



Former property lawyer's more at home in tech sector p22

Exclusive: Sir Charles Dunstone on what makes him tick p30



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Improved Avaya's restructuring plan and given it 11 before the end of the year.

and \$300m in cash because reduced interest payments pension obligations.

This is double our current spending, so we have an opportunity to invest in our UC collaboration portfolio, not mention the new sales and services capabilities and acquisitions that this freedom of investment opens the door to."

MacRae also noted that Avaya's operations are more aligned with a renewed focus on R&D and sales. "Our technology platforms are stron-

ger and we've opened them up to make it simpler for our partners and customers to adopt and integrate," he added.

"Avaya UK has continued quarter-on-quarter growth. We will work alongside the rest of the global team to make changes for the future and maintain that strong growth.

"We've been planning and preparing for 10 months, and we're ready to emerge as a new and stronger company, one that is better positioned for long-term success." **Cont' on page 3**

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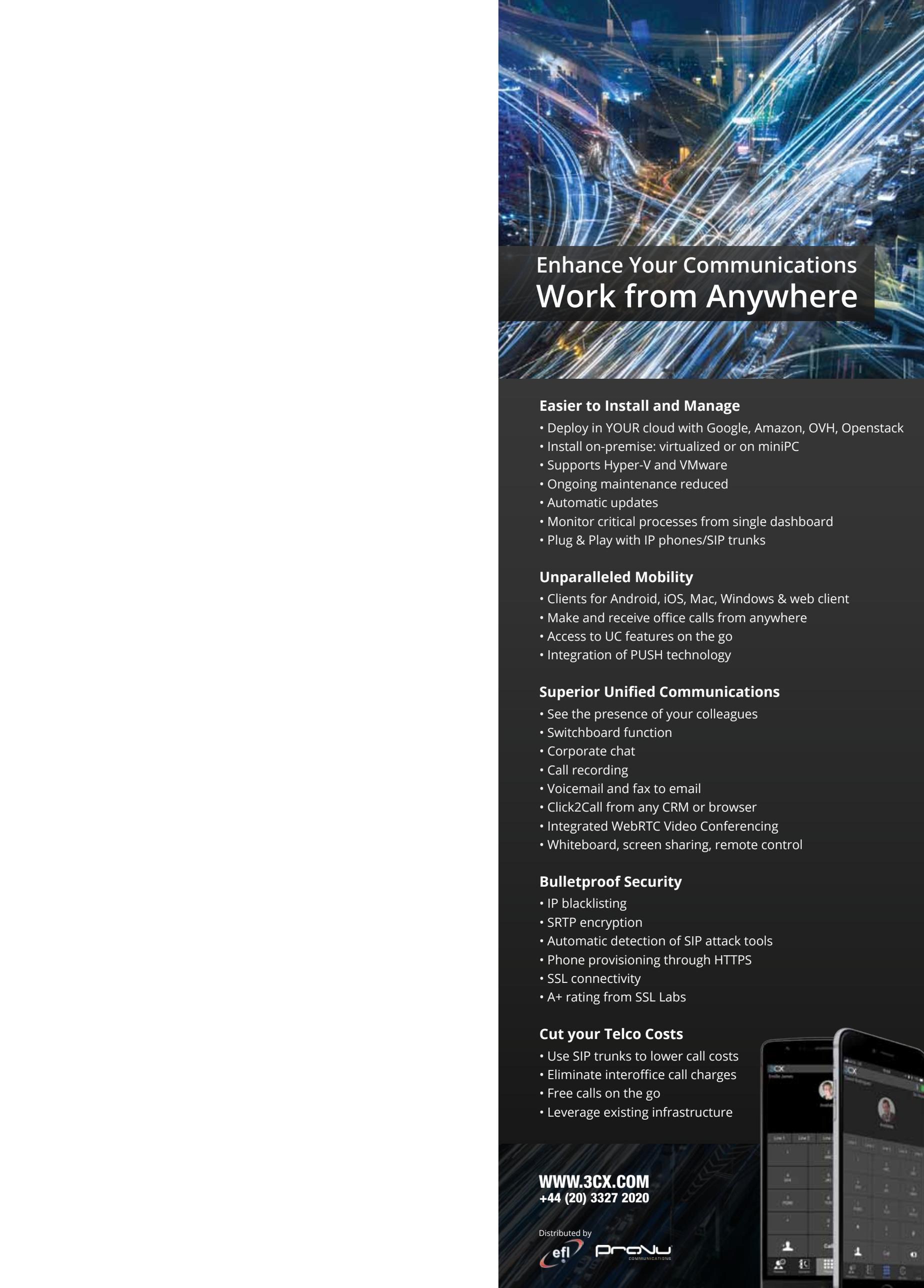
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This month's movers and shakers



New chapter for emerging Avaya

A US bankruptcy court has approved Avaya's restructuring plan and given it the green light to exit Chapter 11 before the end of the year.

SPECIAL REPORT

Less than a year after filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy Avaya expects to emerge with circa \$2.925bn of funded debt and a \$300m senior secured asset-based lending facility, significantly less than the \$6bn debt on its balance sheet prior to the financial restructuring.

"The shackles are well and truly off," commented Avaya's UK MD Ioan MacRae (pictured). "We're coming out of chapter 11 with a stronger cash

flow and \$300m in cash because of reduced interest payments and pension obligations.

"This is double our current R&D spending, so we have an opportunity to invest in our UC and collaboration portfolio, not to mention the new sales and services capabilities and acquisitions that this freedom of investment opens the door to."

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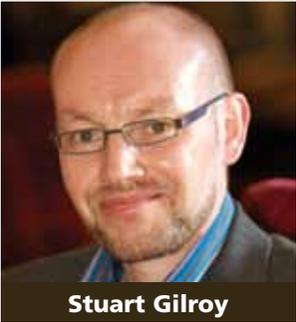
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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

WHATEVER the colour of your badge, it's great to see Avaya back on the pitch after 'injury' and take to the comms playing field fitter and more determined than ever. According to Avaya's leaders – it's 'game on' – and the vendor's worldwide standard bearing followers have rallied to

the flag, which for many proponents remained fluttering in the channel wind throughout the Chapter 11 hiccup – or should we say storm in a tea cup.

Avaya filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy less than a year ago and at the time its world caved in according to a significant portion of the hot headed media speculators and quick-to-condemnners over-keen on promoting their hyped headline rather than offer a sober view of the most predictable of outcomes. It is ironic that those who wear the ill-fitting toe capped boots, who are quick to kick anything when it's down, now hear the marching boots of a reinvigorated industry giant. It raises questions about veracity and trust in the media.

We also welcomed another industry big hitter last month, this time at Comms Vision where Sir Charles Dunstone, Executive Chairman for TalkTalk Group, took part in an exclusive interview that revealed what really drives him, which in part reflects the determination shown by Avaya – 'relentlessly go after what you set out to do', he said (see page 30 for the full interview).

That's precisely what Helen Freestone, Director of UK Partnerships & Alliances at Vodafone, did when she left a career in law to follow her tech sector dream (page 22). Jola's Managing Director Andrew Dickinson is also on a mission, determined to replicate the success he achieved at Griffin (page 26). And Veeam's Managing Director (UK&I), Mark Adams, is hell-bent on helping the firm hit \$1.5 billion in bookings revenue (page 24). In this there is no rocket science, he says. In the main it is determination.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Ofcom railed by CityFibre

ALTNET CityFibre's response to Ofcom's intransigent stance following the Competition Appeals Tribunal's order to quash its Business Connectivity Market Review (BCMR) is unequivocal in its damnation.

Mark Collins, Director of Strategy and Public Affairs at CityFibre, commented: "It is now imperative that Ofcom reconsiders and redefines its assessment of the market to reflect the accelerated rollout of full fibre demanded by the Government and being delivered by the likes of CityFibre. Ofcom needs to take to heart the strong criticisms made by the CAT.

"Although the quashing of the BCMR in its entirety by the CAT was welcome, Ofcom's response to it doubled down on its misguided approach to assessing the scope for competition while maintaining its flawed fixation with regulated dark fibre access.

"Its pessimism about the prospects for real, infrastructure-based competition perversely restricts alternative providers' ability to compete."

Collins pledged to 'study the proposals carefully', and expressed regret over the watchdog's unwillingness to under-



Mark Collins

take a 'fundamental and much needed rethink'.

"As a company that is making substantial investments in the UK's full fibre infrastructure, what we value above all else is predictable and rational regulation, rather than a 'make do and mend' strategy that simply puts sticking plasters over past errors," commented Collins. "In a rules-based system, the referee as well as the players must abide by the rules of the game."

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Continued from page 1

Jim Chirico, Avaya's President and CEO, said that the court's approval of the vendor's plan is the culmination of months of hard work and negotiations with various stakeholders.

"In the coming weeks Avaya will emerge from this process stronger and with the financial flexibility to create greater value for our customers, partners and stockholders," he commented.

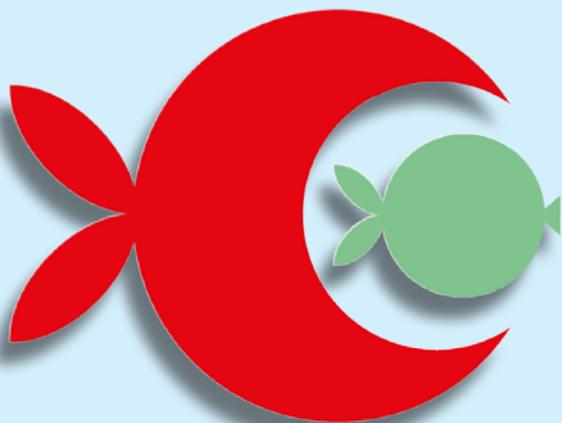
"The trust and loyalty of our global customer base and partner network have played a vital role in Avaya's success throughout this process."

Avaya Diamond Enterprise VAR Sabio has not wavered in its support for the vendor during the restructuring period. Its Chairman (and former Avaya UK&I MD) Lee Shorten said: "2017 has seen Sabio remain a strong supporter of Avaya, and we've continued to invest in the skills and service resources we need to create next generation digital customer experiences, building on and integrating with solutions such as Avaya Breeze and Avaya Oceana.

"So it's great news that Avaya plans to emerge from its restructuring process before the end of this year."

Also responding to the news, Adept Telecom CEO Ian Fishwick observed: "Avaya has always generated operating profits. Its issue was too much debt. It was obvious from the start that a debt restructuring would mean that the company just carried on as normal."

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COMMENT: CHANGING TIMES



Richard Carter

THIS year is likely to be remembered as one of the most unpredictable in recent times. From Trump to Brexit, and Big Ben silenced due to renovation, we truly are living in uncharted and uncertain times. Businesses and stock markets don't like volatility but

on reflection the channel remains in great shape as this year of surprises draws to a close.

In general terms, sales are relatively robust and there remains quiet optimism and confidence among the majority of resellers we work with. The cloud continues to have a major impact on sales strategies but the demise of the traditional PBX seems as far away as ever with MZA showing a halt in the decline seen last year. For us it's not a straight shoot-out between hosted or PBX. In many ways the delivery method is not important so long as your customer gets the right solution that addresses their needs.

There are many market opportunities to be explored and I wouldn't say 2017 has been any more difficult to trade, despite the political uncertainty and a huge question mark hanging over the look of post-Brexit Britain. Smarter ways of working are now more prevalent, not just in the technology we sell but the way business is conducted and captured. I'm sure 2018 will see even greater strides forward with IoT, AI and VR.

Big Ben may be silenced, but times continue to change in Westminster and beyond. Merry Christmas and have a happy and prosperous New Year.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

- Helen Freestone, Director of UK Partnerships & Alliances at Vodafone, displays all the traits of stand-out headship required to lead in disruptive times (p22).
- Cracking into the enterprise space is a core component of Veeam's plan to hit \$1.5 billion in bookings revenue by 2020, and the appointment of Mark Adams as Managing Director (UK&I) was clearly intended to accelerate the task in hand (p24).

NFON strides onto WebRTC launchpad

PURE cloud comms provider NFON is gearing up for the summer 2018 launch of a WebRTC version of its soft PBX.

Ten years in development, the solution is currently being fine-tuned by a team of 40-plus product managers, developers, programmers and UC experts at NFON's Munich base.

Selected partners will test a beta version of the new WebRTC solution in the spring.

According to Markus Kramer, Vice President Products and New Business, it will enable NFON UK's 200-plus resellers to offer customers a 'rip and replace' web-based alternative that will work seamlessly across all operating systems and devices via a web browser or downloaded app.

The NFON app will form the basis for future collaboration services, such as screen sharing, group chat and video.

"The new NFON client will not only unite the user interface of different services, but also put these previously separate technologies into the background," commented Kramer.

"Users will be able to go to a NFON website landing page to set up their devices and how they want to use them.



Markus Kramer

"The one number service is key. Wherever they are in the world the call party always gets the number they have in the PBX, on any device."

NFON UK MD Myles Leach underscored the recurring revenue opportunity: "We recently

took out a phone system that had 6,000 users over 45 sites using mainly traditional ISDN," he said. "They were billed for the ISDN rental and the calls.

"With our web-based solution resellers will of course lose the capex profit on the tin and maintenance revenue, but they'll gain recurring revenue because every user buys a licence on a monthly charge, so the reseller will make money on all users every month before they even pick the phone up."

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ITP to bestow BCS IT badge

THE Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) has been licensed to award an IT technician standard to its members working in the telecoms industry following a link-up with BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT.

Commenting on the RITTech professional registration standard (introduced by BCS in 2015), ITP CEO Crissi Williams said: "IT technicians design, build and maintain the world around us, and this accreditation allows them to be easily recognised for the work they do.

"In partnership with the telecoms industry and the BCS, we aim to encourage widespread adoption of RITTech as a national standard. It establishes proven knowledge, understanding and competence.

"For employers, RITTech is a great way to recognise technicians and the complex work they do, and it can be offered as



Crissi Williams

part of a recruitment package. The standard also helps in the recruitment process by identifying suitable candidates."

BCS CEO Paul Fletcher commented: "RITTech is an essential tool for ambitious IT technicians and this is an exciting time to become part of this standard, whether as an individual or a company. It raises the awareness of technicians throughout IT and highlights the importance of professionalism within this sector."

NEWS ROUNDUP

Resilient's mobile call recording, storage and compliance services have been adopted by Daisy ahead of the upcoming MiFID II and GDPR rules. The service will be known as Daisy smartnumbers.

Daisy Group CEO Neil Muller commented: "Delivered from the cloud, the service operates across corporate-provided and employees' personal devices without the need for hardware, software or capital expenditure."

PSU Technology Group has joined forces with Gloucester Rugby as its Official Communications Partner and will provide the club's telecoms and mobiles at reduced rates along with controlled costs and in-house support.

Russell Connor, PSU's BDM for Mobiles, commented: "International calling is important to the team so we worked with the club to put together a package that allows them to monitor and control overseas calls, keeping their costs as low as possible."



WHITELEY-based Onecom CEO Darren Ridge wound back the clock to spot young talent with a return trip to the school he left 40 years ago. During assembly at Havant Academy, Leigh Park, Ridge challenged pupils to predict the future of technology and launched a competition among students to find the most transformational app, service or technology idea based on the IoT. Split into two age groups the pupils will work with Academy staff and a mentor from Onecom to develop their ideas having been encouraged to think about how the IoT could be used in the future for personal, social or business use. The winners in each age group will receive a Galaxy S8 smartphone with virtual reality kit.

"I'm not just here to put something back," commented Ridge. "I'm a businessman at heart and have a vested interest in finding the bright young things of the future in the hope that they will come and work at Onecom. Any organisation is only as good as the people in it, and Onecom is built on hard workers and innovators. If I see an idea that I think has potential, I will back it 100%. It's not always easy, but with hard work, dedication and a plan, you really can achieve anything."



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Livingbridge boost spurs Giacom MBO

GIACOM Chief Exec' Mike Wardell has led an MBO from founder Nick Marshall following an investment by Livingbridge.

The deal sees LDC, which backed the business in 2016, exit and reinvest alongside Livingbridge for a minority stake. Yorkshire Bank has also worked with Giacom since 2016 and will continue to support the company. Graham Gilbert remains as Chairman.

Giacom has a Microsoft 2-Tier Cloud Solution Provider licence and delivers cloud services to the SME market through more than 4,000 channel partners.

The firm plans to build on its growth momentum and further expand its channel net-



Mike Wardell

work, while cross-selling more products and services across the marketplace and through strategic M&A.

Wardell said: "Following a year of rapid growth which saw us double our revenues, now

is the right time to secure new financial backing and accelerate our growth plans.

"Livingbridge has a track record of supporting other high growth businesses such as ours, and experience of investing in the tech sector."

Livingbridge deal-maker Matthew Caffrey commented: "Giacom is well positioned to capitalise on a significant market opportunity underpinned by SMEs increasingly migrating their applications and infrastructure into the cloud. Giacom's Marketplace platform is well placed to continue to disrupt the market and drive growth."

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Union Street's new roadmap

UNION Street Technologies MD Tony Cook outlined two key strategic objectives during the company's annual get-together held at Richmond's Bingham Hotel.

Addressing almost 90 staff members Cook spotlighted upcoming developments to the aBILLity billing platform and discussed plans to drive deployment of aBILLity's intuitive web client app which boasts an enhanced user interface and provides quick access to much of the functionality.

Cook also lifted the curtain on plans to migrate more on-premise implementations of aBILLity to Union Street's hosted platform, with new incentives introduced for partners to make the move.

"Over half of aBILLity partners have made the switch to

cloud hosted billing, and circa 80% of new partners go directly onto the Cloud Hosted Billing service – our cost-effective SaaS solution powered by Microsoft Azure," stated Vincent Disneur, Head of Sales and Marketing.

"In regard to aBILLity's web client, our goal is to make this the primary interface for the platform by 2019."

Disneur noted that the firm's Streets Ahead initiative, introduced a year ago, has helped to shape the company's culture and values, most notably in the sphere of software development and the customer experience.

"The initiative also increases employee engagement through management feedback, a recognition and reward scheme and a range of staff benefits that improve the working environment," he added.

Virtual1 in Telcoinabox square deal

VIRTUAL1 has extended its relationship with reseller set-up and support firm Telcoinabox, integrating their systems to enable Telcoinabox partners to offer real-time quotes. The move follows big strides made by Virtual1 in the roll out of its Software Defined Network.

Zachery Crofts, Telcoinabox MD, commented: "We identi-



Tom O'Hagan

fied that speed-to-quote at point of sale is a significant factor in increased closure rates for our

partners, and this integration delivers just that."

Tom O'Hagan, Virtual1 founder and CEO, commented: "The relationship with Telcoinabox is a key part of our growth strategy over the next 24 months. It is also exciting to see a partner making use of our APIs to further build their own value proposition."



The Union Street Technologies team

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Richard Thompson

PREVIOUSLY confined to science fiction, AI, robotics, AR, wearable technology and facial recognition are now entering the workplace. They are still in their relative infancy, but trials in businesses are increasing. Companies such as DHL and Boeing are already using AR in the workplace, while AI and automation are

seeing larger scale trials in many industries. TalkTalk has been piloting AI technology such as IBM Watson in our contact centres and chatbots for internal helpdesks. Like most organisations, we're trying them, analysing their impact and moving successful small pilots that benefit our customers into mainstream projects. Such 'controlled incursions' are necessary to stay ahead in the channel.

A 2017 World Economic Forum research report into the retail sector found that the IoT, AI/ML, robotics and AR are on different adoption trajectories, but all are expected to reach full readiness in the next two-five years. It begs the question – if large scale adoption of these technologies is that close, are they in your five year business plan?

If you joined TalkTalk Business' Workforces 2025 webinar in November you'd have heard how UK businesses will need a trusted IT provider to help them roll out these projects. Now is the time for channel organisations to be adding these technologies to their portfolios and having the sales, technical and support staff to make them a success.

This is a big commitment, so be smart with 'controlled incursions'. You aren't going to be able to offer all the technologies at once, so choose those that you feel will add the greatest benefit to your customers. Execute them well, and only when you've done that move onto the next. There are a few years to get this right and ensure that you are in a strong position when the majority of your customers come knocking on your door because they fear losing their competitive advantage.

Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Pangea nets first century

PANGEA has exceeded expectations and smashed its 2017 target to recruit 100 partners into its channel programme which launched in May 2016.

Pangea's expanding partner base helped to almost double revenues over the past six months and the company's growing influence in the market is reflected by its Comms National Awards 2017 win for Best SME M2M/Wireless Solution in October.

Sales Director Bernie McPhillips commented: "The programme focuses on collaborating with partners as opposed to dealing with the end user, and aims to help them drive new revenues within their existing clients and grow market share.



Pangea celebrates

"Our strong relationships with three of the major UK mobile networks, without any third party involvement, are benefitting our partners."

Salesman Terence le Poer Trench made it a century and was presented with a bottle of champagne by Pangea MD Dan Cunliffe to celebrate the milestone (pictured above).



NIMANS has bid farewell to Operations Director John Cunningham who retires following a 20-year stint working with the distributor. He was initially recruited to implement a new computer system in the late 1990s and went on to play a key role in developing the logistics operation and planning the new Manchester HQ warehouse expansion. "The company has grown dramatically over the years but there are many things that have stayed the same – the family atmosphere and Chairman Julian Nimans' passion to achieve more success," he said.

NIMANS has bid farewell to Operations Director John Cunningham who retires following a 20-year stint working with the distributor. He was initially recruited to implement a new computer system in the late 1990s and went on to play a key role in developing the logistics operation and planning the new Manchester HQ warehouse expansion. "The

TheCloud sheds old branding

FAREHAM-based TheCloud has shed its former identity and rebranded as Atmoso.

The name-change reflects a broader product portfolio and longer-term vision, according to MD Daniel Crespi.

"With our portfolio branching out in new directions we felt that what we had was no longer just a cloud, but more of a connected atmosphere," he commented. "The new Atmoso name also applies to the 'atmosphere' that connects ourselves and our partners."

The firm is currently developing its voice suite, which includes call recording, workforce management and analytics.

"This suite is scalable and modular to suit businesses from small start-ups to large contact centres," added Crespi.

"Also in line is our cloud PCI compliance solution which makes traditionally prohibitively expensive telephone card payment security accessible to any business, and is completely carrier agnostic."

Atmoso runs its products and services on its own Revolution-Cloud infrastructure.

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

No argument about ISDN scrap scheme success

ESSEX-based Channel Telecom boss Clifford Norton says scores of resellers are already taking advantage of his company's ISDN scrappage scheme launched last month.

Under the initiative, Channel Telecom will pay partners £1,000 for migrating a customer over to Ethernet lines, payable on a 36-month lease.

The partner can choose to keep the cash or pass it onto their customers to incentivise them to make the change to a hosted or cloud infrastructure.

"Since we started marketing the ISDN scrappage scheme scores of partners have signed up and we have had an equal number of enquiries from companies wanting to know more," commented Norton.

"It may be perceived as a clever marketing ploy to get reseller customers to scrap their ISDN set ups, but there are many other clever things built into the process which partners may not have yet grasped

"For starters, we don't just add the £1000 on to the end of



Clifford Norton

the lease. We achieve the savings by paying the ISP/carrier in advance, so the 36-month contract is paid up front offering a saving of £1000 off the initial price.

"Also, due to the discounts we get, the customer can buy the three-year lease at pretty much the same price originally quoted by the partner, who then gets all the profit paid up front."

Norton also noted that the partner can still charge the customer for all other services used over their Ethernet, such

as hosted, SIP and many other Internet-based applications, but on 30-day rolling contracts.

"This means the partner is not held to long-term contracts if the customer's business was to fail," he added.

"One of our reseller partners made £11,000 up front from their first deal under the scrappage scheme and was then able to put £5,700 worth of kit into the customer's premises and, through us, bill monthly for the hosted licenses and any calls outside the package."

Vouching for fibre roll out

THE roll out of Gigabit-capable full fibre services to SMEs in certain areas is set to accelerate following Entanet's harnessing of the DCMS (Department of Media, Culture and Sport) new voucher scheme.

The vouchers cover the whole installation cost for channel customers wanting access to Entanet's new CityFibre-based GPON and Ethernet 1Gbps bearer services, which offer bandwidth options ranging from 100Mbps to 1Gbps.

The vouchers are available across all of the four areas covered by the first wave of the DCMS scheme: Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire; Bristol and Bath and North East Somerset; Coventry and Warwickshire; West Yorkshire Combined authorities – Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield and York.

Entanet's Head of Products Paul Heritage-Redpath said: "We've worked closely with the DCMS and our CityFibre colleagues to maximise the opportunity within this scheme for our channel partners.

"The initial four areas are already covered by our own CityFibre full fibre infrastructure and the voucher scheme presents businesses in these



Paul Heritage-Redpath

regions with the chance to take full advantage of connectivity services that significantly enhance their competitive edge.

"This is an exciting development that gives our partners an opportunity to join Entanet on its joint mission with CityFibre to accelerate Britain's full fibre digital future."

The voucher scheme will be used to fund new connections that are gigabit capable and deliver a minimum of 100Mbps from day one.

The initial scheme runs until 31st March 2019 or until the funding is consumed, with vouchers worth between £500 and £3,000 to cover the cost of installation of all new full fibre gigabit capable services to eligible SME customers.

To qualify for the scheme businesses must meet a stringent set of guidelines.

Avaya connects AI

AVAYA'S new A.I.Connect initiative aims to accelerate the development and application of Artificial Intelligence in contact centres and UC applications.

The focus is on enabling Avaya customers to deliver more engaging experiences for their own end customers, enhancing and integrating workflows with smarter, more personalised interactions through the use of AI and ML technologies.

Eric Rossman, VP of Alliances and Partnerships at Avaya,

commented: "Digital technologies have opened a door to the future that demands the close collaboration of an ecosystem to ensure workable solutions with tight integration.

"A.I.Connect technology partners will help ensure that investments in AI and ML produce better customer and user experiences with long-term value and minimal disruption."

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Burbidge to fire up M&A Peering pays off for telcos



Rob Burbidge

THE promotion of Rob Burbidge to the role of Elitetele.com's Group Chief Finance Officer signals the start of an intensified period of M&A activity with the company also dipping into its £20m acquisition war chest.

The buy and build strategy will be spearheaded by Burbidge who will work alongside Alex Cliffe, Commercial Director, and CEO Matt Newing.

Burbidge joined the company in 2013 following a spell at Knight Corporate Finance where he advised IT and telecoms companies on acquisitions, sales and refinances.

Newing commented: "As we move into a highly acquisitive phase for the business we

recognised the need to have a dedicated CFO who has strong acquisition experience.

"Rob has helped Elite find and successfully complete 14 acquisitions to date, and he will now lead our internal acquisitions team whose task is to fast-track our M&A activity."

Elitetele.com has acquired 15 companies since 2008, all of which have been funded through internal cashflows and conservative leverage with no outside investors.

The group now has revenue in excess of £50m with underlying EBITDA of over £8m, representing growth of 37% and 43% respectively. The company also has 165 staff based across seven locations.

THREE of the UK's top cloud comms providers have ensured that the bandwidth requirements of their customers will be met through new peering partnerships with TalkTalk Business.

8x8, Vonage and NFON UK have geared up for an expected hike in demand for enterprise video, instant messaging tools, virtual reality and artificial intelligence, by leveraging TalkTalk Business's Ethernet connectivity in over 3,000 exchanges across the UK.

"Peering relationships ensure the advantage in performance extends all the way from the premise through to cloud," said Richard Thompson, Director of Partners at TalkTalk Business.

"We want to see businesses of all sizes develop and grow rapidly. With our assistance we know they will have the connectivity to realise this potential."

Charles Aylwin, Director of Channel at 8x8, added: "What's important for businesses is being able to work at speed, collaborate right across the organisation and be completely agile.

"This is what we deliver for our customers, but it's also important to maintain this level of service wherever our customers choose to work. Teaming up



Charles Aylwin

with TalkTalk Business as a private peering partner allows us to deliver this quality of service to our customers."

NEWS ROUNDUP

TeleWare has joined forces with Pennine to help it gear up for new regulations that come into force next year.

Pennine is adding TeleWare's mobile voice and SMS recording capabilities to its portfolio along with the new app-based offering for compliant call recording, named Re:Call, which was created in response to customer requirements ahead of 2018's GDPR and the incoming financial directive MIFID II.

TeleWare's CEO Steve Haworth commented: "This partnership comes at a crucial time with many regulated businesses facing a host of incoming regulation in 2018 for which they'll need appropriate technology."



CONGRATS to Pragma for scooping a hat-trick of awards at the Ericsson-LG Global Partner Conference. For the second year in a row and the third time in five years Pragma scooped Global Partner of the Year. The firm also collected the Global Cloud Partner of the Year and Global Technical Support Team of the Year awards. Tim Brooks, MD, said: "To be recognised for the performance of our overall business as well as our cloud and technical support capabilities is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the team." Pictured: Tim Brooks (far left) and Pragma sales chief Will Morey (far right) with partners.

Ignite strikes 'perfect match' 9 mobile deal

ESSEX-based ICT provider Ignite Business Communications aims to light up the mobile market having struck a 'perfect match' partnership deal with 9.

Ignite also has offices in central London and targets organisations of all sizes with its portfolio of phone systems, connectivity, managed services and cloud computing, all bolstered by 9's complementary and holistic 'Think outside the box' proposition.

Andy Portlock, Ignite's Commercial Director, commented:



Andy Portlock

"The telecom and IT sectors are crowded which creates confusion for many businesses.

"Customers want a single, trusted point of contact for all of their IT and telecom solutions.

"Adding mobile to our portfolio strengthens our position and fulfils the demand that we've been experiencing. 9's simplified mobile proposition ticked all of the boxes."

Stonehouse-based 9 currently has circa 400 partners and the task of its Director of Partners, Adam Cathcart, is to give busi-



Adam Cathcart

nesses such as Ignite an opportunity to become a trusted one-stop-shop supplier.

"Business customers are increasingly looking for a single provider and our proposition is aimed at partners who want to seize the convergence market opportunity," stated Cathcart.

"Through access to our products and expertise we can help service providers meet this market demand."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Pangea has reported soaring demand for its pre-Ethernet solution which acts as a connecting bridge between the three-to-six-month delay in Ethernet line installations.

“Another key attribute of the solution is that it enables resellers to collect revenue from their Ethernet sales from day one,” said MD Dan Cunliffe. “And a 4G connected Pangea router can be used as an on-demand back-up service or DR option should the Ethernet ever go down.”

Cunliffe also hinted at upcoming developments to its pre-Ethernet solution.

A multi-million pound five year deal to deliver a managed cloud telephony and enterprise mobility solution for mental health provider Cygnet Health Care has been won by High Wycombe-based Olive Communications.

Cygnet has a 6,200 strong workforce across 108 UK sites and will be served by Mitel’s cloud-based platform and Vodafone’s network capabilities incorporated into Olive’s Cloud Managed Service Platform (CMSP).

The solution brings together telephony, video, mobility and collaboration capabilities, underpinned by Olive’s status as a Vodafone Total Communications Provider.

Xelion eyes hosted channel expansion

HOSTED communications provider Xelion has accelerated its partner recruitment campaign and issued a clarion call for resellers to join its offensive against the limitations of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ market approach.

The 100% channel focused organisation, headed up by MD Dave Reynolds, enables comms providers to build and configure bespoke hosted voice solutions using its open platform architecture, while APIs allow third party applications such as Microsoft Exchange and Office 365 to be integrated.

The platform brings together voice, instant messaging, SMS, video, wallboards and more, and delivers services on any device via a standardised user app under a single user licence for all devices.

Xelion offers three deployment options: Managed multi-tenant (where the company manages the infrastructure and server while the partner provisions hardware and SIP service); unmanaged multi-tenant (the partner hosts Xelion on their own infrastructure, provisions the hardware and a SIP service); and unmanaged single tenant (where Xelion is delivered via a dedicated server or



Dave Reynolds

private virtual machine within the customer’s own network or on-premise).

“The platform supports any SIP compliant hardware including legacy kit, and can be used with almost any network provider’s SIP trunk service,” commented Reynolds. “Partners can even use different SIP providers with different customers.”

He also noted that channel partners can use the hosted telephony service free of charge, enabling them to get hands-on with the solution and communi-

cate its advantages to prospects in a more knowledgeable and meaningful conversation.

“With all features there are no chargeable bolt-ons and call-recording comes as standard,” added Reynolds. “Xelion can adopt, auto-provision and put the channel partner’s brand on most handsets on the market.”

The service supports handsets from suppliers such as Cisco, Yealink and Aastra.

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Marston’s reinforces Cisco link

MARSTON’S Telecoms has strengthened its partnership with Cisco following a link-up with distributor Westcon Comstor.

“Partnering with Westcon Comstor for Cisco, in particular on-boarding the Comstor Mentor Program, will enable us to accelerate our Cisco ambitions,” stated Marston’s Telecoms MD Mike McMinn.

The move augments the Cisco Select certification held by Marston’s Telecoms and signals a sharper strategic focus on technologies such as Cisco Unified Communications & Collaboration and Cisco Meraki.

The partnership also builds on the infrastructure and connectivity investments made by Marston’s that enable it to offer enterprise grade cloud solutions to partners.



Mike McMinn





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Dubber link for Simetric

THE addition of cloud-based mobile call recording to Simetric Telecom's Mobile-X service brings MiFID II compliance to its users.

The move follows a partnership between Simetric and Dubber that delivers speech intelligence advantages as well as meeting the imperative to comply with the new MiFID II regulations that come into force in January 2018.

"With the deadline for compliance with MiFID II a matter of weeks away, this cloud-based call recording solution can be rapidly deployed to ensure financial advisors can meet the regulatory requirements," commented John Murray, Director, Simetric Telecom.

Under the MiFID II rules all phone calls that include financial advice which could lead to a trade must be recorded. "Many of these conversations will take place on mobiles, creating the need for a solution that will ensure compliance across devices," commented Murray.

The service is delivered through the Simetric network on Mobile-X SIM cards and will be made available to Simetric's partner base as well as wholesale through its interconnect service to other providers.



John Murray

The offering also features Dubber's speech intelligence suite, called Zoe, which enables users to search through their calls and analyse the voice data that has been captured.

"Calls related to financial transactions can be quickly located, which is a crucial component of MiFID II compliance," noted Murray.

"And extracting the value from the voice data enables users to gain key insights from their conversations, which turns a compliance service into a valuable business tool."

Dubber co-founder James Slaney added: "Mobile call recording is key for businesses of all sizes as mobile devices are often external to a company's network infrastructure. The Simetric service enables mobile calls to be recorded and managed in one environment."



CHESHIRE-based wholesale UC provider Zest4's partner conference was capped with a climb to the top of a London landmark. The day involved a number of sessions and workshops with M2M and the IoT featuring prominently. Next came an ascent to the top of the O2. "Despite the chilly weather the view was fantastic, and it was a fitting way to illustrate how partnerships can lead to great new heights," commented Mandy Fazelynia, Operations and Business Development Director. The day concluded with an evening performance by John Bishop inside the O2 where staff and delegates met the comedian after the show.

NEWS ROUNDUP

Nuvias has signed a pan-EMEA distribution deal with Polycom in a move that follows a three-year link-up between Polycom and Siphon in the UK and Benelux (Siphon was acquired by Nuvias in 2016). The extended relationship will continue through the Nuvias Unified Communications Practice and focus on the integration of Polycom VoIP phones into end-to-end solutions for the hosted voice market.

Tech Data is working with Vodafone to offer managed IoT connectivity services. A phased roll-out in the UK will be followed by the rest of Europe. Victor Paradell, VP, IoT & Analytics Solutions at Tech Data, said: "Interest in IoT is stronger than ever, and enterprise investment is increasing along with the number of IoT connections."

Resellers operating in the UK hotel sector should be urging customers to deliver free Wi-Fi to guests. That's the conclusion of a report conducted by wireless solutions provider Zyxel which found that nearly a fifth (18%) of UK hotels (the highest in Europe) are still limiting or charging guests for Wi-Fi access. The average across the continent sits at just 3%.

Alcatel Lucent Enterprise has scooped a top award for its Rainbow collaboration solution, winning the 2017 Global Hybrid UC Architecture Competitive Strategy Innovation and Leadership gong from Frost & Sullivan.

Analyst Michael Brandenburg observed: "ALE has a customer-focused approach to delivering the next generation of cloud-based comms, while acknowledging the reality that most enterprises want to continue leveraging their significant investment in on-premises equipment. This is a differentiator to the common cloud-only approach."



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Horizon aids mobile users



Domenico Idone

THE integration of Gamma's cloud PBX Horizon with its mobile offering under the Connect brand brings office telephony to mobile users.

"As Gamma operates its own mobile core network the integration is provided in the network, without the need for an app or a data connection to make and receive calls," stated Product Manager Domenico Idone.

"This means that Connect can be easy to adopt and used on any mobile phone. By streamlining the communication service, businesses can provide their staff with the flexibility to work wherever they are and improve productivity and responsiveness to customers.

"Agility and flexibility are both imperative for a productive workforce of the future.

"We understand that more and more businesses no longer want employees to be anchored to their desks.

"This is an opportunity for the channel as many businesses look to implement solutions that empower individuals, teams and call groups with true mobility."

Jim Callaghan, MD at Midshire, added: "Addressing the limitations of mobile devices by integrating them with the office phone system will help our customers move to more flexible working models that many are looking to implement.

"By combining mobile and fixed contacts we can retain customers for longer and generate more revenue per user."

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Emerging Avaya set for rebirth

OVER 260 Avaya partner companies and distributors from 32 countries descended on the vendor's 50th Partner Community Council (PCC) conference held in Nice, France.

According to Fadi Moubarak, VP Channels at Avaya International, this year's conference was 'a milestone of commitment and collaboration'.

"As we prepare to emerge from Chapter 11 proceedings this event also marks the start of a new journey for Avaya focused on growth and winning, in which our partners play a bigger role in our go-to-market strategy," he told delegates. "The foundation we are building with our partners will allow us to accelerate our openness and drive greater simplicity."

Steve Joyner, Sales Engineering Leader in Europe, Avaya, added: "There are three pillars central to Avaya's emergence from Chapter 11. We are re-energising our employees and ensuring that customers remain core to everything we do.

"But the glue that holds the first two together is the partners, and the PCC is a great vehicle for us to educate our partners on how we are re-engineering our business."

Arrow darts onto Siebert

ARROW has bolstered its Scottish presence with the acquisition of Glasgow company Siebert Industries, trading as Siebert Telecom Solutions, a provider of hosted, fixed, mobile and data connectivity solutions founded in 1990.

The deal builds on Arrow's acquisition of Aberdeen-based Orca Telecom in 2015.

Siebert's 16 staff located between Glasgow and Aberdeen will remain with the company including one of its founders Alan Muir who joins Arrow Scotland's management team.

Arrow Scotland now has 850 customers, circa 4,000 hosted seats and over 20 staff. The operation will be lead by Richard Burke.



Chris Russell

Chris Russell, who is the CEO of Arrow, commented:

"Adding Siebert's 16 staff to the Arrow Scotland team will expand our local customer support and fits with Arrow's 'buy, build and stay local' strategy.

"Our third acquisition of 2017 adds further geographic and product portfolio diversity to Arrow and completes the achievement of our key objectives for the year."

Going digital brings hurdles

THE number of UK businesses with formal digital transformation strategies has more than doubled over the past year, according to a survey of almost 2,000 businesses commissioned by Daisy Group.

The research found that 63% of businesses said they have a formal digital transformation strategy, up from 27% when the survey was conducted last year.

The biggest barriers to the successful implementation of digital strategies are cited as a lack of time and resource



Neil Muller

(38%), a shortage of skills and knowledge internally (32%), lack of investment (30%) and legacy technology (29%).

Neil Muller, CEO, stated: "UK companies are waking up to the benefits and opportuni-

ties that digital technology can bring. And it is exciting to see new technologies such as the IoT, AI and robotics entering the digital agenda.

"However, some challenges still clearly exist with a lack of resources, legacy technology and skills gaps hindering many smaller businesses and public sector organisations from embracing digital transformation. The problem that we often see is a lack of technology leadership at a senior decision maker level."



CONGRATS to Leeds-based Diva Telecom for punching above its weight in the NextGen Digital Challenge 2017 Awards, scooping an award alongside NHS Education for Scotland, DVLA, Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Borough Council, Broadband for the Rural North (B4RN), HATDeX, People Plus and Mendix. Diva won the Connected Britain Award for its part in helping rural businesses in Eltofts, north Leeds, gain access to next generation broadband services via its Gigabit City Leeds link-up with CityFibre. Diva Telecom MD Erica Lewis commented: "Helping the Eltofts community has been rewarding enough in itself, but to receive this national recognition for our work is just incredible."

If your customer network or website gets hacked... Guess who they'll blame?

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In January 2018 Ombex will officially unveil its SME and enterprise SD-WAN suite of security solutions to the UK channel.

Ombex intends to penetrate the UK market quickly and at scale and has set its sights on recruiting a minimum of

150 ICT resellers with well-established client bases.

Ombex is the only company in the world that presents an opportunity to the UK Channel, that combines SD WAN and Cyber Security as a combined or individual solution. Ombex has

assembled the best-in-class solutions for your SD-WAN/ Cybersecurity, voice, data, and Internet needs. This allows you to leverage our real world telecom insights and considerable telecom experience to develop solutions tailored to the customer's needs.

"Ombex is offering resellers an opportunity for high earnings that has not been seen in the UK for a long time," claimed Oliver.

"Reseller margins are going down because everybody is competing on price. We will demonstrate to the reseller networks that they do not have to compete on price." Ombex partner CYBX, is

the first company of its kind to merge the practice of computer forensics with computer security development and design. Our team exceeds the normal standard of computer security, productivity, and compliance.

QUANTUM SHIELD has demonstrated that it completely disables Winfingerprint's & Advanced LAN Scanner, the top two hacking tools, used to gain entry into any QUANTUM SHIELD protected computer. Quantum shield to date disables 23 of the world's top hacking tools.

For the reseller community, SD-WAN as a Service is a

new and exciting revenue opportunity as it enables them to manage WAN services for enterprise businesses. Likewise, SD-WAN as a Service can be appealing to end users and enterprises that don't want to manage the WAN network or applications, preferring to outsource these services to a trusted service provider.

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BT ups fight on toll fraud



Simon Orme

BT WHOLESALE'S partners have gained wider access to Tollring's real-time cloud-based Credit and Fraud Management System (CFMS), which detects and protects against fraud and manages customer credit limits.

The service is available to resellers using BT Wholesale's Hosted Centrex platform and SIP trucking products.

In practice the CFMS monitors call trends, implements rules and triggers alerts to combat and contain illegal usage and bill shock, while the credit management part of the solution constrains legitimate spend to manage 'risky' customers.

Simon Orme, Director of Hosted Communications at BT Wholesale, said: "By widening access to Tollring's intelligence and analytics tools across our

whole portfolio, our resellers now have the opportunity to take control and differentiate their offering."

Tollring CEO Tony Martino added: "Telecoms fraud can put a considerable strain on relationships throughout the channel. The launch of this latest version of CFMS promotes collaboration across the industry in the fight against fraud.

"From the channel's perspective, they have more control over the tools that help to protect their customers, which both promotes differentiation and helps to strengthen relationships by encouraging customer confidence and loyalty.

"Involving end customers in their individual fraud thresholds and limits will result in a culture of shared responsibility."

ReTell-Nimans ready for regs

CALL recording firm ReTell has joined forces with Nimans to help resellers offset the impact of upcoming regulations on their customers.

The MiFID (Markets in Financial Instruments Directive) was first implemented in 2007 by the Financial Conduct Authority to regulate financial services and protect investors.

But MiFID II takes effect on January 3rd 2018 and brings in stricter regulations, meaning that organisations are required to record all forms of transactional communications.

Nimans' Head of Dealer Sales Tom Maxwell said: "This more robust regulation requires financial sector businesses to record all calls, and they must be held for at least five years.

"Businesses of all sizes are affected and severe penalties

exist for those failing to comply. Resellers should be working closely with their customers to ensure a smooth transition and complete compliance.

"Storing alone is insufficient and monitoring of records should be done regularly along with system testing. We have teamed-up with ReTell to ensure resellers are fully equipped with all the information and solutions they require."

MiFID II precedes GDPR which comes into force on May 25th 2018, replacing the Data Protection Act. "MiFID II and GDPR will have a major impact on how businesses operate in the future," said Maxwell.

"The time is now for resellers to play a proactive and front-line role to advise and support their customers with the latest technologies and expertise."



Tom Maxwell

Daisy set for youth schemes



David Jones

DAISY has launched a new Digital Apprenticeship Programme to give young people with a thirst for IT and technology the opportunity to embark on a new career journey with the telecoms giant. The job roles include network engineer, project manager, service analyst, IT apprentice and HR apprentice.

Daisy's Chief People Officer David Jones stated: "Training and inspiring people provides a huge benefit to our business and for the individuals that take part in the programme.

"Apprenticeships are a highly effective way of developing skills and capabilities that can provide both personal and professional fulfilment."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Pragma has formed a new partnership with Infinity Group, one of the largest IT and telecoms support providers in the south east region. The company is certified to supply all Ericsson-LG iPECS products and has skills in Skype for Business integration.

Rob Young, Joint MD at Infinity Group, stated: "The integration with Microsoft Skype for Business along with the iPECS portfolio provides an opportunity for us to increase our market share as a telephony provider."

IDaaS firm iWelcome has extended its UK footprint following a link-up with Identity Methods, which enables organisations to manage their identity lifecycle, profiles and the access rights of their customers, employees and business partners. The partnership means that iWelcome can integrate these identity management services with its private cloud platform.

Kent-based True Telecom has gone into administration following a series of run-ins with the authorities. The company was under investigation by Ofcom for breaching a number of consumer protection rules and it was reported that the HMRC intended to take court action.

Seminars delivered via boxes

READY-made seminar programmes put together by Node4 will help partners to address mid-market opportunities in cloud transformation, workforce optimisation and security.

The 'seminar-in-a-box' concept forms part of Node4's Channel without Challenge partner enablement proposition and was launched to 35 partners at the company's Northampton data centre.

Director of Channel Sales at Node4, Andy Wilson, commented: "The rationale behind our partner enablement, in particular seminar-in-a-box, is to give partners access to three customer-facing seminars that will help them to open up meaningful conversations with their customers and prospects.

"If the partner is confident to deliver themselves, we will train and support.

"Alternatively, we are happy to co-present to their client base and help them drive forward new business opportunities brought about by prompting the relevant conversations.

"We provide the content, the presenters, demonstrations and even the venue. All our partners have to do is set their own dates and bring their customers."

Buxton buoyed by public sector sales



Eddie Buxton

MAINTEL'S market share in the public sector continues to grow at pace following its Intrinsic Technology acquisition, with key health and education contract wins and government partnerships providing an additional boost.

The firm's public sector practice now accounts for over 20% of its revenue.

"With the public sector facing significant budget cuts, organisations such as the NHS are increasingly looking at how they can make material cash savings while still improving critical services," commented Eddie Buxton, CEO at Maintel.

"Recently, we have seen an increased willingness within the public sector to consider cloud as a vehicle to deliver efficiency and savings, thanks largely to its reliability and security.

"We have helped more than 300 public sector organisations to modernise their comms, covering over 250,000 employees."

In 2017 the company added more organisations to its roster of public service clients, including Greater London Authority, Kingston Hospital NHS Trust, London Borough of Redbridge, and Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Services.

Maintel has also secured projects with existing clients, including University of Bath and a major £10m managed services and IP telephony contract with University College London Hospitals (UCLH).

"While 2017 has been a great year for Maintel, we have every reason to expect even more success in 2018," added Buxton.

"The health sector is showing increasing demand for IP telephony to bring down costs and boost efficiency.

"A number of trusts have signed up to our ICON Communicate platform, having banished their doubts about the

security of cloud-based services. Meanwhile, we are on course to become a Health and Social Care Network (HSCN) member in Q1 2018, which promises more exciting opportunities with NHS organisations planning to upgrade from the N3 network."

Maintel has also secured membership to all ten lots in the Network Services Framework (RM1045), enabling the company to create and develop end-to-end communications environments for its customers.

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

Samsung settles on Nimans



Richard Carter and Paul Burn

NIMANS has become the exclusive distributor of Samsung Unified Communications in the UK and collected a gong to confirm its master supplier status.

The distributor was named Best Partner (UK) in the 2017

Samsung Enterprise Best Partner Awards. Director of Channel Sales Richard Carter and Head of Category Sales Paul Burn picked up the award in Seoul at Samsung's Global Sales & Marketing Conference.

"The award caps a year to remember for our expanded Samsung team as it reinforces our exclusive status as Samsung's country distributor for unified communications in the UK," commented Burn.

"We now have a direct working relationship with Samsung in Korea and our visit was a great way to forge closer working relationships. We were able to interact and share ideas not only with senior Samsung officials but also our counterparts from across the world."



JOLA, KSM Telecom and DV02 joined the Land Rover Ben Ainslie Racing (BAR) team led by Olympic legend Sir Ben Ainslie himself, aboard the AC45 catamaran for a hair-raising excursion off the south coast of England after winning a Daisy Wholesale partner sales incentive. Before their trip, the partners toured the British team's training facility where they were put through their paces learning what is involved in controlling the 44-foot vessel. Garry Grows, Sales Director at Daisy Wholesale, commented: "It was a once in a lifetime experience. Seeing how BAR work together as a team was truly inspirational and it was fantastic to share that with some of our top-performing partners." Adrian Sunderland, CTO at Jola, added: "This was a genuine once in a lifetime experience."



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Cisco unveils new models

CISCO'S latest partner programme, unveiled at the firm's Partner Summit, signals a push towards the recurring revenue model with rewards for partners who drive the new strategy.

The three programme changes focus on building and recognising capabilities, refreshing to digital and moving to lifecycle and recurring revenue.

"To keep pace with the changing technology landscape Cisco needs to be in lockstep with our partners if they are to operate effectively," said Marc Surplus, VP of Strategy, Planning and Programmes, Cisco Global Partner Organisation.

These changes introduce a simplification of Cisco's specialisations portfolio.

In August 2017 the company began the simplification process by cutting the 10 Express level specialisations to one Express Specialisation with tracks that

cover all Cisco architectures. Advanced Specialisations are also being streamlined, reducing from 13 to five Advanced Architecture Specialisations.

Cisco is retiring all Advanced Technology Specialisations (except Advanced Video) and embedding technical adoption capabilities throughout the remaining Advanced Architecture Specialisations.

The new Master Networking Specialisation is designed to help Cisco partners enhance their networking capabilities and is available in March 2018.

Cisco will also recognise expertise in key areas starting with retail, healthcare and manufacturing. To help speed things along the company is offering new incentives and is simplifying deal registration.

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



HATS off to Yorkshire-based Lily Comms for scooping Ericsson-LG's Best Partner of the Year for an unprecedented fifth time in a row. MD Chris Morrissey and founder Adrian Jackson collected the award at the Ericsson-LG Global Partner Conference staged in Kuala Lumpur. Morrissey said: "We have ambitious plans for the coming year that will take us to the next leg of our growth journey. To win accolades such as this is a reminder that we are on the right path." Jackson added: "An extra special thank you goes to Pragma Distribution for its support."

NEWS ROUNDUP

Swyx's just-launched Technology Alliance Programme (TAP) replaces its previous purely technical certification scheme and brings greater levels of integration between technology partners.

"TAP enables us to expand our own offering as well as market third party solutions that complement our portfolio," said Martin Classen, CTO of Swyx Solutions. "We have set the course for closer cooperation with technology partners from different areas, and in turn expanded the Swyx ecosystem."

Following an investment of over £600m TalkTalk Business has extended its Ethernet price reductions in the channel beyond London to other metropolitan cities. TalkTalk Business Director of Partners Richard Thompson stated: "Due to our continued network investment programme we are able to extend our City Zone pricing beyond London to other metropolitan areas across the UK."

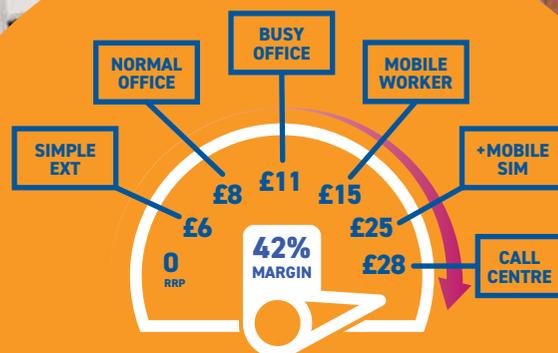
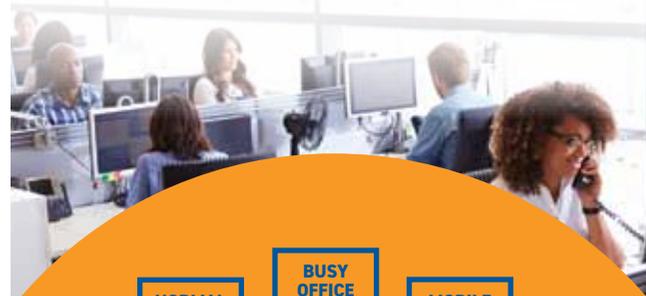
Sangoma's European Conference in London proved to be a winner for ProVu which was crowned European Distributor of the Year. ProVu MD Darren Garland said: "We have partnered with Sangoma for over five years and worked hard to develop our service offering around its products. To be recognised as European Distributor of the Year is a fantastic achievement for the ProVu team."

Glamorgan Telecom has been crowned Business of the Year in the up-to-50 staff category at the Welsh SME Business Awards, in which nominations come from the general public. Kelly Bolderson, MD at Glamorgan Telecom, commented: "The awards ceremony was an amazing celebration of the SME sector. We have had a great year and it's rewarding to see our efforts recognised in this way."



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If David Davis and his team of Brexit negotiators needed any reminding of the importance of securing a good EU exit deal they would have found a highly vocal lobby at last month's Evolution Capital 'Valuations in a Post-Truth World' symposium.



Nigel Cook

Delegate reactions and perspectives...

Chris Papa, Qubic: "I am not worried about the uncertainty. If there's a recession people still need to replace equipment to be more efficient. That has always generated business."

Russell Horton, Elite: "We are confident about M&A. If we do have a slight dip, offering value and savings to customers is where we can grow. If the UK does not get a Brexit deal it will continue to be a buyer's market."

Jonathan Marsden, The Technology Group: "It was great to see that multiples have increased, however that probably won't be sustainable. But once you take the uncertainty away our industry will flourish."

Colin Blumenthal, Complete IT: "With or without a Brexit deal it's down to us to make our clients more efficient and more profitable through better use of technology."

As media sponsor, Comms Dealer joined over 60 ICT channel business owners and entrepreneurs at the thought leadership event staged by Evolution Capital, the M&A Advisor, at NatWest's HQ in central London. Nigel Cook, CEO of Evolution Capital, explained the objective was for business owners to get a clearer understanding of the current climate for acquisition and growth in a business world continually being hit by fake news and economic uncertainty.

Ian Spence, CEO of TMT analyst Megabyte, summarised the message: "There is a lot of talk about uncertainty yet valuations and deal flows are off the chart, but it doesn't feel like a situation that can last indefinitely. So, if you are planning an exit in the next year or two, crack on. However, there is great long-term potential in the industry and opportunities to get investment and add value to your business."

With a note of caution Spence warned about the perils of leaping into

the cloud and its opex-based revenue models too quickly. "A lot of people are going through the capex versus opex revenue model changes," he said. "However, we have got examples of businesses that have wasted a lot of shareholders' money by rapidly going into the cloud. A flexible finance structure is needed to provide the right capital at the right time."

Mixed outlook

Looking at the macro economic climate, NatWest Senior Market Economist Neil Parker, echoing chancellor Phillip Hammond's budget statement the previous day, painted a gloomy picture for UK plc in the months ahead although, bizarrely, investment remains at an all-time high. "In the UK, we were hoping productivity growth would be about

two per cent since the 2008 financial market crisis, but it's less than three quarters of one per cent," commented Parker. "The productivity miracle hasn't happened despite record levels of investment.

"We have slowing growth and higher inflation driven by imports, an increase in the cost of labour and a growing skills shortage. Whether you are the UK Government or a private company, funding costs have increased because of the threat of a further rise in interest rates."

Parker also said the UK had relied on consumer spending power for too long and export growth has fizzled out. "We were sold that after Brexit, with a sizeable reduction in Sterling's value, export growth would be the saviour of the UK economy,"

he added. "But it hasn't because while export volumes have been increasing so have import values, therefore we have not seen a closing of the net trade balance."

Serial acquirer Ian Fishwick, CEO of Adept Telecom, has masterminded 38 acquisitions during his career. "If you are thinking of selling, be careful, but it's not all bad news," he commented. "The uncertainty on interest rates? Give me a break guys! This is still the cheapest money environment ever."

Concluding the Evolution Capital advisory session was Ian Williams, who leads the growth investment team at PE business Lyceum Capital. He stressed there was no let-up in the flow of available funds for comms and IT providers looking to transform their businesses and grow. "There is still plenty of capital out there," observed Williams. "Generally speaking, the environment is holding up. If Labour get into power that could be a driver for change but people are still bullish and we haven't seen the rush to the exit yet."

Across the course of the evening's presentations three things became clear – the UK economy is set for a rocky period yet the climate has never been better to sell a well-engineered, profitable business and achieve the best possible EBITDA multiple. And any companies prepared to ride the potentially stormy waters ahead will have to address the shift towards the millennial influenced technology space and make substantial cultural changes, most probably with the help of an investment community bursting at the seams with cash to splash. ■



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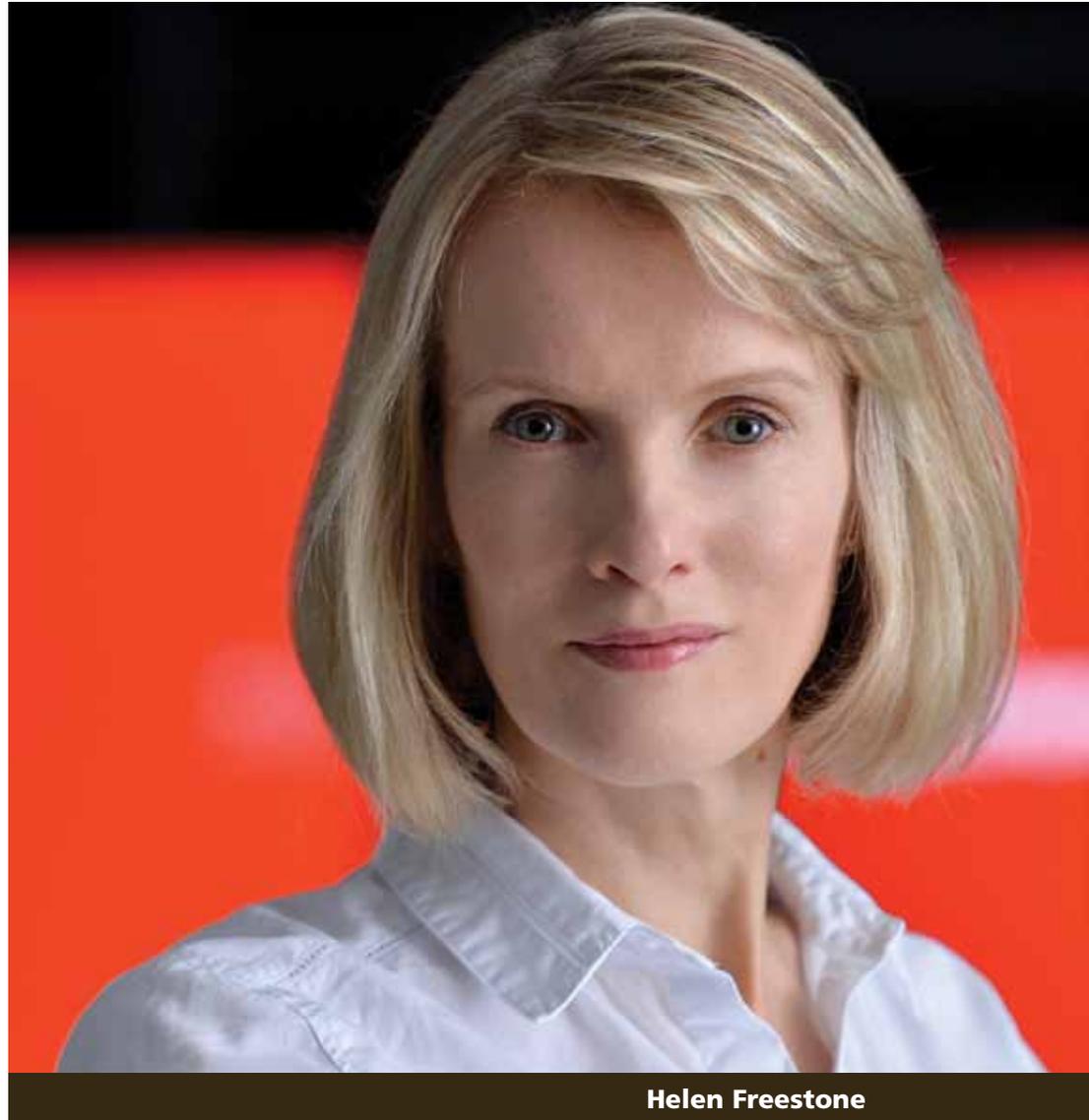
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Former lawyer followed

Helen Freestone, Director of UK Partnerships & Alliances at Vodafone, ranks highly in the league table of channel leaders. Dedicated to duty, people and partner-centricity, she displays all the traits of stand-out headship required to lead in disruptive times.



Helen Freestone

Vodafone Group's vital statistics...

- In 1983, the Racal Electronics Group wins its bid for the private sector UK cellular license
- Vodafone was formed as a subsidiary of Racal Electronics in 1984 and became an independent company in September 1991
- In 1985, the Vodafone analogue network was the first cellular network to launch in the UK
- Vodafone made its first mobile phone call on 1st January 1985 from London to Newbury
- The company has mobile operations in 26 countries, partners with mobile networks in 48 more, and fixed broadband operations in 19 markets
- As of 30th September this year, Vodafone Group had 522.8 million mobile customers
- Vodafone has invested £2 billion in its UK network and services since 2014, and expects to invest another £2 billion over the coming years

Freestone's passage from property lawyer to Vodafone top executive via a Microsoft directorship (and more in between) is a remarkable story of realisation, determination and ambition – with an injection of daring. "After more than six years of training in law it was not an easy conversation with my parents to tell them I wanted to follow my dream into technology," she said. "My Dad has just about stopped introducing me as his 'daughter who used to be a lawyer'.

After her epiphany Freestone moved away from law and immersed herself into the global technology industry where she amassed 20 years experience working in the private and public sectors. She is now responsible for leading the activity across Vodafone UK's Partnerships and Alliances business, which includes B2B partners, ISPs and industry partnerships. "Vodafone is one of Britain's greatest success stories so when the opportunity to lead Partnerships & Alliances came up in April I had to go for it," she added. "There

is something special and exciting about working in the partner channel where entrepreneurs have risked everything to build their businesses. On spending time with them, listening to their aspirations, their challenges and feedback, I knew there was an opportunity to collaborate and grow our respective businesses. It is the energy and excitement of working for these companies that I find incredible."

Freestone has triumphed in all tasks of leadership and her past experience adds polish to the gleaming prospects she currently has in her sights. "I was inspired by the

There is something special and exciting about working in the partner channel where entrepreneurs have risked everything to build their businesses

combination of opportunities and challenges, and also the chance to bring my wider experience – for example, from my time at Microsoft – to the table," commented Freestone. "I was part of Microsoft's journey from an enterprise technology supplier to a leading cloud solutions provider that developed both a consumer and an enterprise voice.

"My four years at Vodafone and eight years at Microsoft have shaped me into a creative, resourceful and focused leader. People and culture are a particular passion of mine and I pride myself on building highly

her tech sector dream

than volume, Vodafone replaced the Platinum, Gold and Silver tiers with new capability tiers called Approved, Specialist, Advanced and Total Communications. "Whatever a partner's ambition or capability the new structure enables them to find a level that suits them and offers the appropriate level of support," explained Freestone. "We have also created a suite of training and certification materials. For the first time, partners can gain certification across the Vodafone fixed, mobile, converged and cloud portfolios."

A third of Vodafone's partners have already used the marketing tools, assets and investment. And one partner has projected a 10-fold return in revenue on a joint investment in their social media campaign. "We introduced a new approach to how we work and support indirect B2B partners with this programme, and put our business customers at the heart of what we do," added Freestone. "Already, we've invested around £1 million in the programme during the last 18 months, and another half a million is committed."

With Vodafone's new programme firmly in place its direction of travel is plain to see, with new disciplines, structures and rewards that reflect value and growth in the fast evolving market around us. "We are at an inflection point in our industry," observed Freestone. "Things are moving fast and no-one can predict the future. However, what we can do is equip our partners with the tools, knowledge and skills to take advantage of any market change, no matter

how quick or unexpected. In return, our partners give us real-time market insights."

Peer behind the market's surface layer and it becomes obvious that customer expectations and working practices have transformed, with digitalisation impacting on businesses of all sizes across all industries. "The pace of change is greater than ever," added Freestone. "While it's a challenge, it's also an exciting time if the channel can embrace and capitalise on the transformation. We're seeing a huge thirst for knowledge on how to sell, deliver and manage new technologies such as UC and the IoT in order to outperform competitors."

Empowering partners

"Ambition remains high in the channel. Partners want to better understand their customers as well as explore new services and technologies to fundamentally grow their business. Therefore the technology that we and our partners provide to customers is more than communications, it's about working practices that fit with a modern age and a modern way of doing business. Then, it's about empowering partners with a programme that gives them the knowledge, tools and skills to better sell and service their customers."

The integration of communications is being realised across all types and sizes of businesses, whether it's the convergence of landline, mobile and communications applications, or across cloud and IoT services to create new business models.

Organisations are looking for ways to deliver a greater customer experience and be more responsive to customers. Many businesses are looking for new innovations to drive more economic service models, and partners need to master the technologies that the new market direction demands.

"Businesses are on a journey that is driven by digitalisation, and our roadmap with partners mirrors this path," stated Freestone. "At the same time, market changes are providing many of the building blocks for the IoT, including the networks and SIMs that are opening the door to a new, highly automated data-driven world. Partners have an important role to play in this landscape. Their knowledge of industries, geographies and businesses means they are ideally placed to help companies digitise their operations."

Freestone's can-do attitude will ensure that the needs of Vodafone's partners are absolutely met no matter the challenges that may lay ahead in an uncertain market. Her capacity to stare down and overcome significant hurdles was displayed early in her career when she qualified to practice law in Commercial Property, an achievement that would have come as no small surprise to her erstwhile doubters. "I have a form of dyslexia," said Freestone. "As it was not spotted until I was at university, at school my teachers would either tell my parents that I was lazy or not bright enough, or that I would never amount to anything. I now don't believe anyone who tells me I cannot do something." ■

Just a minute with Helen Freestone...

Role model? Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft. I met Satya before he became chief exec'. He has a quiet charisma and genuinely cares. I admire the way he has transformed Microsoft, not just in terms of its vision for cloud, but also its culture and innovation

What talent do you wish you had? To understand quantum physics and unravel the mysteries of the universe

In hindsight: I would have been bolder, worried less and taken more risk. I would also have believed in myself the way others believed in me, and I'd have been more kind to myself and to others

What do you fear the most? My 21-year-old stepdaughter's bedroom – best avoided!

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I love old WW2 movies

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Having the courage to leave the legal profession for the tech industry

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? I can be relentless which is great when you need to get something done, but it can be intimidating on the receiving end. So I remind myself that not everyone completes tasks the way I do, and to get the best out of people I may need to adjust my working style

Best career achievement: Personal achievements provide a fleeting sense of excitement, but watching those who I have managed or mentored go on to become phenomenal successes provides a warm glow

engaged customer-focused teams that strive to over-achieve their targets. My core goal right now is supporting partners to face and take advantage of a rapidly changing market. This was one of the reasons for launching the new Vodafone Partner Programme at the beginning of the year."

Capability counts

Vodafone's partner programme has been in action for seven years but the revamped version is a converged scheme open to all VPS partners, both fixed and mobile. With a focus on rewarding capability and customer experience rather

Veeam rockets into ente

Cracking into the enterprise space is a core component of Veeam's ambitious plan to hit \$1.5 billion in bookings revenue by 2020, and the appointment of Mark Adams as Managing Director (UK&I) in October was clearly intended to accelerate the task in hand.

Drafting in Adams was always going to be about firing up Veeam's long running stellar growth levels into a new orbit, and if anyone can provide a rocket boost to greater growth it is most certainly Adams who began his career as an aeronautical engineer for British Aerospace. Before anything else he is an engineer, and remains one at heart, but his mettle is strengthened by a remarkable capacity to design and build business strategies that underpin the sales ambitions of global organisations. It is a skill not to be underestimated.

Because of his engineering background Adams's initial sales roles were technical in nature. "I love how technology creates new industries and new ways to approach how things are done," he explained. "I've always veered towards disruptive technologies throughout my career, and that fits perfectly with my current role at Veeam. I've previously worked for major Fortune 500 companies and start-ups in sales leadership roles, running UK, EMEA and global corporations."

Veeam is an 'availability' company that aims to back-up any app, any data on any cloud, and Adams's broad experience puts him firmly in touch with Veeam's ambitious new strategy to ramp up



Mark Adams

We are determined to grow to \$1.5 billion in the next few years. That's the high-level objective

operations in the enterprise sector alongside the thriving SMB and channel business. The enterprise landscape is familiar territory for Adams, a stomping ground upon which the magnitude of deal sizes he has secured would register a 10 on the Richter Scale. "I've got 25 years experience in doing

enterprise-level deals, so the direction and guidance needed for Veeam EMEA and UK was a good fit," he stated. "I can assist Veeam in achieving the massive growth that we're aiming for."

Adams worked at Sun Microsystems for 11 years and secured some of the

company's biggest deals. He saw the business grow into a \$1 billion global organisation in circa 2000, and was also with Sun when its EMEA division hit the \$1 billion milestone. "Sun Microsystems very much took on the establishment," added Adams. "It was good fun and became more of a hobby

than a job. Nothing beats a business, or even just a sales team, firing on all cylinders."

Adams displays a readiness to repeat and even surpass his past successes and help put Veeam in the driving seat as a long-term market disrupter. "What's exciting is the room we have to grow," he stated.

Enterprise space

"We've got a fantastic track record but an increased focus on the enterprise gives us a huge runway. That absolutely fits with my experience."

Veeam was founded in 2006 by Ratmir Timashev and his college roommate Andrei Baronov, the team previously behind Aelita Software which was well known for its Windows Server management solutions.

Aelita was acquired by Quest Software in 2004 and after ensuring the successful continuation of Aelita's products and strategy at Quest, the team founded Veeam Software to provide similar systems management solutions for virtualised server infrastructures.

Remarkable growth

The company has grown rapidly over the last 11 years and now has around 267,500 customers with offices in more than 30 countries, adding on average 4,000 new customers per month. In Q3 2017 Veeam registered its 37th straight quarter of double-digit growth, alongside 34 per cent year-over-year total bookings growth, and also sealed its largest enterprise deal in its history. "This year we have closed more \$500k-plus deals than in the previous four years combined," commented Adams. "And we're seeing a surge in enterprise partnerships, recently adding integrations with Pure Storage, Nutanix, Starwind and N2WS, as well as being added to the global price list for both Cisco and NetApp."

Veeam's goal is to become the *de facto* availability provider to enterprise-sized organisations, and the UK and Ireland are specific

markets. Right now Adams is not treating the enterprise as a collection of individual vertical industries. Availability is a horizontal play, not an option but a necessity. "For many enterprises in the UK 'availability' is not seen as important, but they don't realise the importance of back-up and replication until something goes wrong," explained Adams.

"The simple fact is that enterprises need to be always-on, so we just need to make our story relevant and push it up the priority list. It's a traditional model and as we get bigger and more successful and referenceable then we'll probably start to look at vertical markets. If we execute well on the enterprise then that is the pot of gold for us. We want to spread right across their physical, virtual, VM-based and cloud world, and that's very much what we're going to deliver by ensuring the message and product is a priority for CIOs."

How well Adams rises to a challenge has lain at the root of his success to date, and in taking a more holistic solution to the enterprise sector he has never been more primed to execute. "We had a goal of \$1 billion by 2019," he said. "We're on course for that and are now determined to grow to \$1.5 billion in the next few years. The UK needs to contribute a stronger part of the EMEA number, and it's not rocket science. No-one is asking me to do something that I haven't done before. But it was especially attractive to come to Veeam and do so again. I've got staunch support from very senior people within the company to do exactly that." ■

Just a minute with Mark Adams...

Role models? I am an engineer at heart, so Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Ivanovich Sikorsky and Thomas Edison: They all figured something out where nothing existed and changed lives as a result

What talent do you wish you had? To be a great musician

What do you fear the most? Heights is interesting. I like flying and gliding but looking over a cliff edge is not good

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I enjoy watching science fiction films. I also have a thing for watches and wish I could afford some of the beautiful creations out there

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Leaving an engineering job and going into IT was heresy to my father and others

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? One of my strengths is simplifying complex issues, boiling them down to the key actions and then getting buy-in to get them done. But at times I can be a little 'half empty' so need to reflect positively more often

One example of something you've overcome: My wife had cancer. It wasn't me but it changes all your priorities and focus. All good now

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? Engineering. I started off as an aeronautical engineer for British Aerospace

Name three ideal dinner guests: Billy Connolly, Micky Flanagan and Peter Kay

ENERGY UPDATE
in association with

Fidelity Energy
Energisising Our Partners

Energy supply now Activ in North East

PROVIDING customers in the North East of England and Scotland with a full portfolio of services from one supplier is a central plank of Activ Technology's business strategy.

Ian Gillespie, Managing Director of the Newcastle based company, is also an advocate of 'listening as well as you hear' to ensure customers get the best all round service. Hence the addition of energy services in partnership with Fidelity Energy has been a natural extension to Activ's offerings.

"We offer the full scope of communications and technology services to a regional customer base. We listen to the needs of our customers and encompass a range of products to meet developing requirements. Our offerings include business mobile contracts, telephone systems, IT support, utilities, hardware, software and device management programs," said Gillespie.

By creating this converged range of services, Activ can ensure productivity over multiple platforms, all managed and overseen centrally with one point of contact.

"We're a local company dedicated to delivering the friendliest service, which is supported by our world class partnerships with networks including O2 and other major hardware and software providers," continued Gillespie.

"Fidelity Energy approached us to form a partnership due to our strong customer base and enhance our current product suite and it was perfect timing

as we wanted to offer our customers a larger product suite and allow them to have all their services under one roof."

Gillespie has been impressed with Fidelity Energy's seamless integration programme which has enabled Activ to speedily offer customers energy savings.

"The Fidelity Energy portal has full capability from the quotation stage to initiating contracts. We can now manage the process for customers to switch or renew their energy contracts with ease, saving them money in the process. We can easily analyse their current gas and electricity bills to understand their usage and requirements. Following this we can simply source the energy contract that's right for their business by comparing offers from up to 14 different suppliers."

To date, Activ has found that all customers are receptive to being informed of the various suppliers and tariffs and has identified some volume users of gas and electricity.

"In conjunction with Fidelity we have completed a full analysis and been able to save them significant money and lock in the saving for up to five years which is a big selling point," said Gillespie.

"As a business, our objective is to offer our customers the best advice on all services and with the knowledge and support Fidelity Energy provides, we see our partnership to be a natural addition to giving our customers the best advice and service," he added.



“ We can simply source the energy contract that's right for their business by comparing offers from up to 14 different suppliers.”

IAN GILLESPIE,
MANAGING DIRECTOR

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Jola repeats Griffin's win

Resellers are under pressure to master the new comms landscape as disruptive technologies like next generation mobile connectivity emerge into market reality, observes Jola's Managing Director Andrew Dickinson whose mission has always been to put partners on the right course and ease their journey into such high growth markets.

Dickinson has built a reputation for summoning partners to the banner of modern communications, firstly at Griffin and now Jola where he reconvened the erstwhile Griffin dream team – from management through to sales and operations – in a bid to replicate and build on the former ISP's proven growth formula. Griffin was ultimately sold in August 2012 with revenues of circa £24 million and EBITDA approaching £3 million. "One of the biggest challenges in a fast growth business is making sure the systems and establishment can keep up," said Dickinson.

"At Griffin we automated wherever possible and developed a company-wide recruitment process with the objective to hire the top five per cent of performers in their field. They are not always available when you have a position open, so we constantly recruited in expansion areas like sales. Once on board, weekly training and development kept staff growing, learning and always challenged."

Dickinson attributes, in part, Griffin's success to experience he gained prior to joining the company when he worked in early stage investment and management after leaving Mercury Communications in 1996. By the time he joined Griffin in 2004 he had a

good idea of the dos and don'ts in running a business and a clear vision for easing the strategic path ahead for partners. "The strategy in most of my projects has been rapid growth based on great technology – and with less than £1 million in channel revenues Griffin was ideally placed for growth," said Dickinson.

Not one to sit on his hands, Dickinson regrouped the former Griffin management team in 2014 and established Jola. From a standing start and in its second full trading year the company grew organically from circa £300k in annual revenues to over £2.4 million. "Within five years we will be ten times this size," stated Dickinson. "Our ethos is the same as Griffin, based on what we believe to be the best products, best price, great customer service and being easy to do business with."

Starting strategy

Jola's product strategy from the outset was focused on Ethernet connectivity. And with new technologies rapidly reducing the cost of leased lines, Dickinson felt he could help partners connect their customers cheaply and reliably, following up with a range of cloud products. "But fibre broadband turned out to be far more reliable than anyone expected," he added. "For most SMEs, two lines – one for voice and one for data – is a better



Andrew Dickinson

solution than Ethernet. In our first year of trading the star performer was our BroadSoft platform, and while JolaPhone continues to do well it has been overtaken this year by JolaMobile. Mobile broadband leads the way due to a number of innovative new products we have developed."

According to Dickinson, JolaMobile appeals to resellers who bundle airtime and handsets or sell data-only solutions. "We offer multiple networks to provide a range of services including multi-network, roaming SIMs and fixed-IP mobile data SIMs," he explained. "Our SIMs are cost-effective and available

with unlimited calls and texts plus 500MB to 200GB data packages on 30-day rolling contracts. JolaPhone and JolaNet appeal to partners wanting to bundle feature-rich BroadSoft licences with pre-configured handsets over a reliable Internet connection. JolaBilling and JolaSupport attract partners

Planning formula

who want to transition from a dealer model to a reseller arrangement."

Dickinson was quick to spot the mobile data opportunity and you don't need to be Einstein to see how the numbers add up. "Almost 200,000 businesses can't get 2Mb/s broadband and over two million have no access to 10Mb/s," he commented. "Perhaps the greatest opportunity for Jola and our partners is mobile broadband. The cost of mobile data has come down more than 60 per cent in the last two years, and with growing confidence in the speed and stability of 4G this now accounts for around 50 per cent of our business.

Mobile data

"The Government wants to accelerate the roll-out of 5G and this could have a dramatic effect on the connectivity landscape. In laboratory conditions the next generation of mobile broadband runs at 30 times faster than 4G. BT Openreach may be the Achilles heel for network operators today but hopefully they will soon be able to deliver high speed connectivity without the need for a physical local-loop.

"Jola is ready for this disruptive acceleration in mobile data adoption. We have completely automated the ordering, control and management of 4G as we did for broadband with Griffin. Our systems manage and control unlimited estates of data SIMs. We have also developed fixed IP SIMs and ways of measuring usage that eliminates unwanted overages and the problems caused by network delayed data. Mobile Manager is an ever-popular portal and

continues to be developed and enhanced with new features, particularly around the management of data and prevention of bill-shock."

Mobile data could become a focal point on the voice and data reseller battleground, as companies supplying desktop, server and LAN support to SMEs have started selling connectivity, hosted telephony and even mobile. "They have made significant progress," Dickinson observed. "Their customers always consult them before buying products that need to run over the LAN, so hosted voice and connectivity have

I doubt there are many industries that contain so many entrepreneurs. My only regret is that I didn't become one sooner

become easy additions to their portfolio. Traditional voice resellers are having to re-think how they acquire new customers as their PBX, calls and lines bases come under attack from emerging channels and cheaper alternatives."

The 250,000 SMEs between 10 and 250 employees is where the independent channel primarily operates, and buying behaviour in this sector is also evolving. "When making decisions about communications

purchases the MD is usually involved in the process," added Dickinson. "In the main they won't have a dedicated internal IT resource, so many will turn to the third party that manages their LAN for advice. IT VARs seem to have an edge with cloud products that run over LANs, but voice resellers appear to be more commercially aware with stronger sales teams.

"In the battle between the voice and data channels for mindshare of the SME market it will be interesting to see which of these channels prevails. Ultimately, the voice and data channels have already consolidated at the top level and this activity will cascade until voice resellers and IT companies are indistinguishable from each other. Few of the 8,000-plus IT support companies in the UK have a RID code, but this is changing."

Nothing stands still in comms, and the shifting sands have created a landscape that stimulates perpetual opportunity. "The voice and data channel in the UK is a wonderful, fragmented organism full of enterprise, innovation and opportunity," said Dickinson. "I doubt there are many industries that contain so many entrepreneurs. My only regret is that I didn't become one sooner. With low barriers to entry and constantly evolving technology, hundreds of new companies enter the channel every year. The most successful have a distinct culture and develop software to vertically integrate with suppliers and customers. Consequently, their initial choices of networks, platforms, billing systems and support are vital and mistakes can be expensive." ■

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Comms Vision exclusive interview

Sir Charles Dunstone

Dunstone has a gripping tale to tell and an instinct to make a difference. He also has personal traits that some might class as disadvantages. Yet he emphatically confirms the opposite.

Dunstone is not especially academic and has a mind that flits from here to there – but these attributes are godsend to many entrepreneurs and feature

prominently among his pack of trump cards. “I’m dyslexic, have a short attention span and a restless butterfly brain, so I can’t stick at one thing for very long,” he told Comms Vision conferees in an exclusive interview.

“Therefore I am always inspired by what I see around me – that’s the core of it.”

Dunstone’s psychological make-up is of a unique kind that catalyses the entrepreneurial spirit to go viral and inform almost every decision and action. So much so that his comfort zone is where most fear to tread – the relative unknown. Why? Because unchallenged familiarity needs hitting over the head from time to time, he believes, to help detoxify the mind of potential sluggishness. “Every day you need to have some kind of friction to make things happen,” he said. “We need a load that’s always running through

our mind to make us alert and keep us going.”

Dunstone has shown himself to be a born entrepreneur driven by an instinct to never stagnate from within. And his authentic arguments

indicate that the biggest threat to a business could be its leadership sitting on their hands.

“Many business leaders have their eyes closed and pretend there is no change – but change is happening in a profound way,” he said. “It is hard to predict the trends, but you can’t run away from change. You must run into it and assess how you can optimise your position and get ahead before anyone else.”

In leadership, the task is not to hand down power but to view it in proportion, to find a compromise between an oligarchy and fairness, says Dunstone. “You need to be something of a control freak and be comfortable with the pressure of making decisions,” he added. “You also need a tight team around you. I’ve always believed that companies



Every day you need to have some kind of friction to make things happen. We need a load that’s always running through our mind to keep us going



Falconer charts route to growth markets

Never have ICT resellers gazed over a landscape with such growth potential, but realising the opportunity is just as challenging as exciting, says Gamma CEO Bob Falconer.

In his keynote address to Comms Vision delegates Falconer re-emphasised a number of reliable indicators of growth, he cautioned conferees on the threats that are in attendance, and offered a strategic roadmap for the reseller channel as they concentrate on rising markets. "Helping the channel to win a bigger share of the market is not a simple matter of driving out more products," he stated. "The key is to recognise and go with market growth."

Falconer noted that the channel accounts for circa 20 per cent of the £10 billion business comms market. Bright spots include IP voice which is experiencing an average growth rate of 12 per cent, and he highlighted Ethernet as a displacement product for broadband, hailed fibre as 'utterly transformational', blew the cloud horn where IaaS is registering 32 per cent growth, and illustrated the remarkable potential of converged fixed and mobile. "Yet many channel companies are struggling to achieve top line growth," he observed.

The statistics scream of an unprecedented opportunity, but they also mask a number of threats to some channel players, including disintermediation, not adding value and the rise of US tech giants offering comms services as a package that can be bought online. "However, they are not close enough to customers," stated Falconer. "Resellers must show credibility and supplier choice is a key part of this, with between two and four key suppliers being the best way forward for resellers."

Gamma has adopted a three pronged approach to ensure partners have few if any problems in winning a bigger

share of their markets. The first, Marketing and Sales Support, reflects how far the industry has moved when it comes to generating and closing leads via Gamma's Accelerate portal, which has become the centralised hub for many of its users including companies like Capita.

Gamma's second focus area is Training and Operational Support, a category in which the company's Academy continues to flourish beyond expectations, offering 10,000 courses, serving almost 2,200 users from 819 organisations across which more than 3,600 badges have been awarded. "The Gamma Academy has rocketed," commented Falconer. "No-one has a right to sell to customers, but we are giving partners the expertise they need."

Star dust

Thirdly, Gamma's long held policy to offer Product Differentiation also continues to pay dividends. "Our philosophy is not to give partners a commoditised product, instead we add a sprinkle of star dust which enables them to achieve the right price," added Falconer

He noted four product categories of particular interest that reflect the main growth areas in today's market – Connect (Gamma's phone system), call recording, compliance and cloud compute – which alongside the company's three pillars of support add up to a strong strategy, believes Falconer. And a season of light awaits those resellers who are switched on to the needs of their own business as well as those of their customers, pointed out Falconer. "The channel opportunity is bigger than ever," he commented. "But it's a challenging environment. Resellers must provide the whole shooting match and choose their partners wisely."



Resellers must provide the whole shooting match and choose their partners wisely



The real question about Digital Britain has little to do with timescales, it's more about whether the channel will address the opportunity it has within its hands to catalyse the roll out of full fibre and create greater competition in the marketplace.

Full fibre call to arms

CityFibre, the disruptive infrastructure builder, and Entanet, the channel-centric connectivity wholesaler CityFibre acquired in July this year, are united by their shared vision on the essential role of full fibre in serving the growing needs of the digital workplace. In their session, CityFibre Director of Strategy Mark Collins and Entanet CEO Elsa Chen rallied the channel to embrace the power they have to deliver full fibre at scale and ultimately help to make Digital Britain a reality. Chen explained that for the first time the channel is entitled to exercise options that will have a direct influence on Britain's digital future, simply by embracing alternatives. "The channel underestimates its power," she said. "Collectively, as a community, we can influence decisions and increase competition in the marketplace."

Their proposal reflects the stance of Ofcom and the Government which both applaud the role of altnets in building full fibre networks with less reliance on the incumbent. "We are not an infrastructure business with a wholesale arm, we are a wholesale company with infrastructure," stated Chen. "The difference for Entanet now is in greater scale and depth. Our core has always been wholesale, and post transaction we have created a unified platform for the channel to build a full fibre network. We invite the channel to join us and collectively exercise the power of choice to influence the marketplace. We want the channel to tell us where to go. Where there are pockets of

concentration we are happy to have a conversation. It's about aggregation. Choice makes the channel partner powerful, but it's not going to happen overnight."

Vision and ambition

Yet CityFibre's relatively short existence displays clearly what can be achieved when vision and ambition combine to create an unstoppable force. The company was formed in 2011 and from the outset its mission has been to respond to under investment in fibre and increasing frustration in the channel. "We saw an opportunity – a simple one – to invest in building a full fibre infrastructure across the UK," added Collins. "Our growth has accelerated, we are 100 per cent channel and have always been reliant on partners that enable us to build networks. We need to embrace the channel more while maintaining key relationships and migrating out of previous ones based on exclusivity. We are opening up as much to the channel as we can. Only when entering a new location will we have anchor partners."

According to Collins and Chen, their fibre-first and wholesale-first approach to market answers the concerns of a business community begging for world class connectivity. "The channel has increasingly better connectivity options and we have to work collaboratively together," added Collins. "Our model is to create fibre evangelists in the channel. We all have a part to play in taking Digital Britain forward."

We invite the channel to join us and collectively exercise the power of choice to influence the marketplace



Time's ripe to catalyse in in the world of IoT

The IoT's emergence from the shadows could be the phenomenon of modern communications, and Steve Best, Managing Director, Product Management, Strategy and Regulatory Affairs at BT Wholesale, has no doubts about that.

Best delivered key insights into BT Wholesale's strategic momentum and presented a portfolio structure designed to deliver end-to-end digital transformation across the full spectrum of communications. It was especially significant that he spotlighted the Internet of Things (IoT), by far the biggest disruptive technology of the day cited by 41 per cent of respondents in a BT CEO survey. BT's research offered a strong guide to the state of the comms market right now, with the following categories rated as the next most important technologies: Cloud computing (35 per cent), mobile computing (30 per cent), social media (28 per cent), Big Data (26 per cent), and AI/ML (22 per cent). The evidence suggests strongly that the traditional order of communication services is hardly fit for a modern purpose. Small wonder then that Best delivered his Comms Vision Convention keynote address under the banner, 'How to become a competing force in the new digital enterprise'.



He gave insights into what makes BT Wholesale tick, and its evolution is a sure sign of the times, evolving to help the channel respond most effectively to the new ICT ecosystem and on-demand world, driven by the rise of M2M, the IoT, growth in bandwidth, 4G, and virtualisation technologies such as Network Function Virtualisation (NFV) and Software Defined Networking (SDN).

"BT Wholesale is undergoing a period of transition," stated Best. "The consistent theme is building networks and connecting customers, but the methods of connecting are changing. Therefore we are investing in NFV, SDN, flexible bandwidth services, cloud UC, mobile, contact centres and IoT technology. The IoT is nothing new. We've been talking about it for over 20 years. But it's no longer just an idea, it's about turning ideas into reality and adoption will only increase."

BT Wholesale is investing in IoT through the channel where deep insights into verticals will play a key role in its success. "Only then can we pull the IoT layer

The IoT transforms our approach to market, but it is not a case of one size fits all

Innovation

together, based on analytics, connectivity, sensors and actuators," added Best. "BT is focusing on low bandwidth spaces where the cost of sensors is less and battery life can run between five to ten years."

Best cited research that showed 57 per cent of companies worldwide have already adopted IoT technology, rising to 85 per cent by 2019. "We're combining our expertise, network and partnerships to create innovative IoT solutions," he added. "IoT transforms our approach to market, but it is not a case of one size fits all."

Key IoT markets for BT include Intelligent Retail where insights can be leveraged to boost profits; Intelligent Data that powers faster, better decision making; Intelligent Assets that provide global inventory visibility; and Intelligent Cities which are fast becoming more sustainable places to live. "We provide the foundation that makes the IoT possible – connectivity," added Best. "That's just the start."

From the IoT to mobile to NFV and all else in between, the channel has to see that sticking to old technologies won't work, pointed out Best. "Traditional markets are in fixed pipes and fixed capacity," he stated. "We are now moving towards flexibility and bandwidth control through our portal. We offer the capability for customers and consumers to use the bandwidth they need when they need it. We are focused on virtualisation and new value propositions."

The virtualisation of customer site hardware brings greater service provision agility and operational cost reduction. And Best revealed that BT is poised to kick off customer Proof of Concept projects that put control and visibility into the hands of CPs, supported by enhanced systems integration via its portal. As well as this, BT is leveraging its acquisition of EE, a significant mobile player offering MVNO services, and plans to launch a mobile office capability. BT Wholesale's mobile strategy sits alongside other key focus areas including UC, hosted SIP trunks, Avaya Aura cloud solutions and fraud management in the cloud space.

Best also pointed to a new SIP Trunking proposition aimed at migrating SMEs from ISDN, which offers a single and common customer user experience irrespective of the SIP or centrex technology deployed. Investments continue at pace in professional services, additional fibre expansion, extended data connectivity coverage and 4G, with the promise of more Ethernet in data centres to improve the speed of connecting up customers. 10G Ethernet Access Direct (EAD) is planned for next spring, while 4G access will hurry along Ethernet lead times and provide a solution for business continuity. "This is the changing nature of our business," stated Best. "The time is ripe to drive innovation and value." ■

Digital leaders keep it simple

The future success of digitalisation in the workplace is as much about effective leadership development as it is technological innovation, according to Mark Rhodes, author and international leadership speaker (introduced to delegates by Platinum sponsor 8x8). In his Comms Vision keynote Rhodes explained what transformational leadership means in the more complex digital workplace, and why business and cultural change is imperative and can be achievable without having a negative impact on customer service at this time of unprecedented workplace transformation. But he cautioned that too many boardroom execs fall short of what is required to lead their business successfully into the digital era. "Transformational leaders must know how to nurture and coach people to over-perform," he stated. "People are unhappy and unresponsive when their reality does not match their expectation. You can reset expectations, but you need to understand what they are. You cannot survive by doing the base minimum."



Rhodes categorised transformational leaders as those who prioritise and disseminate a company vision, develop a thriving culture, and who believe in their teams and people – rather than get stuck on matters of accountability. "People need to be led to a different place, not managed there," added Rhodes. "They need to understand how transformation can work for them and the business, rather than focus on negativity. It's simple stuff, but too many leaders over complicate what's good for their organisation." ■



From the fear of losing jobs to widespread apprehension about the all-powerful rise of robots, organisations have to realise that Artificial Intelligence is a tool rather than an alarming force in technology and cause for concern, according

to Duncan Gooding, Acting Managing Director for TalkTalk Business, in a Comms Vision panel debate entitled, 'Automation and AI: The new realities of how digital is changing work'. "In a recent survey 20 per cent of people welcomed AI as it removes layers of administration, allowing them to do more," he stated. "The key is to encourage staff to get involved in the transition. It's about growing the organisation, speeding up processes and making AI relevant to the overall digital strategy." ■



Digital strategies that b transformation to work

In the language of communications it is wholly illiterate to talk about the digital workplace without reference to the space that wraps around new technology implementations. In that there is no argument, emphasises David Dunbar, Director at Workmodes Consulting.

Dunbar is well known for leading the development of BT's flexible working strategy, and as Head of Digital Workplace and Transformation at Nationwide

he was responsible for planning and driving the digital transformation for 20,000 people. In his Comms Vision keynote Dunbar illustrated why a strong digital workplace strategy is crucial to the success of transforming organisations towards more agile, more flexible workplaces through technology, the physical space and culture. This is the real transformation that businesses should be harnessing and cohering, he says, suggesting that ICT providers should deliver a much clearer message on digital transformation that speaks of technology and space coming together to support what he calls an 'objective focused collaborative culture'.

"Space is a wrapper for technology," he stated. "Technology enables people to interact – space allows technology to be applied. Space is increasingly intelligent and functional, moving away from

traditional office structures to areas that are team-based, collaborative and have specific functions."

All want frictionless digital transformation, however there is no off-the-shelf arrangement, a fact clearly illustrated by Dunbar's definition of the digital workspace which hinges on four interconnecting factors: Minds (empowering the workplace), Spaces (leveraging the workplace), Occupancy (occupying the workplace), and Control (controlling the workplace). "Exploiting technology, signposting new behaviours and creating functional space are key," he said. "The digital workplace exists at the intersection of technology and property. It includes aspects of space planning and intelligent buildings, empowerment for employees and even organisational structural change. Technology is absolutely one of the main components, but it's not the objective."

An organisation's digital workspace strategy must consider the weight of its current condition with its aspirational



The digital workspace is a state of mind, a way of thinking for the entire organisation with underlying complexity



Laying foundations for digital transformation

Networks have been subject to evermore demands on performance since the advent of digitalisation, never more so than today. No surprise then that Interoute has set about making connections unfit for purpose a thing of the past.



The best way to tackle network shortfalls like latency? Create a solid foundation for enterprise digital transformation, says Mark Lewis, EVP of Products & Development at Platinum sponsor Interoute. "We must deliver reliable and predictable performance in an uncertain digital world," stated Lewis in his keynote address to Comms Vision delegates. "Organisations are changing how they do business and customers are moving to the cloud where they can be subject to slow and inconsistent ISP connections."

Reducing latency has a significant impact on improving application performance, and Interoute is ever more obsessed with eradicating such inconsistencies in poor network performance and has designed its Enterprise Digital Platform and Cloud Fabric as an antidote to these blights and distractions. "The platform is entirely software defined from customer site to virtual data centre," added Lewis.

Interoute was established in 2002 and now operates a 2 billion euro pan-European fibre optic network that supports 25 of the top 30 service providers in the world. The three pillars of its strategic plan are the Cloud Fabric, its software defined global network; Virtual Data Centre (VDC), the global IaaS platform; and Edge, incorporating software defined WAN and NFV, optimising access to all applications in the data centre and the cloud. "Cloud Fabric and Interoute VDC offer faster access to

applications and better application performance," said Lewis. "It differentiates against the likes of Amazon. Cloud Fabric services both private WAN and public Internet. With Interoute Edge, SaaS traffic is sent securely and directly to the application. Bandwidth to the data centre is not consumed by Internet traffic, and the security policy is pushed to the edge but centrally managed."

Lewis highlighted the power of SD-WANs to digitally transform businesses and showed where SD-WAN fits into the next generation of IT infrastructure – the new Cloud Fabric. "Our SD-WAN approach enables cost versus performance and SLA optimisation across all access," he added. "Dynamic path control routes and optimises traffic on the optimal, best performing path for the application."

Cloud migration

Lewis cited research that indicates 60 per cent of UK businesses are planning to move at least 40 per cent of their infrastructure to the cloud in the next 12 months. And almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of IT decision makers think it's important that the cloud and network are fully integrated when it comes to putting applications in the cloud. Not surprisingly therefore, the top IT challenge is having the ability to integrate legacy technologies with cloud-enabled applications. But the cost of skills for digital transformation projects is on average 31 per cent higher than for other IT projects.

Enter Interoute's Digital Infrastructure Platform. "It's a software defined network and multi-cloud platform," Lewis commented. "A single solution that delivers integrated public, private and hybrid Infrastructure as a Service with global private networking. Security is inherent, not complex. Everything is interconnected, not isolated. Developers can think outside the box and build distributed solutions that bring applications closer to users and deliver superior performance. Furthermore, existing technology investments can be integrated without re-factoring applications. Simply plug them in." ■

The platform is software defined from customer site to virtual data centre

High tech by nature

Businesses are safer than ever in the hands of the young and will gain more traction if they push forward their upcoming youngsters into work areas they have not before occupied. The catalyst for this change of approach? Their naturalisation of technology – which makes them the natural choice for certain roles, believes Comms Vision Chair Andrew Lippman, Associate Director and co-founder, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “Hire the young in this time of transformation,” he said in a Comms Vision panel debate. “We see companies bring in kids as interns and put them in front of customers in some circumstances. For the young, they don’t talk ‘technologies’ – they were born with it.”

A secondary obligation on the younger generation is to influence change within their organisation, believes Steve Best, Managing Director, Product, BT Wholesale. “We have a big focus on generational factors, and young people need to help us change as a company,” he explained. “Furthermore, the way customers communicate is changing and this has a lot to do with the younger generation. Customers want a far more integrated comms environment, including social media for example.”

The advance of digital technology is not only creating new opportunities for the youthful, it is also sparking additional markets and new revenue streams – and the channel sits in the middle. So how can the channel continue to harness technological innovations and turn them into digital value propositions? It’s a matter of understanding the influence that resellers are able to leverage, says Elsa Chen, CEO, Entanet. “The channel has the power to transform the British infrastructure that will support the digital revolution,” she stated, also noting that the company’s full fibre roll out could potentially be led in part by partners.

The channel should also elevate customer engagement to a new level, believes Mark Lewis, EVP of Products & Development, Interoute. “The engagement is no longer transactional,” he stated. “The challenge is that becoming a trusted advisor involves a long process of partnering with the customer.” ■



Trust shifts to the networks

Institutions are losing their grip as populations place their trust in networks – and there is no quelling the revolt, stated Comms Vision Guest Chair Andy Lippman – Associate Director and co-founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab (MIT) – in his conference keynote address. At the heart of this transition phase is the technology that facilitates it, he pointed out. “Society is going through an age of disruption and we are not immune to its impact,” commented Lippman. “Technology is the enabler.”



The first phase of Internet disruption sent shock waves through businesses, noted Lippman. “Disruption now attacks institutions,” he commented. “Trust is migrating away from them to distributed networks. It’s a big shift that is changing our lives.”

Historic events in recent times have helped to spark a network renaissance, noted Lippman. He pointed to 2001 and 9/11 as flags to an era when people displayed trust in institutions. In January 2009 Bitcoin arrived (the distributed currency which has no government or centre). Next, Edward Snowden’s leaks in 2013 helped to nudge the shift in trust away from institutions towards distributed networks, which for many was a moral imperative defined by faith in numbers.

A key point is that technology has allowed the interests of individual people to come before the nation state to which they previously subscribed. No less remarkable and also bound up in the network experience is the impact of AI, which Lippman defined in his own unique way. “There is no AI, only human intelligence, it just runs on a different platform to the human mind,” he said. “It’s human-guided deep learning that uncovers themes and biases. The difference is that it brings out patterns of recognition on an unprecedented scale.”

In one example of AI in action, MIT has a programme that analyses news to assess the important issues and various slants used by the media. MIT uses this intelligence to uncover the biases and act as a counter to the notion of ‘fake news’. “The intersection of technology with society is the crucial enabler,” noted Lippman, citing autonomous vehicles as an example. “The magic is when new technology meshes with society. The challenge is to rethink our perception of the network, recognise the spirit of disruption in the world and see the societal shift in trust towards distributed networks.” ■

Targeting verticals need

When it comes to competing in the technology arena, homing in on one specific vertical market can be extremely beneficial but what are the central tenets of this approach?

When attacking a vertical, it is vital to make ensure that all aspects of your business are aligned in a unified effort. From product marketing to sales processes, engineering to business development, all your teams should be on the same page and have a collective voice across the business. This is crucial as you go through a sales cycle because you want everyone who makes contact with your potential customers to be well versed and communicate consistent messaging.

Without a strong unified approach you run a real risk of creating disconnect and confusion both internally and externally, which will ultimately lead to a failed attempt at gaining market share in a particular vertical.

Is it worth all this effort? Yes, because by becoming a clear leader in a particular vertical market, you can set a standard of performance for competitors who attempt to encroach on that specific market. And remember, once you have secured yourself as a market leader, it is crucial to listen closely to the customers within that vertical, stay innovative, and continue to raise the bar to maintain your 'trusted advisor' status in that sector.

It is also vital to consult with expert advisers and engage with the right technology partners. As an example, construction companies are increasingly adopting the cloud for content and project management, accounting, safety, plans, daily reports and job-site mobility. If you consult with industry specialists and seek input from customers to identify the best in class applications you'll find it easy to become a favoured supplier. Again, using construction as an example, a visit to the industry trade shows such as Building Live or Ecobuild will provide tremendous value in determining where the opportunities lie in the vertical and adjacent markets.



CARL LOWE
CLOUDSOURCE
TECHNOLOGIES

“ Specialisation encourages our sales team to acquire in-depth knowledge of a specific market - their requirements, their business goals and what challenges they need to overcome - so that we can approach potential customers in a more focused, targeted way. By getting to know what makes a customer tick, you can tailor-make a solution that you know will integrate with their specific systems and programs and then use this expertise when approaching other customers within that same vertical. If one ticks that way, it's likely the rest will to. ”



NEIL MCMANUS
GHM

“ Targeting a vertical market gives your business a clear focus and an opportunity to work at a much greater depth which can be both challenging, in a good way, and rewarding. The three things to remember are firstly choose a vertical that you are passionate about. You'll be working with industry experts and end users and it's vital that you genuinely want to help them. Secondly do your research. Look at how the industry is performing, what the projected growth is, what the influencing factors are and what the competition is like. Finally, be prepared for it to be a long-term investment. It will take time to grow your position in the market place and so don't expect results overnight. ”



ALEX HOOPER
CISILION

“ Cisilion has recognised the importance of customer experience and user adoption as key success factors in delivering our solutions to our customers. Consequently understanding their market environment, their user profiles, their culture and the regulations and practices they need to adhere to, is critical for us to deliver on their business outcomes. Market specialisation allows us to bring like-minded customers together to share ideas that facilitates development of market specific solutions that will integrate with commonly used practices within that sector. From a solution delivery perspective it also allows us to identify potential problems before they occur, understand and remediate common objections and deploy a risk adverse solution into their environment. ”



DAVID HUGHES
INCOM-CNS

“ It's all about referenceability! Building upon a good story is key to developing credibility within a particular vertical and can set you apart from your competitors. Quality case studies and industry award wins, based on specific deployments, have helped us gain market share in a number of verticals. This kind of success has also engaged the whole team, across the business, which means we have developed a collective voice which delivers consistent messages to potential customers. If you can define yourself as a clear leader in a specific market, remain innovative and deliver a great customer experience, you can build on that momentum to achieve significant, ongoing success. ”

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BRINGING VENDORS TOGETHER



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SHAHRAM BAGHERZADEH
LOOP VOICE & DATA

“ Market specialisation enables us to become experts in how we can help our customers improve their internal processes. The more clients we serve in a given vertical, the more we understand their business. This enables us to also better understand their needs and preferences, as well as their customers’ needs and behaviours, resulting in stronger relationships and improved service delivery. It also improves our efficiency which has a positive result on our profitability. Ultimately, the role of any comms solution must be to improve communication, internal processes for the client and improve the service that they deliver. ”



TIM DOCKER
MPS

“ For the reseller, genuine vertical market specialisation can drive new business acquisition through recommendation and referral within a chosen sector. To realise this organic growth the reseller must have or develop an intrinsic knowledge of the sector which sets it apart from its competitors. Consultancy and technical staff must be aligned to the sector, understanding common sector specific commercial and operational challenges and expert in designing, delivering and supporting solutions which address those challenges, and deliver demonstrable return on investment. The reseller must provide first class service delivery, resulting in a superior customer experience. Ideally intra-sector communication should naturally disseminate the value of the reseller’s offering which can be enhanced by marketing activities such as sector aligned seminars and the creation of user groups. ”



JOHN MCKINDLAND
NIMANS

“ In the SMB sector, there’s a lot of ‘vanilla’ resellers who are just selling lines and calls, or hosted or just PBX, not looking at the wider picture of how they can add value to a sale. That could be an application suite that leads to market specialisation such as call centres and the health care industry with associated bolt-on solutions such as Wireless LAN. Becoming a niche operator can add significantly value to a business and here at Nimans we have specialist teams on hand to support resellers. It’s about understanding what your customers need and also what your suppliers can do to help. ”



IAN BEVINGTON
OAK INNOVATION

“ Vertical market specialisation enables solution providers to be relevant by addressing specific industry challenges using the customers’ terminology. Over the years, many solution providers have built successful industry sector practices by winning a deal and reproducing their success across similar organisations. Before long, marketing is engaged to write case studies, identify industry sector events and execute vertical market campaigns. Wherever you start, expect to spend 12 – 18 months to get under the skin of a vertical market and see incremental sales. Looking forward, digital transformation will demand a greater understanding of the customer’s business, closer relationships with specialist technology partners and an ability to tailor solutions. For this reason, I predict more vertical market specialisation over the next three years ”



PAUL HARRISON
THE VOICE FACTORY

“ Tvf’s focus on the hotel sector has demonstrated exceptional growth and we’re now adding two hotels a day to our platform. Our partner, Fourteen IP, is currently providing hosted telephony services to 43 Marriott hotels in the UK, plus the Ritz Carlton Geneva will be live shortly. You have to be innovative when addressing a specific market sector which is why we have added our free of charge SENTRY fraud management service to our portfolio which safeguards hotel businesses against PBX and SIP hacking and provides alerts to unusual, high spend by hotel guests and internal users calling long distance and premium numbers. This enables the hotel to verify the call with the user or cut it off before high costs are incurred. ”



NIKKI LAKER
INFINITY GROUP

“ Market specialisation has its advantages as your product/service offering can be refined to uniquely support the needs of businesses within particular verticals. Your business can build a reputation as a market leader due to the solution you design, implement and refine over time and you’ll have some strong case studies to gain new customer’s trust. Specialising also has its disadvantages as you could lose out in other verticals, thereby limiting your growth. Choose carefully, identify the risks, and more importantly analyse what competitors you will come up against and determine how your offering is different to theirs. If you do decide to specialise it could pay off to choose more than one vertical with transferable needs between them. ”

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Go the extra Myall



Lee Myall

INTERROUTE'S Lee Myall has returned to home shores to lead the cloud and network provider's UK Sales Division as Country Manager. During his 14 year spell with Interoute he has held various positions in sales, marketing and operations, most recently leading business units and transformation projects across continental Europe as Senior Vice President. In all, Myall brings 30-plus years IT, media and telecoms industry experience to the role.

"The UK is a key market for Interoute and our goal is to make it as quick and easy as possible for customers and partners to leverage our network, cloud and voice infrastructure," stated Myall. "Our global cloud and network infrastructure provides a foundation for ambitious companies seeking to scale and grow services for customers either nationally or internationally."

Interoute's UK sales organisation forms part of a single Global Sales & Marketing division headed up by Global EVP of Revenue, Jan Louwes, who has been driving growth in the European region for over ten years.

Linsell takes Timico role



Kevin Linsell

TIMICO has drafted in Kevin Linsell as CTO reporting to CEO Ben Marnham.

The appointment forms part of a management team restructure following a £550 million investment by

Lyceum Capital earlier this year. Linsell previously held senior director roles at Computacenter Group, Datapipe Europe and Adapt Services. His new remit is to develop and drive market and product strategies while forging partnerships and developing the product management team.

Linsell said: "I have a passion for technology and the role it can play in an organisation's success. I intend to deliver a compelling proposition and roadmap for Timico."

Marnham commented: "Kevin's passion and commitment are representative of Timico's ethos and we welcome his expertise in delivering client focused thought leadership."

Also on the move...



Tracie Fawcett

TRACIE Fawcett has joined Nimans' Network Services Division as Channel Development Manager for the south of England region. She brings 17 years experience with previous spells at EE/BT, Daisy and Avenir. Fawcett

stated: "Nimans provides me with a great platform to further develop my career and take it to the next level." Head of Network Services Mark Curtis-Wood added: "Tracie is a valuable new addition to our expanding team, further enhancing our mobile proposition. She will be a great asset not just to us, but to our growing customer base."

PURE Telecom's newly created Marketing Manager position has been filled by Sharon Hutchinson, who joined the firm from Halls Auctioneers in Shropshire where she oversaw all marketing



Sharon Hutchinson

activity including print, digital and social media. Prior to that she was head of marketing at Telford-based distributor Enta Group. Hutchinson said: "I look forward to working with the great team and to help grow Pure Telecom's presence locally

and regionally." Pure Telecom provides mobile and fixed telecom solutions for businesses throughout Shropshire and surrounding counties.

Invosys lifts rising stars

INVOSYS has completed a round of internal promotions as the company prepares for a new phase of growth. Anna Hoban becomes Head of Operations with a focus on customer service, additional training and team building. Darren Singleton and Ed Cheung take on the new roles of Pre-Sales Project Managers, collaborating with the sales team on bringing new business on board. Dan Fish assumes the role of Chief People Officer and will prioritise staff development and wellbeing along with the firm's recruitment strategy. Dave Brocklehurst has been promoted to BDM while Ellie Hazelwood joins the sales team as a Telephone BDM. Luke Grannell has been promoted to Billing & Credit Control Manager.

Peter Crooks, COO, commented: "We've always invested heavily in our people – and it's paid off. The staff who have been promoted are loyal members of the Invosys team and we know they are pivotal in helping us achieve our ambitious plans to shake up the channel and challenge the telecoms establishment."



Invosys rewards its rising stars

Converged fills top service job



Ian MacIntosh

CONVERGED Communication Solutions' customer service will be led by Ian MacIntosh who has been promoted to Operations Manager out of the business development team. His remit is to oversee customer service from initial enquiry through to delivery, while also ensuring processes and systems are optimised. MacIntosh joined Converged in late 2016 following a 20 year stint in the retail and IT industries, initially running his own business franchise. He said: "I've seen first-hand the transformation that new technology can have on a business. When designed to work in unison, IT and telecoms systems can deliver significant positive benefits to any size of company."

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