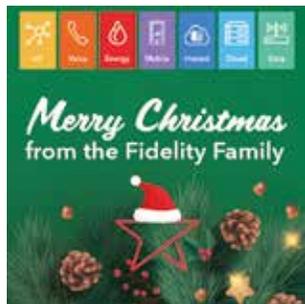




Voiceflex launches SoGEA Voice platform to channel p32

Scott McEwan sets post-merger sights North of £100m p38



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Comms People

This month's movers and shakers



DWS adds SaaS via Giacom buy

DIGITAL Wholesale Solutions (DWS) has snapped up a high growth SaaS platform and added 3,000 data resellers following the acquisition of channel-only Giacom from PE firm Livingbridge for an undisclosed sum.

SPECIAL REPORT

The deal forms part of DWS's converged comms-SaaS strategy and is a response to robust demand for combined cloud, software and comms solutions, according to DWS CEO Terry O'Brien (pictured above).

"We are two businesses with high growth in different sectors coming together to form something bigger and better," he said. "This is a huge step forward in our plans to support an ever

converging ICT partner channel. We can help Giacom with UC, connectivity and mobile. Equally, Giacom brings all the capability to help telco resellers really get into that cloud and software marketplace."

In its financial year ended July 2020 Giacom generated almost £49m revenues, £6m EBITDA and is on track to hit circa £62m revenue this year.

The company will continue to operate from its Hull base with its circa 80 staff in place

along with the leadership team headed by CEO Mike Wardell.

O'Brien noted that the sales process was highly competitive with impressive levels of interest from trade and PE.

"We believed that we could do something that other interested parties couldn't in terms of moving forward together in a big way," he stated.

"It's not about cost synergies, it's about revenue growth by continuing to help our now 5,500 partners win." **See page 30**

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

IT IS PERHAPS one of the comms sector's biggest ironies that during a national lockdown we have witnessed an unbridled acceleration and expansion of existing market dynamics like never before, eclipsing every effort made in the

past by many quarters of the channel to motivate the market for cloud services and the like.

The Covid-19 lockdown has literally precipitated a showdown between the more traditional comms options and next generation hosted and connectivity services as the work from home imperative becomes a cemented foothold in UK plc territory.

Nor is that all: We are facing a cauldron of market stimuli over and above Covid-19, again, the likes of which we have not before seen, all pointing to a one way market pivot requiring a one way ticket – and all resellers have been urged to start the journey right now and make plans for the fast approaching era of full fibre, 5G and the watershed 2025 copper switch-off, the gateway to an all-IP world.

You don't need to stare into a crystal ball to read the future. The writing is on the wall for all to see. And in another irony, despite the consensus that we live in uncertain times, there has never been more certainty about the technologies and market dynamics that will underpin future growth – all reflected in this month's magazine, which we hope will help you to plan ahead with clarity and confidence.

Note DWS's acquisition of Giacom (page 30). Note also our Full Fibre Unlocked Insight Session report (page 16), and Voiceflex's SoGEA Voice launch (page 32), along with our 8x8 Insight Session (page 12). They all encapsulate where we are today and where we need to be tomorrow, making strategic planning a must-do New Year's resolution.

We thank you for your continued support and wish you a very happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Five-way tech firm merger eyes £100m

ALITER Capital's tech sector buy and build strategy has taken a leap forward with a series of M&As that have united five businesses under the North brand targeting £100m turnover within three years.

Boston Networks in Glasgow, Wales-based Pinacl and Pinacl GDA, North Shields and Birmingham-based 2020 Vision Systems and London's PEL Services have between them netted a £30m-plus forward order book since the Covid-19 outbreak.

The enlarged business is also set to boost its 250 headcount with a recruitment campaign.

North is running the £6m IoT Scotland network, part funded by the Scottish Government, supporting firms with projects via hundreds of LPWAN wireless gateways.

An early target of the new company will be to engage with other UK local and regional authorities aiming to roll out similar IoT infrastructures UK-wide.

North's Group Executive Chairman Rob Bardwell, former Chief Executive of Pinacl, commented: "This remarkable year has seen a shift in the way we all live and work, with



Scott McEwan

working from home becoming a reality for many. Technology and network solutions have never been more pertinent for companies and we know they are now high up on the board agenda of every organisation.

"While most sectors have experienced a heavy burden from Covid restrictions, the tech industry is well placed for a steady stream of business."

North's Group Executive Director Scott McEwan, former Chief Executive of Boston Networks, added: "Throughout the pandemic all of our constituent companies have secured major contract wins which have added to our growth trajectory.

"In recent years we've gone from strength to strength, and in bringing each of the group's companies together we have an offering and expertise to tackle the challenges of our customers in the UK and globally.

"Covid-19 has put network infrastructure and the safety and security of people, buildings and assets at the top of the agenda for private sector companies and the public sector. They need robust and secure systems at the heart of their organisations during the pandemic and in the future." See page 38

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NEWS ROUNDUP

IP INTEGRATION (IPI) has launched IPI Cloud AI, a SaaS-based service including IPI's own applications with AI capability from Microsoft, Google and Amazon. Steve Murray, Solutions Director at IPI, said: "We feel that IPI Cloud AI strikes the right balance between cutting edge capabilities and ease of adoption."

NFON UK distributor Nuvola has extended the hosted comms provider's Cloudya solution to its Irish partners. NFON first signed a distribution partnership with Nuvola in 2019. Nuvola Distribution MD Michael Lloyd said: "The demand and adoption of cloud telephony is very much on the rise with the switch to hybrid working models."

BLIZZARD Telecom has access to additional training, support and premium marketing packages from Gamma following its designation as a Platinum Partner. Blizzard now supports over 300 resellers across the UK. Daryl Pile, Managing Director – Channel at Gamma, said: "Over the many years we have worked together, Gamma has seen first-hand Blizzard's commitment to providing a seamless experience for its customers."

Wavenet in Qubic purchase

WAVENET'S presence and influence in the south region will be more strongly felt following its acquisition of St Albans-based Qubic Group.

The deal takes Wavenet's 2020 acquisition tally to three, adding to its purchases of VIA and Portal earlier in the year.

Qubic owners Joe Papa and Chris Papa said: "Being part of the Wavenet Group builds on the portfolio of cloud-based voice and data solutions that Qubic already offers."

Wavenet CEO Bill Dawson added: "Welcoming the Qubic team into the Wavenet Group provides some positive news in what has been a challenging year for many.

"Qubic shares the same values that drive the team at Wavenet, and the combination of our collective expertise will boost our cloud and technology experience while giving Qubic's customers access to Wavenet's solutions portfolio."



Bill Dawson

FluidOne scales up with move on PSU

FLUIDONE has shifted into rapid expansion mode with the acquisition of Cheltenham-based ICT service provider PSU Business Technology.

The deal is Livingbridge-backed FluidOne's first under the leadership of CEO Russell Horton as the firm seeks to scale up over the next four years.

PSU was established 30 years ago, has 38 staff, over 450 customers and generates circa £6m revenue.

PSU owner and MD Nigel Davies will stay with the business as Technical Director for IT Services as FluidOne positions the company as its 'centre of expertise'.

"Our strategy is to acquire quality businesses with skills in IT services, UC and advanced security, and combine these with connectivity to help customers create multi-cloud and multi-connected environments," stated Horton.

"Having known Nigel for nine years, I approached him late last year to discuss the opportunity because, knowing PSU, I felt it would be a strong addition to our portfolio with complementary services.

"I will work with Nigel and the PSU team to invest in, and



Russell Horton

grow the organisation as our centre of expertise for IT services and UC, cross-selling into the FluidOne customer base."

Davies added: "When Russell approached me about the potential of acquiring PSU, it was clear that this partnership

would be a real boost for PSU, providing greater opportunity for growth, investment and career development than we would have had alone."

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Zen-CityFibre collaboration



Paul Stobart

ZEN is collaborating with CityFibre on developing a wholesale business service across the infrastructure builder's national fibre network.

Zen is CityFibre's third national consumer ISP to launch gigabit speed broadband services over its networks.

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch commented: "With build or mobilisation already underway across 67 towns and cities, and plans to reach up to eight million premises, CityFibre is fast creating a nationwide wholesale full fibre platform."

Zen CEO Paul Stobart said: "Full fibre is set to be the backbone of the UK's connectivity for years to come. We will offer this service through our network of 700 channel partners so they can make the most of FTTP and the move to ultrafast."

The initial launch covers four cities – Newcastle upon Tyne and Worthing in January, and Ipswich and Leicester later in 2021 – with plans to extend the service to more locations.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

MYPHONES resellers are offering customers on-hold messaging services following a link up with Audpro. Research states that 90% of callers will hang up after hearing 40 seconds of silence and 34% of those will not call back. MyPhones Sales Director Paul Gibbs said: "On-hold messaging has now become a standard requirement for small and medium businesses needing to retain good customer relations while their offices are closed."

SCANSOURCE has sold its European business for \$30m to US private investor Ten Oaks Group. The deal does not include Bristol-based intY, the cloud business acquired by ScanSource in 2019. The distributor announced plans to sell off its European, Latin America and South America units over a year ago. The combined assets were said to be worth a total of over \$600m in annual revenues at the time, with the largest portion generated in Europe. Last month ScanSource reported Q1 group net sales of \$757.3m, down 10% year-over-year, while gross profit slid 18% to \$80.8m.

Chalvington pockets Tendit to bolster regional presence

EAST Sussex-based Chalvington Group's regional influence in Essex and north London has been significantly strengthened by the acquisition of Chipping Ongar located business comms provider Tendit Services.

The deal also expands Chalvington's customer base and according to MD Claire Baker the new office location enables a more seamless service delivery across the south.

"The possibilities for our increased customer base and our financial projections for the coming year look promising, with further company develop-



Claire Baker

ments planned for the not-too distant future," she said.

Former Tendit staff will join the Chalvington team including Director David White.

He said: "Chalvington is well known and well estab-

lished, not just in Sussex, but across the south east. When the opportunity presented itself, the decision was a simple one – Chalvington will preserve the very best of the business and take it to the next level."



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US-based firm buys UK's ECS

LONDON-based cloud solution provider ECS Group – which has a particular focus on the banking and financial services sector – has been acquired by US consultancy firm GlobalLogic.

The deal bolsters GlobalLogic's European and financial market footprint and adds complementary cloud services.

ECS boasts significant AWS capabilities and is an Advanced Consulting Partner and Amazon Connect Service Delivery Partner. It also holds AWS DevOps Competency Accreditation.

ECS was founded in 2008 and has more than 650 employees worldwide.

"The demand for digital engineering and cloud services continues to grow at an accelerated pace," said ECS CEO Mark Farrington.

"With access to a broader set of competencies and global scale we can address a wider range of client opportunities."

Shashank Samant, President and CEO, GlobalLogic, added: "ECS's expertise in complex cloud services, its strong position and presence in the UK, and the company's heritage in regulated industries such as financial services are all valuable additions to GlobalLogic."

01 Telecom's CXS merger



Alex Lower

A TECHNEDS Investments backed merger between 01 Telecom (01T) and CXS Connected Enterprise lays the ground for a new year launch of the Global Network Exchange platform operating under the 01T brand.

The deal sees 01T's operational capability augmented by CXS's high capacity carrier network, UK data centre footprint and channel offering.

01T chief Alex Lower will continue to lead the enlarged organisation post-merger as CEO, working with COO Daniel Deak, CTO Tobias Hooton and CFO Kenneth Runcorn.

Techneds Investments' Iain McKenzie becomes 01T's Group Chairman and the PE firm's founder Simon Mewett joins as Non-Executive Director.

"As the demand for robust, high capacity global network

connectivity skyrockets – and the value of infrastructure and data centre grows – reach and service has never been more important," said Lower.

"This merger provides us with the platform to realise our vision of bringing the world on-net and becoming the natural place for businesses to exchange data across international boundaries."

The firm will launch its global carrier Ethernet network in early 2021, initially bringing 103 countries on-net with 100 Gbps ports as standard.

Hooton added: "GNX will enable our customers and partners to connect to the services, platforms and content they need to, anywhere in the world."

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Network biz picks up Skyline

CITYFIBRE partner Gigabit Networks is targeting bandwidth-lite areas in the east Midlands following its acquisition of Skyline Wireless.

Haverhill-based Skyline delivers last mile wireless Internet connectivity via radio and 4/5G networks. The firm also provides UCaaS, VoIP and security solutions to SMEs.

From its Leicester base Gigabit Networks aims to provide connectivity and Internet services in regional areas with below par bandwidth.

"The pandemic has created massive demand for faster and better quality connectivity," commented Gigabit Networks CEO Dan Ilett.

"We can now not only make central city businesses faster, but more rural areas too."

David Yates, who is the CEO of 4 Oceans Venture Capital which has invested in Gigabit Networks, commented: "The Midlands is one of the most exciting places to do business right now as the connectivity potential is huge."

"Most people in the Midlands haven't realised the potential speeds and technology that are now available to them. Gigabit and Skyline will change that."

Xelion in October bonanza



Dave Reynolds

CLOUD comms provider Xelion sold more UK user licenses in October than at any other time with the majority using a softphone rather than a conventional desk phone.

New user licenses were up 20% on the previous best month and the pandemic has been identified as the primary catalyst for cloud telephony and softphone adoption.

Xelion UK MD Dave Reynolds stated: "The number of business staff now using the Xelion hosted telephony service for home working has surged since the pandemic began, and this hit a new peak with our record month in October for new users."

"Not surprisingly, with space for office work at a premium in most homes, the majority of new users are opting to have the Xelion softphone installed rather than have a desk phone."



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Contractors mobilised in fibre roll out

CITYFIBRE has awarded construction contracts with a value of £1.5bn for full fibre roll outs across 27 towns and cities, addressing approximately up to three million premises.

The awards will create over 3,750 new local network construction jobs across the UK.

The move is part of CityFibre's recruitment and training programme through which it expects to create up to 10,000 network construction jobs over the next three years to support its national roll out.

The conclusion of the first phase of its Accelerated Tender Awards Programme (ATAP) brings CityFibre's total build contracts to up to £2.5bn.

With 26 build partners now under contract its construction supply chain is secured for roll outs targeting more than five million premises across 66 towns and cities.

Mobilisation of its new partners and projects is already underway, and all projects are scheduled to be in build by summer 2021.

Before the end of the year CityFibre will launch the second phase of the ATAP through which it will award build contracts for up to a further three million premises.

This will commit construction resources across the entirety of its up to eight million Gigabit City Investment Programme target, which it is on track to have substantially completed by 2025.

CityFibre's roll out is supported by Bechtel, which was recently appointed to accelerate the mobilisation of CityFibre's construction partners and to maximise the productivity of each roll out project.

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch stated: "By awarding these full fibre network construction contracts we can ensure we have the construction resources we need to get the job done.

"Each contract represents hundreds of jobs and up-skilling opportunities for local people, building the networks Britain needs to survive and to thrive in a digital age."

Trust acquires distributor SOS



Vince Leahy

MANCHESTER-based Trust Distribution has acquired fellow distie SOS Communications, which will continue to operate under the SOS name as a Trust Group brand.

SOS founder and MD Colin Hepher is a long-time friend of Trust MD Vince Leahy and he decided to sell his business for personal reasons.

"We know each other so well," said Hepher. "We live in strange times and the passing of my friend led to a conversation with Vince and his wife Jane, the Financial Director, which ultimately brought us to where we are today."

Leahy added: "This is a great addition to the Trust operation and complements our 100%

channel commitment. The 500 reseller customers we partner with know we will never break that promise to ever compete with them.

"The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to be with us for some time but it has already changed the face of business communications forever.

"No longer will enterprises be reliant on an office-based workforce but instead deploy a dispersed set of employees that can drive their business forward through the use of communication technology. The coming together of Trust Distribution and SOS Communications will continue to open up and build upon these application opportunities for our partners."

Platform for MSPs launched

ULTIMA Labs, the product development arm of Ultima, has developed a service that enables MSPs to take a more automated approach to managing customers in the cloud. The firm claims that its IA-Cloud platform reduces Azure management costs on average by 66% with fewer fix issues.

Ultima CEO Scott Dodds said: "While developing our own automated platforms for customers we were asked by partners and Microsoft to build them for other MSPs, so that's what we've done.

"MSPs are under pressure to manage new workloads and optimise workloads via the cloud at an unprecedented rate. IA-Cloud is designed to build, monitor, manage and optimise Azure environments for MSPs with enterprise level architecture so that they can focus more on service and innovation."

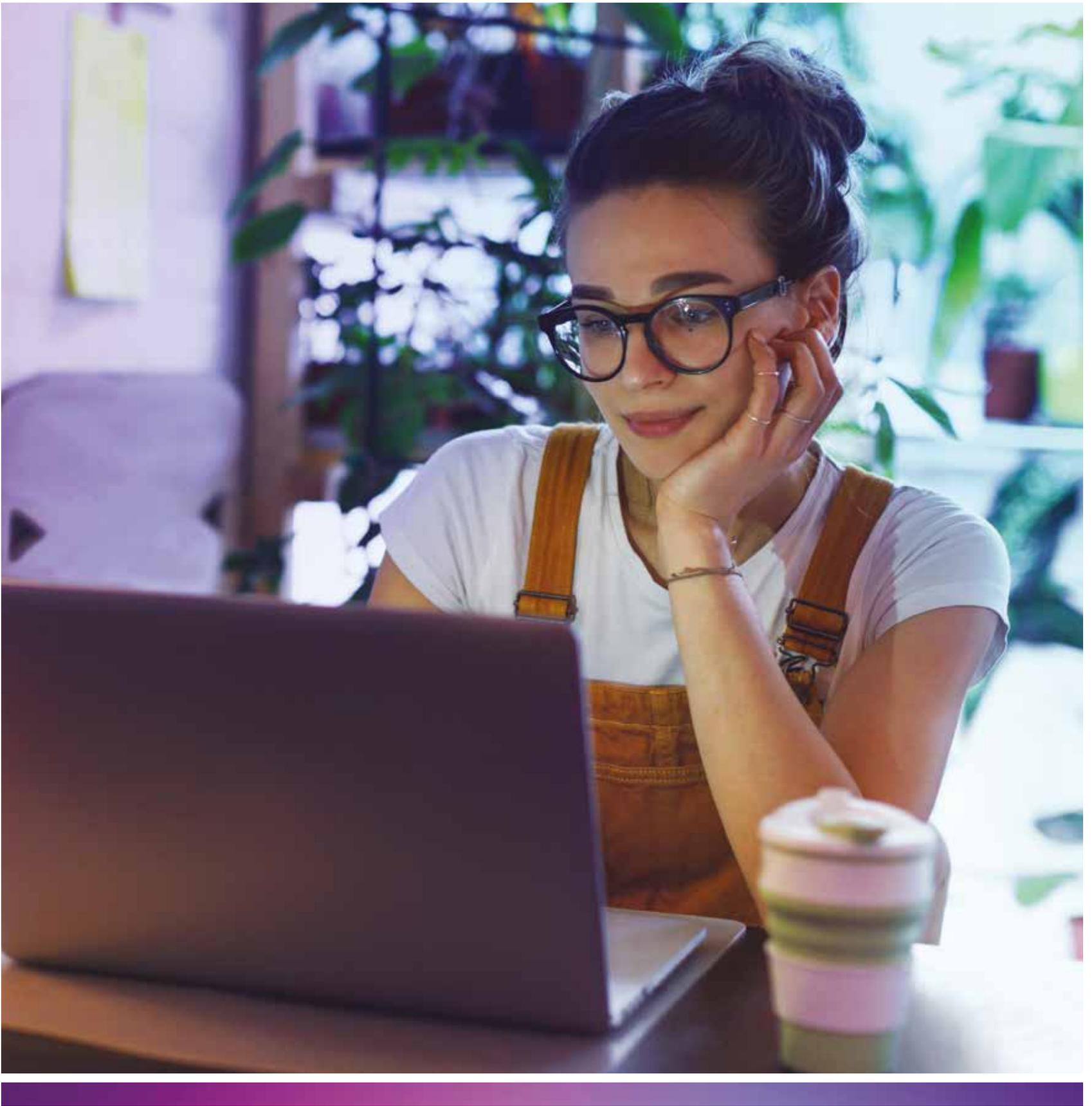
Amy Jaffer, Head of Ultima Labs, added: "Our goal is to help organisations to adopt automation more easily, whether that's to automate business processes or the management and monitoring of their environments. The new platform can be set up and switched on ready to go in a matter of minutes."



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TelcoSwitch gets Buxton



Eddie Buxton

TELCOSWITCH has received a leadership and strategy boost following the appointment of former Maintel Chief Executive Eddie Buxton as Chairman of its Board.

He spent over ten years as CEO of the AIM-listed cloud and managed services firm and is credited with driving business transformation, revenue, profitability and growth.

TelcoSwitch founder and CEO Russell Lux commented: "Eddie's appointment is a key part of our strategic plan to increase our leadership capabilities. He has an exceptional level of experience and is highly regarded in our industry and

in the funding and operating space. He will be a fantastic asset as we move forward."

Buxton added: "With a number of key activities underway to bolster our product offering and increase our customer base through acquisition, this is an exciting time to be joining such a dynamic organisation."

Prior to joining Maintel Buxton held leadership positions at Redstone Telecom, Onetel and Cable&Wireless, focusing on business development, M&A, fundraising, restructuring and strategy.

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Light bulb moment delivers Xmas shine

A MEETING to discuss the distribution of festive hampers to partners and staff in these challenging times led John Haw and his Fidelity Energy team to a light bulb moment.

"One of the team raised the issue of all the waste in a Christmas hamper," said Haw.

"All that plastic, a basket that gets burned when you run out of wood for the chiminea and the standard Christmas pudding that gets put in the cupboard and ends up being thrown in the bin eight years later!

"Over the course of our discussion we also decided that most people like to give more than receive.

"Research suggests that giving and acts of kindness can improve your mental wellbeing.

"So much so the NHS publish this in its five steps to mental wellbeing.

"It creates positive feelings and a sense of reward, gives you a feeling of purpose and self-worth and helps you to connect with other people.

"Ultimately, we wanted an idea that was more heart warming than a hamper so, working with Action Through Enterprise (ATE), a charity that I have known for many years, we



John Haw

decided to tie the two things together and came up with the idea of giving a 'Gift of Hope'."

The gifts will contain some humble hand-made items and delicacies but, more importantly, will include a donation on behalf of the partner to the ATE charity, explained Haw.

The donations start at £10 to feed an underprivileged child, £25 for a 'back to school' gift and £50 for a family grant gift

to help those families with disabled children who are struggling to survive.

"We are sending these to all our top partners and all our staff as a recognition for their efforts, to hopefully give them a sense of wellbeing, self-worth and most importantly to help others who are far less fortunate than ourselves," added Haw.

Find out more at: <https://ate-ghana.org/gifts-of-hope>

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Time to revise your approach

The Covid-19 induced market pivot calls for a new approach to engagement across all aspects of the channel and customer model. Let's call it the era of Permanent Adoption. And given that end user uptake is the true catalyst of market disruption, last month's online Comms Dealer Insight Session (held in association with 8x8) sought to establish the core principles upon which channel organisations should centre their strategy at this time of total business transformation.

Only customer adoption is truly disruptive, and, following the Covid-19 outbreak, the comms sector has experienced the biggest disruption in its history. But you cannot shift suddenly into a new phase of market demands and technology adoption and expect nothing else to change. It requires a collection of revised operational principles, according to our panel of experts. The common thread of their discussion is a change of approach and the enhancement of existing practices, ranging across the contexts of customer and staff engagement, technological development, go-to-market strategies, partnering and ultimately user adoption – with a focus on creating value, all

based on the core principle of customer centricity.

"The key has always been engaging with customers," stated NTS Comms Director Alan Pallett. "The relationship between the channel provider and the customer is critical, and the engagement must now continue beyond the sale. Too many providers think the job is done once the solution is installed, but that's when the job begins and it's where channel partners can really make a difference.

"We need to continually challenge customers about what they do and don't do and why they do it in that particular way. We need to truly understand what can make a difference and add value. Being a trusted channel partner opens



Keith Jackson

up opportunities. We can get a deeper dive with customers, we can widen the set of stakeholders we talk to, this is how we can help customers understand how they can do things differently."

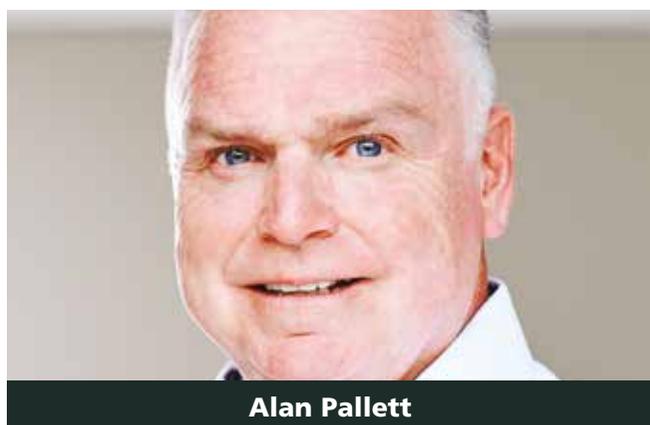
Testing times

Covid-19 has tested the limits of all businesses – perhaps the comms sector, as a prime mover in keeping Britain working, more than most. But for the channel it is still a time for pushing boundaries. "Business requirements are shifting faster so the outcomes need

to be achieved at a ridiculous rate," said Opus Sales Director Matt Dudleston. "Therefore working closely with a partner in the channel sphere has become more important to deliver value to the end customer. Vendors do a great job of delivering the technology, it's our job to map that and deliver a solution. It's about the business outcomes customers want to achieve and then modelling to get to that point. Our value comes once the sale has been done and by working in partnership with customers to meet those objectives."

Engagement is key

There is a great expectation in the power of UCaaS and CCaaS to help lead organisations out of the second wave of Covid-19, and resellers may need to engage with customers in a more tactful way than they are perhaps used to, observed 8x8 Senior Partner Manager David Green. "The change businesses are



Alan Pallett



Matt Dudleston

Approach and core principles

looking to drive through UC or contact centre plays to the integration elements of our portfolio," he stated. "We are seeing interest and activity around contact centre, driven by businesses thinking about how they are going to manage and support their customer service functions.

"But it's difficult to go into a business that uses Teams and tell them that from a voice perspective it's not that strong or it may not be appropriate. You have to start that conversation carefully. We saw some instances when businesses took the choice of taking Teams and not any kind of integration from the UC or contact centre point of view, and we've had them come back to us."

Everyone must now accept the need for a more holistic approach to Teams adoption, for example. Equally, everyone must accept that market disruption is all about uptake and usage. It is customers who are disruptive, and until Covid-19 they had barely caused a ripple in cloud uptake. "We've all seen the move to Teams accelerate through lockdown," said Britannic Executive Director Jonathan Sharp. "It's gone from circa 20 million users worldwide to 100 million during that period.

"There are however gaps in functionality, and customer contact and interaction is key. Teams does not have all the answers so an overlay of contact centre technologies is important. The other consideration is how you connect not just people and channels but also systems. There is an opportunity around more open APIs to integrate systems and applications like CRM, Salesforce or Dynamics. We are seeing a move towards efficient and effective working across all technology stacks."

Robust platform

Being able to provide a Teams application at the front end with a robust voice platform that offers stability, for

ring and say we're doing Teams for everything and it's a 2,000 user business," he said. "We ask a number of 'what if...' questions and the customer normally realises that what they want is the user front end of Teams because it's intuitive and works, while the functionality of UCaaS and CCaaS solutions gives it the supercharge that meets all of the business requirements."

Bistech Sales Director Mike Fry has sensed that some customers don't always trust Microsoft in terms of its commitment to a particular solution. "They may feel beholden to the Microsoft ecosystem and compelled to use its productivity tools," he explained. "From a voice

We need to continually challenge customers about what they do and don't do and why they do it in that particular way. We need to truly understand what can make a difference

example across multiple sites, is a winning combination, believes Charterhouse Voice & Data CRO Richard Betts. "Customers sometimes

perspective they remember the link into the Skype for Business and then Teams and think Microsoft could change its mind at any minute. So there is a reassurance factor in having that underlying pedigree vendor with a heritage in voice which mitigates the risk."

Against the backdrop of now common customer engagement issues like those outlined above a yawning gap will open between progressively collaborative channel partnerships, and their opposite, believes 8x8



Jonathan Sharp

RVP Channel Sales EMEA Keith Jackson, who took interoperability as an example of a more engaged and evolved approach to what will become a common requirement. "8x8 has been pragmatic in how we looked at the integration," stated Jackson. "We looked at the browser play, we looked at the bot-driven experience and all the areas we examined had a potential security or compliance risk.

"Multiple bot integrations and multiple chrome browsers are difficult for IT to manage. So the Direct Routing approach we took leverages all of the security and functionality that we've bolted into the platform over the past 15 years, which still complies with Microsoft at

the back end. We could have got something to market quickly, but the compliance and security risk and the end user experience risk were too high, so we developed a solution that is more structured, fit for purpose and less work to implement in the background."

If not already, MSPs and resellers will become the thought leaders in their customers' technology adoption journeys, dealing entirely with matters such as Teams and systems integration that require deep consultation. In the process becoming known across the wider customer organisation as a trusted advisor; and such a reputation must reflect the reseller's ability

Continued on page 14



David Green



Richard Betts

Continued from page 13

to simplify for the customer what can often be a complex solution. "There is so much complexity at the moment, with multiple vendors, many products and features and integration issues, along with the challenges of transforming a legacy base to new technology and the big macro factors around the PSTN switch-off," stated AdEPT Sales Director Alex Larcombe.

"The role of the channel is to help customers navigate complexity, tailor solutions and make those right investment choices. It's about outcomes rather than products. For channel partners it's about having close relationships with vendor partners and keeping up with technology changes. Open communication is needed in this approach. Channel players have the expertise and have gone through the process of vendor selection and are making sure they are up to speed with market changes. They have access to all the function and features customers need."

Simplification is one of the principles that channel businesses should now centre their business on, but a balance must be struck with another principle – how to create long-term value post-Covid-19. "People try to commoditise too much about what we do," added Pallett. "There is a lot of experience in the channel that can be diluted quickly especially where you've got

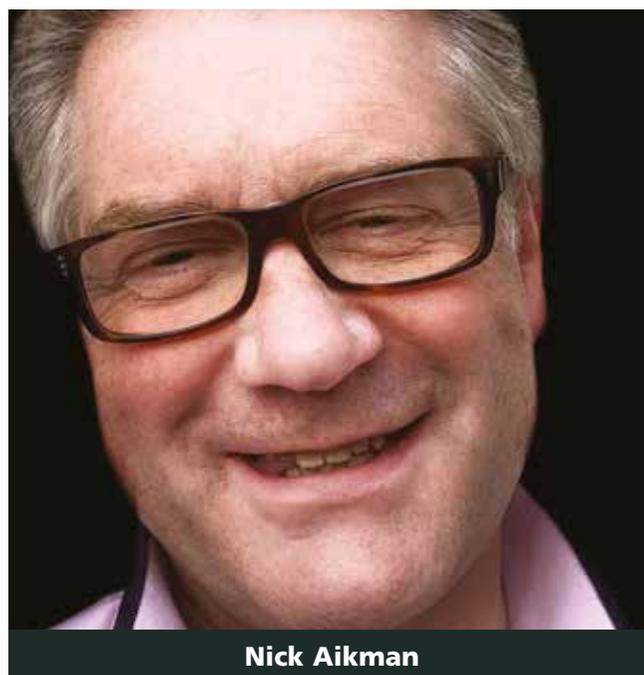
UCaaS and SaaS providers going to market directly. Those organisations don't truly understand the UK and how we can add value. There is value beyond the price and we are going to play a key role as resellers to demonstrate to the customer where that value exists within their stack."

Balancing complexity

Dudleston has witnessed first hand 'huge success' in the collaboration and employee interaction space, reflecting the importance of simplifying complexity and then productising the solution. He cited a McKinsey report that stated 85 per cent of corporates have increased uptake of simplified collaboration technology. "We've benefited from simplification, but we will devalue the proposition by the over simplification of contact centre, digitising channels and Artificial

The role of the channel is to help customers navigate complexity, tailor solutions and make those right investment choices. It's about outcomes not products

Intelligence, for example," he said. "There is a lot of complexity and we can't downplay that. It needs to be scoped in the right way otherwise you won't be able to deliver the business outcomes that customers need."



Nick Aikman

This approach means taking a long-term view, which changes how you think, plan and where you put your energy. And as end users continue to undergo a process of renormalisation (the new normal), the shift to home working is a

8x8 Channel Account Manager Nick Aikman noted that there was a 'feeding frenzy' in April-May when most people realised they lacked a home working solution. "Now businesses are expecting people to have sorted out their communications strategy and how they work from home and use video conferencing," he said. "Some of that is around Teams: 8x8 played it well not to compete with Microsoft, but work with Microsoft to enable people to work smarter."

As we double down on approaches to customer engagement and technology enablement it is necessary to fully consider the new agile working blueprint and where it might lead. According to FluidOne CEO Russell Horton it would be wise to take a longer term view of current trends before establishing and executing

on revised strategic plans and approaches. "The original Covid-19 response was to match productivity, but the productivity gains have taken people by surprise," he commented. "We will likely see a move away from permanent home working full-time to 'permanent part-time' home working – two or three days in the office for example. So the IT world and UC will need to gear up for the permanent part-time scenario. How does the tech work for that? This all accelerates the move to the cloud."

Six Degrees Agile Workspace Technical Director Tom Cotton added: "Where people still need to do a lot of work is not necessarily around the comms and meetings platform, the major change will be around other business systems and processes. They are not going to be geared up for the move to agile working longer term. Coping with hybrid working is going to be difficult. Any line of business apps that are 15 years old aren't going to cope well with long-term changes to how we work."

Lessons learned

Customers in the main have learned the hard way that they are better off following a tech upgrade. But while Covid-19 is an opportunity to break down barriers against upgrading legacy comms, there must likewise be a more progressive structure of collaboration in the channel. One example of an evolving partnership approach is the dynamic relationship

natural focal point. For many businesses, technologies not before considered will prove the most robust and stable, able to accommodate their requirement to enable disparate workers in any region.

"Prior to lockdown 24 million people in the UK had never worked from home, so the UC and collaboration tools the industry has long talked about had only been used by a small proportion of the workforce," said Sharp. "This has now become a necessity, not only to carry on doing business but to manage the remote working transition. Covid-19 has changed how people see technology."



Alex Larcombe



Russell Horton



Tom Cotton

between NTS and 8x8. "We are working with 8x8 on a number of opportunities," explained Pallett. "The legacy vendors are probably finding the market a bigger challenge, only managing a small element of the solution, meaning that there is only that element

been anything other than transformational. But rather than test organisations to destruction, the pandemic has opened minds to new possibilities and ever evolving channel partnerships are passing the test. Now it's the turn of less forward thinking resellers to snap out of their

Customers are embracing SaaS but some resellers are reluctant to move into that market space

of the solution that they can provide compliance or comfort around. We are able to provide customers with an end-to-end solution because all of the security measures and accreditations are in place. We are not finding it difficult to reassure customers on security. The story is easier with disruptors like 8x8 and the cloud providers."

Few would contend that the impact of Covid-19 on most organisations has

conventional modus operandi and take a new approach that befits the times, and that positively reflects all of the issues discussed in this Insight Session, none of which can be questioned over their topicality and veracity. "Customers are embracing SaaS but some resellers are reluctant to move into that market space," added Pallett. "If anything it is the reseller community that is nervous about making that step rather than customers." ■



Mike Fry

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Last month's Comms Dealer online Full Fibre Markets Unlocked event (10th November) sponsored by BT, CityFibre, TalkTalk Business and Zen put the spotlight on current FTTP and all-IP priorities via an insightful agenda and a line up of industry experts. We hope that the special report that follows (pages 16-26) will help to give you a strategic advantage when planning ahead for your full fibre future.

Fibre drive accelerates

Nothing should distract resellers from 2025 PSTN switch-off and the shift to full fibre and all-IP, according to Paul Beacham, Senior Manager, Data Networking Portfolios at BT Wholesale.

Resellers must throw any resistance to full fibre adoption to the winds, urged Beacham, who emphasised that the 2025 PSTN switch-off is for real and preparations for the change should be put in place now by resellers. "This is a massive dynamic, driving resellers and end customers to think about their comms infrastructure," he stated. "Furthermore, lockdown and the move to home and agile working has raised the focus on connectivity outside of big office locations.

"Covid-19 woke up the market to the importance of high bandwidth high performance connectivity across all locations. We saw an increase in focus on resilient services too. Whereas copper is subject to environmental conditions, the advantages of fibre are performance and stability as well as higher bandwidth for running applications like video conferencing and accessing cloud-based services. The momentum is there and accelerating at pace from all providers, and there are multiple offerings in the market that are going to complement and drive Digital Britain."

Even though the UK is in catch up mode in terms of

full fibre penetration we will see an accelerating roll out from multiple suppliers, pointed out Beacham. "For resellers, it is time to get on board and ride that wave of growth," he stated. "You are only going to see it accelerate and there is support from the Government for national coverage. 2025 is not that far away when you consider the volume of services and the decisions that UK businesses and channel partners need to make. Full fibre based services will be critical."

Openreach is now connecting over 40,000 premises a week, double the rate compared to a year earlier and achieved during a pandemic. It is clear that full fibre will impact virtually every segment of the market, observed Beacham. "That illustrates the opportunity we all have in supporting the roll out and the services based on fibre," he added. "From a corporate perspective you would traditionally have office-based connectivity but the move to far more flexible working and more agile working models requires higher bandwidth and more stable services."

But for resellers to achieve alignment with these developments help from upstream providers, especially around education and go-to-market strategies, is a clear



Paul Beacham

The momentum is there and accelerating at pace

necessity. "It's more than just the pure connectivity layer, commented Beacham. "There is a greater focus around end-to-end solutions and how applications can be brought together. We need to get the basics right and enable the channel with products and services that they can take to market, so our number one focus has been getting FTTP and the other access technologies fully launched into our portfolio.

"We have FTTP and SoGEA fully launched in our broadband and Ethernet portfolios alongside our

traditional dedicated fibre services such as EAD. We are adding our DIA service in the new year. Key for us is how these are exposed. It's not a tactical solution therefore needs to be fully integrated into the portfolios and available through portals and automated journeys."

Close collaboration

It is no surprise that BT Wholesale uses Openreach significantly, and is therefore in close collaboration with Openreach around service levels, looking at FTTP Professional with business grade SLAs as well as symmetric bandwidths. "We

need to look at the different access technologies, how they fit within the portfolio and how we offer them to partners," added Beacham. "Our strategy is to make sure we have the widest range of access products and services available for resellers. One size does not fit all, and FTTP is not the only answer to Digital Britain, it is a combination of technologies and we all have a role to play in terms of educating the market on the differences between the various products and how they are delivered.

"Some customers are happy with 2 Mbps services. Not every customer or application requires higher bandwidth, and this is where the likes of FTTC and SOGEA will still have a role to play in the coming years as FTTP rolls out, in terms of bridging the gap. A lot of this is about how we provide information that could be rolled into a channel partners' own portfolio positioning. For broadband and Ethernet-based services this includes how we make the coverage and availability visible to partners. We've got online tools and APIs that can be interrogated. We are also working with Openreach on data feeds to make coverage far more visible. Not just for FTTP but for some of the other technologies too." ■



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Start planning now

Never has the UK's connectivity landscape been more in the spotlight than now, and CityFibre's £4 billion full fibre investment plan serves as a beacon to all resellers with a keen interest in their business's future direction, according to CityFibre's Head of Wholesale Andrew Wilson.

The clear message of the digital revolution is that, like CityFibre's infrastructure build, it is relentless. "We've kept building during Covid-19," stated Wilson. "That is our game plan. We launched a new city to the channel during lockdown – Plymouth – and have not been held back by the challenges. During lockdown we worked closely with local authorities, DCMS and central Government to make sure we are on track."

With 67 cities already announced, CityFibre has build projects underway across 31. Meanwhile, channel partners have access to 28 cities on its business footprint. "It's build, build, build, and we've awarded a contract to Bechtel, one of the world's largest engineering and project management firms," added Wilson. "We'll be giving jobs to about 10,000 people directly and indirectly through this build programme, and we are learning all the time. Therefore our build out will continue to get better, more efficient and faster. We are building above our budgeted plan and Bechtel adds to our resource."

CityFibre's routes to market are carrier and national (the larger providers) and a regional play to build cities and presence around the UK. "It's about working with

local partners and enabling local communities," added Wilson. "We look at how we can build and promote a partner's business locally; and in each city we have a City Manager who runs the relationship with the council and works with industry forums within their region. We work collaboratively with partners in their areas, giving them marketing support and access to data on all of the businesses that are addressable by our infrastructure. This provides a clear strategic focus on who they should be contacting. We help with contact plans and demand generation programmes, all geared to nurture the regional opportunity."

Wilson noted that CityFibre will be available to eight million homes and businesses by the end of 2025. An impressive footprint, but clearly the infrastructure builder will not deliver ubiquitous full fibre across the UK on its own, so any national play would entail aggregating all services. "To access as close to 100 per cent penetration as possible you're going to have to work with other altnets," he said. "As long as we are all clear about where and how we are building with the support of DCMS across the UK, then we have a rosy future for full fibre and the channel – a brand new product set across a brand new infrastructure."



Andrew Wilson

We are building above our budgeted plan and Bechtel adds to our resource

CityFibre is helping partners to evolve the way they market this opportunity, taking a more social engagement lead, for example. "There is no change in sales strategy in how you position the products and solutions," said Wilson.

"But the way you promote the services and get the message across has changed. Embracing social media, developing an online presence and being more intelligent around analysing data on buying behaviours is key. Partners are introducing new sales and marketing methodologies to attract the right customers through different mediums."

CityFibre has created a number of initiatives, promotions and ways to support its channel during the pandemic. "We engaged one-to-one with most partners, conducted surveys, looked at feedback and held online events," said Wilson.

Tactical response

"We also looked at what Covid has done to our market and viewed it in analogous terms as a sports injury: You're performing well and suddenly you are hit, how do you cope? We worked with sports scientists and coaches and presented initiatives to deal with problems and challenges back to the channel. We

are now in the second wave and know how to work around some of the challenges we are facing."

This might involve looking at different ways to give customers access to full fibre, commercials, different ways of migrating customers, and ways to bundle hosted and cloud services into the fibre connection. "As a wholesale-only provider we can offer partners different ways to procure our network, whether locally, nationally or as a managed service," stated Wilson. "The channel can add innovation to our product."

Wilson believes that the industry will get a clearer view of where everybody is building very shortly. Then, it will become more obvious to many that CityFibre is also addressing smaller towns as well as the big city conurbations, and could potentially bring rural areas into its programme.

"Poor connectivity is exceptionally frustrating and from a business perspective potentially damaging," he added. "The opportunity that Covid-19 has driven home is the need for decent bandwidth. The use case has become more apparent and is accelerating. And we have a big job to fully fibre-enable the UK, improve applications and services and deliver a positive impact on GDP." ■

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Time to get scientific

Resellers need visibility, simplicity and a scientific outlook if they are to effectively drive the next revolution in communications, argues TalkTalk Business Managing Director for Wholesale Richard Thompson, who says the onus largely rests on upstream providers to deliver transparency, remove complexity and leverage analytics.

With 2025 looming ever larger, resellers need all the help they can get to pinpoint full fibre opportunities and deliver the 'final connection'. "We have to translate how technology and the plumbing will enable businesses to work better, faster and be more productive," stated Thompson. "That's not for the channel to do on its own. This is down to how we communicate as an industry. There are full fibre variants that make it complex for customers. We need to boil this down into language that translates easily into how fibre can improve businesses. This is not just about delivering a price point, it's about establishing a clear joint go-to-market strategy. We need to spend time thinking through transition pathways."

According to Thompson, full fibre is perhaps the number one priority within TalkTalk Business. He says the company has a 'challenger mindset' and has set about becoming the full fibre enabler for the channel, giving partners ubiquitous coverage irrespective of network. "That's against a backdrop of a significant investment in our go-to-market," added Thompson. "We assess how resellers can leverage local marketing activity and capitalise on

some of the successful experiences we have seen in cities and specific geographies. For resellers, beginning this journey sooner rather than later is critical. FTTP is the final connection and I don't envisage a huge switched market. That's why we talk about FTTP as a race. It's also about how we leverage data and insight."

TalkTalk Business will be working with Openreach, CityFibre and other altnets as part of its strategy to provide insight into when fibre will be released and where. "Our plan is to give full ubiquitous coverage through a single discovery interface," explained Thompson. "Otherwise partners are faced with multiple relationships with providers across the UK, which is complex. Simplifying that will significantly enhance the overall customer experience for the channel and should accelerate the deployment of fibre."

"But we have to be pragmatic: There are certain things restricting how quickly we can operate. One is around supply and how we get these connections in the ground and faster. On the build side, we need more support from Government and administrators. 2025 will go in the blink of an eye and we need to get more scientific about it."



Richard Thompson

FTTP is the final connection and I don't envisage a huge switched market. That's why we talk about FTTP as a race

Thompson reiterated that mindset and anchoring yourself in 2025 is also key. "Everything we sell today is effectively the legacy of tomorrow," he added. "All of those services will transition to new technology. We are creating a playbook, a detailed transition pathway for partners to help them have that conversation. We are scientific in our approach to what is a big pivot."

Having the right plumbing that enables people to work effectively is a given, and Covid-19 has truly highlighted the importance of connectivity. "There are clear benefits associated with FTTP: Lower churn, lower cost to serve, it just works and will increase customer satisfaction," said Thompson. "Based on our research we think there is an opportunity for at least an additional

million lines through home working. Ways of working, wellbeing and security are all becoming topical debates – and connectivity underpins everything. This is where the channel can capitalise. The channel knows the challenges their customers are facing."

Nor is that all: Covid-19 has proved that most if not all office tasks can be carried out in places other than an office. And having the right technology to support the right application is now at the forefront of business leader minds. "The changes we've seen in terms of the move to home working over the past six months would typically take a decade to get that level of adoption," stated Thompson. "There is a consensus among businesses that remote working is more productive and better for staff wellbeing and it's going to be the new normal."

"Every customer requires great value connectivity, and each will need it in a slightly different way depending on their applications. We have network insight around bandwidth utilisation, so rather than just saying 'you need a FTTP connection', ask why customers are topping out on their current service and discover the applications that fibre will unlock. That's how the channel can add significantly more value on the back of fibre." ■

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Reasons to think fibre

When a whole section of the comms market says it's time to act, it's also time to take control because customers not won today could be lost forever, warns Zen Partner Managing Director Steve Warburton.

Resellers can't afford to ignore the inevitable switch to ubiquitous full fibre connectivity and have been urged to act now if they are to secure their long-term sustainability. The good news is that the market conditions could not be more propitious, believes Warburton. "From an ultrafast point of view it's a fantastic time to be involved in the market," he stated. "The opportunity for partners is to acquire market share. Not too many providers are doing this and many end users are not aware of an alternative to BT. If you are not in there quickly there is a risk that customers will be lost to competitors.

"The switching market will reduce: We are seeing customers typically stay with us on FTTP for around six and a half years, compared to standard broadband which has a circa two year tenure. Once fibre services are in it's reliable and offers a great performance. So the question is, why shift supplier? If you do not win that customer now you are at risk of losing them for a long time."

Zen has been offering ultrafast services for ten years and has circa 700 partners currently buying full fibre. Three years ago the company invested in its portal and APIs to manage services and track orders. Another important point is around network investment. "You need to

make sure you've made the appropriate investments so the network can handle FTTP speeds," added Warburton. "During Covid-19 we saw our network usage grow by 68 per cent. We expect usage to grow 20 per cent to 30 per cent year-on-year. It's a huge spike and reflects the appetite and demand for these types of services.

"We are also expanding our network with 450 exchanges live, taking that to 700 over the next three years. There are 26 million broadband lines in the UK, and in around five years time we're going to see 20 million of them transition to full fibre. This is a tremendous opportunity and the next big shift in connectivity."

Bundled services

For resellers, in winning the connectivity business they typically have an opportunity to look at telephony, the cloud and security. "Resellers have the customer relationships and play a crucial role in stitching the IT together, so the connectivity is one part of a portfolio of IT services," commented Warburton.

"From a customer's point of view they don't want to contact separate providers for connectivity and cloud etc. They want services stitched together which is where partners add value.

"There can be challenges in the initial provision of the



Steve Warburton

There are 26 million broadband lines in the UK, in around five years time we're going to see 20 million of them transition to full fibre. This is a tremendous opportunity

service. It's not like a copper line that is up and running in a few days. Full fibre requires some work and can take longer with nuances in how it is delivered. But once it's in it works very well. We see a low fault rate and better performance."

That full fibre plays into the hands of resellers adept at adding value and supporting clients is a given, and fibre may generate more support opportunities from customers who say their Wi-fi, router or laptop may need upgrading. "These are all issues partners

can help to address and generate opportunities for additional revenue and margin," added Warburton.

The biggest question and challenge, believes Warburton, is... can I get full fibre? "Coverage is growing at around 150,000 premises per month and we've invested heavily in a tool that allows partners to see which sites are enabled and which are due to be enabled," he added. "They can look at that data by post code, town, city, business or residential – and having got that data it's about how to engage the customer.

"In the current climate you need to be using social media and different methods to reach those customers. We've been working on campaigns and collateral material around messaging to help partners reach end users. Once you do reach them there is real demand and people want alternatives. We aren't seeing a problem in generating demand for full fibre. And once fibre is in it is difficult to shift.

"Furthermore, we are in an interesting period where the consumer and business worlds are being blurred. With many business people working from home now and expected to do so post-Covid, there is also an opportunity for partners to enter the consumer market by serving business users." ■

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Increasingly, full fibre will be key to the profitability of the comms channel, but most resellers are yet to connect with the reality that awaits them, when nothing less than FTTP will be fit for purpose. The 2025 network transition is not something resellers can relax into – it needs action now. So Comms Dealer’s panel of Fibre Unlocked experts sent a strong message to the channel, adding great emphasis to the task and opportunity at hand.

It is fair to say that the comms sector has capacity to speak up opportunities and tech ‘revolutions’ that somehow take a near eternity to materialise. Today there are copious references to full fibre and Digital Britain, but the difference is there is no time to waste and the catchphrase for ubiquitous FTTP has become ‘preparation is key and act now’. “In the context of 2025, just look at the number of services and applications that are copper based,” stated Paul Beacham, Senior Manager, Data Networking Portfolios, BT Wholesale. “They all need to be transitioned.

“And the corporate shift away from office-based operating models is spreading. Organisations that were office centric pre-Covid-19 will be supporting agile working beyond the pandemic. This is about the

services and applications that drive the requirement for the high bandwidth, high performance and stability aspects of fibre. Those are the dynamics that are coming into play and you can see that being prevalent across a number of sectors.”

Full fibre represents a brave new dawn for the comms channel, and FTTP’s greatest proponents, its providers, are not an exaggerating nexus of spin doctors with a radical message (revolutionary though it is). They publicise voluminous facts that should ring loud and clear today, while the copper network cliff edge also puts a bright spotlight on the full fibre imperative and potential challenges.

“2025 is absolutely realistic,” stated Andrew Wilson, Head of Wholesale, CityFibre. “We’ll play our part, but it does require a unified effort from the industry to



Paul Beacham

The 2025 impact and the stickiness of full fibre are reasons why the channel needs to get on board now

make sure we are doing the right things and building in the right places. One of the challenges in digging roads is wayleaves and the legalities of getting across highways and pavements. The DCMS needs to provide more support on resolving these issues. It is important that we all work together.”

Key foundation

As the copper network and associated services become things of the past in 2025, full fibre will be the channel’s raison d’être, underpinning

unprecedented business opportunity rather than an unwanted predicament dogged by insurmountable mountains to climb. “2025 was a huge challenge even before Covid-19,” commented Paul Smith, Head of Partners, TalkTalk Business. “We are lagging so far behind many other economies on FTTP, like Spain and South Korea. Even the 2033 timeline was highly ambitious. We need to apply continued pressure on the Government and infrastructure providers to deliver fibre to more and more cities. It means being courageous in accessing land and supporting street work commissions. We need the help of local authorities to support builders and move us forward as quickly as possible.”

It is true to say that legacy hang-ups exist in the building of the UK’s greatest ever



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nters acceleration phase



Richard Thompson

network, and few resellers are currently flying the flag for connectivity reform. According to Richard Thompson, Managing Director, Wholesale, TalkTalk Business, this is no time for ICT providers to lock up their minds and throw away the key. On the contrary, it is time to formalise existing and future commitments to customers with a longer-term view that considers the UK's full fibre build which all agree is entering a period of acceleration. "I encourage resellers to start building processes around the deployment of full fibre," he said. "If you're used to just having broadband, fibre is different. If you're selling Ethernet, it's similar. Make sure fibre is embedded in your strategy and roadmaps."

Thompson's outlook on the full fibre network build is predicated on the need for more central control and visibility. So TalkTalk Business is drawing up, and then monitoring, a national full fibre coverage and procurement tool for partners. This is indicative of the firm's strong belief in acquiring control through data, which according to Thompson also requires resellers to studiously

analyse the ins and outs of their customer profiles in order to target appropriate solutions. "Resellers need an understanding of the intricacies of their existing base, the technology they use at an individual location level, and what the transition

This is no time for ICT providers to lock up their minds and throw away the key

path for those customers will be," he explained.

"These actions should be based on empirical data about bandwidth utilisation. This way resellers can create and be in control of a clear pathway rather than the market controlling how

quickly they need to move. Future proofing customer bases is super important. This will increase enterprise values as resellers are moving away from legacy onto next generation solutions. It's important to make that transition."

At all stages of the full fibre debate and revolution, the channel's commercial and long-term sustainability interests should be omnipotent and synonymous with fibre as underpinning future growth. Come 2025, all else will be yesterday, including legacy assets within a reseller's existing base. The answer must be to mobilise the channel and the most effective way to get more resellers into full fibre mode is education

and a change of outlook. "Resellers are hedging their bets on fibre," noted Jon Perkins, Strategy Director, Zen. "Fibre's challenging because it's an additional investment for the end user, a more expensive product. But when you apply a lifetime view there are abundant



Jon Perkins



Paul North

reasons to invest – inherently lower fault rates, reduced churn, and it's a case of future proofing. You enable users to do so much more, and if you position yourself early you'll reduce churn and keep more customers in the long term. That investment will pay back."

Knowing what you want for your business in the future requires a sensible and measured response now that fully considers the end game, emphasised Paul North, Head of Regional Sales, CityFibre. "It's an exciting time for the industry, and FTTP could be the last connection you sell," he stated. "If you don't get involved now a competitor will certainly eat your lunch."

"You can shape the build, shape the products and sell in a different way. We encourage our partners to bring opportunities and say this is where we'd like to go next. It's an exciting time for the channel and the biggest change in broadband since 21CN. There's never been a better time to focus on regional and local areas for business."

It is clear that the copper network has had its day, and is badly in need of a

fibre-based shake-up. What matters is rationalising and presenting strong arguments for resellers to change over the next five years. This is all the more urgent given the scale of the task and the high price of inaction. And North's sign posting of a local focus could be a reseller's trump card.

"It has been mentioned many times, but the trust that exists between resellers and their end users, the billing relationship and service integration delivered, means that resellers have that all important contact and relationship," commented Perkins. "Our focus is all about making it as easy as possible for resellers to perform that bridge role – take the product that we carry across the network and deliver it to the end user."

"It becomes much more focused when you follow the Openreach plan. Its ultrafast pivot as WLR is removed from sale will force us to think far more geographically. That is the kind of conversation we are having with partners, about how we can target specific areas and customers on their base by providing context."

Continued on page 26

Continued from page 25

The UK's full fibre network will be more than the sum of its parts. It will be the manifestation of an all-IP era. But as we have seen, the idea that replacing the copper network is top of most resellers' agenda is optimistic. There is a danger that, despite the clear light of day, many resellers will be outpaced by their competition, as well as the FTTP roll out, despite having a head start.

"There is a huge role for resellers to play," reiterated Smith. "FTTP by its nature is

UK," he added. "There are some alternative network providers doing brilliant work, such as B4RN in Cumbria, a community led project with approximately 4,000 users now, where local farmers are digging up their own land, without wayleave issues, putting in their ducting infrastructure. And a project called Fastershire in Shropshire and Gloucestershire is bringing full fibre to some of the most rural areas in these counties."

Come the great new dawn of widespread FTTP availability, for Perkins the

The most effective way to get more resellers into full fibre mode is education and a change of outlook

localised and that's where the channel is at its best. To be successful in this next phase resellers should keep business simple and focus on doing a few things brilliantly. FTTP is fundamentally different from the copper alternatives, and there is an education piece to ensure we are consistent in our messaging."

To resellers for whom the facts so far are not persuasive enough, perhaps the actions of local full fibre protagonists offer an incentive. "There are circa 30 regionalised independent fibre builders at this point, and they have an opportunity to zig while the world zags and minimise any geographical divide that could pop out of the back of pure investment cases," commented Smith. "They have that local focus and can do things differently. Competition is rife on that front which is great."

Week in, week out, North sees more and more alternative network providers getting involved. "Up and down the country there are a variety of full fibre providers focused on pockets of the

crux of the matter is about adoption and the levers that the Government can pull together. "There needs to be some innovation from Openreach and some of the bigger suppliers around the commercials that will enable adoption," he said. "Then it is all about utility for customers and proving the case for fibre and why end users need to make that transition. The Government can lead by example. With innovation around commercials and delivering utility I'm confident that we can all deliver against expectations and keep up with the rest of Europe and other parts of the world."

The overwhelming message to the channel is to seize this chance to forge Digital Britain and that resellers are by their very nature best positioned to blaze a transformation trail. "This is a disruptive play, a migration, moving from one technology to another, so having an existing customer base gives resellers a head start," enthused Wilson. "But that does not protect you. Early adopters on the front foot are going to win out." ■

Understanding the 5G perspective: Gavin Jones, Channel Sales Director, BT Wholesale

DURING the Insight Session Jones, who led BT Wholesale's mobile team for six years, said 5G is accelerating fast, citing advances made by EE which is active in 112 towns and cities across the UK, Vodafone is close with O2 and Three also in the mix. He said the average speed of the EE network is 125 megabits and noted peaks between .8 Mbps to 1 Gb in certain areas. What needs to develop is latency which sits at around 25 milliseconds.

"It is key to remember that 5G is a moniker," he said. "There are three 5G categories: Enhanced mobile broadband; massive machine type comms and IoT; and ultra low latency (what works in five milliseconds). All operators have much network transformation to do over the next three to four years to enhance these."

Jones noted use cases for FWA which is easy to install and delivers fast speeds,



Gavin Jones

especially in urban areas.

"The use cases we should look at instead of full fibre are in rural areas," he added. "You've still got to build towers and masts and some of the long distance spectrum isn't being auctioned off until next year. Looking towards 2025 you may envisage a utopia of choices – satellite dish, 5G etc – but they are

always going to complement and sit alongside full fibre."

Jones also noted some 5G limitations around high order spectrum that doesn't travel very fast, making it hard to use in cities. "5G will complement fibre," he said. "Fibre is here in perpetuity and we'll see a blend of mixed estates." ■

More Session Insights...

2025 is a massive challenge, so other technologies have a role to play. It comes back to the combination of services that can be provided.

Paul Beacham, Senior Manager, Data Networking Portfolios, BT Wholesale

Home working is a reality and a huge opportunity for the channel. People need reliable and secure congestion free connectivity. Fibre delivers a much more robust experience and is the right solution to take the economy forward.

Richard Thompson, Managing Director, Wholesale, TalkTalk Business

If we overbuild in certain areas then we are not going to get that reach across all areas of the UK. We're working closely with DCMS to make sure we are all clear on where we are going and how we are doing it.

Andrew Wilson, Head of Wholesale, CityFibre

We shouldn't underplay 4G. LTE in particular gets to 60-70 megabits per second which is in excess of what FTTC customers get today. So just looking at 5G over simplifies things. You can bring in 4G, and it's in our roadmap to look at how we bring the two products together as part of a back-up solution.

Jon Perkins, Strategy Director, Zen

Corporate flexibility is the new mantra and work-ready homes are going to be a big focus for the future. Employers are starting to realise that unless they provide people with flexibility they won't attract talent. Use of cloud in the all-IP world will make fibre super important for productivity.

Gavin Jones, Channel Sales Director, BT Wholesale

How we make the coverage and the roll out visible to resellers is key. Local knowledge is a real advantage with FTTP as there is that regional sell.

Paul Beacham, Senior Manager, Data Networking Portfolios, BT Wholesale

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Artificial Intelligence and An

Artificial intelligence (AI) analytics from NICE's newest product NICE ENLIGHTEN provides benefits to the whole business and customers too. A winning combination as the contact centre deals with the 'new normal'.

The contact centre conjures up images of large rooms full of agents wearing headsets. COVID-19 saw many of these agents sent home but sent home to work. Two lockdowns later and some socially distanced working in between and home-based contact centre agents are a long-term reality.

Meanwhile, customers are more reliant than ever on contacting businesses and organisations on the phone as they are largely prevented from visiting premises in person. As the economy struggles to cope with the pandemic, customer service is more critical than ever.

These are both compelling reasons for resellers to revisit their contact centre

customers with NICE ENLIGHTEN, but there are more.

Nicky Butler, VP of EMEA Channels, said: "NICE has the analytics to help businesses understand what is going on in their contact centres and to improve their customer service by making their agent interactions as good as possible."

NICE ENLIGHTEN's sentiment model is at the core of this cloud-based contact centre solution to eliminate manual processes and replace them with an automated and unbiased system to free up supervisor time and to improve agent's soft skills. Having analysed billions of interactions from many of the world's largest organisations, NICE ENLIGHTEN is so accurate

that it predicts customer satisfaction at a rate of 97%

How does AI analytics improve agent interactions?

Historically, agent interactions were improved through expensive customer surveys along with quality control and training provided by supervisors or team leaders who would listen to and score a random selection of calls. The number of training sessions and thoroughness of evaluation would often depend on the number of agents and time available. AI turns this manual process into a fully automated and adaptive agent performance programme that interprets soft-skill behaviour that influences customer sentiment. This means every interaction receives

a quality satisfaction score rather than a selection being manually evaluated.

Butler said: "With the power of AI, we can go beyond specific analytics; we can be more subjective. It's more of a black box solution."

How does NICE ENLIGHTEN enhance agent satisfaction?

With agents at home potentially feeling anxious about the pandemic or uncomfortable about working remotely, regular updates from supervisors are critical. Some quality programmes have been suspended as staff numbers have been stretched leaving agents feeling dissatisfied. Although, many agents had already felt that the subjective nature of human evaluation made the process unfair.

Butler continued: "Supervisors can talk to agents about their interactions from the previous day to give them the support they need. If they can coach agents on a daily basis, they will be fully engaged with the organisation. Meanwhile, your agents will be pleased all their interactions are being accurately measured, rather than just a small random selection."

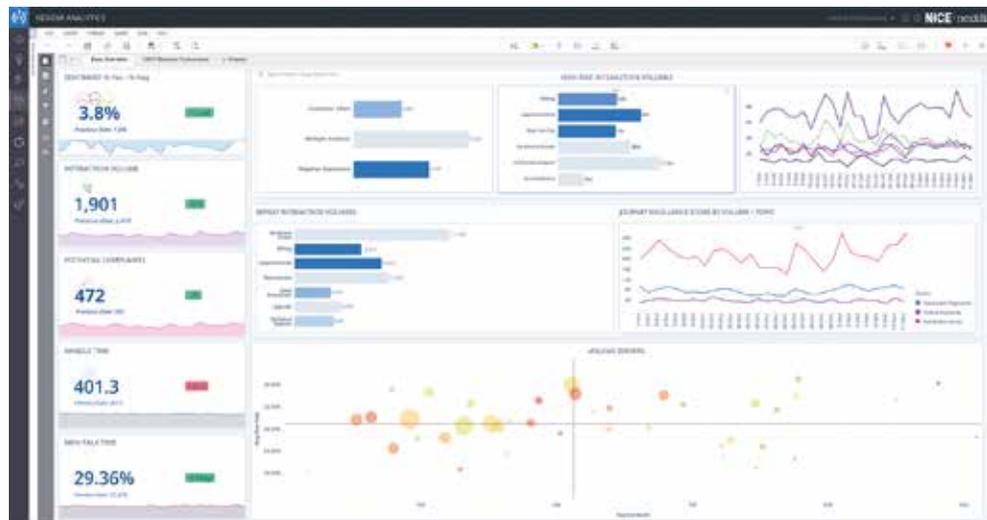
NICE ENLIGHTEN also makes it easy for agents to see for themselves how they are performing as they can view their scored interactions from a personalised dashboard and take action by listening to their calls or requesting coaching.

What about the supervisor?

It's all about relieving the burden. Clearly, supervisors will save time on what can be a very arduous process to maintain consistency and will be relieved of the subjective responsibility of analysis.

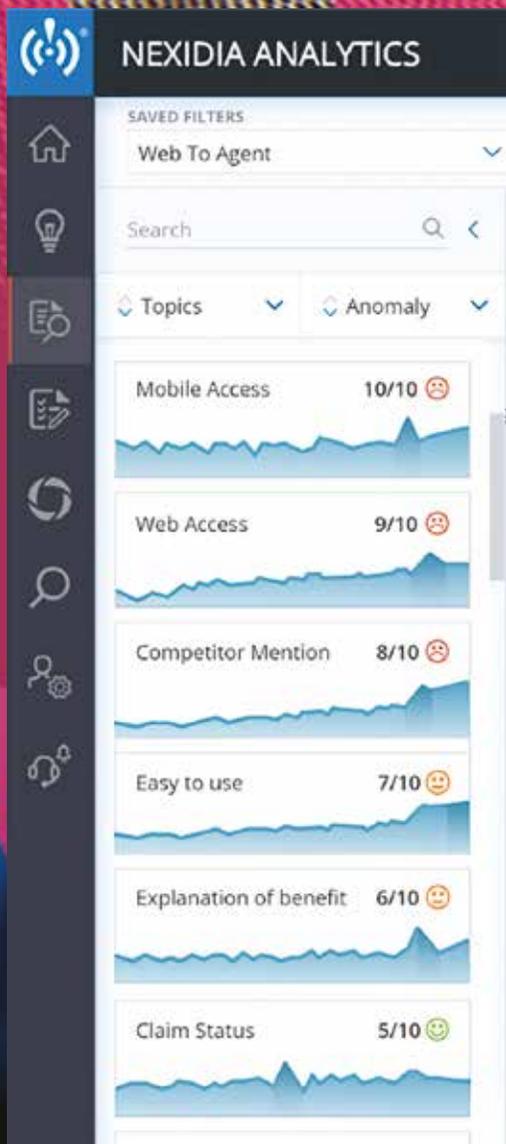
Dashboards provide ready access to analytics based on behaviour data models to easily see where coaching is required to achieve team KPIs. NICE ENLIGHTEN will recognise any problematic interactions and will automatically queue them for the supervisor to rapidly review. Coaching is more accurate too as analytics will pinpoint the areas that need improvement and praising! Supervisors can even give real-time guidance to influence interactions to hopefully arrive at a positive conclusion.

Accuracy of reports will improve over time in the true tradition of machine learning. With accurate

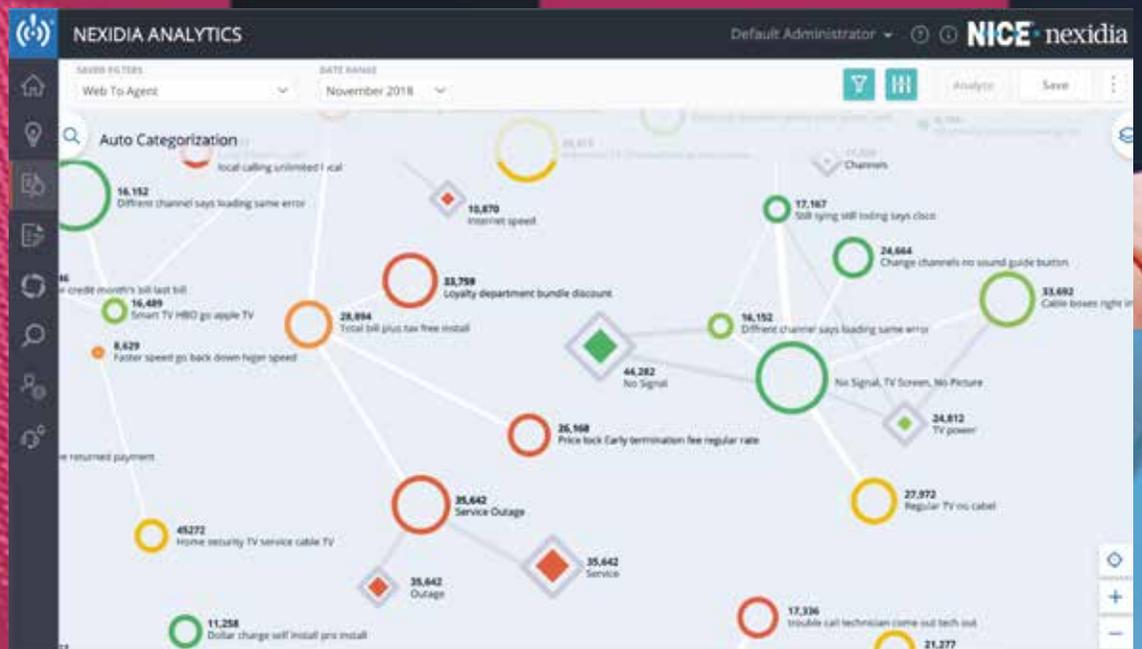


Executive Dashboard with Business KPI Monitoring and Trending

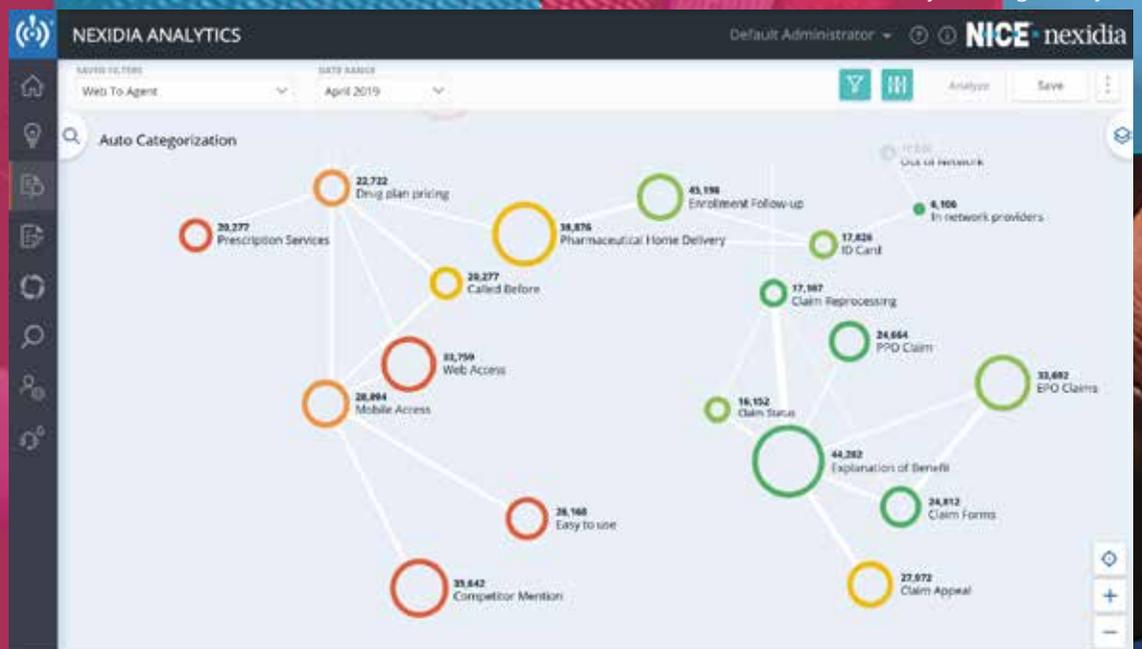
Analytics in the Contact Centre



Anomaly Detection



Query Coverage Analysis



Automatic Categorisation

and increased engagement, supervisors should benefit from lower staff turnover too.

Return on investment

Businesses and organisations are seeing their transactional net promoter scores (tnps) go up, complaints come down and rising customer confidence and sales. Operational contact centre

costs of manual listening and surveys are reduced too to promote increased profitability.

Butler concluded: "Where we have deployed NICE ENLIGHTEN, it's impact has been felt all the way through the business."

Business partner programme

NICE Enterprise has

launched a business partner programme to give contact centre resellers access to NICE's analytical solutions, which are designed for both SMB and enterprise clients. The programme also provides expert help from product specialists, wholesale or referral

commercials, and marketing support.

NICE Enterprise's UK&I Channel Manager John Byron said: "The fact all areas of a business or organisation stand to benefit from NICE Analytics is presenting real

opportunities for resellers. If you can demonstrate an ROI, solve the challenges customers are facing and increase their customer satisfaction scores, then you'll almost certainly increase your sales revenue and their loyalty towards you."

To enquire about becoming a NICE partner, please contact John Byron at John.Byron@NICE.com.



Giacom buy hands SaaS t

The ICT industry once again faces massive change and Digital Wholesale Solutions' (DWS) acquisition of Giacom provides the channel with a strategically precise response to the converging and disrupted marketplace, according to DWS CEO Terry O'Brien and Giacom CEO Mike Wardell.

The acquisition is a wake up call for ICT resellers and a strategic leap from which all forward looking channel organisations can take a steer. According to O'Brien the move is also timely and just what the channel needs. "We are two businesses with high growth in different sectors coming together to form something bigger and better," he commented. "This is a huge step forward in our plans to support an ever converging ICT partner channel. We can help Giacom with UC, connectivity and mobile. Equally, Giacom brings all the capability to help telco resellers really get into that cloud and software marketplace. It's great news for everybody."

In its last financial year ended July 2020 channel-only Giacom generated almost £49 million revenues, £6 million EBITDA and is on track to hit circa £62 million revenue this year. As well as a revenue boost the deal gives DWS access to 3,000-plus IT reseller partners, a complementary skill set and adds expertise in cloud services and software including Microsoft 365 and Azure, security and back-up, which Giacom delivers to over 70,000 end user SMEs through its partner network. O'Brien noted that the deal marks a key turning point in DWS's long-term converged



Terry O'Brien

Giacom brings all the capability to help telco resellers get into that cloud and software marketplace. It's great news for everybody

comms-SaaS strategy. "I want this to feel like a merger," he said. "Giacom is a centre of excellence which will be great for our combined 5,500 partners."

Giacom, which has around 80 staff and just passed the milestone of one million product licenses sold, will continue to operate from its Hull base with all staff and the existing leadership team headed by Wardell in place. Wardell, who is a former KCOM Group Finance Director, moved to

a marketplace model," explained Wardell. "To provide customers with the best products and services we worked with as many vendors as we could to help our existing base move forward.

"But it's about a lot more than providing access. In the software world you need to manage licences – it can be quite complicated in terms of APIs for example. We also put a lot of effort into digitally empowering partners and helping them to enable their customers to transition to the cloud. That includes marketing, training and support. Our focus is helping customers to be as efficient and effective as they can be. What does that mean? It's about the right platform, the right products and the right technical support. And to drive efficiency we need to make everything frictionless, clear and simple. That's where we hang our business."

In 2016 Giacom had two key assets – a strong IT reseller and MSP base and a platform; and in 2017 there was a change of investment from LDC to Livingbridge. The go-to-market strategy clearly paid off in spades with revenues shooting up from £6.9 million at the end of 2016 to over £49 million today. Small wonder Giacom has been a Sunday Times Tech Track 100 company for four years

on the trot. Why sell to DWS? "Livingbridge was in its third year of investment and we exceeded the plan it put in place," explained Wardell. "From our point of view we wanted to continue to grow the business and do something different, and the convergence of IT and comms is key. We've never put comms, broadband and mobility to our customer base. We've not had the expertise nor strengths and would have compromised our vision.

Converging world

"This became a problem because to provide the best support for our customers we need those products and expertise. The world is converging. So for us to continue to scale and do the right thing by our customers DWS was the perfect choice. Our cultural alignment and use of language resonates, as does the way we look at our customers and staff, and importantly how we invest in the continued development of our platforms to make it easy for partners to work with us. It is clear that the two businesses are a great fit and the opportunity is huge. Giacom has grown a lot, but the journey has only just begun. We're 20 years old and feel like a start-up."

According to O'Brien Giacom's sales process was highly competitive with impressive levels of interest

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10 DWS partners

from trade and PE. “We believed that we could do something that other interested parties couldn’t in terms of moving forward together in a big way,” stated O’Brien. “It’s not about cost synergies, it’s about revenue growth by continuing to help our now 5,500 partners win. It’s a very strategic move for us.

“We are a platform business and our focus is all about developing that platform and being the best people to do business with. Our organisations are so aligned in our focus and ways of working and I don’t see any integration challenges. Our immediate priority is how we ensure that Giacom’s platform and DWS’s platform talk to each other and give partners access to all of the products and services, and make it feel like one simple experience. The priority for partners is to access services quickly with product and marketing support and training.”

O’Brien first met Wardell three years ago when Giacom went through its initial investment raise. “I was interested and got to know the company,” explained O’Brien. “This opened up my mind to where we could extend our business long-term. This was the genesis

of the acquisition. Since then I’ve been on a journey to demerge DWS. We have our own vision and our strategic plan is clear. The channel is converging and we see the circa 15,000 resellers in the UK starting to sell a broader range of services – comms, cloud and IT products – and while organically shaping our business I looked for companies that would accelerate our pace of change and make it easy for those 15,000 partners to embrace the converging product set. Giacom gives us a massive step forward.”

Disruptive times

The ICT market is experiencing unprecedented disruption and businesses are having to make decisions like never before to ensure they survive and thrive in the new supercharged world of technology convergence. Up to now the reseller community has slowly but surely taken on more products and services, moving towards becoming a one-stop-shop for clients including cloud services – but now the pace of change has suddenly picked up.

“It’s been a slow journey and we would have got there in a few years time but Covid-19 has accelerated everyone’s thinking, including mine,” stated O’Brien. “We’ve all

been disrupted and the channel will be thinking, as I have been – how do I make sure our business is fit for the long-term? Do I need to become something different? Do I need to start selling cloud services to protect and grow my business? Covid-19 has also accelerated the thinking of end users. In terms of transforming their business some end users are doing incredible things. They are so positive as they make their organisations fit for the long-term.”

The widespread shift to cloud has been forecast for what seems like generations, but the slow crawl has become a near stampede and it’s time for the channel to shift up a gear. “Ultimately, we are supporting partners on this accelerated journey to becoming the trusted partner for small businesses across cloud, telecoms and IT services,” added O’Brien. “The on-premise to hosted telephony move took a while to gather steam, we are now getting into the acceleration phase of that cloud and UC transformation and it’s a huge window of opportunity for us all.

“Over the coming three years we are going to see some incredible changes – we have the 2025 switch-off, 5G roll out, FTTP for the masses and the Covid-19 pandemic transforming how we think and how we work. These are major moments that give all businesses a decision point, and there is nobody better than resellers with their agility, their versatility and their closeness to customers to advise and pick up business in this window. The market disruption and opportunity has never been more exciting.”



Mike Wardell

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Voiceflex develops SoGEA

Voiceflex has issued a clarion call for ISPs, aggregators and resellers to connect with its just launched SoGEA Voice platform and tap into a 28 million IP circuit transition opportunity ahead of the 2025 copper cliff edge. Here, Sales and Marketing Director Paul Taylor talks strategy.

Openreach's launch of SoGEA (Single Order Generic Ethernet Access, a single order version of fibre broadband based on FTTC rather than copper) provides an opportunity for the channel to strategise their PSTN migration plans now and lock in customers at a time when the race to all-IP is hotting up. There is no conceivable argument against ending the life of copper so it follows that there should be no possible barrier to the channel's delivery of the next generation of voice, other than a decision not to respond appropriately, now, to the fast approaching 2025 PSTN switch off, believes Taylor.

"There are 28 million data services with a PSTN line that will need to be replaced with SoGEA by 2025," emphasised Taylor. "It's a £1 billion a year industry and the beauty is that all 28 million circuits will have to be changed within the next four years."

The language in which he spells out the all-IP reset leaves no doubt: That the channel needs to act quickly on SoGEA and incorporate the voice element – and that Voiceflex has pre-empted this requirement and moved decisively to help ISPs, aggregators and resellers with an easy voice add-on specifically



Paul Taylor

It's a £1 billion a year industry and the beauty is that all 28 million circuits will have to be changed in the next four years

designed as a wrap around service for SoGEA.

The intention, explained Taylor, is to first crystallise a 2025 reality check, raise awareness of the opportunity and then pursue a two pronged go-to-market approach with a strong emphasis on partnering the UK's ISPs and aggregators on the national stage as well as reseller partners, its market sweet spot being 30 to 40 users.

"There are circa 140 ISPs in the UK, we're looking to work with at least 50 per cent of them," stated

Taylor. "SoGEA comes directly onto our platform, we understand voice, we understand data and the portal access is available to tick the voice services box for partners. We also provide different variants and packages for ISPs to present as a unique product, all white labelled and available from December 1st."

Early interest

The launch, which has already garnered great interest, follows an intense period of software development to create a market ready SoGEA Voice platform, designed from

the ground up, that is also primed for ongoing development and expansion, including a hosted voice element planned for next year. The launch could not be better timed, according to Taylor. He pointed out that the 2025 PSTN switch off is now creating a buzz in the channel and that there will be a phase of manoeuvring among the UK's ISPs as they seek partners that can give them a competitive edge and an early foothold in this transitioning market.

That's not all: The timing of the launch could prove critical to the long-term sustainability

of ICT resellers required to act quickly on a chronology of market demands. The same must-do attitude applies to end user organisations not yet persuaded to prepare for the all-IP world, despite the motivation of a 2025 PSTN switch-off deadline.

"With any leap in technology there are always problems bridging the requirements or expectations of users and making them a reality," stated Taylor. "A key benefit of SoGEA is that there is no PSTN and it offers broadband without line rental, but the major disadvantage is no voice. Any service reliant

A Voice platform

on the PSTN will no longer work, and with any forced change comes opportunities. A large proportion of users will require a voice service. SoGEA Voice gives partners an opportunity to engage with customers, not only to see if they want to move but when."

Taylor noted that Voiceflex's SoGEA Voice platform delivers the requirements of a single line user's basic needs, such as making and receiving a call through to call recording and messages delivered to Facebook, WhatsApp or mobile, whatever the customer's preference. And a range of data products will be available throughout the UK as exchanges are upgraded with many activated now.

Taylor believes that the market for SoGEA will accelerate fast in mid-2021 and urges ISPs to act now in preparation for the land grab. "There are 28 million data connections that all have to be changed by 2025," he said. "That's a fantastic opportunity for the channel. It may be that customers just have PSTN or they may want some kind of hosted service. Any change scenario offers an opportunity for the reseller to sell more. The data connection is the umbilical chord. Customers will consume more of the reseller's products and services – and there will be a rush to gain as much market share as possible."

As a key player in the SIP and hosted channel Voiceflex is no stranger to providing voice over broadband, so pioneering the voice element of SoGEA is a natural next step. "We responded the moment SoGEA became a

talking point in the channel and the big question was – what about the voice aspect?," added Taylor. "We looked into the opportunity in great detail and decided to be first to market, having developed a platform from the ground up which, in its most basic format, is a direct replacement for the soon-to-be retired and very legacy PSTN service.

Growth opportunity

"This provides an opportunity for businesses to make changes to the communications and applications they use and stimulate growth in the market. SoGEA puts customers in a better place. Any additional price point is far outweighed by the opportunity to sell more products and services. The shift to fibre is a multi-million pound per year business and proactive resellers could gain a big share of the market."

The 28 million switch-to-SoGEA opportunity is not to be taken lightly, and nearly half will need voice. It surely is a huge market opportunity in which resellers can think about selling additional services. For example, radio and television services for hairdressers or salons. "SoGEA Voice is a step-change that enables growth," added Taylor.

Pricing is tiered into three levels: Making and receiving calls; additional options such as messaging and redirect services; and call recording. As mentioned, the roadmap includes a hosted voice service. Another advantage for resellers is that SoGEA is a 'one throat to choke' service.

"It is important for resellers to get more granular with

customers and how they use technology, and gain a better understanding of which additional services could be sold," noted Taylor. "Whoever sells the data connection is going to keep the customer going forward. This is a fantastic opportunity to go back to the entire base and put new products in."

Fibre is touted as the final connection, and the other complementary option is to leverage the potential of 5G SIMs which is on Voiceflex's radar screen. "SIM technology enables users to use the same IP address for the SIM as the data service, based on a connection into our platform, providing a seamless DR solution," he added.

The operational and service efficiencies brought about by the simplified SoGEA proposition include a single order process that incorporates integrated number portability, a long overdue solution to one of the comms sector's biggest bugbears. Just as well when you consider the scale and challenge of the task at hand, to switch circa 15 million homes and businesses across from PSTN to a new all-IP network, with most customers using legacy products and services being required to switch to SoGEA or full fibre.

"Using SoGEA's API, ISPs, integrators and OEMs can deliver this offering through the simple automation of ordering, number porting, provisioning and configuration," explained Taylor. "And Voiceflex has a standalone portal that enables channel partners to order the service irrespective of the service provider." ■

Cloud Voice & Data and Fidelity Energy in perfect harmony

Cloud Voice & Data has only been operating since 2019, but directors Russell Clarke and Simon Whitney and their team have over 80 years' experience in IT and Telecoms, so the company has already established a strong foothold in the marketplace.

With a suite of services and solutions at its disposal, Cloud Voice & Data has now partnered with Fidelity Energy to add energy procurement to its customer base and has already landed energy deals.

Cloud Voice & Data specialises in supplying phone systems and business services to deliver cost reduction benefits to UK businesses. This is achieved with its unified billing and a personalised account management service. These benefits are also exactly what Fidelity Energy offers, so adding energy to the company's portfolio was a straightforward choice to make.

Russell Clarke, Managing Director at Cloud Voice & Data, explained: "We were really impressed with how similar Fidelity Energy's approach to its customers was to ours. We strongly believe our service and that alone wins us the type of client who we want to work with. For us it is all about the service and it is all about trust. Partnering with a business which also strongly believes in these values was an easy decision, as we know our customers are in the best hands."

When it comes to Fidelity Energy's onboarding process, Russell said: "Fidelity Energy is

an impressive outfit, and their team is fabulous. When we first signed up Zack was brilliant. He's efficient and a lovely guy. Ryan was fantastic and called all of our team to introduce himself and walk through any questions they had. Fidelity's marketing allowed us to have energy ready to go in our brand instantly. It is something we are hot on, but do not have the time to do, so to have resources already white labelled is a great help!

"This truly is the best service we've received to date from a supplier or partner. We started getting bills in not long after we launched energy and have already locked in a few energy deals for our customers. I'm really looking forward to a bright future."

When asked what he would say to other telecoms companies thinking about adding energy to their portfolio, Russell said: "At a first glance, adding energy to a telecoms business doesn't seem like an easy fit as the two industries feel poles apart. Once Fidelity explained that it really is as simple as adding another service to compliment those that we already offer, selling energy has become another reason for us to help our customers, alleviating their pain points and further strengthening our relationships.

"I am more than happy to fly the flag for Fidelity Energy, and we have already recommended them to other businesses. Honestly, I think anyone not partnering with them is missing a trick!"



Cloud Voice & Data directors Russell Clarke and Simon Whitney.

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Enter the sunny Uplands

Introducing Uplands, this year's Comms National Awards SME Reseller of the Year (one of two gongs won) and a benchmark for service delivery at its best, spearheaded by business owner and Managing Director Paul Hooper.

Hooper's trump card when he entered the comms sector was having a knowledge of people, rather than marching in as a technology buff. He first worked in technical training and personnel for the Halfords motor group, part of the integration team between Halfords and Boots the chemist. The move to Uplands was a 'huge leap of faith', with no knowledge of technology but well armed with great insight into people and an interest in how communications and technology could improve peoples' lives. "I joined Uplands over 25 years ago and just like Victor Kiam I liked the business so much I bought it," said Hooper.

Uplands was established in Swansea in 1979 when it was known as Uplands Car Radios, a car audio and multimedia provider. In 1984 the company entered the mobile market providing its first mobile phone, the state-of-the-art Motorola Transportable 4500X, to a butcher in Cardiff. "As the mobile industry grew so did we," added Hooper. "Anyone who knows Uplands today would see us as a B2B UC provider, but it is not where our journey started. Uplands for many years had its feet firmly in retail. For over six years we operated through 89 Debenhams stores, 56 House of Fraser stores as well as partnering with the likes of Benneton in the UK and



Paul Hooper

I joined Uplands over 25 years ago and just like Victor Kiam I liked the business so much I bought it

Europe. With a proliferation of mobile on the High Street, we timed our exit from consumer to business and have never looked back."

Converged portfolio

Uplands entered the B2B market in 2009, becoming an O2 Direct Partner, one of only 22 in the UK and exclusive within the south west and Wales. "Now we have embraced emerging technologies to become a true UC provider," added Hooper. "One of the big changes we have seen is the customer requirement for a single unified operating

solution. Our conversations are always UC centric and focused on enabling customers to work with greater fluidity and control. This is what underpins our proposition which includes a portal that enables customers to make changes to their account with the click of a button. We also know that our customers value the personal touch."

At the core of Uplands' mobile proposition is its O2 Direct Partner relationship, enabling it to deliver airtime solutions and business applications. Notably,

Uplands' second Comms National Award win this year was in the SME mobile solution category. "Despite the rise of many other products and services mobile remains for many businesses the remote control for everything," said Hooper. "We are still seeing growth in mobile, however one size doesn't fit all so we also deliver EE and Vodafone services along with IoT.

"There is also a greater need for business collaboration and seamless remote working. Our hosted solutions, Internet and fixed line services are delivered by our partnership with Gamma, and IT services are sourced from various partners such as McAfee and Office 365. The proposition is continually evolving. Our focus for the future is very much on integration and we are seeing greater requirements for IoT and automation, particularly IoT and its involvement in renewables and greener sectors."

Housed in its new headquarters, Uplands is poised for a fresh phase of organic growth that will also drive an expansion of the workforce. "We operate a five year business plan and are on track to achieve our goals," said Hooper. "The important thing will be to ensure that we hit our targets but never at the cost of service. I have always wanted to deliver not just excellent service, but legendary." ■

Just a minute with Paul Hooper...

Role model: My Dad. Sadly he is no longer with us, but he taught me about respect, friendship and decency.

What do you fear most? As long as you understand your fears they are not so daunting. So not knowing or not being in control is probably a fear I have.

What talent do you wish you had? To be more musical. I play guitar and started to learn piano during lockdown, but would love to be more proficient.

What possession could you not live without? My £1.99 dough cutter tool for making bread.

Best piece of advice you have been given? Be honest and don't ski down a mountain after two bottles of Chardonnay!

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I have run my own Tae Kwon Do school for the last 15 years and am a Black Belt IV Dan.

Name three ideal dinner guests: John Lennon, he would have some amazing stories. The Dalai Lama, as I have read many of his books and love his warmth, humour and approach to life. Sir David Attenborough, an absolute legend.

What could you not do without in your job? My wife. I could not get half of what I get done without her.

Your main strength and what could you work on? Resilience is a strength, but I struggle sometimes to take serious things seriously.

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Telcos show resilience

Major UK telco results for the quarter/half to September 2020 again demonstrate resilience through the Covid-19 crisis, with modest impacts on demand and revenues largely mitigated by cost savings, writes Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabyte.com.

Looking specifically at profitability, BT's EBITDA fell 3% to £1,908m, Virgin's fell 3.6% to £515m (but was flat in underlying terms excluding one-offs), its pending M&A partner O2 fell 4.5% to 516m euros, Vodafone UK was down 2.3% at 626m euros (6 months), while 3UK's gross profit was flat at £316m. The outlook is broadly stable. TalkTalk has yet to report, we assume given ongoing take private talks.

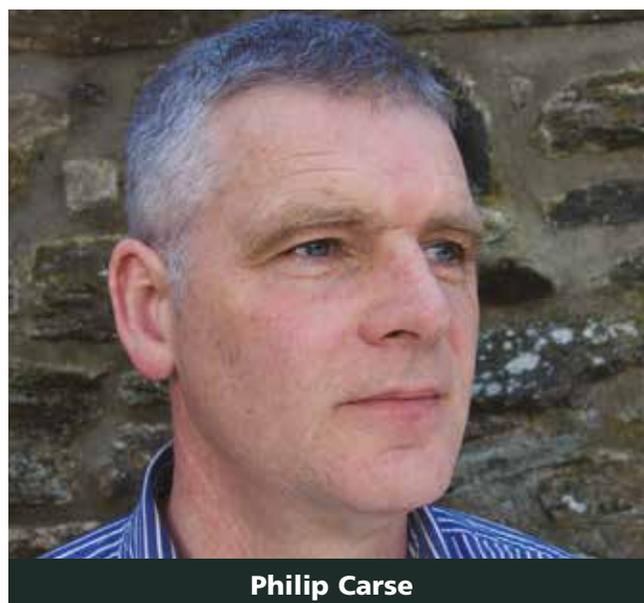
BT
BT reported EBITDA down 3% at £1,908m on revenues down 7% at £5,357m, impacted by lower sports TV and enterprise revenues. However, given cost cutting measures, BT has upped the bottom end of fiscal 2021 EBITDA guidance by £100m (now £7.3-7.5bn versus £7.9bn in fiscal 2020) on continued 5-6% revenue declines (though FCF guidance remains at £1.2-1.5bn), and has introduced a fiscal 2023 EBITDA outlook for more than £7.9bn while confirming a return to dividends in fiscal 2022 at 7.7p (versus 15p in fiscal 2019).

By division, the second quarter 2020 revenue trends were similar to the first quarter, with reductions for Global (-17% to £926m), Enterprise (-10% to £1,358m, -7% excluding the divested Tikit and Fleet

Solutions) and Consumer (-5% to £2,511m), and growth only in Openreach (+2% to £1,299m). BT highlighted continued FTTP progress, including roll out reaching 40k premises a week to 3.5m premises (up from around 31k per week in the first quarter), all four major resellers now selling FTTP, orders doubling from pre-Covid-19 levels to around 13k per week, and the FTTP customer base up 62% year-on-year to 655k. Within Enterprise, BT expects further Covid-19 impacts through SME bankruptcies while Global is seeing cancellations and delays to purchasing cycles from enterprises, which will negatively impact revenue and EBITDA in the second half of the year.

Virgin Media
Virgin Media reported EBITDA down 3.6% to £515m (flat in underlying terms excluding one-offs and O2 merger preparatory costs) on revenues up 0.8% at £1,291m. Residential cable subscription revenues fell 0.8% to £891m due to lower sports revenues and postponed price rises, B2B rose 5.2% to £200m (SoHo up 12% to £25m and larger B2B up 4% to £175m, aided by new fibre wholesale contracts), and Mobile rose 3.6% to £171m, boosted by a release of deferred handset revenues.

Operational highlights included 37k new customers



Philip Carse

(+0.6%), the best quarter in three years – 22k of these came from the Project Lightning network extension, with roll out up from 93k to 125k premises for the quarter, now at 2.4m premises. The company is also upgrading its existing network with gigabit speeds now available on 45% of the network and with 100% coverage due by the end of 2021. The average cost per new Project Lightning premise was £605 versus £650, with scope for further reductions due to cost optimisation measures.

However, current quarter EBITDA will be impacted by headwinds, including the postponement of price rises, onshoring more customer care, investment in digitalisation and product innovation, pre-merger integration costs, and

headwinds from regulated contract notifications and higher programming costs and network taxes.

O2UK
Virgin's pending M&A partner O2UK reported EBITDA down 4.5% to 516m euros on revenues down 9.5% to 1,596m euros, with 6.8pp impacts from Covid-19 such as reduced roaming. However, capex also fell by 6.1% to 205m euros.

Vodafone
Vodafone reported an in-line first half to September 2020, with Group EBITDA down 1.9% to 7,023m euros on revenues down 2.3% to 21,427m euros, while capex fell 11% to 3,000m euros. Service revenue fell 0.8% to 18,544m euros, with a circa 1.9pp Covid-19 hit (primarily roaming). There was an improvement in the second

quarter (-0.4%) versus the first (-1.3%). The company reaffirmed full year guidance of broadly flat EBITDA (14.4-14.6bn euros) and FCF (5bn+ euros), with Covid-19 impacts outweighed by underlying growth and cost savings.

The UK showed similar improving trends, driven by Business, with the service revenue decline falling from 1.9% in the first to 0.5% in the second quarter, with a 2.8pp roaming impact. However, total revenues fell 5.3% to 2,983m euros, with EBITDA down 2.3% at 626m euros. There was a marked Mobile versus Fixed revenue split, with the former falling 4% and the latter rising 6.3% aided by increased broadband. Both improved quarter-on-quarter, with the Fixed line improvement (from +4.8% to +7.8%) attributed to increased corporate demand for virtual call centres and core connectivity, and increased SME demand for productivity and security solutions.

3UK
For 3UK, quarterly revenues rose 2% to £603m but the company's gross profits were flat at £361m (no EBITDA numbers provided). However, capex more than trebled to £203m due to 5G roll outs and IT upgrades. Active customers and monthly ARPU both fell 4%, to 9.91m and £12.66 respectively, but contract customers rose 4% to 7.39m. ■

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McEwan sets sights North

The merger of five complementary tech firms to create North brings a more centralised growth strategy and sharper focus to an already thriving operation spurred by ambitious PE firm Aliter Capital.

Scott McEwan, the co-founder and CEO of Glasgow-based Boston Networks, was instrumental in selecting and bringing together the five businesses that form North. Here, he discusses the rationale behind the merger, the wider context and long-term objectives...

When was the plan first hatched?

North has been on the Aliter Capital investment journey since January 2018 and we planned acquisitions and mergers for quite a while. Once the five complementary businesses came together – Boston Networks, PEL Services, 2020 Vision Systems, Pinacl Solutions and Pinacl Global Delivery Alliance – it felt like the right time to create our new brand. We had reached operational readiness, had expanded geographically and held expertise across complementary technology areas.

What are your initial objectives?

Financially, we are currently sitting at a turnover upwards of £50 million and plans are in place to exceed £100 million in the not too distant future. Ultimately, we would also be looking to increase our market penetration within specific sectors such as defence and with infrastructure and utilities, concentrating on organic and inorganic growth



Scott McEwan

Our name represents our focus on taking organisations on their technology journey and using North to find their way

across each. We have more acquisitions planned in addition to striving to engage with other UK enterprise and public sector organisations, and we aim to expand our IoT footprint UK-wide.

How successful was your Covid-19 lockdown strategy?

With a clear plan in place, maintaining strong operations across the business and managing cashflow well throughout lockdown, we utilised that time to focus on winning transformative deals. Looking back, it was tough. It was of course the first time we had to contend with such a challenge, but we looked after our staff's wellbeing

and won significant business in the process, providing critical services for the likes of Aberdeen City Council and Hammersmith & Fulham Council. When lockdown started to ease, we were able to deliver those key projects.

What is the nature of these project wins?

In recent months North has won a string of new business totalling over £30 million in a diverse range of industries across the UK. Project wins include a four year contract with Hammersmith & Fulham Council worth £4 million, to relocate the Council's safety and security command and control facility, while future proofing its CCTV

and infrastructure estate made up of over 1,900 cameras. Other Government and public sector projects total £18 million, which are confidential under NDAs. North is also running the £6 million IoT Scotland network, part funded by the Scottish Government, supporting businesses with innovative projects via hundreds of LPWAN (Low Power, Long Range) wireless gateways situated throughout the country.

Is North coming out of Covid-19 stronger?

Throughout the pandemic all of our constituent companies bucked the trend by securing major contract

wins which have added to our growth trajectory. As we look ahead, 74 per cent of company directors say that home working is here to stay (according to a survey of 1,000 firms by the Institute of Directors), and we will continue to help businesses across the UK successfully transition. Throughout this period, North has strengthened its team with strategic appointments and we will be recruiting to increase our 250-strong headcount. We're keen to encourage young talent to come into the business through graduate and apprenticeship schemes, in addition to providing opportunities to our current staff members for development, management training and promotion.

Is the name 'North' indicative of a regional focus?

The name North isn't down to geography as our national organisation has five regional hubs scattered across the UK, from Glasgow to Northolt just outside London. North felt like the perfect fit as it defines all other directions. Our name represents our focus on taking organisations on their technology journey and using North to find their way, with our viewpoint being that no matter where you are in the world, you would use North to navigate while simultaneously providing a guide to what comes next.

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h of £100m

How are you better able to serve the market as a unified group of companies?

Due to the strength that each of the businesses have brought in forming North there are very few companies in the sector with such a broad and complementary range of expertise. In addition, one of our strongest assets is the ability to provide regional support but with a national service function and offering. Through this approach we can provide opportunities for our clients to tap into more experts across the business and provide a well-rounded service offering.

What is your biggest opportunity?

The gap in the market for a company of our size combined with our agility and experience is our biggest opportunity. When reviewing competitor analysis, there's a definite gap between big industry players and regional providers. We're positioned as a national provider that targets mid-market blue chip companies. Not too big to maintain our service offering, with a backend success rate that enables continued growth.

Technology underpins every business and organisation, and now, more than ever, it's a board level discussion point. We are focused on informing the C level board decision makers, showcasing to them how technology can help to improve their workings, increase their efficiency and save them money. Gone are the days where technology was viewed as a luxury, now it is an essential part of every business – whether that is permitting employees to work remotely from

home with ease, installing IoT networks and sensors to prepare companies locking their office down to hibernate for winter, or providing detailed insight and data to understand a business environment better.

What trends are you seeing that interest you most?

Covid-19 has put network infrastructure and the safety and security of people, buildings and assets at the top of the agenda for private sector companies and the public sector. This has become particularly apparent during lockdowns and restrictions – and with the heightened terrorism risk video analytics and augmented intelligence are now at the forefront of conversations.

How do you think the role of resellers will evolve over time?

Customers are smarter than ever and we are starting to see organisations being more open to change. System integrators need to include a better use of technology with a managed service offering and get the mix of both just right to ensure that customers truly reap the benefits.

Where do you see North in three to five years time?

We're looking to grow significantly and be much more involved with a variety of global players. With 5G in the mix, our aim is to stay ahead of the curve on the technology journey and continue to grow, focusing on scaling up the business and finding the best talent. We always want to keep the entrepreneurial spirit and agility that founded North. We don't want to become big and cumbersome. ■

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Digital Events



Comms Dealer's new online events are designed to offer a cost-effective route to market and a unique opportunity for sponsors to build their own reseller communities.

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James Emm ready to lend an ear to anyone struggling

James Emm has been a bastion of the telecoms industry for over four decades and remains Chairman of Oak Innovation, the call management business he helped establish in the late eighties. In industry circles Emm is well known for his sociability and being the life and soul of any channel gathering, so many will be surprised to learn that he has suffered from depression in the past.

He is now well, but his experience of seeking and getting the right sort of help when he got very low has equipped him well to volunteering as an Associate of Mental Health Associates, and lending a kindly ear to anyone in our industry who may be suffering from a mental health issue.

So James, tell us about how your difficulties started?

A few years ago a combination of overwork, a very unpleasant burglary and my natural inclination to be anxious resulted in a severe breakdown. I survived, but there were days when I was at a very low ebb. Now, due to correct medication and therapy, I am very well.

Has your own experience helped in your role as an MHA Associate?

Absolutely. I know how easy it is to slip into a dark place and I am certain that had I sought help before the darkest hours, so much pain could have been avoided.



James Emm

How did you train for this role?

I was very pleased to be invited to a Mental Health First Aid (MFHA) training course by Peter Orr, founder of the MHA charity, which also kindly funded the course for me. It was hosted by Karen Hayward. Some readers may recognise her name from Union Street.

Can you run through the key things you learned?

Both Karen and the course were excellent. The written content was basically a belts and braces rundown of various mental issues such as depression and anxiety, OCD and psychosis. For me, the course filled in several gaps in my knowledge and will help me to be a first-line supporter to people in our industry.

What help do you provide?

As an Associate it's my role to act as a listening post. I know the industry well and I know

the pressures people face in a fast-paced business, so I can empathise with anyone who may be struggling. Basically, I am just there to listen and talk. I think it is important to stress that the support I would give is first-line only and after listening my task is to channel people towards expert help.

How can anyone in our industry help MHA?

Charitable donations generally are diminishing due to this torrid time, but I hope companies will consider a monthly donation to help MHA fund its activities including more training. This is a subject close to me and my son William, who is now my CEO, and it is our intention to support this charity on a regular basis.

You can donate at [gofundme/mentalhealthassociates](http://gofundme.com/mentalhealthassociates) or call MHA founder Peter Orr on 07766 088775

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Everyone's Dream: Recurring Revenue

A quick guide on setting up your business for recurring revenue streams.

We're going to let you in on a secret. There's a way you can end the frantic, year-end scramble to reach your annual target and grow your business simultaneously. Even better: it costs nothing to put in place and once you're set-up, you can sit back, safe in the knowledge that your revenue will roll in, year after year.

With 3CX you can easily set up your business to benefit from recurring revenue. Focus on growing your profit, rather than simply maintaining it.

Annual Subscriptions

Consumers want pay-as-you-go, subscription-based services for their IT and communications. Give them what they want with a hosted communication solution from 3CX, on a simple annual subscription plan.

They'll enjoy the low CAPEX and easy setup and you'll be able to kick back, safe in the knowledge that you'll be receiving a steady annual income for the duration of their contract. Say goodbye to leaky bucket syndrome and say hello, to solid, reliable income.

Leasing

Why stop at licensing? Monthly packages can be a great option for businesses in need of additional hardware and new IP phones. Having to fork out for new equipment can make or break a sale but offering the same package, in manageable monthly payments can encourage your prospects to sign on the dotted line.

3CX gives you total control of your leasing. Choose from the largest range of supported IP Phones, SBC's and peripheral hardware in the market or add your own devices and support them independently.



Deployment

Choose between 3CX's hosted, private cloud or on-premise options to deploy your customers' instances. Each option has its benefits. With Hosted by 3CX you can have ease of mind that 3CX will manage and update each installation for you allowing you to focus on training and supporting your customers on a monthly retainer.

If you choose to host 3CX for your customers then you can charge them for hosting as well as training and support. If you opt for on-premise you can add hardware rental and maintenance to the mix.

Support Agreements

Support agreements are a key piece of recurring revenue. Often, communications vendors include basic support in their product

pricing, which deprives partners of a valuable opportunity to boost their earnings.

3CX is different. All partners are provided with free support and training from 3CX, so that they can offer their clients comprehensive support packages, with the confidence that their vendor and channel team is backing them every step of the way.

Support agreements aren't cut and paste products. They can be customized for each client depending on the nature of their business. Consider offering a range of support plans including:

- 24/7 Emergency Support
- Set number of maintenance hours per month
- Extended hardware warranties

● Pay-as-you-go Support

Aim to secure an annual contract where ever possible and consider an automatic renewal to avoid going through the contract process year after year. Instead, hold an annual review with each of your clients to re-evaluate their needs for the year ahead.

Training

Training is often overlooked but for the customer, getting to grips with their solution early can be the difference between loving their new system or re-tendering next year because they're missing out on key features and benefits.

Include an initial training session in your leasing package so that your clients always get off to the best start! Then offer optional add-ons,

such as admin training, yearly refreshers and staff onboarding. Or get creative and run specialist training sessions for conferencing, remote workers and schools- depending on your client's background.

Unlock the Benefits of Recurring Revenue with 3CX

Whether you're an MSP or dedicated communications provider, switching to a recurring revenue model is guaranteed to improve cashflow and business processes.

Forget hunting for new customers to replicate last years figures. Instead, you'll have a steady, predictable income, that makes it easier to budget, hire and invest in your businesses for the future.

Forget racing to the bottom. Rather panicking about your year-end target and quoting for every tender under the sun, recurring revenue means you can dedicate more time to finding profitable clients that match your expertise. These clients have the longest lifetime value so you'll be growing your profit margins in no time.

Recurring revenue benefits you and your customers, so it's time you made the switch! Partner with a vendor that keeps you in control of your leasing packages, whilst providing the support and tools you need to thrive. ■



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You can't cross-sell without u

Any channel sales professional will know the benefits of upselling, which is fundamentally offering a customer an upgrade on what they originally agreed to. Cross-selling is an equally powerful bullet in a salesperson's bandolier and has become even more valuable in equipping customers to work remotely. Headsets, monitors, enhanced microphones – even software that reduces background noise - can be added to connectivity sales.

Cross-selling is not rocket science. How many times have you thrown in a packet of sweets or batteries at the supermarket checkout strategically placed in front of you as you load your purchases onto the conveyor belt?

In the ICT industry everyone knows that cross-selling is effectively bundling products into more profitable sales that pleases customers who feel they are getting added value from a deal.

These sales usually come about through the relationship a salesperson has with his or her customers. Put simply, it's all about earning more revenue from existing customers. It's important to bear in mind that it's five to 25 times more expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to retain an existing one. And when you do retain a customer, they're more likely to spend more and purchase more frequently.

Seasoned channel salespeople are usually in a great position to cross-sell and upsell successfully because they already have an in-depth knowledge of their customers. The key is making an offer that's appropriate for where the customer is at that time and salespeople or CRMs with a pulse on the customer will know what extra solutions they need to achieve their goals.

And it's a well-known fact that existing customers are easier to sell to. You are 60-70% likely to sell to an existing customer, compared to the 5-20% likelihood of selling to a new prospect. At the risk of stating the obvious, if your sales teams aren't cross-selling and upselling, you're just leaving money on the table.



RICHARD BETTS
CHARTERHOUSE
VOICE & DATA

"It's all about developing meaningful relationships with our clients! A consultative approach based on trust where you proactively listen is key, and using an engaging mix of communications tools – video of course, but don't forget email, webinars and a simple phone call - makes for a much more engaging and rewarding relationship. Underpinning this is the right support where salespeople are nurtured to develop an in-depth knowledge of the products that transcend their own specialist area. It's about having a sales team that has more than a superficial understanding of a product portfolio, that truly understands how those products complement each other and how they make a difference to clients. Charterhouse weighs heavily on training and has set up a sales and product training academy which underpins our claim of a consultative approach. By leading with knowledge, we can be the trusted advisor first and watch our relationships grow."



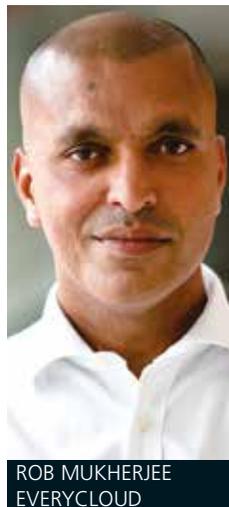
JOHN IGOE
CITYFIBRE

"The most important aspect to successful up/cross selling is understanding the customer's specific situation and not presuming it's just the same requirements as the last customer you spoke with. We've had most success where we have provided bespoke solutions, specifically moulded to match the needs of the individual customer. But it's important to remember that all the value-added services you promote are critically reliant on the core infrastructure being fit for purpose. It always comes back to the quality and performance of the underlying connectivity. When using full fibre connectivity, this enables our partners to confidently propose complete solutions with various value-added opportunities, all delivered across a solid and reliable connection, providing the customer with a complete solution and the wholesale partner with a profitable recurring income."



ROB DOWNES
9 GROUP

"Partners that have experienced significant sales success in recent years will almost certainly have been offering customers solutions, rather than leading with individual products. Two further considerations will deliver success in the current climate. Firstly, it's vital to understand the consumerisation of ICT. Historically, communication technology has emerged at enterprise level, through to the SME market, with IT Managers working hard to improve levels of user adoption. Typical home users now have access to unlimited content, along with the ability to seamlessly communicate across all devices and platforms. These users demand the same level of accessibility in their workplace. Partners who support customers to achieve this can benefit from a lucrative cross-sell opportunity. Secondly, it's important to bridge the communication gap between the knowledge of what's possible and the technology that underpins that. It's about providing decision makers with enough technical understanding to be confident in their decision, without overcomplicating the sales."



ROB MUKHERJEE
EVERYCLOUD

"At EveryCloud we believe in building a people-led future fuelled by technology (never technology-led). This means our sales teams are focused on understanding their customer's world first - and our solutions second. Once we have onboarded a new customer, we are constantly assessing - how has their world changed? How are we reacting to that change? We sell a range of cloud communications and cloud security solutions. Our sales team's success in cross-selling and upselling comes from understanding each customer's industry and the opportunities and risks that their industry is facing, understanding the company's goals and objectives and how they as a salesperson can help, and understanding each person's role and individual priorities. That understanding comes from widening your network and broadening your conversations. Don't predict the outcome and avoid the temptation to lead with your strengths. Do it well and the customers will be led to your strengths."



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Understanding customer needs



ANDY SMETHURST
GAMMA

"The key, as ever, is to start with the customer. Whether it's a cross-sell or an upsell, you put the customers 'requirements' and 'needs' first by understanding how, in an ideal world, they would like things to work. It's not up to the end-customer to be aware of what solutions might exist to enhance their ways of working. These days, most channel partners would consider themselves to be 'Managed Service Providers', therefore they need to 'sell' in a much more consultative fashion. At Gamma, we use new product developments and innovations, as well as existing data, to try and generate cross or upsell opportunities. An example being the uptake of our UCaaS service, Collaborate, which massively matched the needs of many UK businesses that were forced to work remotely through COVID-19. We went to great lengths to assist our partners with end-user facing collateral and video content to assist the easy roll-out and adoption of Collaborate."



NICKY BUTLER
NICE

"As the world is reacting to the COVID-19 epidemic, organisations and employees are trying to adapt to a new and demanding reality. Customer Service employees must adjust to a work from home environment, as they are facing higher customer demands than ever, while at the same time considering health and safety aspects. Organisations must respond to the changing needs of both customers and employees, while complying with government mandates and navigating through volatile economic conditions. More than ever, resellers are required to support their clients and guide them through the challenges they face. Our three key tips would be: Be proactive, don't wait for customers to ask you for solutions to fix their problems; enhance your product portfolio to include a wider range of solutions; stay up to date on key messaging and solution positioning as this helps you to identify cross-sell opportunities."



GRAHAM ROGER
HIGHNET

"HighNet's advice is to stick very close to and be available for your customers. Account Managers should of course know the 'white space' in their customers and arrange review meetings where they can discuss these areas. Getting the customer to open up about their challenges is essential, and right now the language should be about flexibility, making sure the customer can adapt at speed without feeling pressure to sign long term contracts. Finally, don't just send a proposal out! Get face to face over video to take the customer through your proposal, adjust as required, and then send it out - shorten the sales cycle! HighNet is helping customers 'flex' their business by being creative financially. Examples include 30-day Mobile SIMs, no contract, offering collaborate homeworker solutions four months free then pay monthly, no installation fees on ethernet 12-month terms, and even agreeing payment holiday options in advance."



MICHAEL O'DONNELL
(JNR) - OPUS

"Cross-selling starts with delivering exceptional service and demonstrating the value of your partnership with a customer. It's important to take a genuine interest in your customer's organisation, understand its business goals and objectives with regular account reviews and ask the right questions to uncover pain points and identify opportunities to add further value. It's then a case of aligning technology solutions with those customer needs and making them aware of the benefits on a one-to-one basis. Our core strategy is only to partner with organisations where we can genuinely add value, and this applies equally to cross selling as it does new business. It's important to be able to fully integrate and support any additional services, not just sell for the sake of it and risk damaging a good relationship. Taking this approach has resulted in more than 70% of our customers taking three or more services from Opus."



DAVID HUGHES
INCOM CNS

"We have used the opportunity presented to us during this extraordinary year to re-focus the entire team towards our existing customers, concentrating on how we can serve them better, enable their success and drive new sales and upgrades. Our sales team has made use of the plentiful online training available to us via partner portals to increase their knowledge of existing products and services and glean new expertise. Empowering our team with the right training has given us the edge when aiming to introduce value add services to our customers. Over the last three decades we have thrived by periodically introducing new products and services to our loyal customer base. Adding cyber security, and more recently energy, to the portfolio has created continued cross-selling success for our team over the last six months, as customers see us as their trusted advisor for not only comms, but all of their utilities."



BETHANY HOOPER
UPLANDS

"One size doesn't fit all. Being a specialist, doesn't mean you can't be extensive in your offering and providing a wide range of solutions will open countless opportunities to speak to your existing customers again and again. The more you have to offer, the more conversations you can have, and don't be afraid to ask, you never know what tech requirements a business may have. Most importantly, it's about getting the delivery right. If you deliver exceptional service from day one, your existing customers will want to buy more. As a traditionally mobile-first provider, that has adopted a unified communications offering in recent years, our traditional customer base is mobile centric and since the development of a wider product set we have been able to continually increase ARPU by simply having a more holistic conversation with our customers, enabling us to cross-sell a broad range of telecoms and technology solutions."

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 ** Distribution of weekly email newsletter (1st January 2019 to 31st December 2019, Average Distribution 9,409)

Gamma's key hire



Lauren McManus

LAUREN McManus has joined Gamma as Head of Channel Marketing, a newly created role which sees her assume responsibility for building integrated marketing strategies and driving channel partner engagement. McManus's previous experience includes a notable stint at Daisy Wholesale (now Digital Wholesale Solutions) where she was responsible for steering the rebrand and defining a new market development strategy to acquire IT resellers. McManus

was a finalist in the Chartered Institute of Marketing's 2019 Marketer of the Year Award category and featured on the CRN Women in Channel A-list 2019. She commented: "I join at a particularly exciting time for Gamma which is looking to bring a variety of new and enhanced products to market early next year, including contact centre, a WLR replacement, a new mobile proposition, Horizon Collaborate 2.0 and Horizon integration with Microsoft Teams."

Also on the move...

TELAVOX has expanded its UK sales team with the appointment of Andy Brunt as Partner Sales Manager. The move signals Telavox's intent to replicate its Scandinavian UCaaS market influence in the UK. Brunt joins after a 15 year spell working as a sales professional, director and consultant for companies specialising in UC, cloud and contact centre solutions. His experience includes stints at BT, Virgin and Verint. "My particular area of expertise is in delivering multi-site communications solutions and digital transformation in a variety of industries and verticals, from large local government organisations to global travel companies," he said.



Andy Brunt

IAN McNamara (pictured) has joined Fidelity Group as Head of Transformation. A seasoned telecoms professional with over 30 years experience, McNamara helped the management teams at Pink Telecom and Frontier Voice & Data grow and achieve successful exits before spending two years as Business Improvement Director at Chess ICT. "I am looking forward to working with the Fidelity team providing analysis on processes and performance across the group," said McNamara.



HOT on the heels of its connectivity platform launch in July and the subsequent completion of a refinancing deal Isle of Man based plan.com has pulled in Richard Cotton as Sales Director. He brings more than 20 years experience in senior management, sales, marketing and operations including stints at WeBuyAnyCar, HomeServe and E.ON. Plan.com co-founder Keith Curran said: "Richard's commercial knowledge and sales experience will be a great addition to plan.com and coincides nicely with our new business strategy. His vision and team will play an important role in achieving our future growth in the mobile and wider business communications space." Cotton added: "Joining plan.com at such a pivotal stage in the business's development is an exciting opportunity."



Richard Cotton

FINANCE high flyer Nick Dunn is to join CityFibre as CFO in January 2021. He moves from Gatwick Airport where he served as CFO for ten years. His prior experience includes stints at Anglo American and Centrica for six years in a number of senior finance roles. Dunn also brings more than ten years experience in investment banking, mostly specialising in the infrastructure sector.

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COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS

WINNERS CREATIVELY SHARE THEIR SUCCESS!

Under normal circumstances we always run photos of all the 2020 Comms National Awards winners in Comms Dealer, but social distancing measures have made publication of our Roll of Honour an impossibility this year. Some of our winners however did go to extreme lengths to get us a picture to acknowledge their success. Here's a selection:

CAPITO – BEST RESELLER INNOVATION

Sharp thinking Capito decided their distribution warehouse would provide the perfect opportunity for a socially distanced team photo. Very uplifting!



WINDSOR TELECOM - BEST SME VERTICAL MARKET SOLUTION

Windsor Telecom CEO Pete Tomlinson has fitted the award win into his daily keep fit routine. "You know, these awards are quite heavy," he said.



JABRA – BEST END POINT OR DEVICE

Here are some of the UKI Channel Sales and Marketing team that contributed to Jabra's success, pictured before lockdown (obviously!)

AKIXI – BEST CALL MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

Now this is clever use of video conferencing. The Akixi team highlighted Marketing Communications Assistant Kelsey Davies clutching the award. We get the point!!



SALT DNA - BEST ENTERPRISE MOBILE/IOT SOLUTION

Thumbs up to SaltDNA's on-line solution. Pictured are CEO Joe Boyle (top left), Head of Business Development and Marketing John Bailie (top right) and Marketing Executive Nicole Allen.

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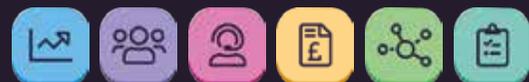
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