconsider their contact centre strategies."

Ultimately, the key to gaining a competitive advantage is for resellers to ensure they are aligned with their CCaaS providers, willing to share knowledge and keep up with the technologies. "Most importantly, the channel provider needs to have both the skills and the willingness to focus on this market," added Martino.

"Resellers will succeed by identifying their target audience, understanding the needs of their audience and then cookie cutting the service as much as possible for a particular vertical or market segment, otherwise it will be too complex to integrate with multiple different systems. The provider can then specialise and become expert in a flavour of CCaaS together with a strong upsell story." ■

"It's still early days for AI, but with the likes of Microsoft's Copilot starting to become embedded within the tools we use day to day it is likely to have huge repercussions for the way we and businesses work. In this context, the considerations for Wanstor are how to embed this capability into our internal operations, how we help customers to see the full benefit of adopting these tools, and how we ensure that we protect and secure client data through this process. I am expecting a lot of change over the next three to five years."

What is certain to remain unchanged is Lukes' passion for technology development and harnessing innovation to drive value for customers.

B Corp Redsquid set to pu

Redsquid is aiming to create a common ESG purpose across the UK channel following its certification last month as a B Corporation, marking not only its commitment to social and environmental responsibility but also its wider goal to help more channel businesses repurpose their strategy as a force for good, says Camilla Karm, Director of Sales & Marketing, who champions and leads the Herts-based MSP's B Corp agenda.

With a clear view of Redsquid's purpose and values, and a strong personal interest in ESG, Karm wasted little time in coordinating Redsquid's carbon neutral journey and subsequent B Corp certification process, liaising with B Lab (the non-profit organisation that certifies B Corps). Here, she shares insights into how Redsquid developed its B Corp strategy, how the movement is likely to evolve in the channel, and how the MSP's experience can help like-minded channel firms become part of what is shaping up to be a thriving inter-channel community of agenda setting organisations.

What does being a B Corp say about Redsquid as an organisation?

B Corp certification shows that Redsquid cares about more than just profit. We care about our people, our planet and our purpose. We want to use our business as a force for good and create positive change in the world. Being a B Corp will also help us to attract and retain the best talent, win more customers who share our values, and improve our reputation and credibility in the market. We wanted to join a global network of like-minded



Becoming a B Corp, or following similar ESG practices, is a moral imperative for any business that wants to strive and thrive in the 21st century

businesses that are leading the way in sustainability and social responsibility. Our industry has too often been overlooked when the conversation falls on

environmental accountability, but it is imperative that the channel comes together and embraces the responsibility we have towards becoming more sustainable.

When did you decide to become certified as a B Corp?

For eight years we have been heavily invested in charity fundraising and

working closely with charitable organisations in our community. Five years ago we formed an official charity committee to drive our efforts. At the same time we wanted to expand into the environmental side and became carbon neutral in 2020, and continue to reduce our emissions on a yearly basis. But we wanted to do more, have a bigger impact, lead the industry and make sure our purpose is in line with profits. Then our eyes fell on the B Corp movement which has values that resonate with our own, and we have been working on achieving the certification during the last few years.

What did B Corp accreditation require?

We already had a lot of practices and policies in place that aligned with the B Corp standards, such as our environmental management system, employee engagement programme and community involvement. We also saw an opportunity to improve our performance and impact in other areas such as governance, diversity and local impact. To become a certified B Corp, Redsquid went through a thorough evaluation process to ensure we meet high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency

ush channel's ESG agenda

and accountability. The accreditation is built on a points system (with a minimum of 80 points out of 200 to qualify as a B Corp) across five impact areas to become certified – governance, workers, community, environment and customers. Before we started making real changes we happily saw we already had a score of 57.5 which gave us a good starting point. Having gone through the process we are proud to say we ended on 93.6 points in total for our first certification.

How long did it take to prepare for B Corp certification?

It took us about two years to prepare, from the time we started the online questionnaire to the time we received the certification. We involved our key stakeholders, such as employees, customers and suppliers in the process. And did not use an external sustainability consultant as we felt that we had enough internal expertise and resources to complete the assessment. However, we did use the online tools and resources provided by B Lab and other B Corps to help us prepare and improve our score.

The preparations involved collecting and analysing various data and documents, such as our financial statements, our employee surveys, our customer testimonials, our supplier contracts, our environmental reports, and our social impact reports. We also had to write and update some policies and procedures, such as our code of ethics, our diversity and inclusion policy, and our stakeholder engagement policy. We worked out

where we are and where we wanted to improve, not by comparing our score with the average score of our industry and size, but by setting a new standard of what an MSP can be.

How is the B Corp assessment evaluated?

Following the assessment, you go through the evaluation queue where B Lab UK conducts an initial

B Corp status will have an impact on our relationships as we will measure and evaluate the partners we work with based on their practices

'health check' of the B Impact Assessment. This includes uploading company information, P&L statements and amending legal documents on Companies House. Throughout this process the B Corp analyst verified Redsquid's structure, eligibility and impact models. Next is the verification stage where you have to submit documentation for all claims you have given throughout the process. B Lab Global will then independently assess practices, policies and general behaviour.

How challenging was the process of submitting for B Corp?

The process was challenging but rewarding. It required a lot of time and effort to gather the evidence and data needed to support our answers, and to verify and validate our claims. It also required a lot of honesty and

transparency as we had to acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses, and identify areas for improvement. It was not a tick-box exercise, but a rigorous and holistic evaluation of our impact and performance. It was also a great learning opportunity as we discovered new ways of doing business better, and new best practices and benchmarks to follow. We were very aware that we

wanted the whole process to be done right – not just as fast as possible. Therefore amendments have been made in line with our stakeholders and aligned with budget to ensure

long-term sustainability of the initiatives we have introduced. We now have a set line for ESG development as a part of our yearly budgets.

What did you learn that was most valuable?

That being a B Corp is not a destination, but a journey. It is not a one-off certification, but a continuous improvement process. It is not a static standard, but a dynamic and evolving one. We learned that we need to keep measuring and monitoring our impact and performance and keep setting and achieving new goals and targets. We learned that we need to keep engaging and communicating with our stakeholders and keep listening and responding to their needs and expectations. We learned that we need to keep innovating and collaborating with other B Corps and keep learning and sharing best practices.

To what extent is becoming a B Corp a moral imperative?

Becoming a B Corp, or following similar ESG practices, is a moral imperative for any business that wants to strive and thrive in the 21st century. The world

is facing unprecedented social and environmental challenges, such as climate change, inequality, poverty and human rights violations. These challenges pose significant risks and opportunities for businesses and require a new way of thinking and acting. With 85 per cent of GHG emissions coming from UK businesses, organisations can no longer afford to ignore or externalise their impact on society and nature but need to embrace and internalise it. Businesses can no longer focus only on maximising shareholder value, they need to balance it with stakeholder value. Differentiation can't continue to be just about price, quality and specialism, but also about purpose and impact.

Do you foresee the rise of a B Corp community in the channel that will prefer to work only with like-minded businesses?

We do expect the emergence of a B Corp community in the channel – we're already part

Continued on page 34



Team Redsquid celebrates B Corp certification

Virgin updates UK channel on strategic plans

Virgin Media Business Wholesale has reaffirmed its commitment to significantly build on channel investment programmes this year and pointed up the imminent launch of a new future-proofed metro network designed to meet growing demand for 10G services. "The launch removes the requirement for bespoke design and build making it quicker, easier and cost-effective to deliver 10G," commented John Chester, Director of Wholesale Fixed, Virgin Media O2 Business.

This was among a number of developments revealed at the company's Partner Connect event, held on 8th February at the County Hall in London. The conference reflected how Virgin Media Business Wholesale began pivoting its focus towards backhaul last year and provided a platform for Virgin Media O2 CEO Lutz Schüler to shed light on the company's strategic pathway ahead as it relates to partners.

Also under the spotlight was the optical core platform launched in 2023 and how the upgrade will progress across more sites throughout this year. Virgin Media Business Wholesale says the Ciena solution offers a 'robust new backhaul network' for partners looking for higher bandwidths across the country.



John Chester

The partner event also showcased more of Virgin Media O2's strategic priorities this year, including additional investment into 5G and FTTP with plans to expand its network to five million more premises through Nexfibre, the joint venture between Liberty Global, Telefónica and Infravia.

Alongside an evolution of 2023's strategy, expanding network reach and capabilities, boosting customer experience is also

a key focus area with the company aiming to deliver an experience characterised by proactive communication, open dialogue and seamless collaboration. Chester commented: "Partner Connect was an opportunity to kick off the year with our wholesale partners and show our gratitude for their business in 2023. It was an opportune moment to reflect on some of the improvements we made across our business last year."

Continued from page 33
of it and proud to see that other partners and channel businesses are following the same path. B Corp status will have an impact on our relationships as we will measure and evaluate the partners we work with based on their practices. We are keen to work with more B Corps and this will be a key part of future decision making. By working together we can create a more sustainable and responsible channel ecosystem that benefits not only ourselves, but also our customers, suppliers, employees and our communities.

Have you seen evidence of customers wanting to work with B Corps only, or other proven sustainable businesses?

Sustainability is taking up a bigger part of the conversations we have with customers and prospects. We already have a number of customers who have been B Corps for a while and we are looking forward to becoming a part of their growing communities and see how we can make an even bigger difference for them. We have also seen organisations wanting to work with B Corps, or proven sustainable businesses, in the private sector where ESG is increasingly becoming a source of competitive advantage and customer loyalty. This is now a core part of the majority of the tenders we go through. Since becoming carbon neutral we have embarked on new conversations with our customers and have some of them starting their own journeys towards becoming more sustainable.

Ultimately, what will drive the future of ethical business in the channel?

Three main factors – customer demand, employee engagement and regulatory pressure. Customers will demand more transparency and accountability from their

suppliers and will prefer to work with businesses that align with their values and goals. Employees will seek more meaning and fulfilment from their work, and will choose to work for businesses that respect and empower them. Regulators will enforce more stringent and comprehensive standards and laws, and will penalise businesses that fail to comply or perform. To do better at CSR, the ICT industry and channel needs to adopt a more proactive and strategic approach, and integrate CSR into its core business strategy and operations ending in clear and ambitious ESG targets. The industry also needs to collaborate with other stakeholders and leverage its technology and innovation to address ESG challenges.

What advice do you give to MSPs looking to achieve B Corp status?

Go for it. It is a worthwhile and rewarding journey that will help you understand your business and its purpose better than ever before, while improving your organisation and your impact. Complete the initial B Corp assessment, set targets for improvement and identify areas that resonate with you most. You don't need to be perfect, but you do need to be ambitious and committed.

Most organisations will have a star player with a personal ambition to become greener and tonnes of good ideas on where and how to start. Also, fully engage and involve your stakeholders and reach out to other companies that have been through the process. We are more than happy to share our knowledge, where the quick wins are and where you need to delegate a budget. By coming together we can all make a difference, and we hope 2024 will be the year where we can take the conversation to the next level and show how innovative our industry can really be.



Are your teams Channel Champions

4th July 2024, Regents Park

www.channel-champions.com

HEADLINE SPONSOR



neat.

Meet, create and collaborate better.

Elegant design. Easy to install. Simple to use.

Neat Bar and Neat Bar Pro allow your customers to focus on what matters, People. They focus on whoever's talking and reveal the expressions of others, enabling remote participants to engage in more natural, free-flowing conversation.



nimans.net

The 'go to' place for Neat.

nimans
a Midwich Group company

Founding members extol the

Corporate social responsibility plays a crucial role in how brands are perceived by customers and 32 companies in our industry have now recognised the power The Big Goal initiative can provide.

A nationwide five-a-side tournament, culminating in a final's day at St George's Park – the home of England football – coupled with individual sponsorship of Street Soccer Foundation academies brings a doubled edged sword of opportunities for founding members.

With over 40 company teams set to play in the tournament, with regional games being played at the community training grounds of Brentford FC, Nottingham Forest FC and Sunderland AFC this spring, a spectacular team bonding programme is gaining momentum.

Moreover, the supporting of academies in sponsors' local areas, helping disadvantaged young people gain direction in their lives through the power of football, represents a priceless CSR opportunity.

In this month's Kaleidoscope, some of The Big Goal Founding members explain why they have lined up alongside headline sponsor Giacom to support this unique initiative and encourage others to get involved.



IAN WALKER
COMPANY DIRECTOR
FIFTEEN GROUP

Football is popular in our business and in our city, with Port Vale and Stoke City being our local teams. Having our company team in a national industry football tournament is exciting for team building and this is a great vehicle to support and assist young people who are struggling and may be homeless to get into a regular, positive habits through the 10-week Street Soccer Academy programme. We're seeing more and more people on our streets which is a major problem within Stoke-on-Trent, so it made total sense to support this. I'm looking forward to witnessing how we will make a real contribution to individuals in our local community and seeing Fifteen Group lift the trophy!



SAM WELLER
HEAD OF WHOLESALE
SKY BUSINESS

As a founding member of The Big Goal initiative, we're helping to tackle youth homelessness across the UK by supporting the Street Soccer Foundation. Sky is committed to supporting the communities where our customers and employees live and work. Our teams are excited to participate in this programme, we want to give people access to the skills, support and mentoring they need to succeed.



ELLIE ALLSEYBROOK
BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT
DIRECTOR
INFORM BILLING

I have a background in the social housing sector and am a long-time Derby County and England supporter, so the Big Goal and its work to tackle youth homelessness holds a special place in my heart. This is a powerful charitable initiative that our wider team is keen to embrace, whilst coming together and sharing the experience with fellow channel businesses across the industry. We are looking forward to playing a part in supporting hundreds of young people in gaining valuable skills and in turn positively changing their lives. Participating in The Big Goal not only promises to be a fantastic team-building experience, but also a meaningful opportunity to contribute to the impactful work of Street Soccer Academies.



SOHIN RAIATHATHA
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER
REDSQUID

Redsquid has a strong commitment to supporting charitable initiatives, particularly those that contribute to the well-being of the community. The Big Goal will offer a new and unique opportunity for Redsquid's workforce to make a direct difference to the lives of disadvantaged young people in our areas of operation. We aim to enhance the Street Soccer Academy experience by providing support, encouragement and resources to aid the community, plus personal growth and important life skills for participants. We are most looking forward to the sense of camaraderie and community spirit during The Big Goal. It's a fantastic opportunity to bring people together, have some fun, and contribute to a meaningful cause through the joy of playing football.



BRETT KING
ACCOUNT
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER
EXCALIBUR
COMMUNICATIONS

Hearing the passion Keith Mabbutt, the Street Soccer Foundation's Chief Executive Officer, has for helping young people via The Big Goal initiative was incredibly infectious and motivated us to sign up. We run a large charity event each year. A couple of our favourites have been the Three Peaks Challenge, when 16 of us smashed all three peaks in 24 hours, and a team of eight completed The Royal British Legion's Pedal to Paris – a super hard slog over four days on bikes. In both scenarios, we managed to raise a lot of money and made a big difference to a lot of people. Through The Big Goal, we are looking forward to getting to know other people and companies and having fun playing footy together!

Comprehensive solutions for managing the heart of your business operations

A powerful SaaS business management software designed to help optimise your business at every step, from sales enquiry to customer billing.

 Workflow management

 Billing solutions

 Quality Assurance

The virtues of The Big Goal



MARK BEARDSLEY
SALES DIRECTOR
NT VOICE AND DATA

The staff at NT Voice and Data enjoy being involved in team events that support worthwhile causes. The experiences of some of the young people who have been through the academies was inspiring the hear and if our efforts in supporting The Big Goal can help just one more young person to get their life on track, it's worth the effort. In the past, NT Voice and Data has supported charities through collectively walking and running the distance from Lands End to John O'Groats and back over the course of a month for Motor Neurone Disease Association. During The Big Goal process, we're looking forward to meeting some great people and, of course, playing in the football tournament!



STEFFAN DANCY
GROUP MANAGING
DIRECTOR
RYDAL GROUP

We joined The Big Goal to actively contribute to tackling youth homelessness, a pressing issue in the UK. Our passion for social responsibility and belief in the power of collective action drives us to be a part of this significant initiative. By joining forces with others in our sector, we aim to leverage our resources and influence for a greater impact. Importantly, we aim to provide both financial support and technological expertise to enhance experiences at the Street Soccer Academies. Our goal is to help create engaging, effective training and educational environments for the participants, fostering both their soccer skills and personal development. The prospect of seeing real, positive change in our communities is truly motivating for our entire team.



DAVE MCGINN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER
DAISY
COMMUNICATIONS

We're always looking to support our staff and local communities, so The Big Goal is a great opportunity to do both. We hope we can support young participants in their journey off the streets, facilitate education in important life skills, encourage a healthy lifestyle and a better mindset. There's nothing like the camaraderie of teams competing together in sport, so this will provide an excellent foundation for them to feel safe and supported in their growth and development. We love to see talent rewarded, so the real excitement will be seeing the change in these young adults, knowing we've supported that. Ultimately, being able to offer opportunities to these individuals and welcome them to Daisy will be the biggest win.



ROB STEVENS
OPERATIONS
DIRECTOR
JOLA

When we first heard about The Big Goal, it was the word football that caught my attention as I have played football all my life and I also have two children who play. The launch day gave me the information on how football can be used to help vulnerable, often homeless, young people to learn new life skills. There is a unique opportunity to come together to make a real impact in terms of helping to fund an Academy and help The Street Soccer Foundation offer more courses, in more areas, to help even more people. Jola has previously supported local food bank charities and The Big Goal will offer another unique opportunity to support people in our local area.



BARNEY TAYLOR
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER
FOCUS GROUP

The Big Goal has presented us with a game-changing opportunity to collaborate with industry partners, friends and colleagues to raise awareness of youth homelessness in the UK. We believe by harnessing the universal spirit of football, we can transform adversity into fresh prospects for young people, foster a sense of belonging and kickstart a future where every goal scored becomes a step closer to ending homelessness. Our team members are keen to use their own experiences to motivate and support the development of social skills, self-awareness, resilience, and teamwork, together with providing job-hunting advice, interview tips and career path insights. We're also looking forward to having some fun on the pitch and will of course be bringing our competitive spirit!



ALEXANDRA STEPHENSON
HEAD OF
COMMUNICATIONS
WAVENET

We signed up to The Big Goal because we wanted to support our communities, as well as companies from our own industry. Hopefully our participation and contribution, as well as the potential of young people later enrolling in the Wavenet apprenticeship programme, will make a difference to the Street Soccer Academy participants. Wavenet has recently been supporting the Trussell Trust as its charity of the year, by organising various fundraising activities across its offices. We are excited for Wavenet colleagues to have the opportunity to work together across our different offices, whilst also supporting our local communities and having fun by participating in The Big Goal tournament.

anvil
anvilhub.com
0800 048 4848

Keep these dates free!

We've got 2024 all sewn up with a fantastic programme of unique ICT Channel and Fibre events proven to bring communities together to celebrate success, build relationships and forge new industry connections...



UK FIBRE AWARDS
6th June 2024
London Marriott
Grosvenor Square



Margin
20th June 2024
Forest of Arden
Midlands



CHANNEL CHAMPIONS
4th July 2024
Regents Park
London



comms national awards
26th September 2024
Park Plaza
Westminster



commsvision
THE GLENEAGLES HOTEL
6th - 8th November 2024
The Gleneagles Hotel
Scotland

For full details of our awards and industry networking events visit.



Murphy's return



Miriam Murphy

TD SYNnex has pulled in former NTT CEO for Europe Miriam Murphy as European President responsible for leading the company's 7,000-strong European workforce. She returns to TD SYNnex following a two year spell at NTT where she held responsibility for the strategy and P&L for 14 countries. Prior to this, she served at TD SYNnex for more than 20 years in various leadership roles including SVP, Advanced and Specialised Solutions, Europe, and regional leader for Northern Europe among others.

"We already know about Miriam's leadership attributes," stated COO Patrick Zammit. "She brings a people-first mentality combined with business acumen, an extensive network of contacts at vendors and customers, and a commitment to delivering excellence to all our stakeholders. She returns reinforced by experiences outside the company and brings fresh perspectives on end market and customer requirements, especially in the strategic area of services."

Murphy is a prominent advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion in the IT industry. During her previous stint at TD SYNnex she played a key role in helping to establish and advance the company's inclusion programmes in Europe, supporting the creation of co-worker resource groups covering topics such as gender equity, disability and LGBTQ issues.

Also on the move...

CYBERSECURITY firm Bridewell has appointed Ben Vaughan as Chief Commercial Officer. He brings experience in Critical National Infrastructure, defence, aerospace and enterprise. He also headed up Thales' north American cyber defence solutions business and in western Europe led Airbus' cybersecurity marketing function.



Ben Vaughan

Co-CEO Anthony Young commented: "Ben's background in cybersecurity and his track record in commercial expansion are what Bridewell needs for our next phase of growth. His commercial experience on an international scale enhances our ability to serve a wider client base and address the complex cybersecurity challenges facing our customers."

SIMON Skellon has been appointed SVP and Head of International Region at Mitel covering EMEA (excluding DACH). He brings over 25 years experience in the business comms industry with a particular focus on the unified comms market, spending 18-plus years in various sales leadership roles at Mitel before joining Atos Unify where he was responsible for the company's strategy across over 50 markets.

FORMER Logicalis long-termer Patrick Jordan has joined Dublin-based Auxilion as Chief Operating Officer. He previously held a number of leadership positions within Logicalis in Ireland and progressed to leading a global business unit for the group across 25 countries. Most recently he helped restructure and run Logicalis' UK&I business. Auxilion founder and CEO Philip Maguire stated: "We hope to make 2024 a standout year and welcoming Patrick to the team is a part of those ambitions. It also comes as more businesses are leveraging digital solutions and partnering with experienced managed service providers to grow their enterprises and drive value."



Patrick Jordan

FIRSTCOM Europe has added 25 years of industry experience with the appointment of Mark Boden as Sales & Commercial Director. His career to date includes stints at Gamma, Daisy and Azzurri Communications. Firstcom Europe CEO Christian Bleakley stated: "I've known Mark professionally and personally for many years and long held the desire to bring his expertise to the business. When this role presented itself there was no hesitation or alternative for Firstcom. We literally jumped at the chance to appoint Mark."

To advertise in **comms dealer** contact The Sales Team on 07759 731134

Field Sales Executive

Are you a dynamic individual with a passion for sales and building strong client relationships? Do you thrive in a fast-paced environment where no two days are the same? If so, we have the perfect opportunity for you! We are seeking a proactive and results-driven Field Sales Executive to join our growing team. As a Field Sales Executive, you will play a pivotal role in driving business growth and expanding our client base.

Job Description:

As a Field Sales Executive, you will be responsible for driving sales growth and expanding our client base through proactive prospecting, relationship-building, and effective sales strategies. This dynamic role will require you to work both independently and collaboratively with our sales team to achieve individual and company sales targets.

The Role:

- Calling new prospects and developing new opportunities: Utilise your excellent communication skills to engage with potential clients and uncover new business opportunities
- Scheduling and attending meetings with decision-makers: Build rapport with key stakeholders and influencers, showcasing our products/services and negotiating deals that meet their needs.
- Maintaining clear records on company CRM: Keep accurate records of client interactions and sales activities, ensuring seamless communication between teams.
- Creating detailed proposal documents: Tailor proposals to address client requirements and present compelling solutions that drive sale
- Meeting or exceeding personal sales targets: Set ambitious goals for yourself and work tirelessly to achieve them, driving both business growth and enhancing our reputation in the market.

- Collaborating with various departments: Work closely with internal teams to ensure the smooth delivery of projects and installations, providing exceptional customer service every step of the way.
- Hybrid Role: Enjoy the flexibility of working from the office, in the field, and remotely, adapting to the demands of the job and maximizing productivity.
- Self-generating leads: While leads will be provided, we expect you to proactively seek out new opportunities, leveraging your network and creativity to drive sales success.

Qualifications and Skills:

- Proven track record of success in field sales or a similar role, preferably in Telecoms.
- Excellent communication, negotiation, and interpersonal skills.
- Strong ability to understand client needs and present compelling solutions.
- Self-motivated with a results-driven mindset and a proactive approach to sales.
- Proficiency in CRM software and Microsoft Office Suite.
- Valid driver's license and willingness to travel as needed.
- Bachelor's degree in Business, Marketing, or a related field (preferred).

What We Offer:

- Competitive Salary: Earn £40,000 - £45,000 per annum, plus a car allowance and commission.
- Uncapped Commission: With an OTE of £80,000 in the first year, your hard work and dedication will be rewarded generously.
- Career Progression: After a successful probation period, your salary will increase by upto £5,000 with ample opportunities for advancement within our organization. If you're ready to take your sales career to new heights and make a significant impact within a dynamic team, apply now and join us on this exciting journey!

Application Process:

To apply for the position of Field Sales Executive at Overline, please submit your CV and a cover letter outlining your relevant experience and why you are the ideal candidate for this role to: Operations@overline.com.

We look forward to receiving your application and considering you for this exciting opportunity to join our team!



Channel Forecast Session: Taking women in tech to the next level

How to make the tech sector more inclusive for women has long been a key focus in Comms Dealer's editorial agenda. In this insight session we explore the programmes and initiatives that are bringing the greatest results and how best to create a pipeline of leadership potential drawn from a more diverse and fully supported talent pool.

The session will be recorded in April 2024 with a panel of industry representatives setting the agenda and looking at where we are on the D&I journey. The session will be covered in a follow-up editorial session in the May issue of Comms Dealer, with a series of 'video shorts' addressing the essential questions, shared extensively on social media.

Join the debate!

To participate in this Channel Forecast session, contact **Heather Miles** on **07955 313 700** or hmiles@bpl-business.com for full details.

comms | Forecast
dealer | Sessions



onecom
P A R T N E R S

Unlock the potential of Mobile

At Onecom Partners, we're committed to supporting Partners every step of the way, offering tailored solutions and expert guidance to help you boost your margins from mobile.

Contact us today to book a free Mobile audit, designed to help you build and grow your Mobile proposition.



0800 068 5939



hello@onecompartners.co.uk