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# Comms Dealer August 2019 Click to open PE deal as Dowd aims for £600m

A MAJOR growth investment by LDC in rising Onecom saw Mark Thompson rock up as Chairman and founder Darren Ridge become Non-Exec' Director.

### SPECIAL REPORT

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Since then he has supported several boards including G3 Comms which merged with Connect Managed Services last

month creating a £55m business (see page 4 for the full story).

"Onecom is in a position to take full advantage of the opportunities presented through convergence in the communications sector, the expansion of digital infrastructure and the roll out of 5G and superfast fibre," commented CEO Ben Dowd (pictured above). "The market is ripe for consolidation and Onecom can play a big role in this across mobile and fixed solutions where there is a huge number of resellers."

Onecom currently manages nearly 100,000 business customers and employs 400 people across 10 regional offices. Its partners include Samsung, Apple, Gamma, Mitel, Virtual1 and Vodafone. Onecom signed a record partner deal with the operator in June and set out plans to become a £600m ICT powerhouse within five years.

LDC Head of London Yann Souillard said: "Ben and the team have a clear vision and ambition for the business and a credible plan to deliver it."

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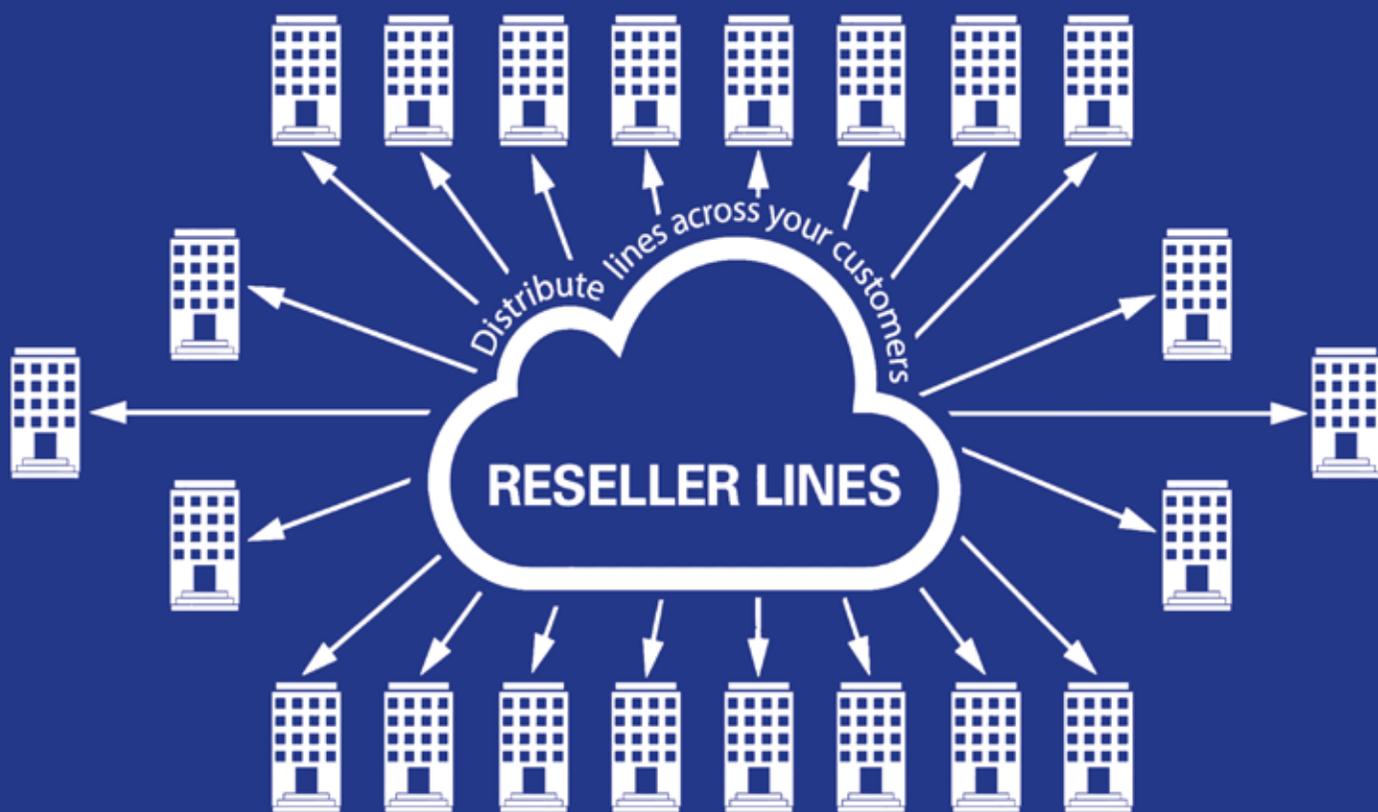
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This month's movers and shakers

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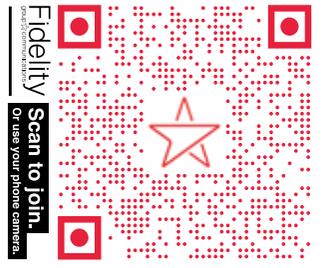
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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

QUITE a big month was July: We got a new Prime Minister, faced the real prospect of a No Deal Brexit – which overshadowed the hottest day ever recorded in the UK – while an exclusive outbreak of optimism seems near uncontrollable among a fresh faced Cabinet of ‘do somethings’ set alight by positive thinking.

That Boris Johnson is practical and driven by optimism is beyond doubt. Whatever is said about his ‘politics’ all must agree that it is a change to watch someone who thinks they are a true leader born for the job and who goes about things with gusto and determination. Whether this is a breath of fresh air from the sunny uplands or a cold blast from the frozen wilderness is another question. But with a finger stuck in the air you can detect the winds of change, and despite the lack of all important detail Johnson’s pledge to ramp up the UK’s connectivity status must be taken as read.

The fact that the UK’s woeful ranking in the global digital infrastructure league has not gone unnoticed by the PM is telling. This is at odds with his vision of the nation and its ability to compete in the world. Who can argue with that? Indeed, a fully fibred up UK is even more essential if we are to help offset the impacts of a No Deal Brexit should that event ever happen.

It is safe to assume therefore that the PM’s FTTP pledge will, sooner or later, have something to do with our industry and most players in it. Although short on the details right now, how the industry will be incentivised to deliver Digital Britain must, with a dose of positive thinking and optimism, be seen as a boon to the channel. Surely that must be good news.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• You must ask yourself a cardinal question: Where do you want your business to be in Digital Britain, and how will you get there? (p32)

# Jola’s direct route to MS

RESPONDING to the stellar rise of Microsoft Teams and the broadening availability of Phone System as a logical upgrade, Jola has launched a channel programme for Microsoft Direct Routing in the UK.

“For the first time the channel will be able to sell a viable white label alternative to traditional PBXs and hosted telephony,” commented Jola CTO Adrian Sunderland.

“If you want to connect Microsoft Phone System to the PSTN – and you will if Teams is to replace your PBX or hosted telephony system – the Microsoft Calling Plan product is a little clunky. It’s also expensive compared to SIP bundles available in the market.

“Instead of using the Calling Plan Microsoft will allow customers to connect Teams Phone System to an alternative network provider using Direct Routing. However, setting this up is complicated and expensive and there are only a handful of companies in the UK offering Direct Routing as a service.”

Jola Direct Routing for Teams is built on a Microsoft approved platform and offers numbers in 167 countries and every area code in the UK.



Adrian Sunderland

Jola claims that its unlimited wholesale UK call package is cost-effective compared to Microsoft’s Calling Plan and it also provides out-of-bundle rates, pointed out Sunderland.

“Due to the level of technical expertise required in setting up Direct Routing for Teams only resellers with appropriate Microsoft certification and administrative access to their customers’ licenses can buy direct from Jola,” he added.

Self-serve ordering and management is done through Jola’s SIP Manager portal. The company also provides an API for customers wanting to place orders via an existing portal.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

DESPITE a lack lustre set of H1 financial results AIM-listed MSP Adept4 says it will continue to restructure the business as it seeks a return to growth. Unaudited interim results for the six months ended 31st March 2019 show sales fell to £4.2m from £5.4m in the same period last year. Losses climbed to £1.1m, up from £800k. Net debt as of 31st March 2019 was £3.4m.

CAMBRIDGE-based MSP ASL Group has acquired Reprotect, said to be the largest independent office equipment supplier in the east midlands. The acquisition follows an investment from Primary Capital Partners and adds to the acquisition of Geerings Digital last November. ASL provides managed print services, UC, software and IT.

MIDLANDS located IT office kit reseller Altodigital has acquired Bedfordshire-based Platinum, an IT support services company with a strong presence in the automotive vertical. The move is part of Altodigital’s plan to drive 25% growth over the next three years. “To meet this target we are focusing on one more acquisition by the end of the year with others in the pipeline,” commented Business Manager Stewart Abrahart.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

**MOBILE** comms will displace fibre as both the primary and secondary connection mode as 5G rolls out across Europe, according to Jason Wells, Vice President and General Manager for EMEA at Cradlepoint. "We're seeing a big transition and interest in wireless," he said. "We're on the cusp of something exciting."

**ISSUES** with UK regulation and the management and ownership of phone numbers have been blamed for the UK's ranking as the world's biggest target for fraudulent telecoms traffic, according to data from BICS which points to over 25 million fraudulent call attempts to the UK in 2018 alone. Criminals are exploiting weaknesses in the phone numbering system, highlighted the report.

A **SITE** sharing collaboration between Vodafone and O2 aims to accelerate the roll out of 5G. The companies will share the use of 5G active equipment such as radio antennas on joint network sites across the UK. They have also agreed to greater 5G network autonomy on approximately 2,700 sites in 23 of the UK's larger cities (in addition to London), representing just over 16% of combined mast sites.

## Bligh joins Adept as Non-Exec

FORMER Gamma COO Richard Bligh has joined Adept Technology Group as Non-Executive Director.

During his 13 year stint at Gamma Bligh was instrumental in building the business to over £1bn-plus market capitalisation.

Adept Chairman Ian Fishwick said: "Richard's detailed knowledge and insight of the converging comms and IT markets will provide significant value to the company. He will be a great asset."

Bligh said: "The development of Adept Technology Group as one of the UK's leading managed service providers, particularly during the last four years, provides an excellent platform for future growth to which I can add value."



Richard Bligh

# Connect-G3 merge to create £55m biz

CONNECT Managed Services has merged with G3 Comms, creating a £55m business.

Connect has witnessed strong growth since the LDC-backed MBO in 2014, notching up £30m revenue last year. LDC exited as part of the G3 Comms deal. Apiary Capital took a majority stake in G3 in March 2019.

Connect's Alex Tupman and Martin Cross will lead the group as CEO and CTO respectively, alongside G3's James Arnold-Roberts and Adam Young who become Group MD and COO.

Mark Thompson is appointed Chairman and G3 co-founder Tony Parish becomes Non-Executive Director.

Tupman said: "Our objective is to create a highly scalable and focused business that can support the needs of a far greater and more diverse customer base in the UK and abroad."

Nicki Boyd, Apiary Capital Partner, commented: "Alex and James have a shared vision of building a platform of significant scale in the market. This is just the start of a highly productive collaboration between like-



Alex Tupman

minded people who are aligned with our objectives."

Arnold-Roberts said: "When we looked at Connect's capabil-

ities alongside our own, including our global network infrastructure, it was clear that this was the perfect fit."

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# Unspent apprentice funds run to millions

UNSPENT funding for apprentices is running into millions and The Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) has urged all employers to invest in apprenticeship schemes, particularly small businesses that may not realise they are entitled to funding.

Employers lost access to £26m of apprenticeship levy funding in June alone, according to the skills Minister.

ITP CEO Crissi Williams commented: "This is a staggering amount of money which is not being used by employers.

"It impacts both levy and non-levy paying as both are able to use it to run apprenticeship and training schemes.

"In an industry facing a huge skills gap, apprenticeships are a logical way to future proof an organisation and this funding needs to be used."

Levy paying employers (with a payroll of £3m or more) pay into the pot and have 24 months to spend it before the funds expire on a monthly basis. "There still appears to be confu-



Crissi Williams

sion surrounding levy funding and training," added Williams.

"While the businesses receiving funding need to spend it within 24 months, smaller organisations may be entitled to funding without realising.

"Setting up a scheme doesn't have to be complicated, and

every year we see the benefits that apprentices contribute to our member organisations."

The ITP launched its apprenticeship scheme in 2013 to help comms firms set up, run and manage apprenticeship programmes. It has created over 100 roles across the industry.

## Gamma's onboarding pays off with new dedicated unit

THE introduction of Gamma's refreshed onboarding programme a year ago has paid off with 100 new partners recruited since launch, prompting the company to set up a business unit dedicated to running the operation and orientating resellers more quickly.

Gamma decided to grease the wheels of its channel recruitment process 12 months ago to meet, in large part, demand from a growing posse of IT resellers and MSPs wanting to move into the cloud voice market.

An important element of the programme is to arm recruits



Mark Lomas

with knowledge of Gamma's products via self-training tools including the online knowledgebase and training hub, the Gamma Academy and self-serve lead generation marketing platform called Accelerate.

Gamma's Head of New Business for Channel Mark Lomas said: "The programme was designed to make Gamma's new business processes more efficient across the board, allowing us to ensure that as our partner base grows we retain our focus on partner relations.

"With Gamma personnel on call and partners encouraged to self-train using the online self-serve portal, the new programme has allowed partners to drive sales straight away."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE European Commission has cleared Vodafone Group's 18.4bn euro acquisition of Liberty Global's operations in Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania. On completion Vodafone will have 116.3 million mobile customers, 24.2 million broadband users and 22.1 million TV customers across 13 European countries.

THE move of Gamma's Scottish support team to bigger offices in Glasgow, which houses a new Customer Experience Centre, follows a period of expansion north of the border. CEO Andrew Taylor said: "These facilities better position us to serve partners and customers in Scotland, and enable us to showcase how we work from an operational and solution perspective." Gamma also has offices in London, Newbury, Manchester and Portsmouth.

CITYFIBRE'S Gigabit Cities Club is to be enlarged by 14 additions that will extend its programme by a million homes, now totalling over two million homes across 26 towns and cities. The new cities are Batley, Bradford, Derby, Dewsbury, Doncaster, Inverness, Ipswich, Leicester, Lowestoft, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Rotherham, Slough, Swindon and Worthing.

# Virtual1 sets upsell model

VIRTUAL1 is upgrading its portal to enable reseller partners to intelligently upsell its data network solutions to customers and give them a clear idea of implementation timescales.

Speaking at the firm's inaugural Future-Connect partner event, CEO Tom O'Hagan said that by October his 450 reseller partners will be able to win more business and improve service at the touch of a button.

"We want our customers to win more business and be able to upsell to their own customers," he stated. "All the maps are already in our portal but we're changing the categorising of orders. Now, the market says it will be between 45 and 60 days, but we're not going to put up with that any more.

"We will also be able to show excess construction charges. So, if it's a remote area we'll be able to give customers an idea of the cost at the quote stage. It's all about adding value.

"Resellers will be able to slide over what bandwidth the customer needs and configure the quote immediately to exactly what they are asking for.

"If it's for 100Mb on a 100Mb they'll be able to say, have you thought about 100Mb



Tom O'Hagan

or 200Mb on a gig? And we'll put that up immediately.

"We'll then put the resilient options up, then the capex option up if it's for the DCMS voucher scheme. It's all about generating a conversation with the end customer that's intelligent enough to upsell them."

O'Hagan says the upgraded portal will also help partners to address the rapidly growing SD-WAN market.

"With Virtual1's own Managed SD-WAN proposition expected to hit the market before the end of this year, this represents a clear opportunity for the channel," he said.

"The size of the prize for SD-WAN is £200m in the UK, and it's set to be £2bn in three years time. There is a huge opportunity for margins."

More Virtual1 news on page 16

# Distie hails intY snap up swoop

SCANSOURCE has opened another route to market for partners to deliver cloud services (including Microsoft, Symantec and Acronis) with the acquisition of Bristol-based intY and its CASCADE cloud services distribution platform. intY CEO Craig Joseph and its 65 employees will join ScanSource.

"The combination of ScanSource's scale, its 2016 acquisition of Intelisys, and intY's CASCADE technology provides partners in the US, UK, Europe and Brazil with capabilities to build their recurring revenue business," commented Mike Baur, Chairman and CEO of ScanSource.

"CASCADE provides partners with critical capabilities, including software provisioning, data analytics, seat management, billing and support, so partners can sell more strategic cloud solutions and build strong recurring revenue practices."



Mike Baur

NEWS ROUNDUP

AN OPEN day held by Nimans and Tempo Communications aimed to remove fears around the 'dark art' of fusion and fibre splicing. Nicholas Coyle, Regional Sales Manager at Tempo, said: "We wanted to show that it's not so scary, especially for installers more used to copper rather than fibre installations."

DIGITAL Wholesale Solutions (DWS) has deployed Linxa's Wholesale Management Platform to manage the voice business end-to-end. The platform gives DWS automated processes for rating, routing, monitoring and billing. Hayley Duckmanton, International Director at DWS, stated: "We are evolving our platforms and finding ways to build agility into processes."

RINGCENTRAL'S presence in the UK and Ireland market will be more strongly felt following a link up with master agent Westcon, which will also extend RingCentral's reach across EMEA. Rene Klein, SVP, Westcon Europe, said: "We've made RingCentral our lead partner for the launch of a new master agency model for Europe. We're pioneering this new approach as a significant addition to our existing channel partner model."

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# Woodward's Positive signs in Aura team for SD-WANs



Tim Walker and Clive Woodward

WORLD Cup scooping rugby coach Sir Clive Woodward has joined forces with Aura Technology as a Non-Executive Director. He won the World Cup with England's rugby team in 2003 and led Team GB to Olympic success as Director of Sport from 2006 to 2012.

Woodward built up an 18 year business career in the technology sector before becoming England coach, and founded a computer leasing business. He also established Hive Learning, an online community where business leaders share technical and commercial knowledge.

Aura Technology MD Tim Walker said: "Clive will play an active role in shaping our business as we grow in London, the south and beyond. He has a strong background in technology and an understanding of how a winning mindset leads teams to succeed."

Woodward added: "After my initial meetings with Tim, I quickly realised that Aura Technology stands out in a competitive market because of its focus on a highly strategic approach to IT. Tim, the board at Aura and I see this as a long-term relationship."

SD-WAN adoption rates increased from 35% to 54% over the past two years, with 90% of businesses either researching, piloting, using or upgrading to SD-WAN, according to a new research study.

Optimising the network to 'support cutting-edge technologies' is the top WAN objective (61%), states the study undertaken by Masergy in partnership with IDG Research.

The 2019 SD-WAN Market Trends Survey also found that security is the top WAN challenge and the main determining factor guiding companies in the SD-WAN selection process.

The skills gap (46%) remains a key barrier to SD-WAN adoption, whereas concerns over interoperability with existing WANs are less widespread than two years ago.

Network management simplification continues to be a key driver for SD-WAN adoption; and the top three business benefits are rated as greater efficiency, improved security and cost savings. "This survey validates the growing maturity of SD-WAN solutions," said Masergy CEO James Parker.

"IT leaders are tasked with transforming their business through cloud applications and emerging technologies, but this introduces a new level of complexity that can be daunting for network and security teams.

"These challenges are addressed by software defined networks, integrated security and managed SD-WAN services."

Masergy conducted a similar survey in 2017 as a benchmark to measure SD-WAN market trends and drivers over time.



James Parker

## NEWS ROUNDUP

CONSULTANCY and security services designed to boost cybersecurity within organisations have been rolled out by Maintel under the Insight Secure moniker. Billed as an end-to-end service, the firm's threat intelligence analysts assess and advise on cybersecurity alongside staff awareness training to educate workers on security procedures. CTO Rufus Grig said: "You can't secure what you don't know, and it's important to identify security vulnerabilities before attackers find them. Insight Secure offers businesses of all sizes the visibility which is vital to their security."

NFON UK has signed a master agent agreement with Nuvola Distribution in a bid to extend its Cloudya hosted telephone system to a wider base of resellers. NFON UK MD Myles Leach stated: "The revolution in the voice comms market and mobility mirrors what happened with data a decade ago when cloud computing streamlined hardware laden businesses to paperless software-driven machines." Nuvola MD Michael Lloyd added: "This opportunity opens up possibilities for new resellers to offer a competitive product to the legacy incumbents currently dominating the UK market."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

NEW SD-WAN services rolled out by Wavenet leverage Silver Peak's software to simplify and optimise the network. "Through centralised orchestration and zero-touch provisioning, as well as self-learning algorithms, network administration is simplified," said Antony Black, Director of Wholesale. "While latency is reduced, end user QoS is protected and TCO WAN costs can be lowered by up to 90%."

CODE Software's UC&C software will be integrated with Jabra devices following a link up. Cirencester-based Code specialises in reporting, monitoring and analytics software for the UC industry. Code will incorporate Jabra's software solution into ClobbADM, which provides reporting, inventory and management tools.

LONDON-based ultrafast broadband provider Community Fibre has secured an additional £50m funding from institutional investors RPMI and Amber Infrastructure. With over 70,000 London homes passed to date, the investment will enable Community Fibre to accelerate its ambitious capital-wide growth strategy with the aim of ultimately passing 500,000 homes.

# Five reign in IaaS market



Sid Nag

SMALLER IaaS market players are losing out to their bigger rivals with Amazon claiming the greatest share, says Gartner.

Amazon remained the top vendor in the IaaS market in 2018, followed by Microsoft, Alibaba, Google and IBM.

Combined they accounted for almost 77% of the global IaaS market, up from less than 73% in 2017, noted Gartner in a new report. Overall, the worldwide IaaS market grew 31.3% in 2018 to total \$32.4bn, up from \$24.7bn in 2017.

Amazon accounted for nearly half of the total with an estimated \$15.5bn revenue in 2018, up 27% on 2017. Microsoft's IaaS revenues surpassed \$5bn in the period, up from \$3.1bn.

"Despite strong growth across the board, the cloud market's consolidation favours the

large and dominant providers, with smaller and niche providers losing share," said Sid Nag, Research VP at Gartner.

"Scalability matters in the public cloud IaaS business. Only providers that invest in building out data centres at scale across multiple regions will succeed and continue to capture market share. Offering rich feature functionality across the cloud technology stack will also be the ticket to success."

Gartner says market consolidation will continue through 2019, driven by the high rate of growth exhibited by the top IaaS providers.

"Consolidation will occur as organisations and developers look for standardised, broadly supported platforms for developing and hosting cloud applications," added Nag.

# Lack of AI skills stop adoption

THE fear of being left behind would prompt over half of UK organisations to adopt more solutions with integrated AI-based technologies if they had the skills to do so.

Circa 70% of respondents in a survey by Vanson Bourne (supported by Avaya) accept that failing to get on-board with AI now will cost their organisation over the next decade.

Avaya UK&I's Customer Engagement Solutions Leader Gregg Widdowson said: "Many customers are stood at a cliff edge looking into the water wondering if they will sink or swim with AI. Not jumping in at all may be the most costly decision that they can make.

"The best lesson organisations can learn with AI is to make their initial excursion a narrow one. By keeping the purpose clearly defined the route to success will be quicker."



Gregg Widdowson

# 8x8 buys up CPaaS specialist

8X8'S \$125m acquisition of Singapore-based Wavecell last month gives it a ready made presence in the global CPaaS market and expands its reach into the south east Asia region.

"The market opportunity in CPaaS is growing and this acquisition enables us to quickly provide these services to our customers around the world," commented CEO Vik Verma.

"We have a significant market presence in Asia and expect to continue to expand in the region and globally."

8x8's Chief Product Officer Dejan Deklich commented: "We can now offer enterprise class APIs, bringing a CPaaS solution to our global communications platform. Customer demand for CPaaS is accelerating and organisations can now add real-time communication capabilities that include SMS, chat apps, voice and video.

"The integration of all the APIs and data into one CPaaS platform gives 8x8 customers the ability to engage with end users in true omnichannel fashion and understand the full customer journey."

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## 20th year in biz for VoIP distie

PROVU has marked its 20th anniversary with a team lunch followed by various activities.

Established in 1999, ProVu was set up to build a distribution business that specialised only in VoIP, which at the time was a new technology. Today the company represents some of the world's primary brands and ProVu has grown to supply goods and services to over 1,000 channel partners.

MD Darren Garland stated: "Throughout our journey we have been at the forefront of the developments of VoIP technology. We have been fortunate to keep a great many of our team along the way, which has allowed us to build a reputation for our technical knowledge and understanding of the industry."

"There have been so many great moments and achievements over the last 20 years and it's a pleasure to share this anniversary with the team that have made it happen."



The ProVu team

# Digital vital in marketing



Boon Lai

AN OVERHAUL of Cisco's channel marketing programme is reflective of the 'critical' role of digital in shaping customer buying and brand experiences, according to the vendor.

The revamp of Cisco's Marketing Velocity programme brings all partner marketing functions under one brand in a move described by the vendor as an 'industry first', based on the scheme's capacity to support the end-to-end marketing requirements of partners and their digital transformation.

"This is more than just bringing all of the partner marketing resources under one brand," said Boon Lai, Vice President, Global Partner Marketing, Cisco. "It's ultimately about integrating and up-leveling our partners' marketing practices

with an end-to-end solution to attract new customers, deliver more sales and drive profits."

The new Marketing Velocity platform is made up of four structural components – learning, funding, the portal and a new co-marketing service currently in limited release with a select number of partners.

This fourth service, which is called Marketing Velocity Activate, combines business data and insights with joint partner planning.

Cisco cited figures that suggest B2B customers are 60% through the buying process before they speak to a sales representative, and 61% of B2B transactions start online.

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## Entanet's flexi offer bursts out

CITYFIBRE company Entanet has launched Ethernet Flex 1Gbps across the UK on its CityFibre full fibre infrastructure. The service offers a guaranteed rate of 200Mbps with a capability to burst up to 1Gbps enabling users to complete bandwidth intensive tasks without incurring additional charges.

Paul North, Entanet's Head of Sales, stated: "For some time we've heard about software defined networks which allow businesses to adjust their bandwidth up and down and pay for what they use."

"With this service we're removing the need for them to even think about requesting bandwidth changes through a portal or incurring additional charges. Our partners can give users a dedicated 1Gbps bearer at a low fixed price no matter how much they use it."



Paul North

### NEWS ROUNDUP

AURORA has developed an Auto-Switch module that ensures customers are compliant with a new Ofcom regulation called Auto-Switch MNP which came into force on July 1st. Chief Operating Officer Derek Watson commented: "Mobile resellers will need a fully connected system capable of receiving network auto-switch text messages, requesting and communicating a PAC code along with termination fees within two minutes, which is the worst case scenario."

EAST Anglia-based County Broadband is set to connect thousands of homes and businesses in rural Norfolk to full fibre broadband following a roll out in Essex earlier this year. The firm has identified over 20 villages. The project is funded in part by a £46m private investment by Aviva Investors.

CONNECTUS Group is opening a new office at the AJ Bell Stadium in Salford for which it will deliver network, telephony and Wi-Fi upgrades that will also serve the 10 companies operating out of the site. The AJ Bell Stadium, built in 2010 and opened in 2011, is home to rugby union team Sale Sharks and rugby league side Salford Red Devils.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE MSP market has reached a tipping point and differentiated portfolios are driving more growth than traditional break-fix and basic monitoring services, according to a survey by Kaseya. It also found that high performing MSPs are not necessarily the biggest, rather those that bring more services to the table.

SWCOMMS and Exeter Chiefs have marked the silver anniversary of their partnership with a new



sponsorship deal signed by the comms provider's Commercial Director Jon Whiley alongside five of the club's 25-year-old players. "A request in a clubhouse bar 25 years ago has grown into a long-term relationship that has seen Exeter Chiefs develop into a top flight club playing at a world class stadium," said Whiley. "The fact that some of the players are younger than the length of our relationship underlines how long we have worked together."

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# Personalised cloud is best

VANILLAIP Sales & Marketing Director Iain Sinnott has urged ICT resellers to prioritise the concept of 'personalisation' as being key to the success of cloud strategies and adoption.

Assessing the particular requirements of individuals and placing their needs front and centre will, he says, ultimately maximise the performance of people within the workplace.

"Businesses deploy technology in a general way but we need to identify tech' that will 'optimise me'," he explained.

"We need to conduct a personal technology audit and deliver the exact toolkit to each individual human resource, by

linking the product platform to personal productivity profiles."

Sinnott called for solutions to be designed for use by all individuals, woven almost into the fabric of their being, so they can operate most effectively.

"To make humans more effective we need to overlay personalised services via the cloud," he added. "The potential to win or lose is big, but you can differentiate through the productivity effect of personalisation and peak performance."

Sinnott issued his rallying call at this year's Margin in Voice & Data symposium (Forest of Arden, Coventry, July 4th). **Full report on page 42**

MYPHONES presented its business strategy and Altos roadmap to over 40 partners at The Tower Hotel in London last month. The white label hosted telephony platform was launched in 2012 and was recently boosted with new features and applications for desktop and mobile users. Altos is handset and carrier agnostic and allows partners to build and market their own hosted solutions. "We have made significant investments in the Altos platform, the technology and our people, and will continue to drive growth and deliver on our development roadmap," said MyPhones MD Andrew Robinson. Pink Connect MD James Pink stated: "It was great to get an insight into the achievements and plans for development of the Altos platform which has come a long way over the past 18 months."



# Alliot joins LoRaWAN tech body



Paul Hayes

IOT distributor Alliot has joined the LoRa Alliance, a tech body focused on enabling large scale deployments of Low Power Wide Area Networks.

Alliot's Product Development Director Paul Hayes commented: "Our current portfolio features a number of certified products which are beginning to be implemented in certain vertical markets.

"We hope that our knowledge and experience will make us a valuable member of the LoRa Alliance and look forward to help drive IoT connectivity forward with fellow members."

Donna Moore, CEO and Chairwoman of the LoRa Alliance, commented: "Adding a new distributor from the UK is a testament to increased demand for LoRaWAN technology and a positive signal from the market that the IoT is scaling globally at mass in all verticals."

NEWS ROUNDUP

OXFORDSHIRE-based Purdicom has bolstered its security proposition following a distribution deal with WatchGuard Technologies. The vendor now has exposure to over 1,600 Purdicom reseller partners.

9 GROUP partners went trackside for the F1 qualifiers at Silverstone as Josh Webster, one of 9's Free to Perform brand ambassadors, grabbed a late opportunity to take part in the Porsche Super Cup race on the Saturday. Mark Collett, Sales Director at IP Office, said: "Seeing Formula 1 up close was an adrenalin rush, culminating in a tour



of the Porsche pits and a conversation with Josh." Best 4 Business Communications MD Freddie Hawker added: "We got to spend time with some of 9's other partners and Josh was more than happy to answer all of our questions." Adam Cathcart, MD of 9's Partners Division, noted: "It was fabulous to see our brand ambassador racing so well in the 9 sponsored Porsche, and of course the serious business of Formula 1 qualifying."



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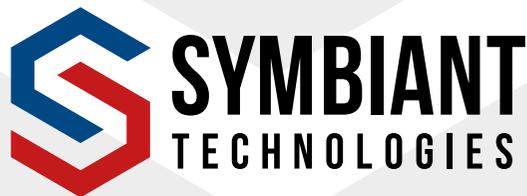
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# Channel event hits the ground running

THERE was standing room only at Virtual1's inaugural Future-Connect event held last month at the Montcalm Hotel, adjacent to its offices in London.

Speakers from Virtual1 alongside Openreach Product Director Mark Logan, Juniper Networks Director Scott Alexander and Pangea MD Dan Cunliffe gave delegates insights and updates on the expansion of Virtual1's data network, the rise of SD-WAN, progress towards the ISDN switch off, the acceleration of 5G roll outs and the opportunities these will present to resellers.

"We were oversubscribed for the event which shows how



**Steve Fenner (right), Head of Operations at Taylor Made Computer Solutions, collects the Best Newcomer Award from Tom O'Hagan**

much we are growing," stated CEO Tom O'Hagan. "We are adding 20% to our reseller base year-on-year and currently have 450 channel partners. We wanted to tell them what we're planning, what's coming in the

future, give them insights into some of the technology changes in the market and also reward them for some of the fantastic deals they are doing."

The winners of Virtual1's first partner awards event were: Growth Partner of the Year, Onecom; Marketing Campaign of the Year, South West Communications; Collaborative Partner of the Year, Incom CNS; Portfolio Partner of the Year, Opus Network Services; Best Vertical Specialist, Global 4 Communications; UC Cloud Award, Charterhouse Voice & Data; Deal of the Year, Glemnet; Best Newcomer Award, Taylor Made Computer Solutions; Cloud MSP Award, Focus IT; and WAN Deal of the Year, STL Communications.

**More Virtual1 news on page 6**



KCOM's Fastest 4 2019 event (staged at Gloucester Rally School and nearby Cowley Manor Hotel) recorded its biggest ever turnout as 34 attendees took part in archery, shooting, 4x4 off-roading and a rally driving experience. To secure their place partners needed to earn a certain number of points by selling various KCOM products, including its Myriad voice platform. "The event is an opportunity for us to reward our channel partners and offer them a chance to compete on the track, unwind and network throughout the day and over an evening meal and drinks," stated Dave Hawkins, KCOM's Head of Channel Sales.

## Wildix to drive VC for SMEs

WILDIX has stepped up its channel assault on the SME videoconferencing and room solution market with the launch of its Wizconf hardware package.

The Italian web PBX supplier claims that a person with no technical skill can establish a video conference in 30 seconds using the Wand remote control supplied with the solution which incorporates one, two or three screens along with studio quality microphones.

Ian Rowan, UK Channel Manager, commented: "Videoconferencing and room solutions have been around for many years but are cost prohibitive for most SMEs.

"We have seen many informal videoconferencing solutions come to market that allow you to use laptops, desktops and mobile phones as a conferencing device. We have the same within the Wildix collaboration solution but our own range of plug-and-play hardware gives the user a complete solution, and our partners a single vendor option for supply and support.

"Wizyconf bridges the gap between informal and formal conferencing solutions allowing participants to join from any mixture of devices." See p18

## NEWS ROUNDUP

**MOBILE** comms will displace fibre as both the primary and secondary connection mode as 5G rolls out across Europe, according to Jason Wells, Vice President and General Manager for EMEA at Cradlepoint. "We're seeing a big transition and interest in wireless," he said. "We're on the cusp of something exciting."

**IOT CONNECTIVITY** platform provider Wireless Logic has extended its European network and boosted its mobile credentials with the acquisition of France-based Matooma, best known as a player in the cellular IoT connectivity space. The financials of the deal were not disclosed. The transaction is Wireless Logic's third major purchase in 2019 and follows deals with Netherlands-based M2MBlue and SIMPoint in February and June.

**PRAGMA** resellers are poised to take advantage of new mobile functionality on Ericsson-LG iPECS Cloud following a link up between the distributor and Tango Networks. The iPECS Cloud Mobile (iCM) solution enables users to dial extension numbers directly from their mobile phone, become part of hunt groups, transfer and record calls.

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# Silver Cloud goes blue

Anyone seeking confirmation of the shift to web-based telecoms should turn their eyes north where Glasgow-based Silver Cloud is now enthusiastically offering customers solutions from the 'Blue PBX' company Wildix.

**D**uring World War Two a simulated Glasgow – built to the North of the City – was used to draw enemy bombers away from the vital Clydeside shipbuilding yards, probably saving countless lives on the ground. It also meant the sturdy telephone exchange in Calton, to the East of the City, survived and the C-listed century old edifice is now home to Silver Cloud, one of Scotland's fastest growing comms providers. The company recently dropped a bombshell of its own by signing up with Wildix, the Internet telephony business, which only launched in the UK a couple years ago.

Managing Director and telecoms veteran Michael McMillan was recruited by Silver Cloud founder Tony Quinn earlier this year. He told us the full story behind the decision when Comms Dealer paid a visit to The Telephone Exchange last month alongside Wildix UK Channel Managers Ian Rowan and Rob Loakes. "Silver Cloud is truly a one man and his dog story," said McMillan. "Tony would walk around Glasgow with his dog in tow selling Samsung telephone systems. He soon began expanding into the supply of other solutions

and since incorporation five years ago the company has doubled in size every year. Our turnover is now £4.5 million but we're aiming to be a £15 million business in five years time."

So, what was the genesis of the Wildix partnership? "It was a perfect storm really," recalled McMillan. "A friend of mine who used to work for DeTeWe phoned me from Germany and said you need to look at Wildix, an Italian company. I had never heard of them. Coincidentally, Rob Loakes contacted me out of the blue, so it all came together at the same time. I have a technical background and when I looked at it, I thought this is exactly what we are looking for."

#### Simplicity matters

Conversely, for someone who has lived and breathed technology for 30-plus years, it was the simplicity of the Wildix solutions that excited McMillan. "Technology is pushed by the consumer," he added. "We don't want products to be baffling. Customers are unforgiving and want technology to work like it does at home. And they know how much things cost. Wildix covers all of that for them. And with recurring licenses it makes things even easier."



**Wildix sign the deal with Silver Cloud. The reseller's sales team on the floor below were beamed into the signing via Wildix's Web RTC huddle room solution.**

Wildix's portfolio offers full corporate telephony system functionality with video conferencing, contact centre, reporting, plus services like transcribing from voice into text at the touch of a button, with no real training required. As McMillan confirmed, Silver Cloud will not move completely away

and built something new that has longevity. Customers want to see innovation. Wildix also offers a five year guarantee which they love because it demonstrates the confidence the company has in its products. One of our customers has a 360-seat system and he's keen to move away to Wildix

"It's all about getting the partner relationship right as well as the product," he commented. "We want to work with companies like Silver Cloud that see the future. A lot of people nowadays will only use a phone as a last resort. If you look at the devices we've all got, these things are speaking to satellites in space and they're connected to the Internet constantly. The phone call is just one tiny element of what it can do."

## Customers are unforgiving and want technology to work like it does at home

from on-premise solutions and still has a number of Mitel installations to service in corporate customers, but rationalisation down to Wildix for cloud telephony and LG Ericsson for on-premise alongside distributor Pragma is the strategic path the management has laid down.

"With these two we really don't need anybody else now," he said. "This is the first time in a long time that a company has started afresh, looked at the market

because of the simplicity and because it fully integrates with Microsoft. These are the things customers want and they are driving it. We have at least 10 people in our pipeline keen to buy it so it's going very well after only two or three months of the partnership."

This is all music to the ears of Wildix UK Channel Manager Ian Rowan, who says he's keen to work with pioneering, forward thinking businesses like Silver Cloud.

Loakes concedes the Wildix approach will not be everyone's cup of tea but believes any reseller business with the passion and belief to take customers on a new path to joined up communications should at the very least explore the 'Blue' option. "When I came here to Silver Cloud, the office was vibrant, it was buzzing. Everybody was for everybody and there was a smile on everyone's faces," added Loakes. "It was clear they were on the same journey as us." ■



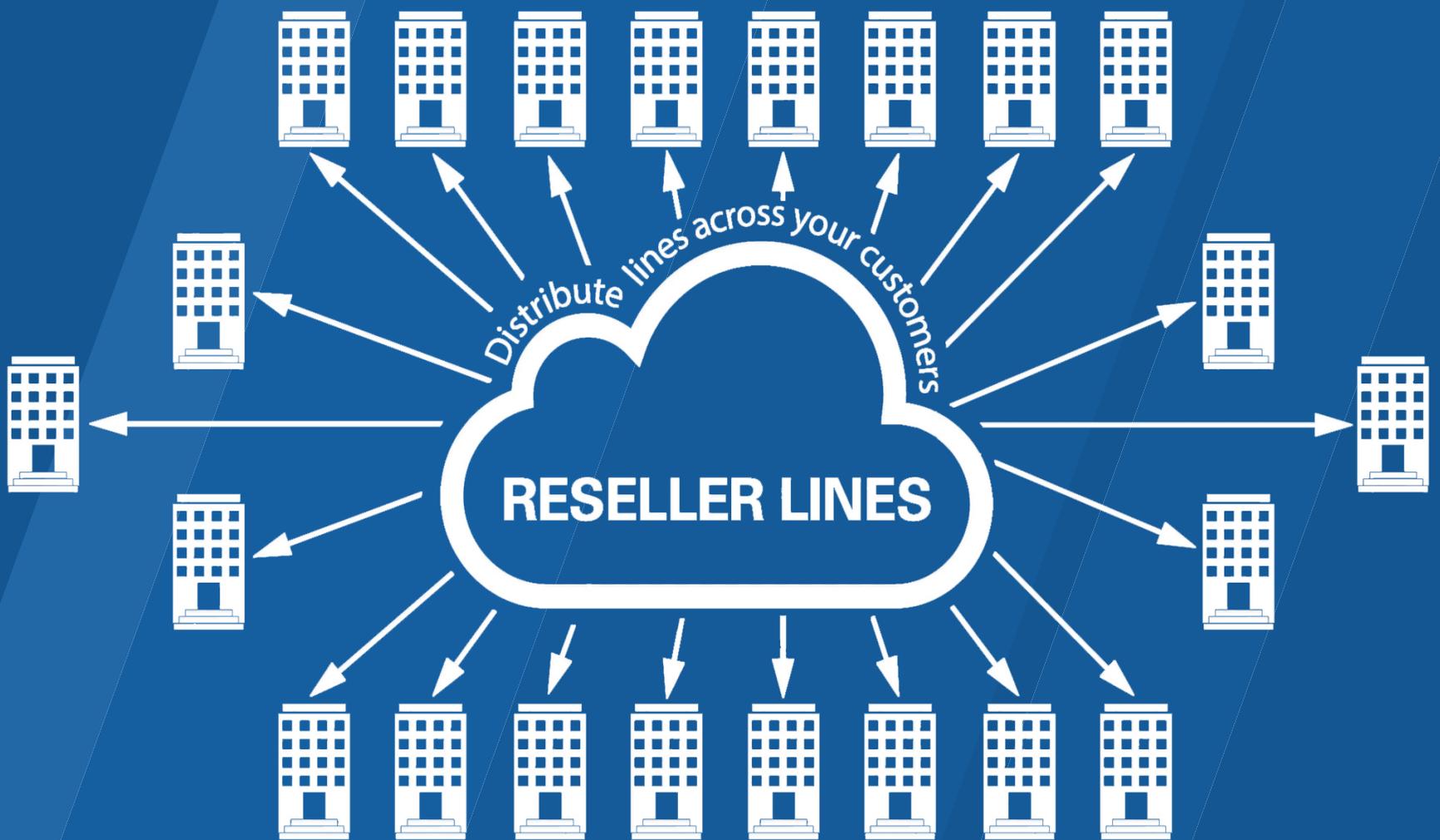
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# Partnerships key to realise channel 5G opportunities

What impact will 5G have on the comms industry? SSE Enterprise Telecoms CEO Colin Sempill assesses what he believes to be 'the channel's biggest opportunity'.

No single technology has ever had, or will ever have, so profound an impact on the comms channel as the spread of 5G, and the major trend over the coming two years will be around 5G readiness, believes Sempill. "A key component of the 5G launch will be high capacity fibre connectivity which must provide reliable ultrafast backhaul to core networks and masts," he explained. "This infrastructure will, in turn, support the advancement of smart cities and connected vehicles.

"As the global race to offer superfast 5G technology heats up, the UK telecoms industry – which is relied upon to provide critical national infrastructure – must strike up strategic partnerships that can drive large digital projects that help to advance the UK's 5G connectivity ambitions. That's why we're investing in the underlying networks and partnerships to support 5G. Such partnerships emphasise the commitment of the industry to work together to future proof the country's digital ambitions."

Sempill is convinced that the channel's biggest opportunity lies in 5G technology and the enablement of smart cities. "Flexible, reliable and fast



Colin Sempill

5G is set to be the linchpin for a quicker, more efficient way of working, travelling and consuming," he added.

### Raising the bar

"It is predicted that 5G will take virtual and augmented reality, high definition video streaming and the IoT to new levels, turning technologies like self-driving cars and smart buildings into part of everyday life. But, one of the main roadblocks is infrastructure. 5G requires a lot of it, including high speed fibre cables, mobile masts and data spectrum bands. This is where the opportunity for partnerships resides. If every telco or service provider decided to develop infrastructure to support 5G on their own we'd have a mess of inconsistency and ultimately an inefficient network."

Propelled by new forms of technology such as cloud, IoT

and AI, data consumption will increase exponentially, forcing businesses to carry out more data processing than ever before. This will drive greater demand for flexible bandwidth, noted Sempill, and 5G will be key in underpinning this demand.

"We're seeing this with smart cities," commented Sempill. "In recent months, for example, we've formed partnerships with MNOs and other service providers like CityFibre to build out a strong network of partners who can work together to push through major digital projects. These partnerships enable us to begin laying the groundwork for eventual 5G roll outs across the capital, utilising Thames Water's waste waterway networks, and providing a substantial number of UK business postcodes with access to high capacity optical and Ethernet services." ■



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# Pathfinding times call for

How carriers perform on the full fibre stage could decide their fate, and it is hard to imagine a more determined protagonist than Managing Director Kristine Olson-Chapman who is seeking to establish TalkTalk Business as the primary B2B wholesale provider for FTTP within three to five years.



**T**here is no disagreement that the UK needs more fibre in the ground, and all agree that the answer is to fully mobilise the comms industry – which means looking for a clear market lead from the likes of TalkTalk Business. It has prepared the ground for a full fibre push, moved to the centre of the fibre debate with a thought leadership agenda (set out at its Connectivity Matters Summit in May), and shown itself as an impactful force of change with deft strategic planning, illustrated by its FibreNation venture, wholesale ambitions and determination to accelerate

the task in hand. “We want to give partners the best FTTP proposition as early as possible so they can land grab before their competition,” stated Olson-Chapman. “To support demand we’re investing heavily in our core network and access product portfolio, particularly fibre optic variants. Ultimately, fibre performs more consistently for the customer and our partners. It leads to happier clients, less churn and a greater lifetime contract value.”

From all corners of the land this is the season of full fibre expansion, and Olson-

Chapman is championing fibre on the basis of it being increasingly key to the UK’s digital future and crucial to the future of channel partners in meeting the requirements of a bandwidth hungry business population.

“Our objective is to help partners easily move their customers up the bandwidth ladder – from copper to fibre broadband products, lower bandwidth Ethernet up to 1Gb variants, and now we’re unlocking the new frontier of FTTP products,” she said. “The development of those products and the service experience for partners is vital.”

**We want to give partners the best FTTP proposition as early as possible so they can land grab before their competition**

It is true that the nation’s digital project is entering a critical phase, which is reflected in the rise of cooptation. For TalkTalk Business, bilateral accords have been reached between what were once diametrically opposed positions, as it works in partnership with Openreach, as well as altnets and its own FibreNation business. “There’s

currently no standardised product, service levels or commercials for FTTP, so we’re collaborating with these providers to create a simple offering for TalkTalk’s partners,” explained Olson-Chapman. “We need a proposition that insulates partners from complexity and provides easy access to the patchwork quilt of FTTP builds taking place across



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# true leadership

of our large size to register 12 per cent growth in data service revenue last year, driven by our partners who represent over 80 per cent of our revenue. We're ahead of the pack with our broadband and Ethernet portfolios, we supply almost half of the wholesale broadband market and we will continue to grow our connectivity proposition – with FTTP being the next technology milestone."

## Talent diversity

Olson-Chapman hopes the march of full fibre will comprise the greatest industry effort possible. But one of TalkTalk's biggest challenges is recruiting great people, particularly for technology roles. It's a quest that taxes the entire ICT industry, more so now than ever, and a big part of the answer lies in greater gender diversity, believes Olson-Chapman. "If we don't appeal to women we lose out on 50 per cent of the talent that could drive our business and Digital Britain forward," she stated. "So our People Service team is focused on attracting talent at a young age. This is essential as there is a clear gender imbalance in technology jobs at a graduate level."

The relocation of TalkTalk's HQ to the Soapworks in Salford Quays brought opportunities to forge links with local educators such as The University of Manchester and Salford Business School. "That's helped us to bring in 50 graduates to fill technology roles in the last 12 months," said Olson-Chapman. "Approximately 20 per cent have been promoted and 95 per cent are still with us. Our Early Talent Manager also searches for youngsters who decide

not to go to university; and we endeavour to inspire more young women to consider telecoms when they're choosing their career path."

When American born Olson-Chapman left university at the age of 22 a career in telecoms was not, it is safe to assume, considered when she immediately booked a one way ticket to London and a hotel reservation for one night, ahead of arriving with \$300 in her pocket and an open mind. "Leaping into another country was a completely transformative experience," she said. "But with the risk came reward. It changed my view on life and my sense of self."

Olson-Chapman's own career map shows how she came to embody a strong customer service ethos, instilled during her immersion in the world of Fast Moving Consumer Goods at Unilever where she developed business strategies based on an understanding of what motivates customers. A ten year stint at American Express followed, during which Olson-Chapman held European Marketing roles.

"My move to TalkTalk was motivated by two main factors," she explained. "I wanted to work in a third industry with different challenges to my previous experience in consumer goods and finance. And I was drawn to the exciting pace of innovation and change in the technology industry. Haircare and credit cards are much the same as they were 20 years ago, but telecoms has completely transformed and the pace of change is accelerating ever faster. I wanted to be with a company that is spearheading that disruption." ■

the UK. It feels like Local Loop Unbundling all over again, and we can't wait to disrupt the market and deliver the latest connectivity products to our partners and their customers."

Olson-Chapman's strong intent to drive disruption reflects how far the market has moved and how quickly it is accelerating as demand for bandwidth multiplies by the day. "The traffic on TalkTalk's core network increases by 30-40 per cent year-on-year," commented Olson-Chapman. "That gives you an idea of how fast bandwidth demands are growing. Furthermore, it is exceptional for a provider

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## Fidelity's winning formula for BDR

BDR Group is a nationally based, award-winning communications and IT reseller providing solutions to around 3,000 businesses across all industries and consider great connectivity to be the heart of a truly successful and modern business.

"We are a specialist in the industry, with nearly 30 years of pedigree. With blended solutions, we can offer a comprehensive range of services, from consultation and assessment to fully integrated IT, voice and connectivity platforms. Customers are encouraged to look at the full range of business IT and telecom solutions we offer and how we can help them," explained CEO Bahman Rahimi.

BDR's plan is to position the company so that they can provide an ever-increasing range of services to its customers and the company had been searching for the right partner to add energy to their portfolio for some time.

"This piece of the jigsaw was finally put in place when we met Fidelity Energy at Comms Dealer's Margin in Voice & Data show in 2017. Once I saw a demonstration of Fidelity's portal and services, along with their enthusiasm to work with us, I was immediately impressed and felt this would be a genuine partnership," said Sales Manager Paul McCafferty.

"Fidelity provided excellent training and sponsored our initial push with staff incentives. This, coupled with the ongoing

support from the dedicated internal account manager and our field-based relationship manager, created the winning formula. Our clients have been very receptive to discussing energy with us and we were soon locking deals in."

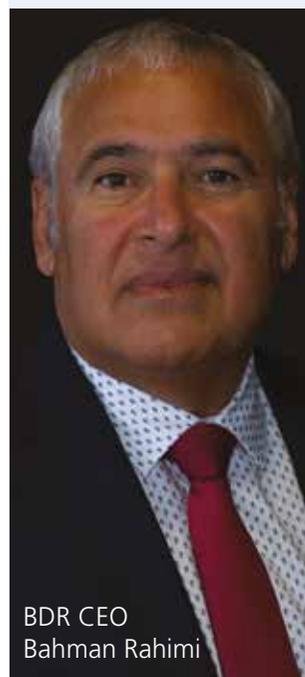
After starting the energy project in April 2018, there were some fantastic early successes. However, the real win came later, with a £3 million contract.

"With all-out support from the Fidelity team, we managed to secure a £3 million green energy contract and a long-term partnership with one of the largest apparel companies in the world. Fidelity's support has been faultless, and their turnkey Energy Management Software coupled with the green energy solution proved pivotal in securing the deal," said Malek Rahimi, Head of Account Management at BDR Group.

"This project has been a fantastic success story for all involved. BDR is now, with the help of Fidelity, tailoring similar solutions and promoting to their key and multinational accounts with very positive early signs. We are imminently expecting our next customer with a multi-million-pound energy bill to switch over."

As well as providing clients with competitive solutions to their energy needs, BDR and Fidelity Energy are also working closely to help reduce customer's energy usage and their carbon emissions. The aim is to power all their clients UK and Irish stores by 100% Renewable Energy (REGO approved). This is being achieved with solar panel outlays across key distribution centers, conducting Energy Efficiency Audits and other green initiatives.

Fidelity Energy's Sales Director, Sean Dixon, said: "BDR's success has been down to their great relationships with their current customers, who were being poorly served by their incumbent energy providers. When we started, BDR asked what our top partners were doing and emulated this straight away with buy in and KPIs for the sales team. The partnership has been a great success to date and we continue to look forward to working with all the team at BDR."



BDR CEO  
Bahman Rahimi

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# McKeever remodels billi

Few career track records speak for themselves as much as Tekton Managing Director Terry McKeever whose channel experience and insights are fundamental to the design of ZOEY, a new intelligent platform that exists to overcome the billing challenges faced by resellers.

**Y**ou would be forgiven for thinking that McKeever – a true mover and shaker who nevertheless sees himself as the ‘quiet man in the background’ – has come to contradict this self-assessment as he ratchets up the volume on what he says will be a refreshing period in comms sector billing following Tekton’s roll out of a new platform that, importantly, is founded on his own channel experience and insights. Also notable is that McKeever’s career to date is spangled with big achievements and positive impacts. For him, actions and influence speak louder than words and these are what get him noticed, not bluster and noise. So when he gives the megaphone to ZOEY, an all new and intelligent billing solution, the channel would be wise to lend an ear.

“In a highly competitive reseller market billing solutions have become real differentiators,” stated McKeever. “Resellers are demanding a flexible billing platform that enables complex tariffing and bundling, whether that be shared or individual, and a fully self-serving customer portal that provides a head start in winning new business. We believe ZOEY ticks these boxes and more.”

It is no stretch of the imagination to say that ZOEY is a reflection and manifestation of key aspects of McKeever’s two decade



Terry McKeever

**Having been involved in the comms industry now for over 20 years, with the last 15 being in the reseller space, I have developed good insights into what resellers have to deal with – and struggle with – on a daily basis**

career in the comms sector. He started out in the Partner Services Division at Cable&Wireless where he became UK Director for Indirect Channels. It’s a role McKeever reprised at Colt Telecom before deciding to develop a number of successful business ventures – some in the IT and comms space, others not – most notably Totility,

a telecoms reseller which started in 2005 and was sold to Maintel in 2011.

#### Key insights

“Having been involved in the comms industry now for over 20 years, with the last 15 being in the reseller space, I have developed good insights into what resellers have to deal with – and struggle with – on a daily basis,”

added McKeever. “That puts me in the perfect position to develop a billing solution that effectively deals with some of these issues and adds value to resellers and their bottom line. The timing and approach of Tekton’s launch is also key. We can offer something different from the old school – and I am now more equipped to run an indirect channel than ever.”

ZOEY grew out of the Zygo Enterprise Billing System which was developed to accommodate the ever changing industry requirements over the past 20 years. McKeever has been an avid user of the system directly and indirectly during the past 15 years. “We built up a strong working and personal relationship with the team

# ng with Tekton

and I was keen to approach them about developing a reseller-based platform, built specifically around my own knowledge and experience of the market as well as the findings and feelings of my fellow resellers," explained McKeever.

Tekton began life around 24 months ago with the project being led by McKeever and his team working alongside Zygo's developers. "Millions has been invested into the final version of ZOEY," said McKeever. "I am genuinely excited about the prospect of bringing carrier grade billing functionality to the reseller community and working with some great businesses over the coming months and years to improve their results."

## Squashing the bugbears

He believes that resellers are becoming increasingly tired of their billing solutions, and thus see virtue in the design aspects of ZOEY. Common complaints include lengthy bill runs (especially those that prevent staff from working), not being able to bill customers in a way that meets the needs of resellers, improving margins along with customer requirements for a sparkling portal. ZOEY's ability to address these issues form just a part of its capacity to transform a reseller's life, claims McKeever, who particularly pointed towards its integration capabilities.

"Businesses are demanding a more joined up and connected back office infrastructure," he added. "Sage, Xero, GoCardless and Dynamics are just a few examples of how ZOEY can be fully integrated into a business. We have a set of API interfaces allowing us to interact with many

different types of software and we are exploring new integrations that will help the long-term growth of our customers' propositions. Ultimately, we are aiming for the biggest integration of all – an integration between ourselves and our customers' businesses. Only when you have that insight, joint mindset and full understanding can you become fully integrated. ZOEY therefore should be viewed as more than a billing system, it is a tool which drives greater efficiency, allowing employees to focus their energy on more productive tasks."

A particular focus of development has been ZOEY's fully branded carrier grade customer portal which empowers end customers to independently analyse their own invoices, view unbilled usage which is updated hourly, and provides full alerting and barring functionality. End customers can also perform SIM swaps and add or remove bars as required.

Personal empowerment is a factor that also defines McKeever's time at carrier and reseller level, always seeking to have a positive influence on colleagues. "I often come across the names of many people I have worked with, managed and mentored," he said. "To see them with their own successful businesses and careers gives me a sense of satisfaction that, maybe in some way, I helped them on their journeys. I hope to continue this narrative with ZOEY. I love the channel and have worked with numerous fantastic personalities, many of whom I hope to work with again in our new venture." ■

## Just a minute with Terry McKeever...

**Role model:** Sir Alex Ferguson: His accomplishments will never be repeated in my mind and his people management skills were something to behold. He really showed the value of leadership over management

**What talent do you wish you had?** Foresight

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I have a passion for street art and own unusual pieces which are often viewed as 'eclectic'

**How would you like to be remembered?** As a good father, husband and human being is what counts for me, and as a person who is aiming to 'give back' for the benefit of others

**Best advice you have taken:** Henry Ford said, 'Whether you think you can or you think you can't you are probably right'. That tells you everything you need to know about self-belief and mindset

**How do you relax when not working?** Walking my Newfie (Dora) and riding my horses, Booty and Aussie. They never judge you and love you unconditionally

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** Sales of some sort, probably in connection with things I enjoy or have a passion for like cars, art and property to name three

**Top tip for resellers?** Be creative, be different, but most of all be out there doing something

**In hindsight:** I would have opted to go self-employed earlier. There is nothing like it from a business and personal perspective



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# Cisco contact centre whi

BrightCloud CEO Alex Morrison's clear inspiration has always been to match customer challenges with bespoke tech solutions. And as the forces of technology transformation whirled ever faster he banked on becoming one of Cisco's biggest and best UK contact centre partners.

**E**arly in his career Morrison declared his priority was to make businesses better at communicating with their customers. On leaving Leeds university with a degree in Computer Science he soon became immersed in Cisco Unified Communications, contact centres and the customer experience, and cut his teeth solving specific issues with bespoke applications and integration, also leveraging technology he developed himself. "We connect our clients to their customers, making the complexities of the contact centre simple," explained Morrison. "With a focus on Cisco Contact Centre, we provide support to our partners throughout the customer lifecycle, from consultation and pre-sales, to design and implementation, as well as managed service support."

Leeds-based BrightCloud was established in March 2011 by Morrison and Hesam Yavari, who Morrison bought out of the business in May 2017. They had identified an opportunity to provide niche expertise in Cisco contact centre technology and began offering implementation, integration and support services through large channel partners. "The MBO allowed us to focus on using our core capabilities and offerings, and has aided the organisation in its growth," added Morrison. "We have doubled in size since 2017."



Alex Morrison

## Migrating from an on-premise contact centre to cloud is not simple. Engaging with businesses to ensure the technology meets customer experience goals is critical

A turning point for the company was gaining Advanced Technology Program Accreditation in Cisco Contact Centre Enterprise and Customer Voice Portal. BrightCloud is

also a channel only Cisco Authorised Technology Provider (ATP) specialist, and picked up Cisco EMEA Service Partner of the Year awards in 2016, 2017 and 2018. "With capabilities

in areas such as Automatic Speech Recognition and software development we were able to build a practice to help partners with their complex customer requirements," commented

Morrison. "The crux of what we do is in extracting value from technology to meet specific business goals."

BrightCloud has witnessed average revenue growth of 20 per cent year-on-year since 2016 and is targeting a 30 per cent increase in revenue for 2020. The company currently employs 21 full-time staff, making it the largest team of Cisco contact centre focused specialists in the UK. Its customers come from all business sectors including public sector, finance, utility, automotive and retail. They range from Fortune 500 companies with distributed contact centres across the globe, to small housing associations with just 30 seats.

Technology is making it easier for these organisations to reach and respond to their customers, even without the need for intermediaries such as humans. Whereas once the telephone broadly enabled companies to speak to customers, technology now enables businesses to become niche communicators – and that may not even involve human interaction. "It is always exciting to look at ways consumers want to interact with companies," commented Morrison. "People are becoming more and more familiar with having their problems resolved by, and interacting with AI, without the need for human contact."



# izz on the rise

"They even invite virtual assistants into their homes. This opens the door for organisations to offer a multitude of self-service options, from voice automation through to chat bots. This promotes world class customer service, offering customers 24/7 access to their contact centre. We are able to take the years of experience we have in providing self-service automation over the telephone and migrate what we know into the online world.

"While this area of technology is very exciting, it is imperative that organisations still get the basics right first. Without a fully integrated solution focused on omnichannel communication, introducing more ways to communicate can create confusion and make it far more difficult to manage the customer journey effectively. If we don't have the right data to feed the AI platform, it will ultimately provide a poor customer service."

## Cloud model

Cloud computing and the pay-as-you-use consumption model are transforming communications and contact centres, as well as customer expectations, observed Morrison. "It changes the way we think about how applications are developed and how we deploy, manage and maintain future versions, so that tools and features can be rapidly made available to customers," he added.

Yet cloud contact centre adoption lags behind uptake of other computing services. That said, Gartner predicts strong growth in the cloud contact centre market by

2022 – so this is a key area of development for Morrison. "On-premise contact centres traditionally have a large IT footprint, which would have specific requirements in relation to the environment, data centres, network and IT infrastructure," he commented. "With the shift to cloud models many of these limitations and complexities are naturally removed. But the migration from an on-premise contact centre to cloud is not simple. Engaging with businesses to ensure the technology meets customer experience goals is critical."

An important aspect of BrightCloud's long-term growth strategy is the addition of a product-based business, called CCBox, that sits alongside its professional services capabilities. BrightCloud launched its own CCBox Aloha product in March this year, which is an optimisation platform for Cisco contact centres. The CCBox proposition is to provide enterprise grade applications for any size customer, cost effectively. Since launch the company has grown its customer base with over 7,000 licenses sold.

"With the addition of our CCBox product we eliminate the need for our partners to work with a multitude of third party suppliers to provide a single solution," said Morrison. "CCBox provides everything a contact centre needs in one solution from one supplier in one box. We have built a series of tools that every contact centre needs to help them enable, advance and optimise their omnichannel contact centre. We will continue to focus heavily on evolving these products." ■

## Just a minute with Alex Morrison...

**Role model:** Elon Musk. He is successful across multiple industries and takes on the biggest problems known to man right now

**What talent do you wish you had?** To play the guitar well

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I once completed an ultra-marathon – 35 miles

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Roger Federer, I am a huge tennis fan; Tony Robbins, being around someone with such passion, enthusiasm and charisma has a hugely positive impact; and Nelson Mandela, I saw him in Leeds but due to tech issues with the microphone didn't hear a word. I'd love to know what he said

**What possession could you not live without?** An acoustic guitar given to me by my wife, and the 'Best Dad Ever' pair of socks I got on my first Father's Day

**Best advice you have been given:** The key to success in personal and business life is to do more for others than anyone else

**One example of something you have overcome:** The Endurance Life Devon Marathon in the worst storms to hit the UK for 100 years

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** An architect or tennis coach

**Biggest risk you have taken?** Starting BrightCloud. I had a young family, a mortgage, and took the decision to give up the security of a full-time role to pursue my own business idea. It's the best decision I have made



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## Get the recognition you deserve by entering the UK ICT industry's most prestigious awards process

Now in their 18th year, the Comms National Awards is the ICT channel's most respected and coveted prize and now's the time to power up your involvement.

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

of the Year Award. New categories will recognise channel efforts to improve Diversity and CSR (see [www.cnawards.com](http://www.cnawards.com)).

With past hosts including, Jimmy Nesbitt, Ronnie Corbett, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre, Vernon Kay and Stephen Mangan the entertainment as ever will be top drawer. This powerful combination means the Comms National Awards is the ultimate evening for the ICT channel to gather together, recognise excellence and innovation, network with industry friends and colleagues and, of course, have some much-deserved fun!

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This year's Comms National Awards, to be held at The Park Lane Hilton on Thursday 10th October, will be sponsored for the seventh successive year by leading service provider, 9 Group.

According to 9's Group Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, the decision to renew their sponsorship was instantaneous: "This awards evening is the highlight of the year and we are delighted to be able to continue to offer our support to Comms Dealer. The atmosphere is always incredible, the guests represent the high achievers of our industry, the winning entries must be outstanding and the organisation of the event is first class every time, so we are proud to be associated with such an enjoyable evening.

"In previous years, our brand ambassadors, Josh Webster and Maddie Hinch, have held the audience spellbound with tales of Porsche Supercup success and Olympic glory, so we hope to be able to continue that tradition this year with another of our sporting superstars. Watch this space.

"We always relish the opportunity to reward and thank our closest partners and key staff members at this event. The winning mood is infectious, and celebrations inevitably continue into the earliest of hours, before joining some of the more rested revellers for a welcome breakfast."

Saunders recognises the Herculean challenge facing the judges: "They face a potentially thankless task, but one that is carried out with boundless integrity and attention to detail. If you win one of these awards, you can legitimately claim to be the very best at what you do and I look forward to seeing a healthy mixture of familiar and new faces on the podium this year.

"Finally, 9 will once again sponsor an award for customer service excellence and it is always a special honour to judge those entries and meet and greet the winners during the gala evening at The Park Lane Hilton.

"Please make sure you are there to enjoy the very best night out in our industry, by entering as many categories as you can and showcasing the incredible range of talent that this industry should so rightly boast about."

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### Reseller Vertical Market Category

#### Vincent Disneur

Head of Sales & Marketing

Union Street Technologies



"As the industry's leading provider of billing and provisioning solutions, Union Street is very proud to continue our sponsorship of the Comms National Awards. Much like ourselves, the CNAs champions excellence and outstanding achievement within the channel.

"Success in industry awards demonstrates to the market that you are an elite performer with an edge over competitors. Targeting a particular vertical market requires high levels of skill and expertise, truly demonstrating that the winning company is the master of its market. It's a great pleasure, therefore, to be the sponsor of the Vertical Markets category."

### Reseller of the Year – SME

#### Lauren McManus

Head of Marketing & Communications

Digital Wholesale Solutions



"Digital Wholesale Solutions works within the SME sector every day, which is why we are proud to sponsor the category for SME Reseller of the Year. This is a sector that has huge potential so we want to encourage our partners to celebrate their achievements and strive for further growth.

"As a Channel-only business, we are proud to support the Comms National Awards because it brings the industry together to celebrate the successes of both small companies and large enterprises. It is a fantastic opportunity for networking while rewarding your teams for their hard work."

### Entrepreneur of the Year

#### Adam Zoldan

Partner

Knight Corporate Finance



"We work with entrepreneurs daily and we know the value they place on industry recognition which is why we are proud to be sponsoring the Entrepreneur of the Year Award at this year's CNAs. On a more general note, as a finalist or winner of a Comms National Award your business receives a unique endorsement that will enhance the way not only customers, but staff, industry peers and potentially investors and buyers view your business – in our experience perception has a direct and tangible impact on business value. We wish all the entrants the very best of luck with their submissions."

### Distribution Category

#### Paul Taylor

Sales Director

Voiceflex



"Voiceflex is delighted to be sponsoring the Distribution Category at the Comms National Awards, the event has grown in stature over the years and is firmly established as the go to event within the industry. Voiceflex is all about the channel, we are one hundred percent channel focused, if you haven't looked at our applications in a while, it's worth a call. Voiceflex is leading the market with simple but effective WebRTC applications such as click to call and click to call me."

### Business Innovation Category

#### Justin Blaine

Channel Sales Manager

NTA



"NTA are once again very proud to be involved with the Comms National Awards 2019 and this year we are delighted to be sponsoring the Business Innovation Category.

"Having been a winner in 2018 for The Best Hosted Platform, we are fully aware of what the awards mean and how they can elevate your business within a busy and crowded market place!

"We would like to wish all finalists in whatever category they are in, the very best of luck and we look forward to a glitzy evening amongst our like-minded industry peers!"

### Enterprise Reseller of the Year

#### Neil Wilson

Head of Products and Marketing

Virtual 1



"We are delighted to be sponsors of the Enterprise Reseller of the Year award at this year's Comms National Awards. After another strong year in the market it's vitally important to celebrate and recognise some of the outstanding channel achievements.

"Enterprise Resellers are a part of the channel we frequently work with and it's been fantastic to see some of the highly innovative solutions these companies deliver for their customers. Good luck everyone!"

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#### Simon Turton (sponsorship)

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07759 731 134

[sturton@bpl-business.com](mailto:sturton@bpl-business.com)

# Chiming with the times

Audio Productions UK Director Andrew Jones is right to trumpet the services his company offers ICT resellers. They are, after all, music to your ears.

**S**ales people would give their right arm for endless streams of effortless opportunities to impart their messages to customers who have ears only for them. Such opportunities for a captive audience are at best few and far between, but a MoH solution will guarantee them every day. Small wonder Stockport-based Audio Productions UK is increasing sales by 40 per cent year-on-year, with its reseller base set to exceed 350 in number come 2020, just 150 short of its three year target of 500 partners.



Andrew Jones

Audio Productions UK was established in 2002 as a direct sales MoH company and it wasted no time in winning important clients ranging in profile from manufacturing plants to major hotels. The company displayed steady growth and suffered little churn, but a turn in the market during the late 2000s prompted the launch of wholesale in 2008 with some of the biggest resellers in the country implementing audio services 'at source' with phone system installations.

"This made sense from all angles, and we saw a great benefit for resellers by attaching professional audio from day one," said Jones. "That gave us a confidence boost and confirmed that this was the right approach for us. After growing organically for many years in 2017 we moved towards a reseller recruitment strategy. We don't have a typical customer,

## All businesses with a phone number would benefit from MoH solutions. It's about creating a strategy to guide the customer's thinking

we deal with everyone from single person resellers up to the biggest in the channel."

### Adding value

The mission of Audio Productions UK is to put the value back into MoH and create market awareness of its many benefits. "Resellers have so much to talk about when engaging new sales but audio is often overlooked," stated Jones. "There is great value to the customer and reseller in adding these services. MoH maximises the potential of every call by educating or upselling callers with barely any effort from

the reseller. All businesses with a phone number would benefit from MoH solutions. It's about creating a strategy to guide the customer's thinking. Resellers can easily upsell to their existing client base and create a new revenue pipeline from every line they sell. The service is market agnostic. It doesn't matter if you're selling ham sandwiches, accountants or multi-million pound contracts, MoH applies to all."

Supporting resellers to get the most from the MoH pipeline with minimal effort is a priority matter for

Jones, who joined Audio Productions as an audio editor in 2004 and went on to spearhead the wholesale launch. "Resellers need to be continually engaging with their clients and prove their dedication to customers by plugging gaps in their service," he commented. "Providing MoH services is an opportunity to help with this. For example, when business names and customised messages aren't deployed during a held call, customer facing organisations are missing a trick. So are comms resellers – the revenue opportunity in MoH for the channel is significant and should not be underestimated."

The flexibility of cloud systems creates greater opportunities (and demand) for professional audio recordings, pointed out Jones. Clients can create multiple hunt groups, call queues and auto attendants, all of which are vital parts of a caller's journey, so the call must be handled correctly and professionally.

In elevating the service ML and AI hold much promise, producing vocals that are indistinguishable from a human voice and creating programmes that can recognise what a caller is saying and then respond comprehensively. "This could lead to automated call bots instead of 'press one for this, press two for that'," added Jones. "We do have the 'tell me what you are calling about' technology, but it's not quite a conversation yet."

Nor is talk of what Audio Productions UK has up its sleeve, but judging by Jones's ambition to 'take over every phone in the country', the company could well become the talk of the industry when the beans are spilled on a titillating strategy currently under wraps. "We have big plans that cannot yet be divulged, but they represent our biggest opportunity," he stated. "Watch this space." ■

### Just a minute with Andrew Jones...

**Role model:** My Dad. He always puts the family first while working incredibly hard to provide

**What do you fear the most?** Big failure.

People say you learn from mistakes, and I get that, but I fear the big failure from which recovery is not possible

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I've DJ'd at Gatecrasher One in Sheffield, some of the best nights I've ever done, what an experience

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Anthony H Wilson, who fronted Manchester's music revolution; Steve Coogan, I'm a huge fan of all his characters especially Alan Partridge; and Alan Turing, the father of modern computing and a pioneer in AI

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Leaving my life in Huddersfield to join Audio Productions in 2004. I had a great group of friends and a good job, but this opportunity was too good to pass

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# Digital Britain 2.0: Acceleration

Everyone agrees that the road to Digital Britain is redefining how the ICT channel thinks and acts, but there is no broad consensus on how the industry can mould and accelerate the UK's all-digital journey for the long-term advantage. Enter Comms Vision 2019 (6th-8th November 2019, Gleneagles Hotel), which aims to decipher the emerging themes and clarify the threats and opportunities facing the channel and what they could mean for your business.



Minister for Implementation Oliver Dowden CBE opening last year's Comms Vision Convention

**B**ritain's departure from legacy communications infrastructure is not a matter of choice: The Government and regulatory edict is clear – that the nation's copper network will become obsolete, and that next generation infrastructure may split the market down the middle in terms of pure fibre and 5G. What happens next is unclear: The binary structure of the infrastructure market is not yet fully formed nor understood, and the question of just how transformational full fibre and 5G will be for the channel has not been answered with clarity.

## Against the backdrop of unprecedented and accelerating industry and technological change, you must ask yourself a cardinal question: Where do you want your business to be in Digital Britain, and how will you get there?

To form a solid relationship between full fibre/5G and the future success of ICT providers we need a bigger vision to identify real next generation market opportunities. Therefore Comms Vision will clarify the output of pure fibre and 5G beyond pointing to infrastructure, faster speeds and greater capacity. Why? Because it's time to fully

decipher the technologies, services and market opportunities that will be delivered over a modern network – and ultimately come to underpin channel businesses in Digital Britain.

### Cooperation

Comms Vision will explore, among other salient factors, the role of industry collaboration in building a

coherent strategy for the all-digital future, and how cooperation could accelerate the drive to Digital Britain and reshape how the wholesale channel operates. Comms Vision will also explore what more can be done to speed up progress and channel growth in this key mobilisation phase of Digital Britain. Moreover, we assess how the channel's

ICT resellers can make sense of these impending seismic industry changes and look head with a holistic and strategic vision.

A frontline assessment of the full fibre landscape will identify areas of success, the products and services currently being sold, and quantify how channel and end user businesses are

# ating the change

benefiting – as well as highlighting the roadblocks encountered and measures to remove them. Moreover, for Digital Britain to prevail, common sense dictates a joint consideration of 5G and full fibre, and how they set the stage for a digital channel fit to deliver connected Britain.

## Innovation

It is a fact that entry points into the customer are being engineered out as we progress towards an all-digital environment, and universal solutions will continue to scale as full fibre and 5G come to dominate. So how do we remain relevant and differentiate in this disintermediating and commoditising market – and find additional/alternative opportunities? Comms Vision will highlight the areas where opportunities to harness innovation and differentiation exist in selling OTT services and provide a strategic focus on innovation and disruption as a route to differentiation and growth in Digital Britain.

5G, like full fibre, merits meticulous attention. Given the frequency with which 5G launches are likely to occur in the coming months and years, Comms Vision is a timely platform for delegates to receive an update on 5G right now, and undergo a crash course in distinguishing tangible business opportunities from the hype and the headlines. It is expected that 5G will create a wireless connectivity network that opens the gates for an unprecedented wave of innovation as a platform for the future, providing a boost to technologies such as AI, Machine Learning, the IoT and smart cities. But questions need to

be answered: What will be the true impact of 5G on the channel? Do the underlying economics work? What does 5G mean for businesses? Should resellers plot a 5G roadmap now? Comms Vision will address these key strategic issues.

For all the fibre and 5G boasts about unleashing a new era of innovation, the possibilities will remain meaningless concepts in modern communications unless we fully understand what the primary and industry-specific applications and services will look like. In crystallising next generation business opportunities, Comms Vision will take the exploration of fibre and 5G further and examine how they enable great advances in applications and tech like VR, AR, mixed reality and the IoT – and how these technologies are likely to impact your customers and your business.

## New approaches

Comms Vision will also shine a light on how next generation wireless connectivity will reshape our approach to all markets, driven by Ultra-Reliable Low Latency Communications (URLLC), Network Slicing, multi-gigabit-per-second speeds and the Tactile Internet.

Furthermore, we will explore how 5G advances the ultimate goal of seamless converged connectivity, connecting customers to a

network that intelligently links 4G, 5G, Wi-Fi and full fibre. For the ICT channel, 5G, like any new technology, can only be defined by the business case and proposition that makes it real and substantive, and Comms Vision aims to provide clarity on this.

Along the road to Digital Britain ICT providers cannot be denied cast iron choice, and the channel's aggregators and wholesalers will prove crucial linchpins in delivering the full scope of next generation solutions to partners. Therefore Comms Vision 2019 will explore the critical role of aggregators and wholesalers at the interface of change, and how their channel engagement models are likely to evolve in line with the ever greater digital requirements placed on partners by their customers.

Against this backdrop of industry change you must ask yourself a cardinal question: Where do you want your business to be in Digital Britain, and how will you get there? Comms Vision will address these pressing issues, and provide insights into the key leadership questions to ask yourself: Where to focus on the future? How to nurture culture, skills and diversity in your business? How to gain confidence in new markets, face threats and develop the resilience to keep pace with unequalled industry transformation. ■

## It takes Vision to be a leader

**Comms Vision (6th-8th November 2019, Gleneagles Hotel) is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. Places are limited and by invitation: If you would like to join us this year, please register your interest to attend at [www.commsvision.com](http://www.commsvision.com)**



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# Why leasing matters

To what extent is leasing an ancient profession with a modern purpose? Shire Leasing National Account Manager Dan MacKrell explains...

**E**quipment leasing is one of the oldest professions, evidenced by clay tablets dating back to 2000 BC that show the leasing model was used for farming, relating to agricultural tools, livestock, land and water rights. Fast forward to the 1880s and the success of Bell Telephone Company has been attributed to its decision to lease telephones rather than sell them. So it should come as no surprise to learn that businesses today benefit from the same process of making payments over a period of hire, while making use of the product. The IT and business equipment finance sector continues to show signs of significant growth, with new business up in April by 16 per cent (compared to the same month the previous year) to £184 million. In the four months up to April 2019 new business increased by 11 per cent.

"As the industry changes we have evolved our finance solutions and offering," stated MacKrell. "We currently provide leasing for on-premise and off-premise telephony, mobile handsets and IT equipment, along with software and licences. Being an independent lessor has given Shire Leasing the agility to assess new products and services as they emerge. We can then rapidly deliver sales aid financial

solutions to support reseller sales teams when engaging with their target audience, enabling them to maximise opportunities in an ever evolving ICT industry."

Shire has supported the telecoms channel since 1990 and as a matter of course supports innovation and new technology. "We have seen a reduction in the number of on-premise telephone systems being proposed, while cloud has become the preferred choice," added MacKrell. "This has had an impact on the average order value, but the number of new proposals has increased on last year. While the average order value has reduced due to the popularity of cloud for telephony, this has been counterbalanced with an increase in mobile handset origination. The rise in mobile phone handset costs has balanced the reduction in value of traditional desk phones being leased."

MacKrell is surprised that some resellers are still unaware that mobile handsets and hosted telephony can be leased together, or even in isolation. "Rising smartphone costs have fuelled a demand for leasing solutions and the need to spread the cost of the initial outlay for a hosted solution," he added. "Some of our approved resellers say



Dan MacKrell

## We have seen a reduction in the number of on-premise telephone systems being proposed, while cloud has become the preferred choice

that it was previously difficult to present a subscription licence cost along with an upfront bill for the POE switches, routers, handsets and professional services – not exactly cost per user per month! So that's where Shire Leasing can help, as we can include the lifetime licences within the lease too."

### Growing popularity

Mobile handset leasing has become more popular with businesses as it offers the customer greater transparency by separating the cost of the handset from the SIM contract. Furthermore, on consideration of the rising costs of smartphones, being able to spread the cost, as with mobile phone contracts, makes sense, believes

MacKrell. "The customer has the freedom to choose the exact handsets required along with the right SIM package for them," he explained.

"In most instances the cost to the customer is lower, while the reseller can make decent revenue from the SIM-only contract and a small amount on the handset. The customer can then choose from lease terms between 12 and 36 months to ensure affordability."

Shire offers approved resellers/suppliers two off-the-shelf managed service agreements – Technology Lease and Managed Rental Agreement. These products allow resellers to deliver a solution for a monthly cost when the order value is

mainly 'soft costs' or very little traditional hardware. These products still continue to offer the benefit of the upfront revenue to the reseller that is experienced with a traditional finance lease agreement.

"FinTech availability is also becoming a key differentiator for resellers to consider," commented MacKrell. "I often provide no-obligation demonstrations of our Shire Online system – one of Shire's FinTech tools used for sales teams to quote, propose and manage finance deals – to resellers and VARs and most are surprised by how straightforward it has become to package and propose deals, with finance decisions available in as little as six seconds." ■

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# Preparation key for PE

The phrase 'then and now' does little to justify the extent of the transformation in how ICT reseller businesses are viewed by private equity houses today. There was a time when resellers went largely unnoticed, now they represent significant opportunities for investors, but only if certain pre-investment conditions are comprehensively addressed. Here, FPE Capital Managing Partner David Barbour gets down to the specifics of how resellers should go about attracting the private equity backing that could take their business to the next level.



David Barbour

Top of any private equity checklist right now is the issue of what proportion of a company's revenue are recurring or repeating. These two words have become touchstones for valuation, and also for absolute investability or otherwise. And for smaller, more vulnerable businesses they are most critical. Recurring revenues are those revenues provided on an ongoing basis to the same customer under a multi-year (or auto renewing) contract. These are the most valuable and investors will want to see a multi-year analysis (probably at least three years) of the revenue per each large customer. Good examples are multi-year connectivity or managed service contracts, software licence fees and support/maintenance of a fixed amount/percentage.

Repeating revenues are those that are supplied on an ongoing basis but are not quantified at the beginning of the year, such as usage-based, maintain and support charges or variable call revenues.

The proactive actions a business can take will depend on their runway to a transaction. If there is a long (12-18 month) runway then contract terms and sales incentives for new clients can be amended to turn one-off revenue (for example, connection charges) into recurring monthly revenue and existing clients can be migrated into multi-year deals or auto-renewing contracts. But even if the time scales are short some of this can be done, and at an absolute minimum your business must understand exactly what the recurring and

**Continued on page 41**

For many years the word reseller was a badge of second class citizenship, signifying an intermediary taking a margin but dependent on third parties and never in charge of its own destiny. Private equity tended to see resellers as low value organisations with little upside on exit. That's emphatically no longer the case. The elevating status of resellers mirrors the rise of software and the cloud. It reflects the growing reliance of large software players on indirect channel partners and a recognition that resellers can offer a proxy on the high growth of SME and mid-size corporate adoption of these cloud and software solutions. There are some less glamorous reasons for

resellers becoming attractive, such as the more reasonable entry multiples when put up against the eye watering prices being paid for software product businesses, and the general pressure on private equity firms to deploy capital.

## Scaling up

Leadership has also improved. There was a time when resellers were seen as lifestyle businesses with a regional or local ceiling on their size. Now, private equity is working to create larger businesses of scale and the product partners are favouring these bigger partners with better supply terms and more attention. Our own firm has recently invested in a telco with a significant portion of fibre and voice resale revenues,

a Microsoft ERP software reseller and most recently into a cyber software reseller. Each of these businesses came with a strong track record of growth and blue chip customer bases.

The key points of concern and interest that private

partners (vendors) whose products are being resold, and the reseller's depth of relationship with those partners; the capacity to show future growth via either exposure to and expertise in high growth products, or to underlying sectors where clients are in growth; and

## Top of any private equity checklist right now is the issue of what proportion of a company's revenue are recurring or repeating

equity brings to investing in this area are the proportion of recurring or repeating revenue in a business; the competitive strength of

the ability to demonstrate a quantified future proofed product and technical strategy for dealing with the strong move to the cloud.



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# 5G: A major threat or amaz



**5**G services for businesses are becoming a reality with BT's EE and Vodafone having launched the technology across the UK's major cities with lots more in the pipeline.

Controversially, Vodafone has said it won't charge customers more for its 5G plans, keeping them the same price as 4G plans. It claims an unlimited plan will only cost £26 per month with a max speed of 10Mbps, which will be able to handle video calls and video streaming.

So, is 5G a worrying threat or a massive opportunity for the channel? Will customers ditch traditional hard-wired telecoms in favour of smart phones which offer an array of collaboration tools and apps and drive work anywhere polices? Will the desktop phone be confined to a museum in a matter of years?

5G will certainly drive the Internet of Things (IoT), reshaping the way people interact with each other and conduct business. It will revolutionise the retail industry for example because so many retail interactions now take place on mobile devices. 5G technology will empower personalized digital signage, augmented reality, virtual reality, video and pattern recognition of shoppers and interactive mobile apps.

And in the hospitality industry, hotel guests could use keyless entrance into their room using a cell phone connected to the hotel's wireless network, saving money and the environment by reducing the need for plastic room keys plastic, plus, no more lost keys! Once inside their room, guests could even adjust temperature, window shades and lights with the touch of a button on their phone or a user-friendly tablet.

For the channel this is all about a change of mindset and possibly their own business models. With the right 5G partners, resellers have the opportunity to change customer paradigms and give customers the joined-up solutions they will be seeking in the new digital world. Fortune will favour the brave.



SIMON FORT  
9 GROUP

**WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL OPINION ON THE 5G ROLL-OUT?**

It makes sense to launch in the major cities first where the benefits of 5G can be realised with greater numbers of people. 5G delivers higher data speeds and reduced network congestion in over populated areas.

**DO YOU SEE 5G AS A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?**

It's a significant opportunity for the channel to introduce new ways of tariffing and could also deliver potential new revenue streams. 5G has the potential to consume a 'normal' data allowance within minutes, so we'll have to move away from traditional data bundles in order to service 5G customers adequately. Key for us will be how the networks support channel partners to maximise 5G revenues.

**WILL SMARTPHONES TAKE OVER IN BUSINESS?**

Yes and no. For some business customers there will always be a need for fixed line comms to limit what end users can do and to take advantages of the many features offer by hosted platforms (i.e. hunt groups, call pickup groups, etc).

**IS THERE A FUTURE FOR DESKTOP COMMS DEVICES?**

There will always be a need for large screen devices with greater processing power. The question is how these will connect to the internet in future. An eSIM in every desktop device would make wireless connectivity more ubiquitous.



FREDDIE HARKER  
BEST4BUSINESS

**WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL OPINION ON THE 5G ROLL-OUT?**

I think the roll-out of 5G has been at a bit of a slow pace with minimal enthusiasm within the marketplace. Currently 4G offers a viable solution to the consumer and business market.

**DO YOU SEE IT AS A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?**

Every new development in technology offers opportunities. Rapid deployment of high-speed and reliable data circuits is always a welcome solution by businesses. We will now be able to deploy high-speed solutions without lengthy waits, bridging the gap between lease lines

**WILL SMARTPHONES TAKE OVER IN BUSINESS?**

I think that this is a very true and real possibility. We are seeing users within the marketplace wanting the flexibility of being able to use a smart device for all their communication. A piece of plastic on the desk is not quite as portable as a smart phone after all!

**IS THERE A FUTURE FOR DESKTOP COMMS DEVICES?**

Integration with CRM is going to be the next big thing, with built-in diallers. I seriously think that the developers are going to have to have close relationships with the likes of Salesforce dynamics with the ability to add widgets to carry the calls and features.



DEAN BIRGIN  
BOXX COMMS

**WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL OPINION ON THE 5G ROLL-OUT?**

More speed, better latency and high availability of bandwidth can only be a good thing. I understand that the penetration through buildings may not be as good as 4G though hard to say how much of an impact that will have in practical terms. It's certainly exciting.

**DO YOU SEE IT AS A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?**

An opportunity, absolutely.

**WILL SMARTPHONES TAKE OVER IN BUSINESS?**

Perhaps the very small businesses yes, but when there are multiple users, sites or any form of contact centre it's unlikely. I don't believe 5G will influence business customers to exclusively use smart phones either. Bandwidth and speed aren't a barrier to businesses exclusively using mobile. It's more a case of functionality, familiarity and ultimately choice that keeps the desk phone alive. We haven't needed desk phones for many years, but most businesses still prefer them. It's very rare we find a business which is truly mobile only. I believe that we won't see the end of the desk phone any sooner than we see the end of the steering wheel.

**IS THERE A FUTURE FOR DESKTOP COMMS DEVICES?**

Desktop applications will undoubtedly be more and more popular. They're easy to adopt and deploy and can add a lot of value.



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**MATTHEW DALY**  
DALYCOM

**WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL OPINION ON THE 5G ROLL-OUT?**

5G will hit the cities as expected, however that will be great for the static or metropolitan users, but what will happen to the areas where Openreach don't seem to want to invest in FTTC/P, will the mobile Operators invest in 5G in these areas?

**DO YOU SEE IT AS A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?**

As an opportunity if it covers the areas in the counties, it is another form of connectivity. As one technology starts to come to its end of life (ISDN) another one starts.

**WILL SMARTPHONES TAKE OVER IN BUSINESS?**

Yes. BYOD was meant to be the start of that trend. When business apps can be administered easier for a SME then it will be the norm for a new employee to have the company apps (voice, email, messaging, CRM) installed on their smartphone.

**IS THERE A FUTURE FOR DESKTOP COMMS DEVICES?**

Desktop communications will always be there, but where will your desktop be? A mobile worker won't be called a mobile worker, they will be a millennial worker whose desktop can be a laptop, home PC or a smartphone/tablet, communicating with various applications, from various locations, and at various times.



**RYAN KERSEY**  
NSN

**WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL OPINION ON THE 5G ROLL-OUT?**

I am sceptical at the moment as it's so new. I really need to see how it pans out. Early adopters will find that it's very expensive both for the service and for a 5G compatible device and connectivity will be limited and patchy for now.

**DO YOU SEE IT AS A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?**

Initially no threat, once it's more cost effective and more readily available then this will be a massive opportunity. At NSN we are used to such a fast-moving industry and having to adapt quickly, this will be no exception.

**WILL SMARTPHONES TAKE OVER IN BUSINESS?**

100% and NSN are already geared up for this, we have seen a massive take up recently of our new mobile app for our hosted telephony users and this is only set to grow.

**IS THERE A FUTURE FOR DESKTOP COMMS DEVICES?**

At some point in the future (not sure when), I do see a decreasing need for desktop solutions. There will always be staunch customers who won't give up the desk phone and PC/laptop, but we will see a massive swing and the deployment of fully mobile-only solutions will become much more prevalent.



**CHRIS MORRIS**  
FOCUS GROUP

**WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL OPINION ON THE 5G ROLL-OUT?**

Technology moves on. For a society wanting connectivity on the move, with handheld devices and IoT device usage exploding, 5G is just another milestone in the 'above ground' journey.

**DO YOU SEE IT AS A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?**

5G represents another string to a well-balanced telecoms company's bow. For data backhaul in the WAN, specifically in SD-WAN, 5G gives us a connection into the sky, alongside a connection into the ground, the perfect combination of speed and resilience. IoT devices need to be connected and more stuff being connected means more opportunity, albeit in a new device landscape.

**WILL SMARTPHONES TAKE OVER IN BUSINESS?**

I foresee a time when the relevant thing is the software client, not the hardware device. A 'phone' client can be many form factors, it can sit on a handheld device, a desktop device, or something in between. We don't know what form factors are coming down the line, so there are bigger influences than the speed of the network.

**IS THERE A FUTURE FOR DESKTOP COMMS DEVICES?**

5G represents a speed of delivery upgrade and resilience upgrade for telecoms providers. Multiple technologies, with high bandwidth, penetration and reliability, represents good customer choice for carrying data.



**NEIL BARRALL**  
TELECOMS WORLD

**WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL OPINION ON THE 5G ROLL-OUT?**

I think it will be fundamental to the evolution of technology, but for now it's not a game-changer in terms of speed and connectivity. It will take a long time to reach all parts of the UK as they will need new aerials, more power to run the aerials and fibre connections.

**DO YOU SEE IT AS A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?**

It is definitely an opportunity, especially for mobile business who require a stable, fast data connection, nomadic workers, and for IoT.

**WILL SMARTPHONES TAKE OVER IN BUSINESS?**

No, the residential market will, but not businesses who will still require a stable data connection with failover back-ups and encrypted connections

**IS THERE A FUTURE FOR DESKTOP COMMS DEVICES?**

There will always be a requirement for desktop communications in the office, but I don't think so for the home office.



**ANDREW DICKINSON**  
JOLA

**WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL OPINION ON THE 5G ROLL-OUT?**

Jola already enables 500+ resellers to control and differentiate selling 4G data. When the MNOs launch a 5G wholesale product Jola will be one of the first to offer it to the channel.

**DO YOU SEE IT AS A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?**

With solid high-speed connections delivered same day with minimal provisioning and support overhead, how is 5G anything but a massive opportunity for resellers? Mobile data costs have not reduced, so any unlimited product relies on assumptions about wastage, and traffic shaping, in order to make a profit for the MNO. One thing is for certain, resellers do not want to start selling a consumer retail product and the equivalent business unlimited SIM from Vodafone is £41.67 +VAT a month. Also, these unlimited SIMs are locked to the router supplied by Vodafone. An unlimited reseller price of say £30 is still above the current industry average ARPU.

**WILL SMARTPHONES TAKE OVER IN BUSINESS?**

No, not in the foreseeable future.

**IS THERE A FUTURE FOR DESKTOP COMMS DEVICES?**

Microsoft Office365/Teams is a threat to resellers wedded to hosted/PBX but the desktop generally is a big opportunity for resellers selling connectivity (direct routing and 5G).



**JOHN MCKINDLAND**  
NIMANS

**WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL OPINION ON THE 5G ROLL-OUT?**

5G is inevitably a good thing but due to a very limited roll-out across only the major cities, its impact is limited for now. In some places there still isn't 3G!

**DO YOU SEE 5G AS A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?**

It's a massive opportunity in many ways. Mobile convergence with landline telephony or traditional PBX is fairly common so anything that speeds up the communication process will have a very positive impact. It will lead to more applications and create more sales opportunities.

**WILL SMARTPHONES TAKE OVER IN BUSINESS?**

I think we are a very long way away from that. In theory, fixed data could one day be replaced by mobile data particularly with the arrival of technologies such as 5G, but the desk phone is still playing a leading role in office communications.

**IS THERE A FUTURE FOR DESKTOP COMMS DEVICES?**

Agile working is fairly commonplace, and a transition continues to gather pace. The opportunities are for applications vendors and PABX manufacturers to create more integrated solutions between desk phones and mobiles.

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# Davies puts M247 into ex

M247 CEO Jenny Davies has advanced a growth strategy that serves both the market and channel partners. She has prepared the ground for the company's latest push on connectivity and cloud services while widening the spread of its international footprint and overall expansion ambitions.



Jenny Davies

**D**avies applies a strong emphasis on those partners underserved by the bigger telcos, whose experiences may be detached from the channel support structures they need. Thus Davies hopes to gain market share, while advancing partnership policies that deliver simplicity, and pursuing long-term opportunities in expanding markets, both home and abroad. She says M247 is 'uniquely' set up for the task and is a force to be reckoned with, defined and strengthened by the sum of its three parts brought together through acquisitions, further melded by a clear strategic vision.

"I knew that with the right team and the right strategy M247 could be much bigger," stated Davies. "Our

investor, Livingbridge, also recognised the potential and appointed me to build a strategy that allows M247 to achieve its ambitions."

M247 started life as Metronet (UK), a wireless ISP, and expanded into selling fibre, while building its connectivity portfolio and developing voice and security offerings. The company owns a radio last mile network, has unbundled exchanges in the north west, Yorkshire and London, and data centres in Manchester and Bucharest. "There was one piece of the customer proposition missing – cloud and hosting," stated Davies. "So we acquired M247 in 2016, a hosting company based in Manchester and Bucharest, and adopted its name. What we didn't appreciate at the time was the extent to which our international

## There's increasing opportunities for partners to bundle connectivity and cloud services

business would take off, and how central it would become to our strategy. Partners and customers are increasingly wanting a cross section of products and services, not just in the UK. Our international network now has almost 60 strategic data centre PoPs across the globe."

The acquisition of Venus Business Communications

in March 2017 added a LLU network and a strong presence in London. "These acquisitions are key to our success," added Davies. "We've had some leadership changes and worked hard to get the right people around the management table. We brought together some great people and the right technical pieces of the puzzle. We also leverage our own infrastructure rather than rely on third parties. These three businesses were set up by people who were passionate about customer service. It is part of our DNA. We also shared the common value of keeping complex things as simple as possible while innovating to find ways to solve customer problems."

M247 employs circa 270 people in Manchester, London and Bucharest. For the year to March 2018 the

company generated revenues and EBITDA of £55 million and £15.2 million, up 62 per cent and 50 per cent (due to the impact of acquisitions), with a rise of around 21 per cent and 10 per cent organically. Twenty per cent of M247's 10,000 customers are proactively account managed. It also works with more than 600 strategic and managed partners.

This is the backdrop to a campaign for M247 to secure a far bigger share of the connectivity and cloud services market in the UK, and establish at least two or three more offices in international locations over the next three years. Globalisation among mid-market firms is growing faster than any other sector, noted Davies. "We are staying close to this movement," she added. "We want to be the

# expansion mode

technical capability within organisations and extend their capacity to grow.”

As previously mentioned, Davies also hopes to gain market share from telcos that have ‘lost their way with service’. “Making it easy for our partners to do business with us is always a priority,” noted Davies. “Many joined us when we were best known as a connectivity only supplier. Today, we offer much more, so we work with partners to let them know what else we can do with them. We appreciate that our partners’ success is our success. We offer partners training, financial support, marketing and also a reward scheme.”

## Transformation

In our new age of innovation and digitalisation, all organisations are going through some level of transformation that, in the main, is underpinned by secure, high grade connectivity and cloud solutions. “As the demand for data increases and requirements become more complex, a need for low latency, resilience and integration with the cloud has become standard for many businesses,” said Davies.

“There is a reliance on good connectivity infrastructure when making the journey to the cloud and few providers have the deep technical capability and processes in both, let alone the infrastructure to make sure it runs smoothly. There’s increasing opportunities for partners to bundle connectivity and cloud services. We are also focusing on growth markets such as SD-WAN.”

For Davies, the magnetism of achieving results has fought off any sense that being a woman might hold her back in her career, which began as a language graduate working a 12 year stint for United Utilities where she became Operational Services Director (after also working in commercial and regulatory roles). A subsequent move to Openreach immersed Davies into the world of IT, telecoms and the Internet. Four years later she joined M247 and became CEO in September 2018.

“I don’t get hung up by gender, I’m more focused on ensuring we have the best people for the role, regardless of their gender or background,” she commented. “Most people have unconscious bias so I try to educate my team by opening them up to a more diverse workforce. Sometimes they don’t mean to behave in a certain way, but we can educate people. I would however like to see more diversity in IT companies’ boardrooms.

“I’ve always worked in male dominated environments, so have never known any different. I’m trying to work out if I was resilient in the first place or whether my experiences made me stronger. I think the answer is both. Women seem to have to prove themselves more than men. I have observed that men can sometimes simply say they’re good at something and be accepted, whereas women have to demonstrate their capability to earn the same level of credit. I’ve done well because I deliver. I’ve never been good at selling myself and believe that results will always speak for themselves.” ■

## Just a minute with Jenny Davies...

**Role model:** My grandma. She brought up seven children while working full-time after the death of my grandad at 43. She taught me a strong work ethic and what resilience looked like in practice

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be more of a techie

**Tell us something about yourself we don’t know:** I did a degree in modern languages

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Jurgen Klopp, the Liverpool Manager – I’m a Red; Brené Brown, a strong woman who talks sense; and my Dad who would be proud to see what I have achieved

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** I’m inquisitive and not afraid to ask ‘silly’ questions, and don’t accept being fobbed off; but I might focus too much on what is still to do, rather than celebrate success

**Best piece of advice you have ever been given:** ‘You is good’. I can be me, and that’s OK

**One example of something you have overcome:** Imposter syndrome (most of the time)

**If you weren’t in ICT what would you be doing?** I’d be a leadership development coach

**Biggest risk you have taken?** Leaving a comfortable corporate role to set up my own business. I had two young children and was the main earner. But I knew there was more to life

**Greatest career achievement?** Being in a job that I love

Continued from page 36 repeating percentages are and have the management information well presented and understood before a process is launched.

Our experience has been that investee companies are usually ill-prepared and have not reviewed their T&Cs for auto renewal, or are often operating under unsigned contracts and are too scared to approach these customers to get a signature. It’s much better to clean these things up without the pressure of a live transaction going on.

The second key area is the competitive strength of the partners whose products are being resold (against competing solutions) and the reseller’s depth of relationship with those partners. The investor will want a direct, private reference call with these partners to ensure that the relationship is in good fettle and well prepared for what you are going to do. If you sell only one vendor’s products, be ready to defend that single relationship risk, or to have a convincing strategy for broadening into other vendors.

Be ready with market positioning for your vendor’s products and display a strong understanding of the competitive set. Try to ensure you have the best vendor ranking possible and be ready to explain how much of your sales pipeline comes from vendor referrals. If that vendor sells direct alongside resellers be prepared to talk that through in detail. Investors prefer a situation with clear boundaries to one with potential for misalignment and channel conflict.

The third area to think about is the reseller’s ability to demonstrate future growth through either exposure to and expertise in high growth products (cyber, for example), or to underlying sectors where clients are in growth (a

client base of multi-national B2B business services is much preferred to a base of UK high street retailers). Always have market information available on the growth of those underlying sectors and be ready to relate that back to your own new business wins. Private equity wants, ideally, to see a wave of demand coming towards the business. If there are volatile sectors in your customer base (retail, oil and gas, maybe even governmental) think hard about how you will negate the perception that these areas are dangerous – or it will harm your valuation.

## Market insights

Private equity firms have a great window on market trends through our own portfolios and through the large number of business plans we see each year. They know that cloud adoption is a strong and growing trend and they want to ride that wave. But while SaaS models (or at least software ‘rental’ versus traditional perpetual licence sales) offer the prospect of much higher recurring trail licence fees for resellers, they come with a short-term hit to revenues as perpetual licence fees were higher in year one, and they often come with a lower ongoing maintenance-support spend as software standardises around a common implementation for all clients. If this change in business model of your partner is likely to happen or has already started, you will need to have the future financial impact modelled out for this, at least at a high level.

Be ready too for questions about quickening your pace of growth through well (lower) priced bolt-on acquisitions in the same or adjacent products. Private equity sees this as a real route to value in many of these situations, and will in general react well to even some preliminary thinking about this. ■



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# Harnessing change as a r

Managing change is the cardinal issue for most ICT resellers who face direct challenges and opportunities on a number of fronts, according to speakers at this year's Margin in Voice and Data symposium (Forest of Arden, Coventry, July 4th).

Industry transformation is inevitable and the channel needs to face up to it. For resellers, their future may be in the balance, while occupying perhaps the strongest position they have ever been in. No surprise then that the concept of managing change is now entrenched in comms sector discourse. But as with most concepts, change has many shades and can mean a number of things. For Iain Sinnott, Sales & Marketing Director at VanillaIP, it is important to prioritise the idea of personalisation as we move the cloud model forward. "Businesses deploy technology in a general way that does not maximise the performance of individuals," he noted. "We need to identify technology that will 'optimise me'. We need to conduct a personal tech audit and deliver the exact toolkit to each individual human resource, by linking the product platform to personal productivity profiles."

Sinnott called for solutions to be designed for use by all individuals, woven almost into the fabric of their being, to be the best they can be. He asked why personalisation is not more widespread, and questioned the current state of workers being 'on demand'. "To make humans more effective we need a cloud management platform such as Uboss, then overlay personalised services via the cloud," he said. "The potential to win or lose is



Margin in Voice and Data delegates get to grips with changing times

## To redefine the workplace full UC is a necessity with API integration, messaging, collaboration and AI. The comms platform must encompass everything

big, but you can differentiate through the productivity effect of personalisation and peak performance."

Cut to Paul Taylor, Sales & Marketing Director at Voiceflex, who pointed out that while the market is transforming under our noses, many people do not think about redefining the workplace. But the next tranche of employees will change all that, he believes. "By 2025, 75 per cent of the workforce will be Millennials – the last thing they want to do is make phone calls," he stated. "They are young and headstrong, and 20 per cent of Millennials want to be in upper management positions. So we have to change the marketplace – and fast."

Among other things, Taylor has long regarded apps as vital. He cited the usage stats of WhatsApp to underline his point. It's proving very popular, with two billion voice and video calls and 65 billion messages a day. "The application market is creeping up and moving forward," added Taylor. "Consider Zapier, UC and APIs. To redefine the workplace full UC is a necessity with API integration, messaging, collaboration and AI. The comms platform must encompass everything."

Axel Klossner, COO at German vendor Auerswald (which also operates the FONtevo brand), noted that changing times inevitably spawn hype in the market,

which he sought to bring down to earth with clear thinking, offering delegates advice on big issues such as the ISDN switch off and shift to cloud. The ISDN shutdown in Germany was planned for December 31st 2018. It sparked panic among many firms that did not prepare early enough for the switch off.

### Education

"The biggest issue was not informing customers about why they need to make the switch," stated Klossner. "So educate clients early about the business value and benefits of SIP – better communications, new solutions and improved revenue streams. In Germany, every reseller

that started early on the transition generated new revenue opportunities."

The concept of change is universally applicable to the comms sector, and in many instances that change can be radical. But while Klossner affirmed that cloud is the future, he advocates a soft migration as customers require choice. The concept of on-premise and cloud solutions sharing the same strategic roadmap may appear counter-intuitive, but it renders customers more comfortable in their transition, according to Klossner.

"Provide an on-premise bridge to the cloud," he added. "Customers want pay-per-use, so combine approaches to the cloud, on-premise and mobile. Today, more than 50 per cent of the buying power still rests with on-premise, so implement a migration to SIP programme now and create a portfolio of services to help customers manage to and from the cloud, including a step back if the cloud isn't for them. Force vendors to provide agile future proof services, and find a recurring model from cloud and on-premise."

Matthew Worboys, Head of Channel (South East and Scotland) for Gamma, pointed out that cloud penetration was measured at just 16 per cent in 2017, but is forecast to hit 40 per

# oute to growth

cent by 2022. Perhaps the biggest opportunity resides in the 50 to 249 seat space, which Gamma defines as its mid-market, and where cloud adoption is currently lowest. "Employers are demanding instant UCaaS features such as conference savings," stated Worboys. "It's no longer about replacing a PBX with a cheap cloud alternative. Successful partners truly understand the client and tailor their proposition specifically to deliver real business value, displaying an understanding of areas such as CRM. We include hardware to help tailor the proposition. It's about knowing the requirement and pushing the order value up."

Co-presenter Paul Gibbs, Gamma's Head of UCaaS and Mid-Market Sales, urged delegates to ride the UCaaS wave and avoid the race to the bottom on price. In this, Gamma's ownership of the core network is key to managing solutions from cradle to grave, he said, while urging conferees to take a hard look at what makes them different in the marketplace. "Look at the technology you sell, the markets you target, how you shape your proposition, the hidden verticals that reside in your customer base, and ride the UCaaS wave," he stated.

It is a crying shame that what underpins industry transformation could also block the conduits of growth. "It is incredible how long it takes to get connectivity into the ground," stated Mark Curtis-Wood, Group Sales Director at Vaioni. "We completely rely on connectivity as we adopt cloud. But not all networks are the same. We have our

own core network, with an uptime of 100 per cent for four years, largely achieved through its self healing properties. Resellers need a connectivity provider that can support cloud comms, that uses automation and SDN, into which Vaioni is investing millions. We are also handing over the keys to our network through SDN automation, and enabling the network for 4G and 5G."

How to stay ahead of the market and push forward is a pet project for Adam Cathcart, Managing Director for Partners at 9 Group, who, in our changing times, emphasises education and talking to customers as

## It's about knowing the requirement and pushing the order value up

key to future success. 9 Group has itself undergone a transition, reflected in its WLR and CPS revenues which reduced by 13 per cent last year. This shrinkage was counteracted by SIP and hosted margins which are stronger, making the business more profitable overall.

"We've seen that transition from SIP to hosted, explained Cathcart. "Last year we had more SIP sales than hosted, now it's 60-40 towards hosted. We also experienced a big increase in leased line business, up 74 per cent. In mobile, our average user was using 600MB of data, now it's over two gig. People want to consume information quicker and have

access to data. So constantly talk to customers and educate them about what's happening in the market."

To further illustrate 9 Group's evolution, Cathcart noted that the company added 70 people during the last 18 months with a tech or IT background. "We need to be up-skilled to support our partners and enable this transition," he stated.

Cathcart is right to champion partner and client education as a way to inculcate the spirit of change and keep pace with the times. There cannot be too much education and customer discourse, he emphasised, to forge strong alliances and ensure survival. In their own transition, Cathcart urged delegates to 'talk to customers or lose them'.

Against this backdrop of industry change, Knight Corporate Finance Director Adam Zoldan highlighted a big shift to managed services and noted that a spurt in deal activity is symptomatic of overall comms sector transformation, which doubles up as a stimulus for investment and acquisitions. He noted that 617 deals in 12 months across the whole tech spectrum is clear proof of a buoyant market, with intensifying activity around M&A, buyouts and fund raising in the capital markets. "There is much enthusiasm and high investment in our sector," he stated. "PE investment is driving acquisitions, and as competition increases PE firms are looking at smaller deals. The most potent driver of value is to realise it, so be consistent and deliver on expectations to build trust and worth."



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# Empowering the IoT

In explaining the market potential of LTE Cat-M1 and NB-IoT, Zest4's Head of M2M and IoT Anton Le Saux and Arkessa's Head of Solutions Chris Williams expose the high potency of low power connectivity.

**M**obile operators launching consumer 5G services are making the headlines, but as demand for IoT connectivity continues to rise mass adoption will be largely determined by the successful roll out of the cellular low power wide area technologies, CAT-M1 and Narrowband (NB-IoT). "Both promise to deliver low power, improved in-building coverage and low deployment costs when compared to existing cellular options, opening up application opportunities which have been constrained by either technology, cost or both," stated Le Saux.

"These low power solutions mean that the power consumption of user devices and sensors can be significantly reduced, especially in deep coverage. Use cases requiring battery life of up to 10 or even 15 years will be able to be supported, disrupting sectors such as metering, manufacturing and building management. Both CAT-M1 and NB-IoT are the leading cellular technologies for IoT, and provide similar benefits. They do differ, however, and their application suitability is often based on their key technology features."

In general, noted Williams, NB-IoT is best suited to static applications transmitting periodic short bursts of data, such as utility metering and lighting, whereas CAT-M1 can support more demanding applications like asset tracking and real-time industrial decision making. "Each technology has its pros and cons and with the cost of the modules and hardware expected to drop as demand increases, both represent a fantastic market opportunity," added Williams.

"NB-IoT was designed for IoT devices with very low data requirements that need to work over long periods and often in areas of poor coverage such as underground or deep inside buildings. It offers greatly reduced data throughput rates and higher latency compared to CAT-M1, but this also leads to much lower device power consumption."

NB-IoT can also provide better coverage with increased range and signal penetration. Its radio characteristics are specifically designed for longer range operation, higher deployment density and in-building penetration. "NB-IoT is best suited for static, low throughput scenarios requiring low power and



Anton Le Saux



Chris Williams

**Each technology has its pros and cons and with the cost of the modules and hardware expected to drop as demand increases, both represent a fantastic market opportunity**

long range, such as smart metering and numerous smart city applications like parking, lighting, building automation and asset tracking," noted Le Saux.

#### Data rates

Compared to NB-IoT, the higher data rates provided by Cat-M1 means that more data can be sent through the network in a given timeframe. This would be beneficial to applications that rely on speed of transition, for example security or mission critical reporting. "Cat-M1 also has the advantage of being able to support voice transmissions, unlike NB-IoT, enabling support for a wider range of use cases," commented Williams. "With the benefits of Cat-M1 comes the reality

that the roll out to devices will likely cost more as data costs will be higher than with NB-IoT to reflect the speed and latency advantages. However, the costs to deploy NB-IoT (data, device and total cost of ownership) will probably reduce significantly as demand increases in the future."

The roll outs of these technologies currently vary greatly with operators focusing on the deployment of one or the other. However, it is widely understood that the majority of operators will support both CAT-M1 and NB-IoT within the next two years. So, what can businesses do now? "If NB-IoT or LTE-M is a requirement, businesses should get in touch with

a trusted connectivity partner to identify the most appropriate solution in preparation for the universal roll out of these emerging technologies," said Williams.

Zest4 is working with IoT partner Arkessa to give partners and customers of all sizes access to IoT services, solutions and connectivity, and the addition of low power connectivity will add further value, according to Le Saux. "As an IoT MVNO (Mobile Virtual Network Operator), Zest4 gives partners control through its own SIM management portal," he said. "CaaS (Connectivity as a Service) and our knowledge of the IoT spectrum and emerging technology are customer gate openers for partners."



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# Why refurb is best

Mark Williams, Head of Commercial at Bytestock, on why refurbished hardware should be a clear favourite for corporate comms companies seeking to upgrade their systems, especially when supported by e-waste recycling services.

**F**or comms companies that need to support their own network infrastructure, arguments in favour of opting for recertified and refurbished IT hardware are unassailable. “Companies spend significant amounts on new kit when refurbished IT hardware can achieve all they need at a fraction of the cost and help them become more environmentally responsible at the same time,” stated Williams. “Every organisation must ensure that any and all technology is responsibly managed throughout its lifecycle from purchase through to resale and eventual disposal. By helping our customers realise the value in refurbished IT hardware we aim to become the UK’s go-to partner in the supply, reclamation and responsible management of end-of-life hardware.”

Raising awareness of the advantages and positive impacts of choosing refurbished IT over new is top of mind for Bytestock right now, which is helping as many businesses across the UK, and globally, unlock value in their current hardware, as well as gaining maximum value from their available budgets. “By choosing Bytestock as their IT supply partner our customers can concentrate on the more important areas of their business,” added Williams. “Bytestock offers expert service and unrivalled support for the growth of all clients, being the on-call experts when systems need building, expanding or servicing.”

Bytestock’s parent company, LA



Companies spend significant amounts on new kit when our products can achieve all they need at a fraction of the cost and help them become more environmentally responsible at the same time

Mark Williams, Head of Commercial at Bytestock

Micro, was established in 2004 and is one of the UK’s fastest growing independent businesses, generating an average of 30 per cent year-on-year organic growth. Bytestock is the new name and identity for its corporate end user IT arm, selling the best value IT hardware to organisations, and is a specialist in refurbished servers and parts. The recent rebrand to Bytestock is just one part of LA Micro’s evolution as an independent group of technology

and communications organisations, responsible for £35 million turnover in 2018.

The launch of the Bytestock brand, along with a new ecommerce website, is reflective of the company’s commitment to helping businesses fully realise the value in refurbished and recertified IT. Bytestock holds one of Europe’s largest stocks of new, refurbished and remanufactured hardware from the industry’s leading brands

including Dell, HP and Cisco. “With IT budgets squeezed ever further, we help businesses make the most of their IT budgets, unlocking value and giving them the reassurance of powerful, reliable hardware that is simply the best value for money,” said Williams.

The UK IT and comms industry is a huge contributor to e-waste. For example, it accounted for the best part of 50,000 tonnes of e-waste in 2017 (OnRecycle via Gov.uk). Furthermore, there is expected to be circa 28.5 billion networked devices and connections by 2022, and 85 gigabytes of Internet traffic per month per user by 2022, up from 29 gigabytes in 2017 (Cisco Visual Networking Index 2018). So the comms industry will become an even bigger contributor to the problem, driving large increases in the number of personal and business communications devices, as well as the enterprise hardware required to support the networks those devices rely on.

“Technological advances have revolutionised modern business but the constant pressure to have the latest and greatest tech with each iteration has nurtured a culture of disposal,” added Williams. “We help organisations be more environmentally responsible, not only by giving them a way to purchase powerful technology which still has plenty of life ahead of it, but also to collect and ethically manage their own end-of-life hardware.”

The role of all businesses in addressing the e-waste phenomena is pivotal, emphasised Williams. “Our guidelines for companies in need of an ICT upgrade include checking products are manufactured in environmentally responsible ways and from materials that are recyclable, or at least not impossible to ethically dispose of,” he explained. “There is also an important educational role for us to inform customers on how they can recycle, and potentially unlock value from, older and unused hardware – perhaps even running recycling and rebate schemes.”

In advancing approaches such as these Bytestock is pushing against open doors because consumers are becoming more discerning in their purchase choices, often preferring to buy from ethical and responsible suppliers. This awareness of recycling and e-waste management is now emerging in the B2B world with ever more companies wanting cast iron assurances that their partners are doing all they can to reduce environmental impacts.

Bytestock helps to meet that responsibility by managing the full lifecycle of servers and IT hardware. “Any business with unused or end-of-life hardware can unlock hidden value by selling or trading it in to Bytestock,” stated Williams. “Our expert team can design and supply the ideal replacement or upgraded systems, no matter the industry, budget or requirement.” ■

To find out more please visit [www.bytestock.com](http://www.bytestock.com)

# Streetwise Disneur leads

After former TV Apprentice Vincent Disneur found himself at the wrong end of Lord Alan Sugar's pointed finger the Head of Sales and Marketing returned to Union Street's HQ more determined than ever to fire up his entrepreneurial spirit and build a billing powerhouse in the channel.

In 2011 The BBC's Apprentice had its highest viewing figures to date and the channel's very own Vincent Disneur was beamed into the homes of 8.8 million people. Lord Alan Sugar clearly thought the silver-tongued candidate wouldn't need his £250k business investment, making him part of a sensational double firing. Lord Sugar was ultimately right, and eight years down the line Disneur has become one of the channel's best-known faces. Alongside founder Tony Cook, Disneur has helped to build Union Street Technologies into one of the UK's largest and most successful ICT billing specialists that now boasts 600-plus channel customers collectively billing over £1 billion annually.

Disneur says appearing on the Apprentice was a big risk but he has no regrets. "It was an experience which I value greatly," he said. "It did well for my profile although I never took it too seriously, it's a TV show after all. My 15 minutes of fame let me have a lot of fun for a couple of years post-show, but I never wanted to chase the fame game. Ultimately, it made me more determined than ever to succeed with Union Street."

That's not to say Disneur had any lack of ambition prior to his foray into reality TV, having had a passion for

business since adolescence. "My parents taught me that if you work hard it'll pay off and, as a youngster, I developed a mild obsession for making money and the nice things that came with it. So, I worked for it, doing everything from paper rounds to cleaning cars. In summer holidays I'd even cycle eight miles a day to pick tomatoes and once spent a three week holiday in Belgium labouring on building sites. Doing lots of tough little jobs makes you appreciate what it takes to become successful.

"I found my love of sales and IT during my A Levels when I worked part time at PC World, becoming the youngest person to enter Dixons' Millionaires Club for annual sales. I had a bit of money compared to my mates at school and I was a very proud 17 year old when I used some of it to buy my first car - an old Golf MK2 GTI."

As if that wasn't enough, Disneur found time to claw his way up through the ranks of topflight tennis to hold one of the highest LTA rankings in the country. "All my free time was spent playing or practising tennis," he explained. "I'd spend hours watching Sampras to see how he hit different shots, placed the ball, and studying the areas of the court he controlled. It made me realise that to succeed you need to



Vincent Disneur

## My 15 minutes of fame ultimately made me more determined than ever to succeed with Union Street

push yourself, consume knowledge, and adopt a 'give it a go what have you got to lose' attitude."

### Full throttle

Fast forward to 2008 and Disneur truly put the 'pedal to the metal' when he was appointed Union Street's Head of Sales. "It was a pivotal moment in the company's development," he

recalled. "Union Street was in its infancy with just over ten staff and around 170 CPs using our aBILLity billing platform. The introduction of WLR3 meant that for the first time, CPs could truly compete with BT on a level playing field. Our game-changer was developing a WLR3 gateway for provisioning services from Openreach within our aBILLity billing software.

Managing billing and provisioning from a single pane of glass offered huge advantages to CPs who were quick to see the benefits.

"In my first year I covered 55,000 miles travelling around the UK, meeting customers face-to-face. It was hard graft, but it paid off and the order book filled up. The rest is history, and while many other billing vendors have faded away or been bought out, Union Street has moved from strength to strength."

In 2015 Disneur was promoted to Head of Sales and Marketing, taking a leading role in the redevelopment of the company's marketing strategy and brand overhaul. "With the help of my team I completely overhauled Union Street's image, making us one of the most distinctive brands in the channel," he added. "My goal was to develop Union Street's brand identity to better represent the sophistication of our solutions, our position in the market and the many changes in service delivery.

"What's makes Union Street successful is its blend of high quality applications, account management, customer service and training. This ensures CPs leverage maximum value from our solutions and gain a competitive advantage. I developed the



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# s from the front

strapline 'Powering Your Potential' to encapsulate this message and to act as the foundation for Union Street's market offering."

The last year has been a seminal one for Union Street and Disneur believes the company stands in good stead for its next phase of growth. "Over the last year, £2 million has been invested into the research and development of Union Street's software suite and this has led to several enhancements and new features, particularly to the web client for our software and its provisioning capabilities."

#### Win-win

"We've significantly increased our customer base and enjoyed a series of high profile customer wins. aBILLity won the Best Billing Platform category of the CNAs for a record seventh time and won Vendor Channel Sales Team at the CDSMAs, too. Following a series of initiatives to enhance our service offering, we were also accepted as a member of the Institute of Customer Service (ICS). With the help and guidance of the ICS, we plan to make further improvements in this crucial area of operations in the coming months."

Disneur also has his eye on future market developments which he believes will open up new opportunities for channel partners not seen since the liberalisation of the comms industry in the eighties. "Although I'm confident that plenty of life remains in traditional revenue models, there can be no denying that the comms landscape is in a state of flux," he added. "Times are

changing, and the industry is being transformed by evolutions in technology and customer behaviour.

"We have the arrival of 5G, Openreach's planned transition from copper to a full fibre network, changing market trends including the rise in popularity of subscription models and managed service plans. The list goes on and on. Each of these alone represents a step change for the channel but, when combined, it's safe to say that the next five years will be very interesting. Our goal is to empower CPs to fully capitalise on these and other emerging opportunities."

"Great change brings great opportunity and that's one of the things I love most about the channel. We're continually presented with disruptive new technologies that enable reinvention and offer new avenues for growth. Thanks to the changes in network infrastructure that will take place over the coming years, I believe CPs today have as big an opportunity as those that first formed the market following the privatisation of BT."

Disneur is now enjoying the fruits of his labours and continues to relish his time in the channel community. So, what does he consider to be the highlight of his career to date? "The ICT industry and especially comms, is a unique business environment because of its vibrant community and an abundance of interesting characters and successful businesses," he said. "I absolutely love being part of this channel and feel lucky to have made lifelong friends here."

#### Just a minute with Vincent Disneur...

**Biggest passion:** Thinking up new business ideas

**Greatest achievement?** Building Union Street's brand and reputation in the channel

**Your main goals?** Making Union Street a significant global software company

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** Giving Federer a run for his money

**Industry bugbear?** Those that lie about their capabilities or discredit others during the sales process

**Best advice you have taken:** To improve is to change, to be perfect is to change often

**Who do you most admire in the channel?** Tony Cook and Matthew Riley. Tony is on his second successful business. He's kept me grounded and we've had a good journey. I did a deal with Matt when he was billing about £9 million a year – he's done alright since then

**Top tip?** Keep your billing independent and do your due diligence on suppliers

**Name three ideal dinner guests?** Arnold Schwarzenegger, Leonardo DiCaprio and Larry Ellison

"If I had to choose a highlight, the Comms National Awards 2011 would be it. aBILLity has since gone on to win many more awards, but that first time was electric and a fantastic endorsement of our product and the hard work we put into it. Many of our customers collected awards of their own that night too, and the only thing better than winning, is winning together." ■

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# Next generation comms

The market requirement for omnichannel contact centres has suddenly got more real – but the good news for resellers is that they have at their disposal the means to meet ever greater communication demands from a new generation of end customers.

**G**eneration Z is about to impose a significant demand on customer-facing organisations to provide true omnichannel contact centres. And the good news, according to Akixi Product Manager Colin Gill, is that the SME market is already displaying strong traction, spurred by the greater availability of lower cost omnichannel and scalable contact centre platforms that are easier to implement. “Gen Z will expect full customer service engagement via any means of communication that they regard as the new normal, as Millennials did with emails,” he stated. “Adoption of a flexible omnichannel contact centre platform is going to make it much easier for businesses to keep up with the ‘new normal’ when it comes to Gen Z customer communications.”

To make any omnichannel platform more effective and remain relevant it must be able to adapt to new methods of communication with little need for change, pointed out Gill. “As new technologies and channels of communications come and go at a faster pace, it’s more important than

ever that platforms such as omnichannel contact centres can adapt quickly and efficiently to meet those changes,” he added. “Omnichannel is all about bringing different channels of communication together in a single solution – old, existing and new technologies – in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible, which comes from being able to manage them through effective insights drawn from accurate and dynamic analytics.”

That the customer landscape is changing due to the rise of Millennials is not in doubt, and what needs to be done to meet their requirements is also clear. “These customers are more tech-savvy and looking for a better experience when considering the different channels of communication at their disposal, such as online chat, SMS, email, social media and newer options like WhatsApp for Business,” stated Tollring CEO Tony Martino. “They are adopting and adapting to these different ways to communicate and the contact centre must be ready to meet their needs.”

Despite this shift, it must not be forgotten that the



Colin Gill

## That the customer landscape is changing due to the rise of Millennials and Gen Z is not in doubt, and what needs to be done to meet their requirements is also clear

phone call continues to be a significant customer touchpoint, and importantly, is the primary mechanism for interactions where a medium-to-serious customer service issue is ongoing.

### High level experience

“As a result, it is becoming increasingly important for businesses to assess high level customer experience metrics across the different channels in play, while at the same time having the means to dive deep into the most critical interactions,” added Martino. “The focus is turning towards using analytics to understand

customer interactions across the entire business. Furthermore, as we enter a new era of APIs and information in context, resellers are increasingly empowered to deliver these advantages to customers in a way that allows them to differentiate.”

The customer experience is a key differentiator and solutions that deliver on this are in high demand across key market segments. “We’re already seeing core omnichannel principles, like treating the customer journey as a complete story or flow, start to filter down

to the mid-market and to informal contact centres,” added Martino. “When armed with rich analytics around customer interactions, organisations can monitor the resolution time of enquiries or issues alongside averages over time. By reviewing the journey from the customer’s perspective in this way they are able to put the infrastructure in place to achieve the ultimate objective of resolving customer issues on first contact.”

Having a platform that delivers such an omnichannel capability is critical to digitalising the customer experience, reiterated Nick Beardsley, Enterprise Director at Olive Communications. He noted that Olive has witnessed significant growth in the finserve, retail and travel sectors, where the customer experience has become the biggest differentiating factor. “An omnichannel approach is a win-win for both the provider and the consumer as it can simplify and improve the customer experience, while reducing the cost to serve,” he stated.

Furthermore, a growing number of consumers are mobile-first, with a large percentage of initial engagements coming from an Internet search performed on a mobile device. “With a joined up digital customer engagement strategy the customer can transact online or seamlessly move to another channel to either find out more information or complete the transaction,” added Beardsley. “Omnichannel allows a customer to seamlessly move from one channel to another, providing a platform for first-contact resolution.” ■



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# Smarten up the journey

Supporting the expectations of Generation Z will be an important part of the omnichannel contact centre mix, but truly integrated customer journeys need to be much smarter, says James Hughes, Head of Solutions, Cloud and CCaaS at Sabio.



James Hughes

**T**he omnichannel approach is coming under ever more scrutiny, noted Hughes, with retailers particularly suggesting that great customer experiences have never been about all channels being everything to everybody. "What really matters is being available in the most appropriate way at each stage of the customer journey," he stated. "Offering contextual awareness matters for all customers."

The truth is that omnichannel contact centres are well established having been around for at least 15 years. What's different now is that traditional omnichannel staples such as handling emails and SMS are being swamped by digital innovations like virtual assistants, chatbots and robotic processes.

"These technologies are gaining the most traction initially in sectors where they can take out the most pain and frustration for customers, whether that's stripping unacceptable delays out of traditional financial services interactions, smoothing the transition from digital to agent service when buying a mobile, or helping to

progress a holiday purchase without losing your digital progress," stated Hughes. "And if that process is dependent on human intervention for progress to the next stage, there's every chance that there will be an unacceptable delay. Generation Z think of service in seconds, not minutes and hours. That even applies to complex interactions such as a mortgage application."

Most consumers have experienced the frustrations that result from broken customer engagement processes and unresolved customer journeys. Addressing these process delays – and removing the associated pain for customers – sits at the heart of initiatives to improve customer journeys. "Consider mortgage applications," noted Hughes. "Some legacy firms can still take months to process a mortgage application, whereas digitally-enabled challengers can now deliver a proceedable answer within an hour. This kind of disruptive power can't be ignored."

When proposing an omnichannel contact centre solution to prospects the automatic gate openers

## What really matters is being available in the most appropriate way at each stage of the customer journey

depend on how far advanced an organisation is in terms of its customer engagement journey. Today's leaders know that if they get their CX right, there will be an impact not just on revenues but also customer retention and renewals. However, they also know that, whether it's omnichannel or other aspects of CX, there aren't any magic bullets. "Each organisation has their own distinct propositions and customer demographic and getting CX right takes both investment and ongoing effort to make it work," added Hughes.

"Perhaps the most frustrating type of organisation are those with a largely static approach

to CX development. They usually know they should be doing more, but either don't want to take risks with new solutions or they don't necessarily have the drive or motivation to take things forward. Before embarking on any kind of omnichannel project they really need to work on developing their own CX champions."

There's also those companies that don't have a joined-up CX-driven approach to omnichannel. They typically adopt a more short-term approach, investing in single products or solutions to address specific aspects of their customer journey. "While potentially productive in isolation, this approach doesn't equip an organisation with the kind of enterprise end-to-end omnichannel solution they need," stated Hughes.

### Agile approach

"However, evolving towards a more flexible cloud approach can give organisations the agility to focus on delivering consistent and frictionless service. The goal is to achieve the right mix of solutions, digital capabilities and customer insight so that you can work continuously to optimise service delivery."

Hughes also believes that it's critical for organisations not only to provide brilliant customer experiences but make sure they stay brilliant. "Organisations are looking for the kind of analytics and insight that will help improve visibility, responsiveness and control across all of their customer interaction channels," he added. "Specific technologies and solutions can of course help here, whether it's the introduction of Robotic Process Automation to help streamline back office processes that cause customer frustration, or innovations such as content sharing that allows agents to send and share digital information during the course of a call with a customer.

"However, tech alone isn't the answer. Perhaps the greatest challenge for organisations comes from making sure they're leveraging the right CX datasets to help predict and anticipate evolving customer demands. Being able to measure, analyse, understand and optimise the productivity and effectiveness of your omnichannel contact centre operations can deliver the key differentiation that organisations really need." ■



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# Meet a man with a plan

Forget 'wait and see' when it comes to business planning. The only solution to the long-term challenge facing every entrepreneur is to make an exit plan and stick to it, argues net:telecom Managing Director Henry Forde.

**W**ithout a fixed term business strategy all plans can be read any way we want. With this in mind, Forde wisely advises his peers to commit to a plan that serves to magnify the end game from the outset. Thus he conducts his day-to-day routines, with the target always in sight. It is hard to see how else goals can be most effectively achieved, he believes. "Start with the end in mind, build quickly and dispose as soon as you reach your goal," stated Forde. "We should hit £1 million turnover within five years and will look to be acquired by then."

Forde expects to generate circa £450k revenue by March 2020, and every indication so far is that his exit strategy is achievable. With a clear focus on the final transaction and when that deal should take place, Forde illustrates a clarity of strategic vision that drives everything. It underpins his intention to build up the existing channel business (which currently accounts for 85 per cent of revenues) and pursue acquisitions.

Forde currently employs three staff and collaborates with three outsourced support

companies that operate under the net:telecom brand. He has a 200 strong client base and works with 24 channel partners. This core group is well supported by net:telecom whatever the size of the deal, noted Forde, adding that flexible and aggressive pricing where needed has helped partners to drive sales.

"We believe that our model of owning your own hosted IP PBX is the best way to preserve margins and sustain business," added Forde. "The model appeals to reseller partners looking to maximise on their margins over the long-term in the crowded hosted telephony space. As a telecoms reseller in such a fiercely competitive environment, having options for yourself as well as your clients is the way forward. Choice, simplicity and freedom in pricing can win the deal."

Forde is convinced that his small band of resellers are best placed to withstand the pressures of a hosted telephony market suffering diminishing margins, compounded by the emergence of numerous new entrants. The ongoing evolution of products also brings challenges



Henry Forde

## We deployed our own cloud-based telephony services 10 years ago and have nurtured that experience

that demand an effective response. "We see a lot more migration from traditional systems to cloud-based telephony at reduced margins, and from ADSL and FTTC connections to fibre leased lines at lower margins," stated Forde.

### Hosted pedigree

He leverages net:telecom's knowhow in the cloud space as an apt response to these market developments and the basis of an antidote to the plague of shrinking margins. "We deployed our own cloud-based telephony services 10 years ago and have nurtured that experience to develop our enterprise

grade hosted telephony net:IP PBX servers for the channel," added Forde. "We set the goal to build a robust and future proof solution that will allow us to maintain our independence without compromising on features and resiliency, and have developed an alternative to existing telephony managed services. net:telecom is now looking to expand the market presence of net:IP PBX via a growing network of reseller partners.

"We need to convince the channel that our commercial model makes sense financially for any partner looking to grow their hosted telephony

base. Commercially it is better for partners to own their own platform rather than pay licence seat fees in perpetuity. This is one of our main priorities over the next five years."

Throughout each episode of Forde's career to date there have been signs of his telltale end-to-end business strategy underpinned by a clear sense of a longer-term ambition and quest for independence. It all started by door knocking for sales in Camden Town while working for Cabletel in the early 1990s, which proved the perfect grounding for Forde. He quickly rose into management and by the time he left Cabletel to join NTL in 1995 he had become Regional Sale Manager. At NTL Forde became Sales Director prior to its disposal to Virgin Media after which he set up Hi-Tech Communications Services in 2003, which he sold to Spiritel in 2009. Forde established Southgate-based net:telecom the following year selling LCR, phone system hardware and early VoIP gateways.

"The main driver was to be my own boss," said Forde. "In the early days at Cabletel we sold mainly phone lines, Centrex services, ISDN2e and ISDN30e lines and hardware, plus microwave Internet connectivity. Now net:telecom sells ADSL services, FTTC, hardware, VoIP services, fibre leased lines and Daisy HV Select Hosted Telephony plus our own net:IP PBX Units, both on-premise or cloud-based. We are exploring the potential of Artificial Intelligence and how it can be used in the service industry. It's important to look at opportunities outside of traditional comms." ■



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# It's a win-win move



**Simon Burckhardt**

FORMER Vonage UK Managing Director Simon Burckhardt's appointment as Support to Win's Chairman is reflective of his belief in the core role of such organisations in the converging communications marketplace. Support to Win (the Fleet-based managed service and UC company spun out of telecoms training business Train to Win) was formed two years ago and provides outsourced managed services – such as managed provisioning, in-life management and customer on-boarding – to channel partners and service providers including Gamma, NFON, Chess and Vonage.

The company recently introduced a managed migration service and quickly secured a number of large contracts in the last quarter. Burckhardt previously held executive roles in BT, Telefonica, MTS in Russia and Ooredoo in the Middle East and Asia. As Managing Director of Vonage's UK and international UCaaS business he drove double digit year-on-year growth over the last five years and launched Vonage's UC proposition in Australia in February. "As the UK UC marketplace consolidates I strongly believe that the expertise and resources available at companies such as Support to Win will become invaluable to facilitate value creation of any consolidation activity," he stated.

CEO Julie Mills added: "We are seeing significant demand for the services of Support to Win as the pace of mergers and acquisitions of UK UC companies and platforms increases. These developments mean we are having to transform the business and add to the team's experience and knowledge by welcoming Simon as Chairman."

## Also on the move...



**John Vickerage**

**AV DISTRIBUTOR** Ascentae has appointed John Vickerage as Channel Director. He brings over two decades of audio visual and UC industry experience, and latterly worked at Huddly before making the move back into distribution.

He said: "The modern distribution landscape is competitive and the large broadline distributors dominate the market, representing few key brands. This can be a challenge for new vendors trying to gain their attention and for clients who may require technical or commercial help in selling to end users. Ascentae represents this underserved market."

**CONTENT Guru** has pulled in Jonathan Oliver as Chief Information Officer. He brings 25 years industry experience and is responsible for optimising internal and customer-facing systems.



**Jonathan Oliver**

Oliver was previously Vice President of Global Technology at Dynatrace responsible for service delivery and optimisation across employees in 24 countries. He said: "Business transformation is only successful

with inspired employees to drive it. I'm looking forward to motivating our people to continue to deliver frictionless customer service." Sean Taylor, Global CEO, commented: "Jonathan's track record will help us to scale the business."

## Davis climbs Jabra ladder



**Lee Davis**

JABRA has appointed Lee Davis as Software Sales Manager with responsibility for driving the company's channel strategy in EMEA North. Davis has worked at Jabra since December 2010 and held a number of positions including Enterprise

Account Manager. Prior to joining Jabra he was a Reseller Account Manager at Samsung and Sales Account Manager for Toshiba where he oversaw the external account management of corporate, B2B and education specialist resellers.

"Lee will be instrumental in strengthening our relationships with existing software partners while developing new partnerships with software companies that are committed to solving the issues faced by end users – such as solving the perennial productivity puzzle and improving quality of service," commented Nigel Dunn, Managing Director for EMEA North.

FORMER BT Major Business Team leader Kathy Quashie has joined Vodafone as Head of Partnerships & Alliances. She brings 18 years experience in the telecoms industry and while at BT held other roles including CEO and Chair of BT Expedite, the multi-channel retail business.

## PTG names sales leader

SCOTT Deacon is tasked with growing Pure Technology Group's (PTG) customer base by 30 per cent and expanding the 21-strong sales team to over 30 in his new role as Sales Director.



**Scott Deacon**

The move forms part of the Group's strategy to spike turnover from £30 million to £50 million within three years.

Deacon was one of the original four people who set up the business with CEO Stephen O'Brien in 2007. He has held various sales roles within the organisation, most recently operating as Sales Team Manager. "As well as growing our existing customer base organically I'll also be developing a new business drive with the aim to add 270 new customers to our books," he said.

O'Brien added: "Scott has been with us since day one and understands our culture and beliefs. He is well respected within the team."

## M247 appoints regional chiefs



**Kelly Simkiss**

TWO top level appointments provide M247 with a sharper focus on UK and international markets. Kelly Simkiss has been promoted as Managing Director for the UK region. She was previously M247's Customer Operations Director. And Paul Pintiliescu heads up the International operation as Managing Director. He is based in the firm's Bucharest office and was previously Global Director. Both report to CEO Jenny Davies. "Making these two appointments enables the business to keep a firm eye on the needs of our customers based in the UK and overseas," commented Davies. "It also means M247 is focused and ready to deliver on growth plans." **Jenny Davies in profile – see page 40**

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