



Unify's UK&I channel chief forges partner-centric course P26

ITP outlines why apprentices are just the job in comms P48



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Industry to have a say on fibre access

OPENREACH is inviting all comms providers to take part in consultations to 'agree and scope' the process of giving them access to its dark fibre network.

SPECIAL REPORT

The move follows Ofcom's Business Connectivity Market review of the UK's £2bn leased lines market in which it called for Openreach to open up its dark fibre to competitors by October 2017.

Openreach says it has already invited comms providers to take part in initial discussions and 'a small number' have asked to join the Dark Fibre Industry Working Group facilitated by OTA2, the independent organi-

sation tasked by Ofcom to oversee co-operation between communications providers.

Openreach has now opened up the consultation to the entire industry as Mark Logan (*pictured*), Director of Fibre Products at Openreach, confirmed: "We are pleased to invite all interested parties to join us for a series of regular update calls on the negotiations currently taking place," he said.

"This is to ensure that anybody not taking part in the industry working group is kept up to speed with the discussions and with Openreach's obligations on dark fibre services as laid out by Ofcom."

The calls will take place on June 17th, July 21st, September 5th, October 17th and December 5th. To take part in the events comms providers need to register on the Openreach website.

The move has been welcomed by resellers who have been pressing for Ofcom to put more pressure on Openreach over connectivity issues.

Continued on page 3

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

WE ALL KNOW that working under pressure can be an elevator of stress and blood pressure levels, be it deadlines of all descriptions, self-imposed high standards, getting to a meeting on time when all the elements seem against you, to name a few. But all this is a walk in the park compared to feeling the heat of an erupting volcano or the hot breath of a big cat on the

attack, both events experienced in the line of duty by an intrepid wireless comms trailblazer (see page 34).

Almost as adventurous and carrying its own risk is the task of selling connectivity to a highly expectant user base, a process that can often turn into an unsatisfactory endurance test despite the digital ambitions of a forward looking Government.

In a round table discussion held last month in association with Entanet (see page 40) delegates debated the issues that prevent growth in the highly competitive connectivity marketplace. They could not reconcile the notion of 'connected Britain' with their own experiences on the ground when trying to facilitate reliable, high quality business grade connections within a decent time frame. Often, the end result is a frustrated and unhappy customer.

One delegate emphasised, 'enough is enough'. And they all agreed that action must now be taken to address what they said is an industry and national embarrassment that damages businesses and professional reputations. They also believe that the Government does not fully understand 'digital' and urged the industry to form a determined alliance and act accordingly on behalf of all businesses.

This call to action is characteristic of a sector that cares deeply about customer relationships and future growth opportunities – long-term prospects that ultimately benefit all parts of the supply chain.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Access move gets support

Continued from page 1

Neil Barrell, MD at Telecoms World, stated: "Having access will help us and hopefully bring costs down.

"Companies need fibre broadband, especially those in business parks that may have good transport links but poor access to data."

David Donnelly, Director at Midland Networks, believes that in the medium-term access to the dark fibre network will help all resellers install more products to a wider audience.

"But, in terms of being competitive it will be advantageous to the customer more than our industry," he commented.

"It may well prove to be another race to the bottom in terms of pricing rather than using the additional margin to improve customer satisfaction."

This news follows Ofcom's first significant review of the telecoms sector for a decade announced earlier this spring.

Ofcom's CEO Sharon White, alongside the Communications Minister Ed Vaizey, is pushing for a Digital Britain built on fibre. White said: "The UK must do better at rolling out superfast broadband and 4G. Openreach must open up its network of



Sharon White

telegraph pole and underground tunnels to allow others to build their own advanced fibre networks, connected directly to homes and offices."

Meanwhile, under White's leadership Ofcom is also taking a harder line with BT on its service levels and has demanded that Openreach fixes faults within five hours and reduces install times to 40 days.

However, many comms providers are urging the regulator and Government to go further. See page 40

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

One-stop Daisy unit opens up

A ONE-STOP hardware and software supply proposition introduced by Daisy Group aims to secure the total comms and IT spend of customers.

Headed up by Daisy's Director of Group Vendor Alliances & Supply Chain Services Jeff Palmer, the new Supply Chain Services operation is moving to a purpose-built office at the Group's Nottingham site.

The unit has already begun trading around 200,000 products from over 4,000 suppliers, ranging from data storage to laptops, desktops, printers and headsets. Palmer aims to create a £100m turnover business within the next three years.

"Whatever technology products a business needs to function, Daisy's Supply Chain Services can now offer via a process that adds value to every customer engagement," he said.

"Many of our customers are buying other technology-related products elsewhere. That doesn't make any sense for them and it makes even less sense for us.

"The advantage of Supply Chain Services for our customers is that they transact with just one company that they already know and do business with."

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COMMENT: EUROPEAN DOUBLE



Richard Carter

EUROPE will be high on the agenda this month – in both a political and sporting sense – and you could be forgiven for trying to avoid both! The European football championships kick off on June 10th in France followed by the big referendum vote just under two weeks later. At this stage it's impossible to predict how the results will go on and off the football field, but the ramifications and consequences could be huge for the whole continent.

By now many of us will have made up our minds about whether to stay in or opt out of Europe but with no firm 'evidence' one way or the other on what the impact will be to leave, it does feel like a step into the unknown. There are those who claim it's not worth the risk of gambling with our future, while others think that taking greater control of our destiny and borders will in the long-term be the right thing to do.

Football is a completely different matter. Although much less important, eye-catching displays from Roy Hodgson's men can give the whole country a tonic before we go to the polls for a vital vote. The summer of sport continues with the Olympics in Rio so there's plenty to look forward to over the coming months. There's also the Ryder Cup in September where Europe will definitely be united as we take on the Americans for golf's biggest team prize. Interesting times lie ahead for politicians, sports stars, business leaders and the general public. Europe may never be the same again, far beyond the football fields of France.

Richard Carter, Group Sales and Business Development Director, Nimans

• UNIFY'S accelerating channel-centric journey is on track and building a powerful head of steam, according to Barry Tuffs, Vice President of Channel Sales UK&I (see page 26).

Key buy puts Reid on acquisition trail



Marcos Reid

EQUITY Networks has kicked off a buy and build campaign with the acquisition of Cookham Dean-based Centric Systems and its hosted VoIP and connectivity sister company Centricomms for an undisclosed sum.

"This is the first of a number of planned acquisitions, all based around a robust recurring revenue model," stated Equity Networks Director Marcos Reid who co-owns the company with fellow Director Alex Hall.

"Cloud services are the perfect platform on which to build, and with both comms and IT within the same group the only way is up."

The deal was prompted by small business customers asking Equity Networks to help them move to the cloud.

"Microsoft Office 365 and cloud storage kept coming up in meetings," explained Reid. "It was clear that clients saw us as an ICT company, not just a comms organisation."

"We were also installing a large number of dedicated fibre Internet connections which took us into router and firewall territory, work that we had to sub-contract out.

"We had collaborated with Centric Systems on a couple of

ing into each other's customer bases and making efficiency savings at the same time."

Centric Systems has been in operation for more than 13 years and offers a process-driven IT support function to approximately 50 customers that range from SMEs to a division of British Gas/Centrica.

"Many if its customers are moving from premise-based server solutions to cloud IT services, which again is a perfect fit for us," added Reid.

projects and were blown away by its technical capabilities.

"Then its owner, Abbas Azad, told us he was looking for an exit. It seemed a perfect fit.

"We are now busy building both companies and cross sell-

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Adept snares Avaya reseller



Ian Fishwick

TUNBRIDGE Wells-based Adept Telecom has bolstered its UC capabilities with the acquisition of Comms Group, a provider of Avaya IP Office to SMEs, for £3.5m. The deal will be funded from Adept's revolving debt facility and is immediately earnings-accretive.

Adept CEO Ian Fishwick commented: "We are now in a position to provide a complete unified communications offering which can address the whole of the market, from small customers through to large enterprise clients."

Adept's UC proposition was first formed when it acquired Centrix in May 2015.

"The addition of Comms Group addresses a smaller scale of SME client, but will increase the effectiveness of bidding by Adept for unified solutions opportunities overall," commented Fishwick.

Comms Group was established in June 2008 by Matt Tarry and Paul Simmons.

The company employs 25 people at its Northampton offices and is accredited by Avaya, Cisco and Gamma.

Comms Group will retain its current presence and customer service operation in Northampton. And the vendors are to be retained in their cur-

rent roles for a period of at least 12 months post-completion.

The last filed accounts of Comms Group for the year ended 31st March 2015 reported revenue, operating profit and profit before tax of £3m, £0.5m and £0.4m respectively. Net and gross assets were £1.2m and £1.8m respectively.

Comms Group's trading performance for the year ended 31st March 2016 was ahead of the historic results with the unaudited management accounts showing revenue and operating profit of approximately £3.7m and £0.8m respectively.

Fishwick stated: "Comms Group is an excellent fit as, like us, it is asset-light. It builds on our existing expertise, particularly within the Avaya product set, and extends Adept's offering in the UC space through the addition of IT services."

Corporate finance advisory services were provided by Evolution Capital (UK).

Adept supplies comms services to 36 councils, seven out of 10 private hospitals in London, half of all London's business centres and 17,000 customers including national brand names.

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COMMENT: EMPOWERMENT IS KEY



Pete Tomlinson

I GUESS all people in our businesses are happy to help customers. After all they understand customers are the life blood of any organisation and that's a trait we look for when recruiting and developing colleagues. However, it turns out not to be the critical factor in customer satisfaction. That's far more likely to be dictated by whether they are empowered to help, which

is something far broader and absolutely rooted in having the right systems and information available for the right people at the right time. Above all it is a matter of culture.

In recent research (by salesforce.com) 27 per cent of customer service managers described their front line people as completely empowered. That is scary, especially when you consider the figure leaps 75 per cent for the top performing organisations. They seem to get so worried about governance and efficiency, or that one time someone made a mistake, they tie the hands of the very people they employ to help customers.

This isn't just important in a service environment. One of the consistent positive areas of feedback from our own CSAT is around how empowered our account teams are. This chimed with a recent personal experience where I spent weeks negotiating a deal with a senior person from a large organisation, who I won't name and shame here, only to have to wait several more weeks while it went through 'governance' and came out in a completely different form.

Of course our people need guidance and education so they know what is or isn't a good decision, but if you're worried about being in the majority that aren't empowering their frontline teams here's a simple place to start: If there is a question your managers are regularly asked and usually say 'yes' to – stop making people ask it and let them get on with doing their job.

Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM

App approves lease orders on the spot

THE time it takes for resellers to secure lease and hire purchase deals online has shrunk to just 20 seconds following the launch of HowApp.

According to its developer, Newport-based HH Vendor Finance, the app reduces transaction times by up to 90%.

"We developed HowApp to remove paperwork and simplify the applications and credit approvals process," commented Dan Proctor, CTO at Henry Howard Finance. "This enables resellers to fulfil customer orders without delay."

HowApp can be used on any device, meaning that sales teams can transact deals from any location. "With an average 95% acceptance rate, HowApp allows resellers to finalise a lease deal in just seven clicks and 20 seconds, revolutionising the traditionally lengthy leasing process that can take several days before the paperwork is completed," added Proctor.

As well as enabling ICT resellers to seal deals on the spot, HowApp is also designed to highlight additional sales opportunities and provide full audit trails and tools to help its users stay FCA (Financial Conduct Authority) compliant.



Dan Proctor

According to Proctor, HowApp is a prime example of how advances in technology are revolutionising the way businesses are able to access finance. "HowApp offers a quick and easy way for vendor businesses to apply for financial support, and the app ensures that staff's time is spent generating revenue rather than administering lease paperwork," he commented.

HowApp can be integrated into vendor websites and tailored to fit their branding, giving the appearance of an in-house solution. The app is designed according to vendors' unique rate cards and, where appli-

cable, can be calibrated with credit rules specific to typical customers and equipment.

In practice, once a vendor enters the details of the lease or hire purchase an online automated underwriting decision is provided by HowApp.

"The vendor can turn the credit acceptance into a finalised lease document by uploading details of the equipment they require or choosing from their products and pricing already listed on HowApp," explained Proctor. "Lease documents are sent directly for an electronic signature, automatically raising a purchase order."

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COMMENT: THE BIG QUESTION



Clifford Norton

IT'S been called the most important question of a generation – should the UK remain a member of the European Union or leave? Have you made up your mind yet? Me neither, but don't worry, we aren't alone. An opinion poll shows 41 per cent are in, 42 per cent are out and 17 per cent are undecided or won't vote.

Over the past few months I've been back and forth more times than I can remember and always end up at the same conclusion – I just don't know.

In a nutshell, the 'In' campaign is mainly focused around trade arrangements and the ease we currently have doing business with other EU countries. They argue that the influx of young, keen to work immigrants fuels the economy and encourages growth, helping pay for public services. There is also speculation surrounding Britain's global reputation and economic stability.

The 'Leave' message is centred for the most part on immigration and our monetary contribution. There is no escaping the fact that Britain contributes huge amounts of money to the EU, reported to be as much as £350 million per week, leading to the question – what do we really get in return?

This is only an advisory referendum. It's undecided when Britain would leave the EU were the referendum to go that way. But whether it is 2017, 2018 or 2019, we can expect a long, tedious process of renegotiation. Ultimately, we do need the EU and the EU needs us, as a member state or not.

Clifford Norton, Managing Director, Channel Telecom

• IN THE line of duty he's climbed a volcano to upgrade firmware, fled through jungle to escape a jaguar attack and regularly finds himself in precisely the wrong place at the wrong time – welcome to the intrepid world of Keith Edwards, Managing Director of TES Wireless Communications (see page 34).

Ingram bags Comms-care

COMMS-care has been snapped up by Ingram Micro boosting the distributor's service capabilities in the UK. Comms-care's services include pre-sales support, configuration, professional services, maintenance and managed services.

The company has 225 staff and currently serves approximately 850 channel partners and customers in the UK, holding accreditations with Cisco, Citrix, Microsoft, and VMware along with technical capabilities in Dell, HP, IBM, Juniper, NetApp and Lenovo

Brent McCarty, Ingram Micro VP and Chief Country Executive for the UK, said: "The addition of Comms-care

supports our strategy to expand our global capabilities and expertise in fast growing high value markets. Comms-care has developed a well respected services model that exclusively serves the channel."

Ben Davies, Comms-Care MD, added: "Ingram Micro provides us with the platform to achieve our objectives of growing our business and helping our partners achieve more.

"Ingram Micro's broad geographic reach and reputation with vendor and customer partners throughout the world will enable us to expand our coverage into new regions and broaden our offerings to channel partners."



JOSH Webster, son of Nine Wholesale MD Nick, has secured a first win for the Renault RSO1 in the GT Open Series and his second win at Spa. The 22-year-old received a last minute call on 21st May asking him to drive alongside ex-F1 racer Nicky Pastorelli at the International GT Open at Spa Francorchamps in Spa, Belgium, the next day. They finished the race in second place before taking the flag the day after. Webster said: "It felt amazing to be back on the top step of the podium at Spa alongside Nicky after such a fantastic race."

Webinars to dial up revenues

VOIP and hosted dialler services are key to unlocking the full potential of cloud-based recurring revenue sales with 300% increases up for grabs, according to Hostcomm.

The company is hosting two webinars this month (15th and 22nd June) that will outline the three steps resellers should follow to significantly increase billable VoIP minutes, open up new revenue streams through value added dialler services and wrap workflow automation into the solutions.

"Diallers aren't just for making automated calls and they're no longer only used by contact centres," said Chris Key, Director. "For agents and sales teams they turn making calls into a convenient one-click process, driving productivity.

"For managers, it's easier to delve into detailed reports about performance on an organisational, team or per-salesperson basis. Work can be quantified, tracked and measured effectively. And managers are empowered to make real-time changes as and when they need to.

"As that becomes the standard way to work it creates new efficiencies for customers and profit for partners."

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Lender gets £51m boost

INDEPENDENT lender Henry Howard Finance has agreed a £51m asset finance facility via the British Business Bank's ENABLE Funding scheme.

The facility is 50% guaranteed by the European Investment Fund (EIF) and allows Henry Howard to extend its asset finance funding to a larger portfolio of smaller UK businesses.

Henry Howard, backed by investor Cabot Square Capital and based in Newport, is the first South Wales-based lender to become a partner of the British Business Bank.

The company has been providing finance to small businesses for over 20 years and last year it saw its lending grow to more than £70m from £40m.

In an announcement made on May 25th Business Secretary Sajid Javid commented: "Every growing business needs to invest in the right tools to get the job done, whether that's upgraded laptops or new delivery trucks."

"This facility allows small firms to get new equipment without taking a big hit to their cashflow. They can continue to grow, create jobs and benefit local communities across Wales and the rest of the UK."



Mark Crook

Mark Crook, co-founder and COO at Henry Howard Finance, added: "Access to asset finance is a major barrier to growth for many small businesses. We hope the new facility will remove this barrier and allow more SMEs to grow and prosper."

Keith Morgan, British Business Bank CEO, commented: "This is the third transaction in our ENABLE Funding programme which has now provided a total of £202m to non-bank asset finance providers."

The ENABLE Funding programme is delivered by British Business Bank Financial Services, a subsidiary of British Business Bank, on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

TeleWare in key link

A NEW partnership between TeleWare and Cision will initially focus on offering added value to Microsoft Office 365 and Skype for Business users with a range of enhancements targeting finance, legal and insurance businesses.

The enhancements include Intelligent Number, a single number that users can access on any device anywhere in the world, regardless of mobile signal or Wi-Fi connection.

Users can also add enterprise class voicemail, audio conferencing, IVR and voice recording to Skype for Business.

TeleWare CEO Steve Hawthorth commented: "The strength of this partnership is the combination of TeleWare's product offering alongside Cision's strength in the finance, legal and insurance sectors."

UK launch for UCaaS

RINGCENTRAL has rolled out its UCaaS solution called Global Office (designed for multi-national businesses) to UK customers and bolstered support for local developers.

"By connecting workforces across multiple countries Global Office reduces the complexity and high costs of maintaining multiple legacy on-premise PBX systems with a single cloud solution," said John Marlow, MD EMEA at RingCentral.

"Businesses no longer need to struggle with the onerous and expensive task of figuring out how to deploy their communications infrastructure globally."

"With the launch of RingCentral Global Office in the UK, local businesses now have the tools to communicate across multiple global offices for a single monthly cost."

In other news RingCentral has also expanded support for its RingCentral Developer Programme in the UK.

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EXPONENTIAL-E has kicked off a five-a-side tournament for channel partners in a bid to raise funds for the Macmillan Cancer Trust. The first Channel Charity Cup was hosted at West Ham's Boleyn Ground and was one of the last games to

be played at the stadium before the club relocates. "The Channel Charity Cup raises awareness and support for causes that have an affinity with our customers and staff," said Michala Hart, Head of Channel Strategy at Exponential-e. "We also wanted to organise something that would enable us to get more involved with our channel partners." Pictured: Tournament winner Focus Group.



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COMMENT: NETWORK INSIGHTS



James Hickman

THERE have been various alternative currencies over the years. The Romans used bars of precious metals for value equivalents of items such as a cow or sheep or a new toga. Eventually these lumps of metal were trimmed down and they started using coins. When coins got heavy paper was used to make bank notes, cheques and eventually it all got digitised and turned into plastic.

An alternative approach today is Bitcoin. It is accepted as payment in the real world in an increasing number of places, but can it be trusted as much as the pound in your pocket? Bitcoin works by each 'coin' having a complete history of itself with some fancy encryption as part of a publicly readable system called a block chain. In short, nobody can forge the coins as anybody can verify any coin at any time and it doesn't rely as much on bankers behaving themselves. Bitcoin's gained initial value as the system matured, and now as exchanges happen between Bitcoin and other currencies the Bitcoins themselves have an established value, which is recognised outside of the system itself.

The quest for crypto-currency has some other, odder spin-offs like the recent BitWalking scheme. BitWalking generates money as you do exercise. Think of it as Fitbit with a cash-back mechanism. The more you walk, the more you earn. It relies on a central bank but otherwise is still rather novel.

Crypto-currency is a great example of how a human frustration can be overcome by technology in a way that nobody would previously have considered. In our industry, we are fortunate to meet people doing innovative things and providing the infrastructure to support them. Bitcoin needs the network and the world needs thinkers like the people who dreamed up Bitcoin.

James Hickman, CTO, Virtual1

Big advance in detection

F-SECURE has devised an intrusion detection and incident response managed service that combines human and machine intelligence with a promise to notify companies within 30 minutes of a breach detection.

"Companies are finding that on their own they struggle with intrusion detection and incident response," said Pekka Usva, VP of Advanced Threat Protection at F-Secure. "They need to find a staff of cyber security experts, build monitoring infrastructure and source good threat intelligence data.

"Setting up an in-house system is difficult and expensive and takes years to do. That's why a managed service makes sense. It provides an immediate, tangible return on investment."

F-Secure's Rapid Detection Service leverages both human and machine intelligence to provide an all-in-one intrusion detection and response service that's 'ready to go'.

The service consists of three main components: Endpoint and Network Decoy sensors that collect data about events and activities; F-Secure's threat intelligence and behavioural analytics which analyses the data to identify anomalies; and



Pekka Usva

the Rapid Detection Centre, which is staffed 24/7 by a team of cyber security specialists who identify and handle incidents.

When a breach is detected an expert will contact the customer within 30 minutes and offer optional onsite investigative services if needed.

"The human component is an important factor," commented Erka Koivunen, Cyber Security Advisor at F-Secure. "Attackers are human, so to detect them you can't rely on machines alone. Our experts know how attackers think and the tactics they use to hide their presence from standard means of detection.

"The human factor also eliminates false positives which are an extreme waste of resources."

eINX deal heightens Daisy QoS

UK-BASED Daisy Worldwide (part of Daisy Group) has opted for Epsilon's Intelligent Network eXchange (eINX) solution to bring intelligent routing and end-to-end QoS to its networks connecting New York, London, Singapore and Hong Kong.

eINX combines Epsilon's global network (which is supported by over 500 pre-connected carriers in 170-plus countries) with bespoke networking technology. Regional breakout enables traffic to be routed in-region, creating new networking efficiencies and quality of experience benefits.

eINX also supports real-time automated routing to avoid network faults or areas of diminished quality.

Daisy Worldwide supports some of the largest enterprises globally with end-to-end voice and managed services solutions. Hayley Duckmanton, Commercial Director at Daisy Worldwide, said: "Epsilon offers a flexible opex-driven model. And as we grow our business, eINX is ready to support us with scalability and intelligence."

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KCOM throws RNLI Commsworld connectivity lifeline in record year



THE UK's 237 Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) stations have been thrown a connectivity lifeline by KCOM which has provided a managed and upgraded WAN solution.

The project is well underway following two large bandwidth connections with resilient failover into the Poole HQ and

a UK rollout of over 200 private FTTC and DSL connections including deployments in some of the most remote locations around the British coast.

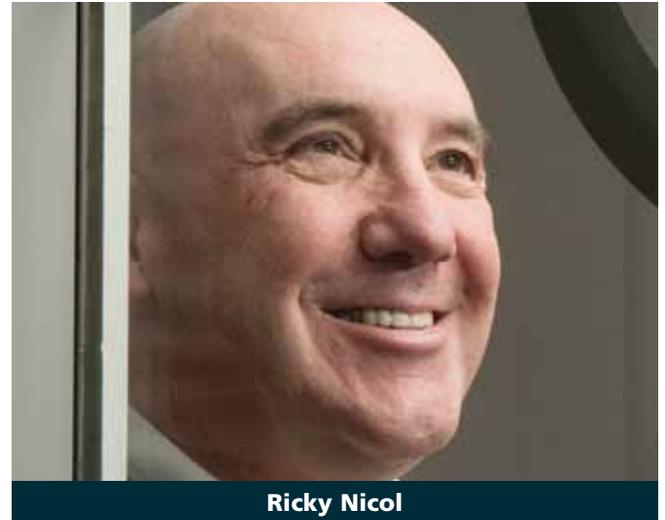
IT Project Manager at the RNLI, Steve North, stated: "Lifeboat crews and volunteers input the details of lifeboat launches and then upload video

footage from their rescues, which can be used for media, training and fundraising.

"A faster connection helps us to spread the word about the lifesaving work we are doing much more quickly. Investing in better technology at our lifeboat stations around the coast will help to do this."

Gary Young, Executive VP for Mid-Market and Consumer at KCOM, added: "Speed is vital in all aspects of the RNLI's work, not just in saving lives but also in raising awareness of the dangers at sea."

KCOM is working with the RNLI on plans for the Republic of Ireland which is due to be connected by the autumn.



Ricky Nicol

COMMSWORLD has multiplied by six the number of connections made up to May 1st compared to the same four month period last year, registering 13,000 connections, which also marks a first in the company's 21 year history having already reached a record year.

This growth has been driven by demand for VoIP services, explained Commsworld CEO Ricky Nicol: "When VoIP first appeared on the scene over a decade ago it was exciting, but it struggled against the resilience, speed and practicality of landline systems," he said.

"But thanks to the advancement of networks and cloud ser-

vices they no longer need rooms full of expensive hardware.

"Voice communications is an essential tool for business. If you want to get something done instantly you don't just send a trail of emails, you more than likely pick up the phone.

"This in itself isn't new, but what is changing is how we are now using voice communications. It is much more likely to be integrated, and the growth of telephony using Internet connections is helping businesses every day, bringing down costs and improving flexibility."

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



HATS off to Glamorgan Telecom MD Kelly Bolderson who scooped the IOD Wales Young Director of the Year award. Under her leadership the company has grown its client base by 22% and a number of new processes have been implemented including the introduction of an emergency engineering team and a 24-hour online help service. She commented: "We've already achieved so much but there are exciting plans in place for future growth. This is just the start of our journey." See page 36

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Thirkill puts in place new leader team



Adrian Thirkill

GCI CEO Adrian Thirkill has finalised his leadership team with the appointment of former colleagues Mike Ayres as CCO and Phil Smith as COO.

He stated: "I have worked with both Mike and Phil for many years at Colt and Easynet and we achieved some great things together. They are talented, consistent and have the backbone to always push for better and see beyond 'same old, same old'."

"I also always remember our time together as good days, fun borne of success. We have reformed a winning team."

Ayres, previously MD of Business Markets (UK) at Easynet and then Senior Vice President Strategic Channel at Interoute, commented: "Across the organisation we have a good team at GCI. Through the discipline of collaboration and partnership – and the traditional values of decency, honesty and integrity – I hope to earn the trust and respect of both our people and our customers."

Smith, previously with Colt, CGI and Capgemini, noted:

"Our many years working together have built empathy and confidence in each other's ability, but it was fun too and I feel the GCI alchemy will be just as good, if not better."

Thirkill added: "We now have a full exec team from CEO to CMO and it's a capable blend of experienced new joiners and proven GCI seniors."

"Collectively, the leadership team shares the single vision of realising GCI's full potential and supporting our people, customers, partners and alliances to the absolute best of our ability."

"More simply, we now have the right people on the bus and we'll pull together to keep GCI pointing in the right direction."

"Our recent announcement regarding the acquisition of Fusion Media Networks is just one early indicator of that."

Ayres and Smith were appointed just weeks after Mike Constantine joined GCI as CTO.

Full interview in next month's Comms Dealer magazine

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

FOR decades now, large swathes of the telecoms industry have been guilty of trying to compete and differentiate themselves by simply cutting prices. But this makes differentiation very difficult among partners and resellers. Passing on a low price rarely sets pulses racing. We want telecoms to keep up with the changing landscape businesses actually face, particularly when it comes to their increasingly international ambitions.

There's a raft of businesses keen for a way to make their international telecoms activity appear more local.

Take retail as an example, an industry where credibility and reliability can turn a one-time shopper into a devoted customer for life. Most retailers still rely on call centres for customer support, particularly as more and more retailers move online and therefore can't offer in-store help. Call centres can be located anywhere in the world and having a separate call centre in each separate country is rarely practical for truly global businesses. Very few customers will want to call an international number, most want to call a geographically local number which looks and feels familiar.

Moreover, any company looking for global growth by attracting new clients in international markets might want a range of international numbers for offices around the world which connect to a single unified global sales team. Potential clients can be wary of international numbers as they could be concerned about working with teams located in different time zones that may not be available at key times.

Global telecoms really can help to create global expansion. Products such as International Numbers and World SIP offer resellers the ability to approach this fresh and largely untapped market.

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Intermedia boosts channel resources

INTERMEDIA has launched two new resources for channel partners in a bid to help increase lead generation and improve lead conversion rates.

A new Marketing Automation Platform enables partners to implement month long integrated marketing campaigns in less than five minutes, without any in-house marketing experts.

The platform contains content for partners to brand as their own with pre-made templates for email, landing pages and social media etc.

The firm has also launched the Intermedia University, a new web-based courseware that provides partners with knowledge to close leads generated



Jon Borgese

from the Marketing Automation Platform. The resource includes a library of interactive training to support partners selling services such as Microsoft Hosted Exchange, Email Archiving and SecuriSync etc.

Jon Borgese, Senior Director of Channel Marketing, said:

"We've already seen hundreds of partners register to use our new through-partner marketing automation platform. And over 1,500 partners worldwide have so far used the Intermedia University. We expect to see significant growth in the partners using these platforms."



VOIP Unlimited celebrated its 10th anniversary with 'petrol head partners' during a VIP day at Silverstone that included a behind the scenes tour of Sahara Force India's F1 operations, a driving experience at Porsche's Silverstone

track and a Porsche Cayenne off-road experience. VoIP Unlimited MD Mark Pillow commented: "It was a great opportunity to not only meet our partners face-to-face and gain a closer working relationship, but to also say thank you for working with us."



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Mesch signs Toople makes agreements debut on LSE

CITYFIBRE has secured new service provider contracts signed on the Milton Keynes and Northampton metro networks, acquired as part of its KCOM asset acquisition in January 2016.

The contracts, with a combined initial value of £7m, are with DBfB, a Northampton-based provider of connectivity, comms and IT solutions, and Exa Networks, the Bradford-based provider of connectivity to education and businesses. CityFibre also signed contracts with Exa on the acquired footprints in Leeds and Bradford.

Under the new six-year agreements, DBfB and Exa will commit to provide connectivity to 500 businesses and schools across Milton Keynes and Northampton.

Since closing the acquisition of KCOM Group's national network assets on 18th January this year, CityFibre has sold 950 connections across five of the acquired metro networks and also added £15.7m in initial contract value covering both the business and public sector market segments.

These latest contracts also take CityFibre past the milestone of 5,000 total customer



Greg Mesch

connections sold since the company's inception.

CityFibre Chief Executive Greg Mesch stated: "This latest deal delivers anchor customers in two market verticals, adding DBfB as our 47th service provider partner, and expanding our existing relationship with Exa Networks.

"The combined contract value of the new business added on the acquired assets to date, including the minimum revenue commitment from KCOM, now totals £40.7m."

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE-based business broadband provider Toople.com has listed on the London Stock Exchange under the ticker 'TOOP'.

The company's leadership team includes industry heavyweights Andrew Hollingworth, former Director at TalkTalk, Geoff Wilson, also from TalkTalk and Neil Taylor, ex-CFO of BT Wholesale.

The listing follows a series of investor roadshows and city fund raising and according to Hollingworth 'it's time to get to business'. "We have raised the funds we needed and launched our website," he said. "Initially we will roll out broadband services with mobile and hosted PBX to follow."

Hollingworth also plans to bring new services to Toople.com's website with full automation across the different platforms and devices.

"Our leadership team jointly has well over 100 years of telecoms knowledge," he added. "Toople.com is the one to watch over the coming months."

The company owns all of its software, enabling it to implement services quickly and cost-effectively, pointed out Hollingworth, who also noted



Andrew Hollingworth

that Toople.com pledges fixed prices for the life of a broadband contract with no hidden terms and conditions.

"Our vision is based on trust and transparency," he said. "We focus on providing the facts in straightforward language, rather than confusing customers with complicated jargon."

SHORT CALLS

Toshiba has appointed South West Comms Group as its authorised distribution partner to support partners and resellers across the UK. swcomms has operated as a Toshiba reseller for 30 years and will leverage its experience to provide countrywide support and spare parts.

Marketing agency Bowan Arrow is celebrating a brace of industry award nominations having been shortlisted in the Best Marketing Award category at the 2016 ISPA Awards and the Best Channel Marketing Agency category of the CRN Sales and Marketing Awards. Both events take place in July.



BIG investments in staff training have paid off for Ultima Business Solutions which collected the Partner of the Year award from Check Point Software Technologies. Martin Collins, Head of Networking and Security at Ultima, collected the award during Check Point Experience, a three-day European conference held in Nice. He said: "Ultima invests heavily in staff training to ensure our technical consultants can provide end-to-end solutions for our customers; and we are one of only a handful of UK partners that are providing zero-day malware protection using Check Point's Sand Blast technology."

SHORT CALL

Distributor Nimans has joined forces with Unify to offer resellers a 'private cloud' solution powered by Virtual1. The technology provides full OpenScape Business functionality and is based on a per-user-per-month licensing model that scales up to 1,500 users. Resellers have a choice of delivering an on-premise server based solution, using a designated data centre or their own hosted service provider.

PRS plans growth

PRS Telecom has signalled big plans for growth following its partnership with the founder of gap personnel group.

The comms provider is aiming to become a £10m business by 2020 with 10-plus offices spread across the UK, all based on a five-year agreement with Gary Dewhurst who is now a major shareholder.

The partnership has already catalysed the acquisition of key client accounts, the recruitment of new staff and a move of the HQ to larger bespoke offices.

Dewhurst is best known as an entrepreneur, investor and business mentor, and under his leadership gap personnel group currently achieves turnover in excess of £100m.

Patrick Gill, Director of PRS Telecom, commented: "This new relationship is all about working together to drive the expansion of PRS into a much stronger, more robust and more profitable business." See p42

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

Women's award

THE Institute for Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) has declared The Chris Seymour Award for Women in Telecoms open for entries.

Applications are required to have a minimum of five years experience in the industry and can demonstrate technical or business leadership skills that excel in one of the following areas: Significant achievements in the sector; long-term excellence; original research on telecoms technology; and outstanding leadership.

The awards are presented at the ITP's annual dinner on the 7th December in London. The closing date for entries is 12th August 2016.

Crissi Williams, Head of Operations for the Institute, said: "This award is designed to recognise the key contribution that women make to the telecoms industry.

"The ITP is focused on helping people develop their professional skills and we want to recognise those who are inspirational to our sector."



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Pisys.net milestone & franchise launch

IT SUPPORT business Pisys.net has reached the £1m revenue milestone and marked the achievement with the launch of a national franchise with new operations in three locations across the UK.

The company was established in 2003 when Directors Steve Bain and John Merrick met at BNI Dylan, a Swansea-based networking meeting that forms part of the BNI South Wales franchise.

Merrick said: "Steve and I hit it off despite our businesses competing, and we soon formed our partnership. Since then we have grown to employ 17 staff, all based in Swansea, and we have franchises in Aberdeen, Inverness and Cardiff East.



"This is a superb move for us as we look to pass on all of our key knowledge from what works, and doesn't work, in the IT industry."

Merrick also noted that BNI South Wales has played an

important role in the firm's success to date.

"BNI has been the backbone of our business from day one," he added. "Particularly in the early days because it was our only marketing platform.

"We built our reputation on the back of referrals received through the BNI network. It gave us a direct route to market that has paid dividends in the form our second and third generation referrals. Therefore we encourage our franchise owners to seek BNI membership."

Pictured (l-r) the Pisys.net board: John Merrick, Jo-Ann Miles and Steve Bain.

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Intelligent SIP is pure Genius

A NEW service launched by Genius Networks called Intelligent SIP enables service providers, SIs and CPs to offer reduced infrastructure costs for multi-national communications deployments, says James Arnold-Roberts, CEO of G3 Comms and Genius Networks.

"For businesses expanding globally, the cost of SIP trunking infrastructure, such as gateways and session border controls, multiplies with every country and carrier connected to the communications system.

"Genius Network's Intelligent SIP aggregates multi-carrier and multi-country SIP connections allowing delivery on a single trunk, reducing the cost of deployment significantly and simplifying integration with other communication systems."



James Arnold-Roberts

According to Arnold-Roberts, Intelligent SIP will be particularly suited to businesses using UC and contact centres with high usage of voice communications across global sites.

He added: "Intelligent SIP is aimed to help businesses that want to expand into overseas markets and require fully managed, cost-effective global communications with a focus on Quality of Experience."

Opengear inks double distie deals

OPENGEAR has strengthened its distribution in UK&I with a double deal, signing up MB Technology and Memory Bank.

Opengear is a provider of infrastructure management solutions and its link-up with MB Technology gives it access to a number of top ranking VARs.

The Manchester-based distributor offers channel services

including deal registration programmes, product demonstrations, evaluation programmes and vendor support.

Opengear's deal with Memory Bank, which is connected to MB Technology, enables it to address the Irish market.

"MB Technology and Memory Bank have a sound understanding of infrastructure

management technologies, and they know how to put these solutions together and the verticals they fit into," stated Derek Watkins, VP of Sales EMEA & India for Opengear.

Andy Kelly, Director at MB Technology, commented: "Opengear is developing reseller tools to on-board, educate and nurture each business."



HATS off to Utilize for scooping the Best Marketing Campaign at the European Business Excellence Awards. The company also featured as a finalist in the Best Company Culture and CEO of the Year categories. Warren Davies, founder and

MD of Utilize, said: "Our DNA for Success has been written by our people and sets out the reasons we want to grow, how we can achieve this growth, our vision, our values and our culture. The continued support of our team helps us to promote an open, honest and transparent environment. This ensures that Utilize has an innovative and intuitive attitude, where everything is achievable."

SHORT CALL

Midwich has listed on AIM with a market capitalisation of circa £165.3m on admission. The proceeds will go towards paying down debt, repaying shareholder loans and funding the final cash consideration relating to the acquisition of Kern & Stelly. "This will enhance Midwich's competitive position as an AV and document solutions distributor," stated MD Stephen Fenby.

Zen Elevates billing capabilities

ZEN Internet has opted for Strategic Imperatives' Elevate billing platform as a springboard for the ISPs next phase of growth.

Chris Platt, Head of Systems at Zen Internet, said: "Billing is a strategic service that our business depends on.

"We performed penetration and vulnerability testing on Elevate, and the system is intuitive and user friendly. Elevate's SaaS nature meant that a pre-configured version of the service was up and running quickly



Chris Platt

and we were able to process the first live bill run within days."

Strategic Imperatives Head of Business Development Tim



Tim Sayer

Sayer added: "Elevate leverages Amazon's AWS to keep the infrastructure highly scalable and cloud-based, giving Elevate

an 'elastic' capability while allowing it to work in real-time, responding instantly to changes in customer and pricing data, immediately recalculating, and giving Zen constant oversight of its business performance.

"Our two-factor authentication and finance industry level encryption ensures total security for Zen and its customers.

"Zen can now plot its commercial roadmap using Elevate's time-based capability, enabling it to plan, deploy and test future propositions in real-time."



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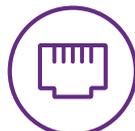
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Abzorb adds PBX support

ABZORB has bundled a PBX maintenance service with its UC and mobility portfolio following a link-up with maintenance partner CSR.

Called PBX Cover, the white label service will be officially launched at Comms Dealer's MiVAD event on June 9th.

The end-to-end service combines PBX system maintenance cover (99% of systems are supported), smartphone systems (Mitel Office 400) and the Money Box SIP gateway which enables SIP to be deployed on legacy PBXs.

According to Abzorb, the proposition unlocks the potential for resellers to upgrade legacy kit with next generation products and services and further lock-in customers with a maintenance offering.

The 24/7 maintenance and support service includes all fixed handsets as standard, response within one hour to all faults, quotes raised within eight hours, nationwide coverage, and resellers could earn up to 40% margin on Abzorb's annual pricing. PBX Cover offers pre-sales and training via the Abzorbplus partner programme.

"With our smartphone systems, services such as SIP



Mark Riddell

and hosted telephony can be accessed without the traditional stumbling blocks often encountered," said Mark Riddell, Head of Indirect Channel.

"PBX maintenance adds value and helps to strengthen loyalty on PSTN, CPS and SIP connectivity, while generating ongoing annuity revenue from maintenance and updates."

Abzorb's long-term partner BT Wholesale predicts greater uptake of its hosted Centrex and Wholesale SIP propositions as a result of resellers adopting PBX Cover.

Dave Axam, Director of Hosted Communications at BT Wholesale, commented: "By adding its PBX Cover service, Abzorb is able to deliver a complete end-to-end solution including configuration, installation and support."

TeleWare enhances SfB ability

TELEWARE has augmented its Skype for Business proposition with the addition of compliant voice recording, IVR and enterprise class voicemail.

"This functionality can help organisations to increase productivity, support training, improve governance and help meet regulatory requirements, while also providing much needed differentiation for Microsoft resellers," stated CEO Steve Haworth.

TeleWare's status as a key Microsoft partner is such that it was awarded the Gold Partner Communications designation, putting it in the top 1% of Microsoft's partners in a global network of 430,000. TeleWare also achieved its first £1m revenue month this year.

Haworth said: "TeleWare has a history of developing partnerships with key communications technology businesses. And we believe that by focusing on R&D to foster the creativity that delivers innovative products, we can help our partners to create the differentiation they need to create growth and drive real value for their clients."

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Data pushes TTB revenue

TALKTALK Telecom's full year results (12 months to 31st March 2016) saw EBITDA come in at £260m with TalkTalk Business revenues accounting for 30% of the Group, growing by over 5% year-on-year.

The on-net wholesale base, comprising the retail customers of businesses such as the Post Office and Utility Warehouse, grew year-on-year, as did TalkTalk Business' direct channel on-net base.

TalkTalk Business has also seen demand for data services continue to rise, with over 9,000 new high speed data lines connected and a strong pipeline of orders for the end of the year, up 23.7% year-on-year. High speed data now accounts for



Charles Bligh

31% of the Group's corporate revenue, offsetting a decline in voice revenues (-16.2%).

TalkTalk Business MD Charles Bligh said: "We expect to see this growth continue as we focus on strengthening our next generation network and delivering new services such as MyNet, SIP and UC to our partners and direct customers."



Kids hospital gets free Wi-Fi

DUBLIN'S Temple Street Children's University Hospital has been fitted out with free public Wi-Fi following a collaboration between wireless network provider Xirrus and Irish telco eir.

The Victorian hospital, which cares for 145,000 children per year, presented challenges during the implementation with due consideration given to the historical status of the building.

Shane Buckley, CEO of Xirrus, commented: "There can be no higher priority for Xirrus



than to provide reliable and safe Internet access to sick children and their parents in a hospital environment. In partnership with eir, we had the combined

experience, technical expertise and appropriate Wi-Fi solution to connect patients and their families to a fast, reliable and secure Wi-Fi network."

The project included components such as a 200Mb ultra-fast broadband connection and a content filtering solution.

The network installation includes Advantage Wi-Fi cloud management and application control to ensure that the hospital can manage network accessibility, as well as content filtering, security and controls.

OPENREACH customer service engineer Alex Lacey came to the aid of an injured runner 24 miles into this year's London Marathon and carried him to the finish line. Lacey overheard St John Ambulance volunteers tell the lame runner he wouldn't qualify for his medal if they gave him first aid and he didn't finish.

"I saw this man holding the barrier with his eyes rolled up and legs like jelly," said Lacey. "I carried him to mile 26 where two other runners helped me lift the man over the finish line. He was then taken away for treatment by a St John Ambulance team."

"As we went down the Mall the crowds were going crazy and willing us to get there. That moment will stay with me for the rest of my life. It would be devastating to get to mile 24 and not complete the race. I couldn't see that happen."

Lacey was running in memory of his late father who died of cancer, raising £4k-plus for the ClíC Sargent children's cancer charity. He hopes to identify the man he helped via social media.

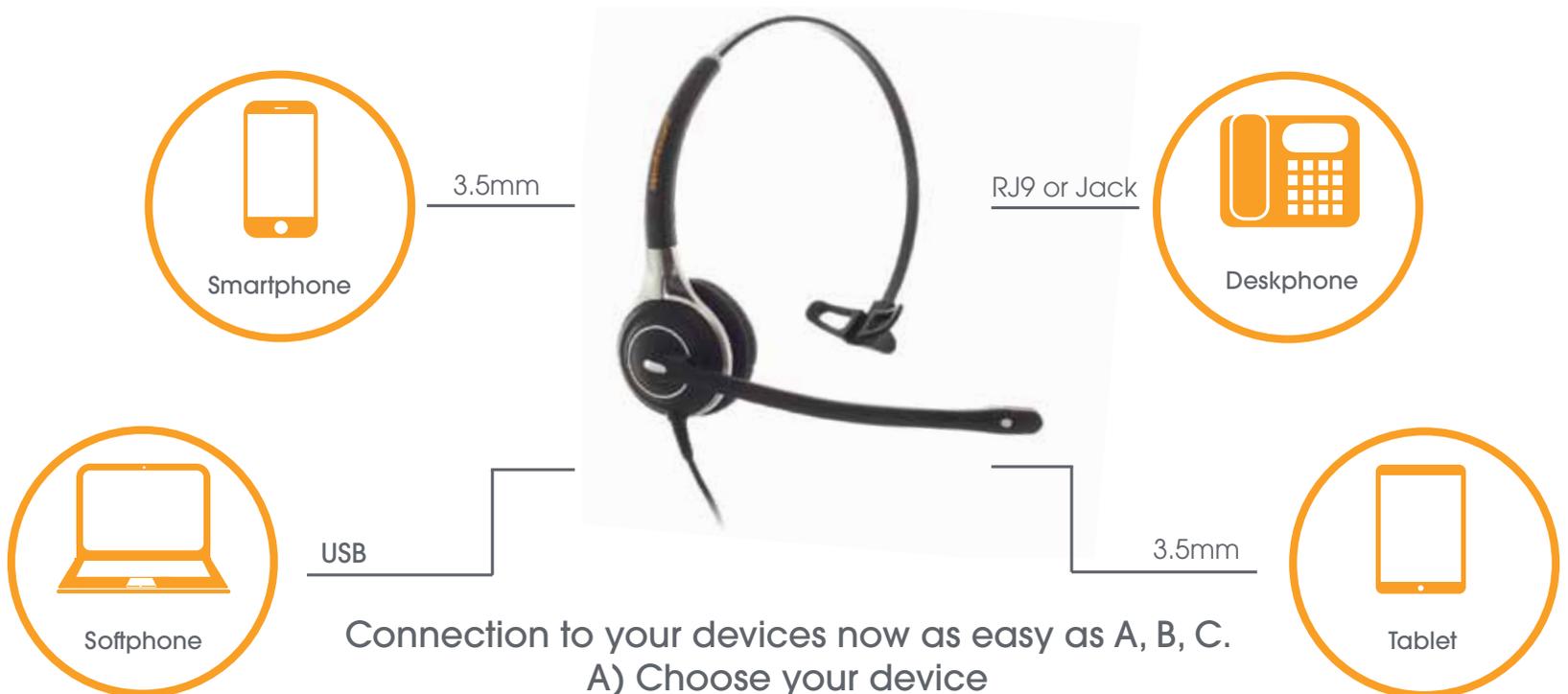


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Challenge to Ofcom plans

A COALITION of comms industry leaders have presented an open letter to Ofcom CEO Sharon White outlining a 10-point plan to reform BT's Openreach subsidiary.

The coalition comprises industry heavyweights Jeremy Darroch, Group CEO, Sky; Dido Harding, CEO, TalkTalk; Jeroen Hoencamp, CEO, Vodafone UK; Malcolm Corbett, CEO, Independent Networks Cooperative Association; and FCS CEO Chris Pateman.

Their plan focuses on three main areas of development – reforming Openreach's governance so that it can act independently; giving Openreach the tools it needs to function as a world-leading network operator; and creating an Openreach that delivers for all of its customers on an equal basis.

Pateman said: "We believe it's vital that the people who decide what 'good' looks like should be Openreach's customers. FCS was disappointed Ofcom's review of digital communications stopped short of recommending the complete structural separation of Openreach from the BT Group.

"Ofcom believes that improvements can be delivered

without the hassle and delays of a full separation, but our 10 point plan represents the industry's proposals on how this can be accomplished swiftly and cost-effectively, using well-proven corporate governance principles that can be benchmarked against experience from other regulated utilities.

"We are throwing down a challenge to Ofcom, Openreach and the industry to work together to shape the future for the good of all market players and all customers."

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

SHORT CALLS

An EMEA partnership between Enghouse Interactive and Microsoft Skype for Business specialist MeetingZone has extended the geographical reach of Enghouse's contact centre applications, including its EI Communications Centre platform.

Ridgeway Telecom has donated a Samsung OfficeServ 7100 system to the charity Against Breast Cancer. The system was supplied and installed free of charge and involved upgrading analogue lines to ISDN 2. Ridgeway Telecom has been working with the Abingdon-based charity since 2010.



PEBBLETREE marked its 10th anniversary by filling a retro phone box with balls of varying sizes and launching a competition to guess the number. Contestants entered via Pebbletree's website and Pebbletree customer Richard Pierpoint scooped the 13 night luxury cruise prize following an inspired punt.

Pierpoint, Director of FlexiSail, a boat and yacht sharing business based in Lymington, stated: "I thought there might be around 4,000 balls, but seeing that there were balls of different sizes it was anyone's guess. Looking down at my keyboard, 4,321 came easily to my fingertips and just made sense. They say that your first hunch is often right!"

Pierpoint and his wife Sue will sail from Southampton to Spain and the Canary Islands aboard Celebrity Cruises' Eclipse ship in October 2016, having beaten off 1,500 entrants.

Janni Thornton, MD and co-founder of Pebbletree, said: "We wanted to splash out for our 10th anniversary. After all, without our customers we wouldn't have made it this far, so a big prize such as the cruise just made sense to us."



NIMANS has extended its own staff training programme and launched a Training Academy for resellers who want their staff to undertake a foundation course for telecoms.

The Basic Telephony course is designed for comms novices and includes information on telephony, mobile networking, IT services, convergence, UC and VoIP. The first one day session was attended by 12 people from seven reseller companies. Nimans' Learning & Development Officer, Matthew Broadbent, stated: "Resellers found the course useful and it will be the first of many. We are looking to expand into other areas such as sales and management training."

SHORT CALL

Gains made in Europe by Agilitas have earned it 45th place in the Sunday Times Heathrow SME Export Track 100 league table, which ranks the top 100 private SMEs with the fastest growing international sales over the last two years. Richard Egton, Marketing Director, said: "We've replicated our Inventory-as-a-service support model across mainland Europe, and this listing is a testament to these new capabilities."

24 Seven's new connection

LEEDS-based 24 Seven is providing connectivity for the M2M and IoT market having linked up with the main networks and leveraging its own national roaming solution.

24 Seven, the company behind the national roaming SIM called Jump, has also worked on developing national roaming as an M2M service, offering businesses a more versatile experience, especially for devices that are on the move and can dip in and out of coverage, according to the firm.

David Samuel, MD, commented: "M2M isn't a new technology, but it's now vital. Once it was the preserve of high value tracking services, but now we're entering a new era in which everybody can benefit from improved connectivity.

"Having developed our own multi-network solution and secured contracts with all of the major networks, we can provide the right solution.

"These services are becoming business critical, and we're ensuring that businesses

remain connected by providing bespoke, resilient communications with a commercial offering to match."

24 Seven's new M2M solutions are targeted at a number of diverse sectors and industries such as the emergency services, security and biometrics, taxi food services and logistics.

"With its diverse benefits M2M solutions are helping end-users to become more efficient in all aspects of business. The technology is here to stay," added Samuel.

SHORT CALL

3CX's PBX has been natively integrated with Exact Cloud Solutions. The plugin automatically opens the contact record and, if the number is not recognised, creates a new contact. It also logs the call and opens an activity box specific to the caller so users can take notes when the call ends. 3CX CEO Nick Galea said: "Out-of-the-box integrations with CRM systems such as Exact give businesses a boost in productivity."



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Semafone in Maintel link

MAINTEL is to offer a solution that removes most of the cost and complexity associated with Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI DSS) when payments are taken over the phone.

The managed services provider has partnered with Semafone, the developer of secure payment software for contact centres, retailers and merchants that take Cardholder Not Present (CNP) payments.

In practice, customers type their own card details directly into a telephone handset, meaning that no card information is seen or heard by the contact centre agent, nor does it enter the merchant's physical or virtual data environment.

It is claimed that Semafone's technology can reduce the number of required compliance controls by up to 95%.

Maintel is offering Semafone's dual-tone multi-frequency (DTMF) masking technology, either hosted in the cloud as part of its SIP trunk offering, or installed within the customer's own environment.

Eddie Buxton, CEO of Maintel Group, said: "In taking advantage of Semafone's pat-



Eddie Buxton

ented payment method we'll be able to ensure our partners are protecting their customers' data while meeting stringent compliance criteria."

Tim Critchley, CEO of Semafone, added: "PCI compliance has always been a critical concern for those businesses that take card payments. This is even more true today as we face increasing numbers of data breaches and the looming EU data protection regulations."

The fines for non-compliance are significant. Depending on the severity of the breach, EU data protection regulations stipulate that fines could be up to 4% of an organisation's annual worldwide turnover or 20m euros, whichever is greater.

Channel's energised by power

FIDELITY Energy has secured its 50th partner contract in the comms channel just six months after launching at Comms Vision last November.

Headed up by former Gamma sales chief John Haw, Fidelity Energy is helping to transform comms and IT resellers into utility providers by simplifying the supply of energy services and maximising on the close customer relationships they already have.

"Partner customers are crying out for someone to help them with their energy spends," said Haw. "We are now seeing real traction. Our new portal enables resellers to write business even if a customer has an energy contract in place, and the fact they can earn revenue share upfront is a bonus."

Haw claims resellers can be earning high margin deals from energy within a month.

"With our portal development, CRM systems and breadth of supplier contracts we have an 18 month lead on any other company entering this space," commented Haw.

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SHORT CALL

Marketing agency
Blabbermouth has appointed Cath MacLeod and Leticia Fonseca as Marketing Account Managers and Rico Green as Marketing Administrator. "These high calibre appointments demonstrate ongoing investment in our team," said MD Elizabeth Sparrow. MacLeod brings significant B2B and B2C marketing experience while Fonseca joins from BT Wholesale where she was Marketing Manager.



CHESS has bolstered its ICT, network and mobile capabilities following the acquisition of Pinnacle CDT from Pinnacle Technology Group. The deal pushes up Chess's headcount to 500-plus and adds 1,000 customers. Chess CEO David Pollock said: "The acquisition is another important step on our growth journey. The people of Pinnacle CDT share our passion for delivering technological advantage to customers." Richard Btsh, Director of Chess, added: "Our acquisition machine is primed to take advantage of the consolidation of customers and relationships."



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Investments to aid distie growth plan

DISTRIBUTOR Exertis, the trading name of DCC Technology, suffered a near 30% drop in operating profit compared to the previous year, according to its 2016 financial year results ended March 31st.

UK losses accounted for most of the dip. But for the rest of the DCC businesses, which are not short of cash, the time is right to invest in new systems and grow organically and through acquisition.

The balance sheet for the group is strong, giving the company the wherewithal to pick up other businesses across Europe.

The year saw overall growth of 35.5% in Group operating profit to £300.5m, driven in particular by the performance of DCC Energy.

But DCC Technology (the Exertis business) saw sales fall to £35.1m from £49.3m, making for a 'very difficult year'.

The UK business, which accounted for 72% of the revenue of the division, found it tough particularly in the first half of the year, with weaker than anticipated demand for tablet computing, smartphone and gaming products.

These factors contributed to a like-for-like sales decline of 7%. Although the business achieved growth in other areas such as audio visual and components, the change in product mix, together with the effects of negative operating leverage, contributed to a reduction in operating margin in the UK.

A new UK distribution centre will come on stream in the next year, adding capacity and efficiencies. This is what vendors are asking for, pointed out Niall Ennis, MD of DCC Technology and Group MD of Exertis, also noting that Exertis has been behind the market in its e-commerce operations.

In response to the challenging trading conditions in the UK the business has reduced its cost



Niall Ennis

base and is continuing to build its market position in new and developing product categories such as smart technology, audio visual, network security and virtual reality.

DCC Technology's operations in Ireland achieved strong growth and benefited from improved demand across a number of product segments, reflecting progressive business development and the continued recovery of the Irish economy.

The Continental European business also achieved growth,

reflecting strong organic expansion in the Nordics and Benelux, offsetting weaker demand in the French market.

The business also added, in the final quarter, the specialist CUC, which has performed 'in line with expectations'. The acquisition of CUC has brought expertise in cabling and connector products and also significantly broadened the customer base of the Continental European business.

According to Ennis the organisation's strategy is not 'one size fits all', and he is looking at emerging areas such as smart-tech, AV and more B2B products, as well as implementing a new ERP system.

He aims at using the new systems and capacity to build supply chain services, offering rapid time to market and demand generation for vendors, coupled with flexibility and speed of reaction.

By offering fulfilment and a service direct to customers, 'we aim to be an excellent partner for vendors', stated Ennis.

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

Zest4 rolls out M2M channel programme

UC PROVIDER Zest4 has launched an M2M Partner Programme following its link-up with Arkessa late last year.

The new programme was unveiled at a Chester Races launch event and is designed to help partners fully address the growth opportunity in M2M and IoT services.

The package delivers education and technical support, training through the Zest4 Partner Academy, marketing support, optimised tariffs and competitive commercials.

At the launch event Zest4 highlighted opportunities in the taxi, public Wi-Fi, construction and logistics sectors.

"Many partners are now seriously considering taking their first step into the M2M arena," said Mandy Fazelynia, Zest4's Operations and Business Development Director.

"The M2M package that ourselves and Arkessa have made available to partners will help them unlock new revenue opportunities both now and for the future."

6DG pledges to 'give back'

SIX Degrees Group (6DG) employees have been given the opportunity to get involved with local community projects and gain volunteer experience during their working hours as part of the company's new Giving Back Scheme.

The company has pledged to 'give back' the equivalent of a 6DG employee's full working year to local communities, equating to 260 days. Every member of staff will have the opportunity to apply for a full or half days 'community leave' each year.

6DG is encouraging all staff to get involved in the local community and volunteering opportunities with their own choice of preferred charities.

Susanna Brown, Director of HR, commented: "In addition to giving valuable time and support to those in our communities who need it most, we recognise that participating in such activities can also help play an important role in employees'



Susanna Brown

individual personal development. At 6DG, we are eager for our employees to get the most out of working life."

The Giving Back initiative will run alongside 6DG's CSR programme, Six Degrees of Hope, through which employees raise money for WeSeeHope.

6DG has supported the charity since the company was founded, fundraising through a number of annual events and individual challenges.



AUDIO conferencing firm Konftel rolled out the red carpet as a 'thank you' to key business partners for helping to drive sales towards potentially record breaking trading. Representatives from Exertis and Trust Distribution joined global counterparts for the three day gathering in the Swedish wonderland of Saxnas where over 50 guests were treated to snow mobile rides through forests, lakes and mountains. The conference provided insights into Konftel's roadmap, upcoming product launches and business strategies.

Konftel's Regional Sales Director Jeff May commented: "With a series of new product developments in the pipeline this year is destined to become one of our most successful trading periods ever."

"We are already witnessing growth triple the industry norm and the five star trip was our way of saying thank you to our most prestigious business partners. With sumptuous dinners, an awards ceremony, hot tubs and axe throwing it was a trip to remember, mixing business with lots of fun and laughter."

Initiative to create more sales ability

COMMS and IT marketing specialist Blabbermouth has rolled out a 'Transformation Initiative' designed to optimise the sales and marketing performance of businesses in the channel.

Blabbermouth's MD Elizabeth Sparrow said the initiative responds to a lack of integration between the sales and marketing functions of many businesses, stunting their ability to realise their full selling potential.

To put things right, Sparrow said Blabbermouth's business transformation process begins with a company health check, strategic planning, discussions about the true nature of a company, its identity, growth ambitions and long-term goals.

"We then put in place a joined up marketing campaign to deliver new opportunities," she explained.

"But this is only part of the solution. No department should operate in isolation, especially sales and marketing which go hand in hand."

Blabbermouth plans to position businesses for growth by preparing them for seamless customer acquisition, and the man at the centre of the company's new campaign is incoming consultant David Sparrow who joins from TalkTalk Business where he was Head of Corporate and Enterprise Sales and played



Elizabeth Sparrow

a leading part in the creation of this high performing division.

Previous roles include notable stints at reseller Freedom Communications, Virgin Media and T-Mobile.

His main purpose is to help sales and marketing leaders escape from the straitjacket of siloed working by creating more scope for professional chemistry between departments.

"Business assessments can often be complex and sensitive," he commented. "But we provide a tactful and uncomplicated review of capabilities, processes, structures and strategies within the sales department before establishing best practices and integrating these with the marketing effort."

"Our aim is to assist a variety of businesses with their growth plans and help them unlock new market potential and large flag-ship opportunities."

"The best businesses are those rooted not in a fractured departmental mode of operation but in a unified framework based on joint targets, measurements and processes that maximise on the benefits of sales and marketing integration."

Blabbermouth's auditing and assessment know-how also enables it to report back on the complete customer journey.



David Sparrow

Revenues driven by the cloud

HOT demand for cloud services drove a 27% increase in Exponential-e's total revenue for the year ending 31st January 2016. Revenues reached £77.3m and EBITDA rose by over 35% to £13.8m with pre-tax profits up 47% to £6.7m.

Underpinning this growth was strong customer acquisition with a 35% rise in new business sales for cloud services.

"Over the last year we have enjoyed particular success in targeting the C-level community," stated CEO Lee Wade. "The security offered with our private cloud network has been adopted by many clients in sectors such as legal, finance and media, that have some of the most stringent privacy, compliance and security requirements."

Exponential-e is transitioning its business into a global IT brand and will focus on its core network and platform stack, investing in automation – SDN (Software Defined Network) and NFV (Network Function Virtualisation) – to drive a better customer experience and enable organisations to scale and deliver services more quickly.

"We will be looking for opportunities to build our capabilities in data centric services, machine learning and proof of concepts for artificial intelligence," said Wade.

Exponential-e is aiming for 23% growth in its next financial year and will recruit an additional 60 staff. Last year staff numbers increased by 20%.



Lee Wade



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Tuffs forges new channel

Unify's accelerating channel-centric journey is on track and building a powerful head of steam, according to Barry Tuffs, VP Channel Sales UK&I.

Fuelled by his strategic leadership and professional experience Tuffs's bid to drive Unify towards greater channel-centricity is gathering momentum. He was appointed to the role of UK&I channel chief in January, and as the new man at the centre of the vendor's partner growth campaign he brings 25-plus years telecoms experience in direct and indirect sales and management, joining from Avaya where he held a number of positions including Director of the UK&I channel team. He also played a lead role in introducing the iConnect Programme which steered Avaya into the mid-market sector. Prior jobs include stints at Cable&Wireless, Telewest and Nortel. Tuffs also spent three and a half years running his own business, Wire Solutions which traded as a BT Local Business. Not bad for someone who 'stumbled' into the comms industry.

Now Tuffs has hurled himself into the task of realising Unify's channel-centric vision sooner rather than later. "This is the core of our growth strategy, as well as moving up the market segmentation ladder and increasing partner capacity," he stated. "This involves the whole organisation – from sales to developing tools, processes and streamlining

education. To match our growth, evolution has to be rapid. This means we must grow our partner community. During the last year we have on-boarded 69 partners but we need more to take advantage of the opportunity in the mid-market as well as the general move to cloud."

Unify's (the vendor is now known as the Atos brand for comms software and services following its acquisition in November 2015) strong heritage attracted Tuffs to the company while its portfolio and strategic direction 'suited him to the ground'. "This was everything I was looking for in a role," he explained. "I now see five main priorities for myself – creating a balanced partner landscape, accelerating partners' move to cloud, monetising the legacy Unify base, defining and implementing a channel-centric model for the UK go-to-market and driving a sales-led approach to the channel. With the last point, the main challenge is the shift from direct to channel as a business model, but the others are simply about execution and getting trust from the partners."

Tuffs is aiming to show true leadership and inspire the people around him with actions as well as words. "The only way to do this is to do and show, not tell," he added. "I invest



We've got the vision, now it's a question of execution

Barry Tuffs

time in our people, coach them every day and ensure I recognise great behaviour. It is important to promote a tight-knit atmosphere and interact with people in a personal, one-to-one manner. Your direction and strategy should also be clear to those working for you, but

you must be able to break it down into achievable, bite size objectives. When I joined Unify I needed to set the direction and stop bad behaviour. This meant I had to be specific on the short-term actions I required. In any organisation there will always be some resistance

to change. But the majority of the time this arises from a lack of understanding and can be resolved by talking to individuals."

To facilitate rapid growth there is a need for clearly defined processes, which Tuffs has already put in

l-centric course

place. His current challenge is putting together a transparent set of 'Rules of Engagement' for both Unify and its partners. "While we are making great progress with this, ensuring that it reflects all sides can be a time-consuming process," he commented. "This is crucial because changes in the voice vendor market mean that it is a hugely exciting and important time for growth for us. The market is fluid with partners looking for a way to consolidate portfolios and become more cost-efficient."

Transformational times

In the lead up to the current inter-company developments introduced by Tuffs there have been three main changes in the Unify business over the past two-three years. The first is its move to a global channel-centric model that has led to over 55 per cent of Unify's revenue coming from the channel. Secondly, there has been the transition from hardware to software. This takes time to develop as finding the appropriate licensing models and tools to support a pay-as-you-go model can be difficult for a traditional vendor. Finally, a big change has been the move from a direct sales force to a high touch model. This is fundamentally different and new behaviours are required of sales teams and partners to meet end user needs.

"The customer, depending on the market sector, will demand that their IT or comms providers have the capability to provide services and support to all areas of their business," added Tuffs. "This should be achieved through a flexible and secure opex model. The partner community will

need to decide on their core competency offering while building a value added proposition for customers. The traditional PBX VAR will be less important to the customer as the IT, data and storage channels evolve to adopt UC and voice-centric skills. Niche VARs will always have a place because they are seen as experts in their field."

One of Tuffs's top priorities is to increase market share in SMEs. Alongside this, he wants to move further into mid-market and low-end enterprises, all while focusing on Unify's key public sector verticals. "We also want to leverage Atos' sales and services line of business to increase penetration into its managed accounts," explained Tuffs. "This will be done through increasing channel capacity and capability, transforming into a high touch sales team, adopting a sales led approach with our partners and focusing on business outcomes. Finally, we want to take advantage of the Unify portfolio, including Circuit which is a differentiator."

In terms of his background, Tuffs is firmly routed in the channel having run channel programmes for vendors, worked for a channel partner and also owned one. "This has given me an insight into the market from all angles, allowing me to understand what is required to drive growth and loyalty," he stated. "We have got the vision, now it is a question of execution. In three years time Unify will have a balanced and motivated channel delivering over 75 per cent of Unify's UK revenue. Having presented our strategy and roadmaps to our local partners in May 2016's UK

Partner Forum, I am more confident than ever that we will achieve this. The partners we currently have are excited and energised and this excitement will carry to new relationships. We have laid the groundwork, but it is a strong and motivated partner network that will be the true vehicle to growth." ■

Just a minute with Barry Tuffs...

Role model: My wife Jane. Her drive, energy and commitment to the business she runs is unbelievable. We constantly help one another to achieve our goals and we make a great team

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I have a milestone birthday this year and have set myself 12 monthly challenges based on what I have always wanted to do but not made the time. For example, sky-diving, learning to ride a motorbike and camping in the desert

What talent do you wish you had? To sing

Comms industry bugbear: The UK still has a great deal of postcode lottery with certain areas deprived of superfast broadband speeds. This affects millions of people

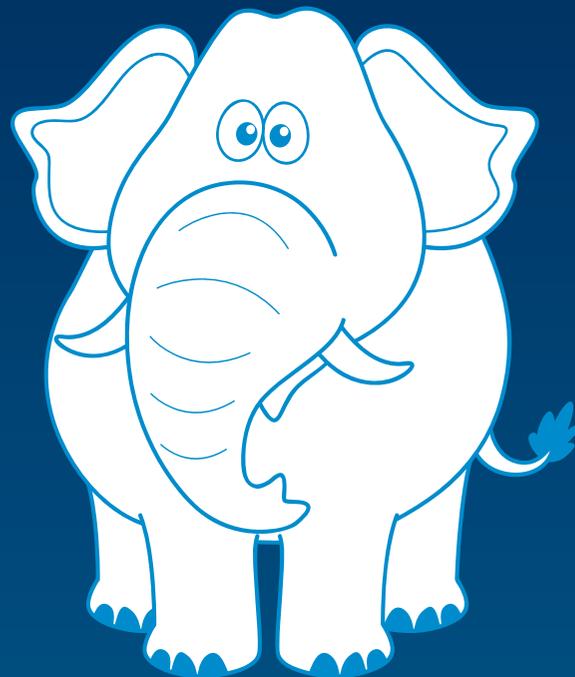
What do you fear the most? Rats

Something you have overcome: Spiral staircases

Top tip for resellers: When you have sold a solution or service to a customer always get in touch with them afterwards. You should check whether it had the desired business outcome, whether it had a positive financial impact and if it drove a key company objective



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Time to go 'UCeamless'

Each of UC's incarnations have been stepping stones towards the 'third phase of convergence', according to Six Degrees Group's (6DG) Strategy and Marketing Director Campbell Williams, who says it's high time we all went 'UCeamless'.

The traditional language of Unified Communications signifies an environment where users collaborate on any device, any where. But the shift away from this application-centric realm of communications towards a more platform-centric one indicates a trend towards greater levels of integration as the technology blends invisibly into the background of everyday corporate life, while collaborative outcomes move to the fore.

According to Williams, customer demand is driving this convergence of UC, a new incarnation of the category, where the channel delivers UC software on Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) cloud platforms. "Frost & Sullivan noted that the need to support a growing mobile workforce alongside the ability to gain faster access to advanced features and capabilities are a strong driver for the market," stated Williams. "Customer demand and feedback are now at the forefront of UC&C development."

The UC discussion has shifted more towards people and the human factor rather

than technology, device and location. This is a trend Williams has witnessed across ICT as a whole. "As customers insist on more from their technology, be that comms, compute, or cloud, IT has become more specialised and there has been an increase in demand for highly skilled people behind these systems," he stated. "ICT now needs people with specific and focused experience, especially in relation to cloud technologies.

"Businesses have experienced a shift in resources away from traditional IT teams, who as one IT leader put it, 'don't have the manpower to baby sit hardware any more'. This change means that IT teams need to understand both the scope for technology to deliver the infrastructure and services their business needs, and how to use it when it's in place. IT teams also need to translate business planning and strategic product and service objectives into real world delivery, and overcome long standing barriers between IT and business."

IT leaders also need to understand that UC is more about the technologies while collaboration signifies



Campbell Williams

the outcomes. "UC can do justice to the ongoing evolution of technology and services in the marketplace today," commented Williams. "However, to enhance customer services and business processes, collaboration is more important than all of the technologies available in the marketplace.

New era phases in

"I don't necessarily disagree with the premise that the industry has entered a post-UC era. I think of it as a third phase of comms convergence. Over the years the comms industry has seen

a huge number of changes. When VoIP emerged over 15 years ago, many industry players dismissed it as a fad. Now, we don't even know we are using integrated VoIP systems. This shows how far we have come.

"VoIP was followed by 'Voice over IT', which delivered PBXs using standard computer platforms. Despite the obvious appeal of this type of convergence many commentators were sceptical, arguing PBXs would always need turnkey hardware. Now, I believe we are entering a third phase where customer demand is at the

forefront and organisations look to converge their communications and deliver cloud-based UC software on IaaS platforms."

Successful UC players, noted Williams, display flexibility and shy away from selling off-the-shelf solutions. They differentiate themselves by adding customisation and building APIs into customers' key business systems. Because of this, Williams believes that the term 'UCeamless' is perhaps more suitable than plain UC.

"Traditional fixed line and IPT sellers will need to have a converged mobile strategy, and quickly," he added. "In the mid-market there has been a large focus on SIP and hosted IPX migration, but the mobile costs have always been associated with an independent mobile operator or service provider. The BT/EE tie up should, in time, start making more customers look to consolidate their mobile and voice to one supplier. So there is a great opportunity for the channel to increase the wallet share of their existing customer base.",

Following the recent launch of 6DG's UCaaS solution with Avaya, the company plans to bolster its proposition with the CCaaS (Contact Centre as a Service) and VaaS (Video as a Service) add-on applications. "These will increase the functionality of our UCaaS platform and enable customers to pick and choose from a wider range of features," commented Williams. "We also plan to invest in further expanding our international foot print, closely aligning the next phase of our UCaaS offering with the growth plans of our customer base." ■

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Speeding towards data

There was a time when Gamma just supplied voice services but the company now supports significant volumes of data connections and is driving the market for high speed connectivity, says Data Services Product Manager George Kinsella who outlines Gamma's channel strategy for converged voice and data.



George Kinsella

Gamma's move towards data reflects strong and widespread growth in the data services market driven by falling costs, wider coverage, faster speeds and shifts to the cloud. The market is also moving towards uncapped, fixed price services that offer businesses greater value for money and control over their costs. In response, Gamma has rationalised its broadband product portfolio to simplify the options available to partners, while offering unmetered options and reduced pricing.

"Gamma's data service initiatives are designed to reduce the cost of sales, simplify the sales and operational processes, as well as support the delivery of telephony services to resellers," stated Kinsella. "The continued transition of voice, IT and other content-rich services to the cloud will drive demand

for reliable, high speed connectivity to support business critical applications."

Superfast broadband and Ethernet play a key role as enablers for overlaying technologies such cloud, IT, voice and video. And the future promises even faster speeds, especially with the development of G.Fast operating at speeds of up to 1Gbps delivered over fibre to the customer's premises (for those lucky to be close enough to the cabinet).

Multiple apps

"This increased speed is essential for supporting the growing number of applications," added Kinsella. "Running multiple applications and business critical services over data connections is becoming a priority for businesses, and it's here that Ethernet is the answer, offering enhanced service levels and quicker fix times compared to lower value broadband services."

He noted that the Ethernet market is moving towards commoditisation, growing at a rate of 25 per cent per annum and supported by annual regulatory price reductions. "This has created a competitive marketplace that gives customers choice, as well as making the product affordable and available to a much greater number of businesses," commented Kinsella.

"Gamma recently passed down these reductions to channel partners and will support improved pricing through our long-term plans for Ethernet. These plans include an extension of our network. The initial build out is to 19 exchanges with an addressable business market of 38,000 postcodes in the metro London area. The long-term view is to potentially build out to other parts of the country and enable our channel partners to be as competitive as possible. Building out the

network means a reduction in supply chain overhead, more attractive prices and ultimately represents an improved delivery, support and commercial proposition to our channel partners."

The market is price-led with network aggregators offering customers a wide choice, but ultimately focusing on the cheapest price to differentiate, believes

Ethernet is the answer, offering enhanced service levels and quicker fix times

Kinsella. "We see the access as a means to an end for the delivery of Internet services, IP telephony or other value added services such as IaaS

or PaaS," he commented. "This creates not only value but a differentiator to those providing pure data. We have designed and built our network to not only carry the Internet access but also our own SIP trunking and hosted voice services."

Gamma adopted the same philosophy for its Converged Ethernet Services as it did for Converged Broadband with a single, resiliently designed and converged voice and data network, engineered to prioritise Gamma's SIP trunking and hosted voice proposition, called Horizon, which is a neat fit with the firm's MPLS-based Converged Private Networks (CPN) product. "The multi-site nature of both products come together to form a converged voice and data offering from a single accountable supplier," commented Kinsella.

"CPN is a natural extension of Gamma's existing connectivity portfolio, which is designed to connect single sites to high quality voice and high speed Internet over broadband and Ethernet. CPN extends these capabilities to privately connecting multiple sites. And with the ability to pull through existing voice incentives CPN increases the addressable market and margin opportunity for our channel partners selling voice and data solutions, enabling them to secure higher value and much stickier longer-term contracts.

"We believe Gamma's channel partners will now benefit from our reliable high speed services that are easy to sell and deliver more value without the hassle of download capacity limits." ■



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Seminar promises Capital advice for ambitious leaders

A 'must attend' event for ambitious comms and IT providers looking to grow their business will take place in London on June 28th. Organised by M&A advisors Evolution Capital and hosted by NatWest, the evening symposium will bring together a team of experts offering advice and knowledge regarding the types of funding available to business owners expanding their ICT business.

Summarising the event, Evolution Capital's M&A Advisor Simon Kelson told Comms Dealer magazine: "Directors of businesses in the TMT arena looking to grow or ultimately sell their business must get an understanding of the sources of capital available, the attributes of high growth enterprises, how to get fit for finance and how to develop a winning investment proposition. Our event will provide all the knowledge they need and give them an opportunity to meet debt and equity funders, network with like-minded peers and meet successful entrepreneurs who have experienced the pain and gain of business growth."

Included in a heavyweight line up of speakers at the 'Get Backed, Get Big, Get Bought' seminar will be NatWest's Ian Mason who will look at debt funding for high growth business; Hans Prottey from Coutts will discuss the process of gaining



Simon Kelson

high net worth investment; Chris Hodges from the Business Growth Fund will explore the process of Venture Capital investment; and Duncan Gregory from Evolution Capital will explain how businesses should go about developing a strategy for growth and provide tips for developing a successful investment proposition. Adept CEO Ian Fishwick will provide the buyer's prospective, explaining what they look for when making investments and what in particular they are prepared to pay a premium for.

Golden nuggets

"Aimed at business owners or leaders in the TMT sector with a turnover of between £5 million and £30 million, our seminar promises to provide real golden nuggets of information and advice

for ambitious channel players and we are expecting places to go fast," added Kelson.

Duncan Gregory, Director of Transaction Services at Evolution Capital, added: "We aim to raise advisory standards and the value of the sector, helping business owners achieve their dreams. We believe TMT business owners can achieve maximum value in company sale and M&A transactions when advised by a specialist firm with relevant industry experience, market knowledge and with a focus on project and advisory standards."

The event takes place at the RBS Conservatory, 250 Bishopsgate, London on June 28th. For more information visit www.evolutioncapital.com/register



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Dancy delivers growth

In his passion for giving customers what they really want and need, Steffan Dancy, Managing Director at Rydal Communications, has built an award winning business.

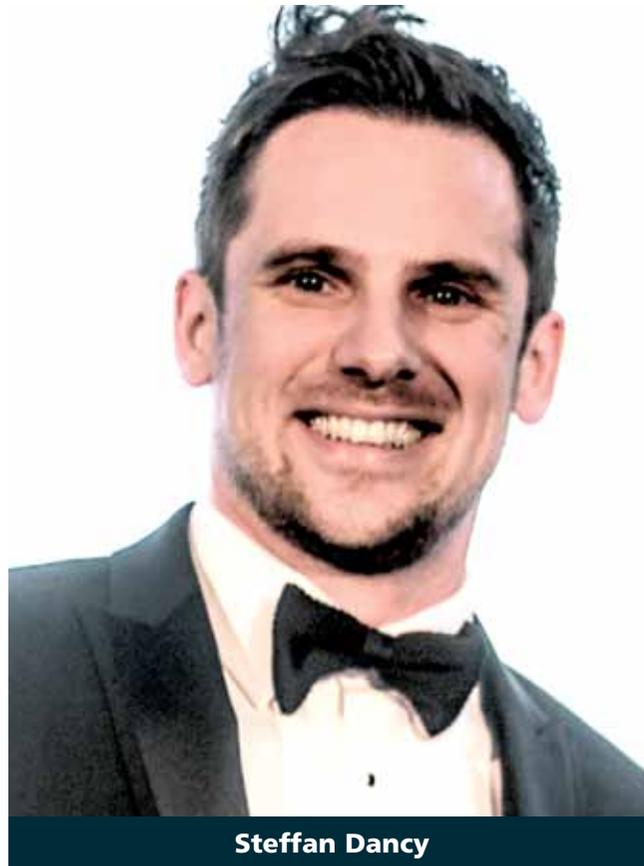
Dancy owes much of his business success to the attributes he acquired during a promising soccer career that was curtailed at the age of 23 following an injury. "This did, however, instil the ethos of winning, working as a team and delivering to the best of your ability, which today exudes through the Rydal Comms office," he said.

Dancy was first exposed to telecoms through an independent mobile airtime reseller, an acquaintance that inspired him to pursue a new opportunity. Rydal Communications was incorporated in 2008 and started trading in 2009 from a bedroom where Dancy ran the operation on his own. "After two years I decided that it was time to grow," he stated. "I moved to a small office and recruited Stephen Watkins who is our Operations Director and Mark Worraker our Sales Team Leader. As a team we were heavily focused around mobile, and in 2012 we embarked on the broadband, calls and lines and hosted system market."

Today, the company has a 23-strong headcount and is a

specialist at delivering unified solutions in accordance with its growth strategy. Another big turning point was gaining access to funds. "Once we understood where the market was going we invested money in expanding," noted Dancy. "This has heavily paid off and further re-investment from myself will come over the following months to position us for the next phase of growth. Our turnover run rate is currently £2.5 million, up from £1.78 million last year. We have consistently delivered year-on-year growth and our intention is to achieve £5 million turnover within the next three years and £10 million within five years."

An important part of Rydal Communications' business plan is its relationship with Ericsson-LG and Pragma. Rydal scooped their 2016 New Partner of the Year award in February in recognition of its sales and delivery success. Dancy credits Ericsson-LG's flagship products in registering high sales and he is already making inroads with the vendor's new cloud solution launched earlier this year. Rydal's target market is businesses with 10-250 extensions but it also boasts



Steffan Dancy

a handful of enterprise clients including Change. ORG, Multi-York Furniture store and a recent contract win from Deafblind UK.

Diversification

IT and energy also feature prominently in Dancy's longer-term plans. "We already offer elements of bespoke IT services but will have a sharper focus on these areas over the coming 12 months," he added. "The convergence of comms and IT is growing stronger. Our main priority is managing the fibre pipe that goes into the business and everything that sits on it, including IT. Further growth may come from acquisitions. However, this will happen when the right opportunity comes across our path."

Following a growth plan is not always plain sailing and Dancy's biggest challenge is ensuring that the business

has the right systems, processes and management structure in place to deliver sustainable growth. "Over the past 12 months we have focused on building the right team to implement our strategy," he said. "We have been, and still are, investing in our people with a key focus on training all of our staff, including the management team. Focusing on our people has resulted in a huge improvement in the business over the last year. Service delivery to our end users is better, slicker and more organised. In hindsight, I would have invested in the right CRM systems and built a support structure around our sales team earlier. Many small businesses make the same mistake of having sales people do far too much."

How best to manage workloads is a question Dancy himself was forced to address on a personal

level. "I used to work every hour under the sun, consistently 8am-8pm for three years and started to burn out," he commented. "Someone older and wiser told me to remember one thing in life, 'health before wealth, otherwise you spend your wealth getting your health back'. This really stuck with me and made me make changes to the hours I was working.

"I realised that to grow, I couldn't do it on my own. I needed to invest my time into others and allow them to spread their wings. Letting go of your business is hard to do, especially when you have built it up from nothing. For me it got to the point where I had no choice. Thanks to the people we have here it's been a blessing in disguise." ■

Just a minute with Steffan Dancy...

Role model: Sir Alex Ferguson: A true leader who got results from his team

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I trade stocks on the AIM/FTSE market

One thing you couldn't do without in your job: Partner incentives

Top tip: Have a plan, know your numbers and stick to it

Your greatest strength, and what could you work on? My greatest strength is my ability to spot an opportunity, and my biggest weakness is that I say what I think

How do you relax? In the gym or out running

Career high point: Winning the Pragma Ericsson-LG New Reseller of the Year Award



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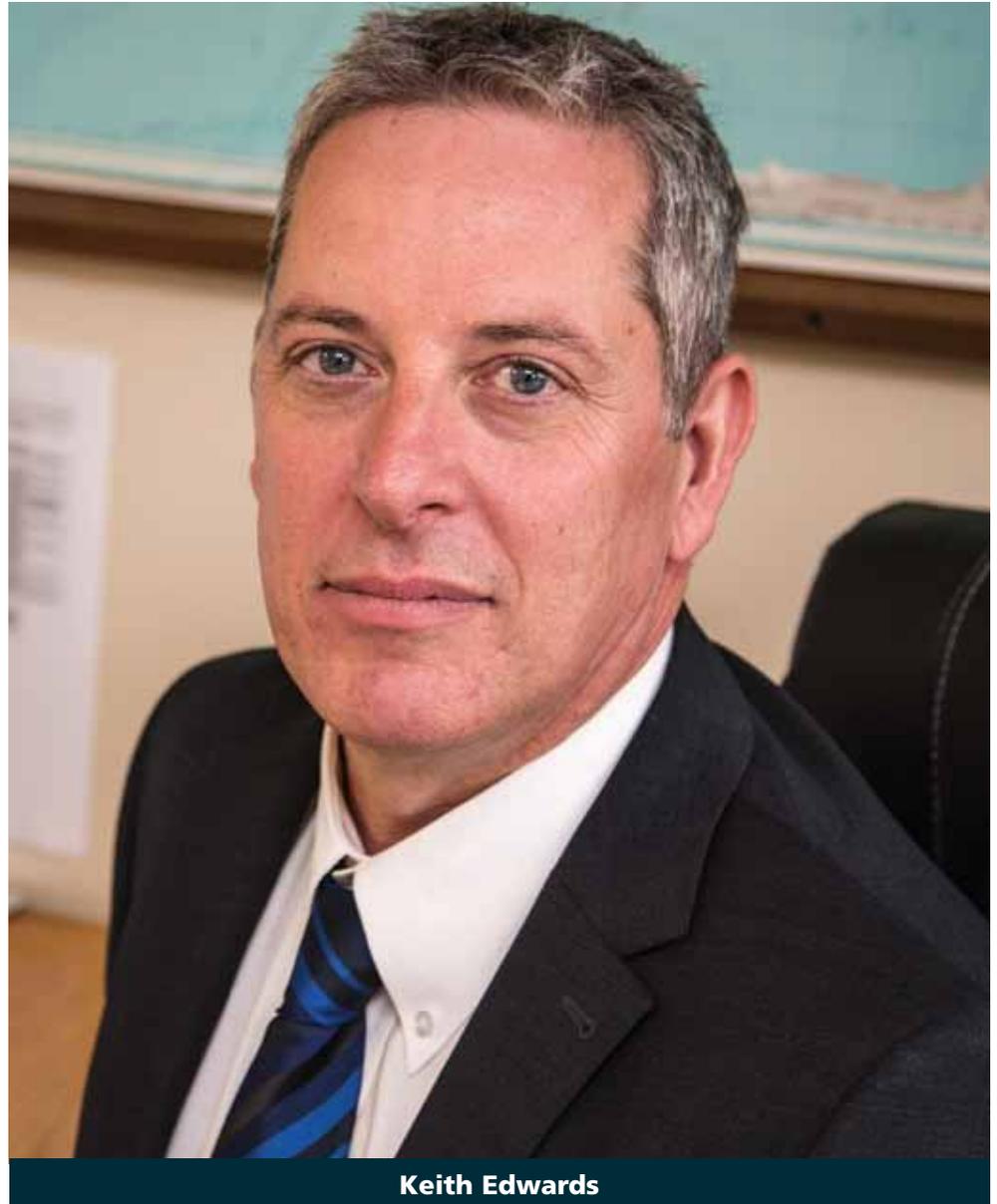
He's climbed a volcano to upgrade firmware, fled through jungle to escape a jaguar attack, and regularly finds himself in precisely the wrong place at the wrong time – welcome to the world of Keith Edwards, Managing Director of TES Wireless Communications.

Evading the close attention of big cats is not a regular must-do task, but the sense of job satisfaction and pride Edwards achieves, even under such extreme circumstances, is guaranteed every working day. And he is something of a conundrum: Risk averse, yet drawn towards danger and unpredictability. He's a dab hand at playing it safe, but also a lover of the wild oceans and their deep unknowns. All curiosities that can be traced back to when he first thought about a career pathway.

At the outset of his working life Edwards wanted to be a Radio Officer in the Merchant Navy. The job served two purposes – he wanted a role that carried zero risk of getting his hands dirty and a career that fuelled his love of the sea. "With so few jobs at sea I found the closest thing, working on naval communication systems for Marconi Communications," he said.

"Workshop life was great for a short while, but I wanted to be at the front end of radio systems so I became a field engineer for a national trunked radio network, National Band 3. This gave me an insight into system planning and the challenges of real RF issues to investigate and solve. Working remotely and on my own meant I had to be fully prepared before leaving for a hill top site, and I put every effort into resolving issues when on site. The Plan, Act, Check, Enable work ethos has stayed with me from those early days and remains as essential and useful as ever."

Although he sometimes finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time, Edwards's life story is just as much about being in the right place at an opportune moment. "In the early days we were lucky enough to be working with a local company, Fylde Microsystems in Blackpool, which had just designed the first commercially available trunked radio system," he



Keith Edwards

explained. "Our strengths in deploying systems to site and maintaining them established us as their global sales and support office. This gave us access to long-term UK and international clients. Fylde Microsystems was subsequently purchased by Sepura and we have established a strong relationship supporting its existing systems."

In the beginning

TES was formed in 1991 following a management buy out of the Communications and Engineering Services Department of North West

Water (now United Utilities). "We rented office space from North West Water and still looked after its regional multi-site radio system, and we were able to pick up commercially viable project work," noted Edwards.

"Due to organic growth in 1997 we moved to larger premises, increasing our workshop, storage and office space overnight. In our 25th year we still provide global support for radio systems, though the technologies we support now include MESH networks, DMR and TETRA digital radio and of course

analogue systems such as conventional and trunked."

With military precision Edwards has developed a structured business model with defined roles for each department, allowing the skills and strengths of staff to reach their full potential. This strategy has helped TES to generate impressive growth in turnover and profit during the last two years. Staff numbers have grown circa 15 per cent over the period, partly because the firm now undertakes all of its own climbing and rigging activities.

of a wireless trailblazer

"In most deployments a radio design is only as robust as the accuracy of its installation," commented Edwards.

"Hence, a move towards taking ownership of our core offering, from design to full on-site implementation, means that we not only reduce the risks we also maximise the peace of mind the client has from engaging the with TES brand."

Radio Frequency (RF) planning (the sums that make radio systems work) is often described as both an art and a science. "While the laws of physics can define RF behaviour in a given circumstance, each individual deployment can be greatly affected by the environment within which it is installed," explained Edwards. "For example, building materials, expanses of water and flora such as trees can all impact on radio performance. Modern radio systems involve a lot of IP configuration and set up, so a true troubleshooting radio expert needs a broad range of skills."

For many years TES has been known as a high tier systems designer, but recent investments in brand, buildings, equipment and staff have opened up broader sales opportunities which are reflected in a healthy order book. "TES clients generally seek a life-time solution," added Edwards. "This means we not only design, install and commission systems, we also maintain them. While we always see maintenance as planned preventative activities, our investment in core skills and knowledge means that we can easily demonstrate the ability to trouble shoot when needed. It is only by investment in

The broader roll out of Leased Line Killer is a priority. However, the main challenge is addressing perception

these skills that we are able to offer attractive SLAs for critical systems, such as a four-hour response."

Not surprisingly, TES has experienced a strong increase in maintenance business. Another area of growth that dovetails with TES' strengths is the provision of alternatives to leased lines. "Our recent offering of 'Leased Line Killer' brings together our RF planning, deployment, and maintenance skills," he explained. "TES has already undertaken numerous leased line replacement projects that have saved clients significant sums with paybacks over short periods. We see this as a significant growth area.

"The broader roll out of the Leased Line Killer is a priority. However, the main challenge is addressing perception. There is an established way of delivering this service and while a radio-based alternative offers significant cost savings and an equally, if not more, robust service, it is never easy to change an established way of thinking."

Point-to-point and point-to-multipoint links are the fastest growing market for

TES, with its one-stop-shop offering making it a credible and safe solution for link deployments. "Our services include, design, installation and commissioning, post deployment 24/7 support and preventative maintenance," added Edwards. "Along with all the back office services such as licence management, training, and project management."

Attaining the trinity of 9001 Quality Management, 18001 Health & Safety Management and 14001 Environmental Management certification with BSI has been essential for TES to demonstrate its commitment to a higher standard of operations, especially given the corporate nature of most of its clients, perhaps more so post-recession. "In the post 2008 world it is clear that businesses need to fully research and justify purchases," stated Edwards. "So TES has evolved its strategy to more clearly offer RoI information such as the tax implications of various ways of funding and more creative ways of achieving our client's objectives."

Growth strategies

For example, hire of radios and systems often proves to be a cost-effective solution for more budget sensitive clients. "We have seen strong hire business over the last couple of years," noted Edwards. "Another part of our growth strategy is to use our experience to focus on certain sectors including security, transport, financial, government and petrochemical. In 2016 we have already gained or delivered systems or contracts with First Manchester, Astra Zeneca, UBS AG, Blackpool Transport and BP."

Despite the risky situations Edwards sometimes runs up against in his day-to-day activities, TES has always been risk averse, following a strategy of organic growth rather than exceeding its ability to self-fund. "This may seem like the safe option but we are as stable and commercially strong as we have ever been," he said. "Our stability is the key to the long-term relationships we have with clients and suppliers. There is little point chasing turnover if it places your company and client relationships at risk. We also cherry pick our work, aiming at the blue chip market. This is why having the internationally recognised standards for management systems and stability is crucial and encourages referrals."

TES is large enough to have critical mass and target corporate clients, but retains the fleet-of-foot flexibility common to smaller firms. "We like the fact we know everybody's name, and we have, for the last 25 years, retained a homely culture," commented Edwards. "We are often described as an external in-house communications department. This only ever works with the strongest of professional skills and experience and a culture driven by honesty and integrity.

"I am lucky to be involved with a company where every day is different and I get to work with a varied client base. To choose one achievement above another is impossible. Every system deployed feels as good as the first one many years ago. On a personal level, it's the relationships with clients and suppliers that makes my job so much more enjoyable." ■

Just a minute with Keith Edwards...

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I was very shy as a child, always at the back of a crowd hiding

What talent do you wish you had? To play a musical instrument. As an RF engineer artistic creativity is not a strong point, so to produce something that doesn't involve calculations and specifications must be marvellous

Role model: My Gran. She taught me that what you put on the wheel of life will eventually come round and hit you on the back of the head. I have always been sure to treat people with respect, and in business to be honest, open and fair

What do you fear the most? Many people fear failure, but there is always something else to be good at

One example of something you have overcome: A debilitating fear of heights, so I undertook several extreme activities to face it head on, with positive results

What possession could you not live without? Memories are much more important, but I do like my own mug at work

Your greatest strength and what could you improve on? I understand people, which helps me when meeting new people or dealing with sensitive matters. But I get bored easily and pester those around me for entertainment

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? I would be at sea. I love its expanse and not knowing what's underneath and what it will throw at you

Bolderson's aiming high

Inspiration and self-belief have oiled the wheels of Kelly Bolderson's fast moving career. Here, the Managing Director of Glamorgan Telecom recalls how she spread her wings as a fledgling new starter and soared.

Bolderson started her career with Glamorgan Telecom at the age of 17 and diligently worked her way up through the company ranks into the position of Managing Director. Her first task on joining the firm was to put in place processes that allowed Glamorgan Telecom to scale its operations in telesales and telemarketing, customer support and project management. "Having experience in all areas of the company has allowed me to better manage the organisation in my current position," she explained. "I've streamlined each department and created a flatter, more dynamic business."

Glamorgan Telecom has been providing telephony solutions to the south Wales and south west business marketplace since 1993. The company was established by Neal Pughe, but after a recent MBO Glamorgan Telecom is now owned by majority shareholder Bolderson and fellow Director Mathew Evans. Glamorgan Telecom was established to supply, install and maintain comms systems for SMEs in its target regions of operation, and is now one of the main providers and installers of

business telecom lines and network services in the area. Glamorgan Telecom has also achieved the Platinum Enterprise Network Partner status from Samsung and is part of its 'team of empowered partners'.

Last year's MBO enabled Glamorgan Telecom to implement an ambitious growth strategy and diversify by offering customers a wider portfolio services. The company currently employees 40 people, and with a three-year expansion strategy under way Bolderson is looking to recruit an additional six employees in 2016, and is forecasting yearly growth of 35 per cent, increasing revenue by over £1 million year-on-year until 2018.

"Since 2010 our client base has grown by 22 per cent," she explained. "This has been achieved by a constant focus on customer services, a reduction in churn and a widening of our geographic territories. We have implemented a more personal and tailored approach for each of our clients, with improved customer support and better technology solutions to choose from, and we have made it easier for customers



Kelly Bolderson

to contact us for support. Businesses now expect faster troubleshooting support and we have made a number of changes to our processes to address these requirements."

Customer management

Examples of Bolderson's improved approach to managing customers include the introduction of an online help service for 24 hour support and an emergency engineering team that deals with serious technical issues outside of normal office opening hours. "But critically, it is about our staff," she emphasised. "Each member has a clear understanding of our values and is empowered to make the right decision

to support the customer. We believe that our success is in our people, and we nurture each employee to enable them to give their best."

The company's primary market focus is the SME to mid-market space, along with schools, healthcare, leisure, charity and institutional customers. "In the medium term we have targeted additional services that will enhance our position as a go-to regional business support group," commented Bolderson. "We constantly scour the market for innovation and listen to what our customers have to say. Their markets are continually evolving and

our agility allows us to react to those changes and deliver creative solutions.

"Glamorgan Telecom's culture is built around being open to new ideas. We listen closely to the feedback we get from clients and employees because it allows us to find better ways to deliver our services and products, and that process drives the company forward. The biggest opportunity facing any player in this market is to listen, watch, learn and take action to anticipate what the customer needs. Selling boxes is not the answer. Providing a long-term service tailored to our customers' requirements will ensure a closer customer bond."

Bolderson's current pain point is plugging the professional skills gap in the south Wales region. "We have overcome this by ensuring that we grow our own," she commented. "Through having clear development opportunities in place we are able to make each and every employee feel valued. This approach is supported by our employee turnover figures, with the average duration of stay being in excess of 10 years."

Not surprisingly, Bolderson rates her journey from a seventeen-year-old new starter to company Managing Director as her greatest career achievement to date. "If my 17-year-old self had the chance to rate my performance so far I might get an 8 out of 10," she stated. "There is always room to learn and grow. Important lessons learnt along the way include getting the facts right first time and understanding the detail, as well as listening to others and always trusting my judgement." ■



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UC&C agenda: What's from

Most crucial for the future success of UC&C will be ease of communication, enhanced functionality, insights, application-based devices, seamless mobility and cross-platform integration. But all this means that resellers must be able to deliver on the unified promise.

The most notable trend in the UC&C market is WebRTC adoption, according to Nick Galea, CEO of 3CX. The company was an early adopter of WebRTC, recognising its potential to heavily influence the future shape of the UC&C landscape. "WebRTC is enabling easy communication at the most basic level with a simple phone call, and it's allowing businesses to make use of plugins and downloads of free video conferencing, screen sharing and presentations etc," he stated. "In business, time is money so anything that can be implemented to save both is a winner."

Having a reliable, complete and feature rich UC system in the office is not enough these days, believes Galea. "Since remote working is on the rise growing demand for mobile UC is no surprise," he added. "Mobile client functionality is no longer a special extra, but an expected requirement. Employees can now make calls, join video conferences, chat and more using their work extension no matter where they are."

WebRTC technology is taking customer service capabilities to another level with features such as click-to-call, screen-sharing and video conferencing, pointed out Galea. "UC is becoming more about making those human connections,

especially when it comes to customer service and sales," he said. "According to research from customericare.com, more than 85 per cent of consumers online are more likely to buy in a video chat.

"We are in a new era of UC. We can expect to see growth in the personal use of UC and with that, a greater number of consumers looking for more advanced and personable communications in all of their interactions, whether that be in collaborating with colleagues in another city, making a purchase online, making a complaint about a service or product, or seeking technical support for a device or piece of software. With this, more vendors will be looking to implement these capabilities into their solutions."

The shift towards cloud aligns with end user demand for flexibility, and the focus has moved beyond UC to workflows and what businesses are trying to achieve, noted Adrian Hipkiss, Vice President and Managing Director, ShoreTel EMEA. "For those in the traditional UC&C area it is all about broadening their thinking," he stated. "The issue should no longer be soft phone versus hard phone, or voice versus video, but how we can make things easier for our employees. This is a massive cultural shift, and we will see a lot more product integration as



Wilf Wood

"We are beginning to enter the Unified Communications era, what went before was a false dawn."

UC starts to act more like a professional service."

Enhanced integration

Hipkiss cited as an example the enhanced integration of Skype for Business with ShoreTel's telephony solution to allow users to seamlessly move between applications, ensuring a more efficient workplace. "Importantly, this isn't a standard approach," he added. "It is highly customised and the channel plays a key part in making sure customer needs are met."

Mobility, data analytics and machine learning and their impact on the customer experience are top of mind for TeleWare's CEO Steve

continue," added Haworth. "Some specialist areas will require deep knowledge too, so partnerships will be key to success."

TeleWare continues to cover more media types, integrating external sources of data for better analytics and deeper insights. "While we can deploy solutions across all communications vendor systems, Microsoft is a key part of our strategy and this continues with much of the work we are doing around Skype for Business and Microsoft Office," said Haworth. "We will utilise recording, analytics and other data sources to route communications more effectively and to provide real-time insights to help improve customer communications."

The trend in UC that most interests Wilf Wood, Senior Product Manager at Samsung Enterprise Networks, is the shift towards a more mobile workforce. Therefore UC&C products need to be credible and capable of delivering value to the mobile user. "Now we are really beginning to enter the UC era, what went before was a false dawn," he stated. "As wide area networks increase in capacity and reduce in cost, what was not possible or costly to achieve is becoming not only possible but the norm. As higher capacity mobile networks are rolled out across the UK



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nt of mind?

and the next generation of 5G is being planned, accessing good quality data connections outside of the traditional office or home bases is a reality."

Another growth area cited by Woods is providing high capacity wireless networks in buildings built to embrace mobile devices, enabling the UC user to use whatever communications devices they want and get the same experience. "For comms and IT resellers the challenge will be in keeping up with the technology that underpins the applications," he commented. "The application is what the customer is sold on, but it has to be delivered and work."

"As a manufacturer we will be concentrating on devices and network infrastructure. Our focus is on mobility as that is where we see market growth. We will also be working closely with our software partners and integrating applications into the hardware platforms to deliver the 'it just works' solutions to our customers."

Distributor ProVu is most occupied with the



Adrian Hipkiss

"We will see a lot more product integration as UC starts to act more like a professional service."

increased functionality and added benefits that new developments in UC bring to desktop and other application-based devices. "We believe that by enhancing and sharing the ideals of UC in a simplistic, seamless manner we can steer products to a wider audience," explained Darren Garland, Managing Director, ProVu. "In order to be successful UC must continue to develop its functionality and offer seamless communication integration in one, easily accessible space."

"We are starting to see phone manufacturers look more towards phone apps that will enable developers to customise their phone capabilities by adding features such as heating and lighting controls to their desk phones. We are also working on expanding our PBX offering by launching products with enhanced UC functionality."

According to Voiceflex Sales and Marketing Director Paul Taylor, companies use different aspects of UC, but very few use a full suite of UC applications. "Many end users are set in their ways of working, all we can do is advise on what is available," he stated. "In my experience, not many companies are interested in changing customer and in-house user engagement. The comms community is years ahead of the end user market. However, hosted will prompt more end user engagement with UC apps. It's a simple license change, it can be tested on a couple of users with no capital outlay. It's also about the ability of the sales person to spot an opportunity to sell UC within the client base."

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How far does ignorance h

A round table debate hosted by Comms Dealer in association with Entanet provided a platform for comms channel players to discuss the main growth inhibitors in the competitive business connectivity marketplace where customer expectations are high. Dominating the agenda were service deployment issues and the inefficacy of Ofcom to change the status quo, leading to calls for the comms industry itself to seize the initiative.



We proffer the promise of productivity gains and cost efficiencies, but the industry in most need of such attention is our own. Comms resellers in the connectivity doldrums are stymied by their inability to give the market that they serve what it wants, through no fault of their own. And there is little sign of any real improvements. "As an industry we are embarrassing and stuck in the 19th century in terms of delivery," emphasised Gary Pooley, Alliances Director, Hosting and Networks, Fujitsu UK. "This is stunting growth. We must raise awareness and make politicians realise that a proper telecoms infrastructure goes hand in hand with a modern forward thinking digital economy. We need to stand up as an industry and urge Ofcom to focus on business. How

can the Government deny that as an objective?"

Our round table delegates see BT and Ofcom in thrall to consumers and far less focused on the needs of businesses and their connectivity requirements. Fraser Ferguson, founder and Director of Kube Networks, underlined the point using BT's profits as a lynchpin to his argument. "Openreach delivered profits of £1.4 billion into the Group this year," he said. "BT will spend £6 billion over next three years on infrastructure – £4 billion will be invested into mobile masts and £2 billion into residential services. This will enable me to watch football on a mobile or at home. But it's not about business. And Ofcom is hopeless. Pressure to strip Openreach out of the Group must come from the industry because the

Government doesn't know what a digital economy is. It's all about connectivity."

Lip service

Too many politicians repeatedly bang on about 'Digital Britain' as if by rote, oblivious to the mountain that has to be climbed to put in the business grade connectivity infrastructure upon which their strategy depends, and they are blissfully unaware that their digital agenda is edging ever closer towards becoming a farcical project. So what's going wrong? Blame cannot be laid squarely at BT's door because it is itself part of a bigger picture. This is ultimately a symptom of Government failure because there is no high level enforcement of accountability.

Meanwhile, many businesses continue to suffer the

consequences. According to the Broadband report from the British Infrastructure Group (January 2016), 42 per cent of SMEs experience problems with their Internet connectivity while 29 per cent also experience poor service reliability. Not surprising when you consider that ADSL is essentially a consumer product with no business grade SLAs (and FTTC is subject to contention). David Donnelly, Director of Midland Networks, noted: "As an industry we must be more open with customers about the limitations of broadband and suggest they consider an alternative because of the downsides. Nobody tells users that their broadband could be down for a week."

Yet it's not a case of finding someone to blame, someone to vilify, it is more a question of how to confront head-on these very serious and

costly issues and enforce a workable solution. At one point the debate turned to financial figures that are simply unbelievable, but absolutely true and add great emphasis to the seriousness of a situation that is only fully understood by those adversely affected at both ends of the supply chain. "We recently calculated our provisioning costs compared to three years ago," stated Ferguson. "It's costing us £150k more now just to manage the carriers."

There were plenty of moments in the round table discussion when accountability for delivery and service levels were top of mind. "The availability of connectivity is an embarrassing conversation with customers and may ruin the client relationship," commented Chris Morrissey, Managing Director, Lily

Reminder connected Britain?



Comms. “We back-peddle and we manage the situation but with a lot of egg on our face. This is frustrating because we try to build excellence where we can. If we had more support from the networks we’d have more clients and more business.”

Despite Openreach’s good intentions there lacks a consistent concept of deploying leased lines. Such basic processes as surveys often advance in fits and starts, resellers are clobbered by unexpected excess charges as a result, and end user planning is obliterated by delays. “One of our customers is moving offices and ordered a 100mb leased line in October for its new premises,” stated Colin Woods, Sales Manager, South West Communications. “The current building is being demolished in June. At the

moment I have an Openreach date of September. Surveys have turned out to be part-surveys and we get excess charges over and over again. This harms our company, our industry, and prevents business growth. If we let customers down the chances of getting future business from them is remote. And it’s not our fault.”

Causal factor

Elsa Chen, Entanet’s CEO, put her finger on one of the main causal factors. “Equivalence of Input may have an unintended effect on Openreach’s service culture,” she explained. “There seems to be more of a can’t-do rather than can-do attitude in Openreach which creates a problem for the industry that is heavily relying on its service delivery.”

When asked, delegates said one thing loud and clear,

they want more Ofcom accountability and support from BT, someone to hear and act on their complaints, in true partnership, rather than be perpetual supplicants at the gates of BT Tower. But that someone is currently denied them. So little wonder there can, on occasion, be strong reactions.

“One of my biggest frustrations is the lack of transparency when there is an issue,” explained Dave Corgat, Managing Director, Arcus Services (and former owner of Rainbow Telecom). “Why not have a screen shot made available to prove that the issue is with BT? I’m told that can’t happen. Sometimes our major suppliers don’t help us. But surely there is a case for wholesale partners to share fault information, or at least have a communication to help pacify customers. This affects our business.”

The appearance of Ofcom’s initial conclusions in its Strategic Review of Digital Communications in February did little to stir hope as it shied away from a BT-Openreach split, a move that some believe would help the industry significantly. “Ofcom didn’t bring out a big stick, it brandished a feather duster,” stated Darren Farnden, Head of Marketing, Entanet. “Not enough noise was made to implement real change and force Openreach to prevent delays from getting worse. But there’s enough power in the industry to turn up the volume and get our voice heard.”

Government pressure could have forced Ofcom to go further in its findings, rather than facilitate an industry crisis that must rank as one

of the saddest episodes in the sector’s history. If nothing else, it shows the power of industry monoliths, in any sector, to wield their wealth and keep blinkered politicians in thrall of their wants. BT’s iconic tower looms large over London and casts a far reaching shadow. But it is also a beacon of immense possibilities.

First step

A blueprint for reform should be professionally targeted at Number 10 as an unsanitised version of Ofcom’s document in a sign of comms industry virility and determination. It is both a last resort and a first step. “Enough is enough,” stated Morrisey. “Let’s put some credibility into our industry and create an environment where we can go to the Government and Ofcom and say you’re not doing the job for us. Let’s become a bigger voice to be heard. We need a vehicle to communicate with Ofcom and collectively we must get behind the endeavour.”

The conclusion so far is that the monolithic character of the BT Group and a toothless Ofcom are driving comms suppliers down a clear path towards self-determined action. For the round table delegates there is no other option. They say it would be foolish to rely on the industry watchdog as our chief lobbying asset. The channel is galvanising, and Ofcom should see a warning sign. Why? Because deployment and quality of service issues are impacting on comms resellers and their customers. And while they seethe, the Government continues to beat a triumphant drum in support of its achievements in creating a Digital Britain that is fit for the future. ■

BITES FROM THE TABLE

Connectivity is not fully understood at both ends of the chain. The Government needs educating as much as end users to understand the complexity required of the digital economy. But the solution lies with the industry.

Elsa Chen, CEO, Entanet

Perhaps the future isn’t fibre but an airborne mobile solution. The technology exists. Fibre is the copper of tomorrow.

Neil Poultney, MD Vodat International

We need to consider how we collectively help change the political sway, and ultimately how Openreach operates.

Stephen Barclay, Sales Director, Entanet

Dark fibre tax is an underlying problem that’s costing all of us. Carriers are petrified of fibre tax, and we don’t yet know what it will look like.

Fraser Ferguson, founder of Kube Networks

There’s too much ignorance about the difference between business grade connectivity and what people use at home.

Darren Farnden, Head of Marketing, Entanet

We should push harder to get services quicker. It’s what customers need. We all have a strong voice and must stick together as a group.

Neil Barrell, MD, Telecoms World



Avoid 7 mistakes when selling connectivity enta.net/7-mistakes

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Gill's winning formula

The ultimate formula for business success in the new information age is a blend of persistence, skill and belief, according to PRS Telecom Director Patrick Gill.

From selling airline tickets for BA to marketing the Rugby World Cup Sevens in Hong Kong, Gill's career has always been about making things happen, and getting better at it every step of the way. A trio of inspirational figures spur Gill to always strive for personal and business improvement, namely Winston Churchill, Muhammad Ali and Prince Philip. Together they embody the three qualities needed to win at running a business, believes Gill.

"They all inspire me to be more than I am now," he said. "Churchill dealt with taking Britain through hell and winning. Running your own business can be like that, 'keep bugging on' he said. Ali knows how to be the best, the ultimate champion. Running your business is about making yourself better than the rest. And Prince Philip is a master of dedication to the cause. He has made it his life's work to make his family and their work a success. He's experienced highs, massive highs, ordinary days, hard times, lows and desperate hours, but he is always true to the cause. These three gentlemen epitomise the winning formula in business – persistence, skill and belief."

Gill put these qualities into practice when he joined

Your Comms in 2002. His target then was £2.5 million. Two years later he left the business, also leaving behind a £19.5 million target. "That was the inspiration for PRS," stated Gill. "Don't work for anyone else! The original PRS Telecom model was premium rate phone calls between marketing companies and their networks. This didn't work out as the three caballeros envisaged, so Peter Crooks, Geoff Bell and I agreed to split. PRS became mine and I relocated to my new home town in north Wales to become a traditional B2B reseller.

"Make no bones about it, we started with no clients, and that, at the age of 48, took a hell of a lot to build. We now have a 12 strong team and approximately 300 customers across the UK, mainly in the north west of England and north Wales. PRS Telecom exists to provide what I would want my supplier to provide – services, solutions and advice, all carried out excellently and at great value. PRS offers the benefits of dealing with a small local business and will do all possible to manage the account, yet it's on a national level."

Last month PRS Telecom signalled big plans for growth following its partnership with the founder of gap Personnel Group. The comms provider



Patrick Gill

is aiming to become a £10 million business by 2020 with 10-plus offices spread across the UK, all based on a five-year agreement with Gary Dewhurst who is now a major shareholder.

Key partnership

Dewhurst is best known as an entrepreneur, investor and business mentor, and under his leadership gap Personnel Group currently achieves turnover in excess of £100 million. The partnership has already catalysed the acquisition of key client accounts, the recruitment of new staff and a relocation of the HQ to larger bespoke offices. "This new relationship is all about working together to drive the expansion of PRS into a much stronger, more robust and more profitable business," said Gill.

"Our growth has demonstrated to Gary that

we have a strong business model, and that gave him the incentive to take a major shareholding in PRS. His main business has 30-plus offices across the UK and it is the ambition of our union to spread PRS Telecom across the UK using the existing resource of gap. We have a five year plan to grow to £10 million and exit. The platform is in place. The suppliers are there, and the customers of group businesses are there."

According to Gill, the next 12 months is all about sustained growth in all areas and establishing itself in four strategically appointed gap Personnel branches. "Until the involvement of gap Personnel our growth was via referral, door knocking, networking and repeat business," commented Gill. "Now we have a national database of clients to run at, including some huge operations with big issues."

Having started the business with nothing and making it something that people want to either buy from or work for is a great source of pride for Gill. He believes PRS is both 'tangible and successful', despite regulatory bugbears that grate by the day and work against the industry's best interests, he believes.

"Ofcom is under performing and telephone numbering is a farce," he said. "The consumer is confused and Ofcom has little idea about numbering, evidenced by the way it managed the 084/087 numbering episodes and the 09 debacle. Furthermore, as long as Openreach sits under BT share holder ownership there can be only one controller of the UK. And it's not Ofcom."

Just a minute with Patrick Gill...

Role model: Muhammad Ali: No other competitive sportsman has ever come close to being that great, that cocky and that humble, all at once

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Sports management. Running the Hong Kong Sevens was mad but fun

One thing you couldn't do without in your job: People and their support

What do you fear the most? Being seen clapping out of time at concerts

Your greatest strength, and what could you work on? Sales, sales and more sales. Never stop learning how to sell

What possession could you not live without? None. It's all about accepting change

What talent do you wish you had? To be musical

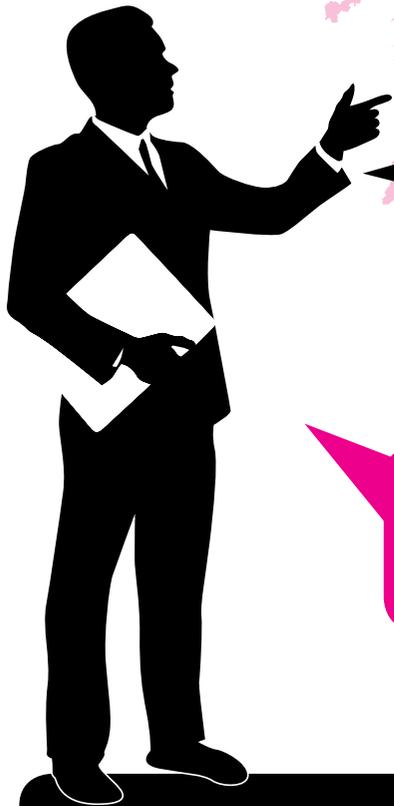


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Progressive strategies

The gulf between go-getting comms resellers and their more static counterparts is widening. Most industry players accept that they need to engage in product and service diversification to prosper, and business success is naturally drawn to those, like Calteq, that press ahead with these progressive strategies, according to co-founder and Director Mike Stephenson.

Stephenson co-founded Calteq with Nigel Willets in 2003. Their intention was simple – to provide great customer service with a product offering to match. “During our previous years working for shareholders we learnt the importance of taking time to understand a client’s challenges and provide a bespoke solution rather than the all too familiar ‘one size fits all’ approach often taken by larger corporates,” noted Stephenson.

Stephenson’s pre-Calteq experience enables him to deal with large customers and carriers, which has been intrinsic to Calteq’s success as a provider of tailored solutions to sizeable multiple site customers using Tier 1 carriers. He first entered the comms industry in 1987 as a telemarketer for sales appointments at Solutions Telecom, a telephone system dealer. After securing a number

of successful appointments he was promoted to a sales role selling systems and smart boxes using Mercury Communications. He then moved to system manufacturer Tie Communications and in 1992 joined Telia UK as Sales Manager. Breaking away from this role Stephenson co-founded IDN which floated on AIM in 2000 and was sold to Redstone Telecom in 2006. During this period Calteq was established.

Today, the company has three offices, one focused on mobile, the other data services while the head office operates as an administration centre. From these secure footholds Calteq targets large multi-site customers, in particular those using traditional voice services such as ISDN30 and are ripe for migrating to hosted and SIP solutions, supported by mobile and data products. “While it’s still not for everyone, with ISDN30 heading towards end of



Mike Stephenson

life we want to drive this message to our customers and offer them a smooth transition,” said Stephenson. “We are always looking for products that can be sold into our customer base. These currently include IoT and M2M solutions which have opened up new markets and opportunities.”

Key acquisition

To expand its product and services range Calteq purchased a small, but specialised, data company two years ago. The acquired data products and Cisco expertise allowed Calteq to offer data services to its customer base, which is now a thriving part of the business and generates almost £1.5 million annual

turnover. The acquisition also enabled Calteq to approach SIP and hosted IP at a much higher level, with good success having sold 2,000 hosted seats already this year compared to 400 at the same time last year.

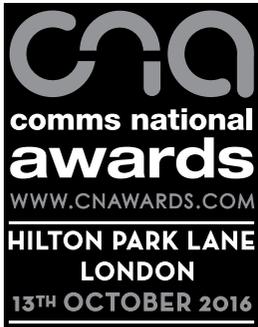
Calteq’s focus on data solutions includes private WAN, colocation facilities and advanced data products such as Sophos firewall deployment. “With security front of mind among all of our customers we are developing our portfolio to include solutions that both alert and protect from call fraud,” added Stephenson. “We have also refocused on mobiles using Vodafone and O2 and achieved a 200 per cent increase in mobile

connections over the last 12 months. Combined billing and account management have been critical to this growth.”

Stephenson cited one company as a good example of its broad solution portfolio in action, the Timpson Group which consists of Timpson, Max Spielmann, Snappy Snaps and others. “We provided landlines, mobiles and data connections which are currently being rolled out via a private WAN to 1,500 branches,” he stated. “This has saved the customer a huge amount of money and introduced a streamlined route for new shop openings and fault reporting. The core solutions include additional support products such as conference calling, automated fraud detection, automated fault logging and comprehensive engineer support for installation of lines into all of the main supermarket chains in the UK.”

To bolster its sales and support capabilities Calteq has invested significantly in up-skilling its call centre and sales channels, empowering them to sell more advanced data products and supporting solutions. This approach also feeds into the company’s culture which Stephenson describes as ‘innovative, supportive and hard working’, and he welcomes a melting pot of new ideas. “We encourage the team to input ideas because they are our greatest strength, whether it’s going the extra mile in our 24/7 customer service operation or developing solutions to protect our customers from fraud,” he explained. “We also like to have fun and always reward great work.” ■

A central process wins



As the build up to the Comms National Awards gathers pace, Nine Group Marketing Director, Mark Saunders shares some

thoughts on how to catch the judges' eye for the Nine Wholesale Customer Service Award.



and expertise to develop high levels of insight and react accordingly, usually fuelled and supported by a class leading CRM system to organise the data on individual customers.

Fantastic customer service starts with positive sales and marketing interactions, because it sets the tone for the relationship. Will it be merely transactional, or will it be engaging, meaningful and mutually beneficial? For me, the latter is a great way to think about the ubiquitous phrase, 'added value'. By working hard to know your customers really well - you can think of it as turning a stranger into a friend - you cannot fail to create truly added value and be more successful as a result.

It is no coincidence that the same names feature regularly when people are asked to name business organisations that they believe offer brilliant customer service - John Lewis, Amazon, Apple, Richer Sounds, Waitrose, First Direct, Eurotunnel and Virgin for example. What is

it about these people that means they do this so well?

The answer is disarmingly simple - they are supremely driven by processes and the customer is in the middle of all of them. Reassuringly, this is not that difficult to copy, so you can start by laying out all your customer facing interactions, then make sure that they have a reproducible process surrounding them.

Finally, make sure that the customer is considered first and sits at the centre of all the actions and the communications. Doing this well and regularly checking to see that it is still in place will make an overwhelming difference to the success of your own business. If your customers never want to leave, they will also endorse you without hesitation.

Last year, the winner of the Nine Customer Service Award was Lily Comms. Here is a letter they received from a customer which sums up why the judges named them as winners:

Dear Comms National Awards

I am writing to lend my support to Lily Comms' Comms National Awards entry.

We have nothing but positive things to say about dealing with Lily Comms. We dealt with a very courteous and knowledgeable salesperson, who understood that we knew the requirements of the system we needed, however with their expert guidance and industry knowledge they ensured we got the ideal system for our needs and the customer service was great. They responded to all of our queries promptly and

were very easy to deal with.

When it came to installing the system, the engineers worked diligently and professionally to ensure it was fitted promptly and minimising disruption to our business. They listened to our requirements prior to installation, and ensured our requirements were met once installation took place.

Any time we have had a query or required some clarification, the Client Services Department are only a phone call away. Their product knowledge is second to none, and they are always happy to help, and they often contact us directly to make sure we do not have any unresolved issues with our system.

We got the feeling throughout dealing with them that Lily Comms would always be willing to go the extra mile to help us out. From the moment we first contacted them, they were always asking how they could help us, and if we required any further advice or guidance.

Our overall experience of working with Lily Comms was very productive and efficient. The staff we dealt with have always gone above and beyond to make sure we were getting the products and services we needed, everything was explained clearly and we would have no hesitation in recommending them to other companies.

To me, this letter demonstrates what customer service is all about and I hope it will inspire resellers that meet these standards to enter the Nine Customer Service Awards this time around.

Traditionally, the topic of customer service automatically conjures up your most recent experiences. Maybe it was trying to report and resolve a fault with a service provider or a utility? I suspect the memory of that experience may not have been a good one!

Alternatively, it could have been the time you had to query a charge or report a problem with your credit card bill? How many times did you have to start a conversation with yet another new person or read out or type in your account number for the umpteenth time?

Or do you recall feeling really brave when booking your car in for a service on a day when the dealership was actually prepared to lend you a courtesy car?

The common factor here is that the service feels as though it is designed for the benefit of the provider, not for you, the customer.

In our market, there are frequent examples of companies who operate a similar, seller centric model, where they try to impose a set solution on a customer. Beware, because this is just the first stage of a mind-set and culture which will continue throughout the entire length of the contract, including potentially negative customer service experiences like the ones I referred to above.

You can spot these organisations coming a long way off from their single size, 'broadcast style' of marketing communications and the "have I got a deal for you" attitude of their sales personnel. My recommendation is, avoid.

Providing a welcome contrast is the customer centric model, which is based on developing a deep understanding of the customer and the consequent provision of an appropriate solution. This requires commitment, time, energy

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Comms National Entrepreneur of the Year



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Ladies and Gentleman... start The race for a Comms National

COMMS DEALER was the first publication to reward and recognise excellence in the channel and the Comms National Awards remain the industry's most respected and highly prized awards programme.

The Comms National Awards are independently judged by a panel of experts to recognise the vendors who provide quality support to channel partners and the resellers who develop and install high value solutions into public and private sector organisations.

Since its inception, the CN Awards have been hosted by the best in the business and past masters of ceremonies have included Marcus Brigstock, Patrick Kilty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre, Ronnie Corbett and Vernon Kaye. Guests can be assured that as ever this year the entertainment will be top drawer.

The Comms National Awards 2016 returns to the lavish ballroom at London's famous Hilton on Park Lane which plays host to the UK's top awards events and, as ever, the hospitality will be first class!

All these ingredients add up to the Comms National Awards being recognised as the evening channel people gather to celebrate excellence, network with industry friends and truly enjoy themselves.



Awards Categories

VENDOR AWARDS

Network Category

Best Mobile Network Provider
Best Fixed Line Network Provider

Service Provider Category

Best Wholesale Service Provider (up to £10m t/o)
Best Wholesale Service Provider (above £10m t/o)
Best ISP

Telephony Category

Best SME Telephony System
Best Enterprise Telephony System
Best End-Point or Device
Best Hosted Platform

Software Application Category

Best Call Management Solution
Best Billing Platform

Distribution Category

Best Convergence Distributor
Best Mobile Distributor

Partner Services Category

Best Channel Business Service
Best Installer/Maintainer

RESELLER AWARDS

Contact Centre Category

Best SME Contact Centre Solution
Best Enterprise Contact Centre Solution

Vertical Market Category

Best SME Vertical Market Solution
Best Enterprise Vertical Market Solution

IOT/Wireless Category

Best SME M2M/Wireless Solution
Best Enterprise M2M/Wireless Solution

Cloud Communications Category

Best SME Cloud Solution
Best Enterprise Cloud Solution

Unified Comms Category

Best SME UC solution
Best Enterprise UC solution

Customer Service Category

The Nine Customer Service Award



SPECIAL AWARDS

SME Reseller of the Year
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Start your entries! Comms National Award has begun!

Nine takes top position again as headline sponsor

Nine Wholesale is delighted to continue its sponsorship of The Comms National Awards for 2016.



Mark Saunders

LEADING service provider, Nine Wholesale, is delighted to reprise its headline sponsorship of the Comms National Awards at The Hilton, Park Lane on Thursday 13th October.

According to Nine Group's Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, renewing their sponsorship of the awards for a fourth year was "a straightforward decision which reinforces our commitment to the channel and our love of a great night out".

The standard of entries was truly exceptional last year, so the winners will have had to work extremely hard to achieve success this year and Saunders stated, "I look forward to meeting and heartily congratulating them all. This is a truly memorable evening, reflecting the innovation, excellence and energy in our sector, with no doubt many well-known characters taking to the stage, as well as some welcome newbies."

Nine Wholesale also sponsors a special award to recognise outstanding customer service, which was won last year by Lily Coms. This award is presented to the reseller who can truly demonstrate that everything in their business is led by the customer's perspective and how they have remodelled and transformed their business to achieve this.

Saunders is a passionate advocate of articulating any business ambition in the customer's voice, claiming, "The availability of just about any information on line has finally enabled the age of the customer. Our award can only be secured if it is the customer who recognises the excellence of the service that is delivered, not the reseller who advertises it. Personalised customer engagement and messaging are now essential, while marketing teams who continue to broadcast indiscriminately across random media channels should consider themselves irrelevant, if not obsolete."

On a lighter note, Saunders confessed that although his memories of the Friday after last year's event are somewhat cloudy, he still looks forward to the after show party, but perhaps with marginally less champagne and a bottle or two more water this year!

Category sponsors recognise power of CN Awards



"Spitfire is delighted to again sponsor the Vendor Software & Application Category of the 2016 Comms National Awards. Superfast broadband, cloud provision of services and virtualisation are changing the way that customers store data and access services and apps. Not only is the provision of data services changing, but the way apps and services are accessed by users is being transformed as well.

"To meet the challenge of a fast changing digital landscape requires software and app vendors to be agile, innovative and responsive to a dynamic marketplace where the pace of change is accelerating. As a company dedicated to providing customers with the reliable super-fast network services that are the gateway to cloud apps and software, it is appropriate that Spitfire recognises the immense effort made by software and application vendors to produce reliable, high quality products that function seamlessly across a range of platforms.

"The Comms National Awards have become the benchmark for excellence in the comms industry, providing public acknowledgement of achievement. All can be assured that all the finalists will be of the highest calibre. But there can be only one winner and we look forward to congratulating the Award recipient at the CNA event in October."

SUSIE WARD – HR & MARKETING DIRECTOR
SPITFIRE TECHNOLOGY GROUP
SPONSOR OF
THE SOFTWARE APPLICATION CATEGORY



The Comms National Awards is, without question, one of the most exciting and highly anticipated events in the telecoms channel calendar, attended by some of the best and most talented people the industry has to offer. It's a celebration of outstanding achievement, with each award representing a great deal of hard work and dedication on the part of the winner.

"Winning a CNA award is a fantastic achievement and demonstrates that you are an elite performer, with an edge over competitors. Targeting a particular vertical market requires a high level of skill and expertise, truly demonstrating that the winning company is the master of its market. It's therefore a great privilege for Union Street to be the sponsor of this year's Vertical Markets category.

In 2015 we were very honoured to accept the award for Best Billing Platform and were equally pleased to celebrate the successes of our channel partners, many of whom received finalist nominations and awards for their efforts.

"We're very much looking forward to this year's CNAs and, on behalf of myself and the Union Street Team, I'd like to wish the best of luck to all this year's entrants."

TONY COOK – MD
UNION STREET,
SPONSOR OF
**THE VERTICAL MARKET SOLUTION
CATEGORY**



TeleWare

"TeleWare is delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards 2016 and to be doing so amongst so many of our well respected contemporaries. The Comms National Awards night is a key event in the TeleWare calendar.

They acknowledge and celebrate excellence within our industry. Without doubt, each year the standard of winners increases.

"We are proud to be sponsoring the highly respected Contact Centre category. We are focused on delivering quality services to our partners therefore we understand the high level of expertise entrants must have in order to be shortlisted in this category. While customer expectations continue to evolve and the number of channels required for effective end-user communication continue to increase, we recognise the importance of technology in streamlining these interactions. The tools available are shaping the future of communications for SMEs and larger corporates alike and the work that the nominees commit to improving this technology is vital for improving the productivity of UK business.

"There are a number of emerging opportunities for our sector as end-user demands continue to transform. The beauty of the vendor/partner relationship is that by working together as an industry we ensure the success and growth of the channel.

"Good luck to all of those who have been nominated for an award!"

STEVE HOWARTH – CEO
TELEWARE
SPONSOR OF
THE CONTACT CENTRE CATEGORY

Apprenticeships matter

With skills in short supply, the industry must ask what the future holds for technology businesses. The answer? A telecoms apprenticeship scheme run by the Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP), explains Head of Operations Crissi Williams.

Back in 2013 we identified the need for a telecoms specific apprenticeship scheme. Having researched the idea with our members we found that 100 per cent would, in an ideal world, employ apprentices if they could. We also discovered, however, that the biggest barriers to taking on apprentices included the administration required, time constraints, staff resources and access to training. In fact, at that time it was only the larger organisations that were in a position to employ apprentices.

Since then, we have successfully created more than 60 jobs in the industry through the scheme, ranging from engineers to technical helpdesk advisors. Through this initiative we are not only offering young people a chance to start their careers, but also providing telecoms businesses a headache-free way to find the fresh new talent they need, whether large or small.

It is currently now better value than ever for employers to take on young apprentices, with the Government recently announcing the abolition of employer national insurance contributions for apprentices under the age of 25. While those perceived barriers first identified in our survey of 2013 still remain for some, they don't have to. Our

scheme takes care of the time-consuming elements for businesses who are keen to take on apprentices, but are not sure where to start.

Our apprentices are supported throughout the programme with further training and development opportunities. One of the most valuable elements is the mentoring scheme. Each apprentice is matched with a mentor, giving them unique access to a senior telecoms professional. We have found this not only drives motivation, but gives them access to unique insights and networking opportunities with peers they may never have met otherwise. It has also proven to be a valuable experience from the mentor's perspective too, with many telling us that they gain a real insight into the challenges faced by young people entering our industry - something which can help with their own training and HR strategy.

The future of apprenticeships

With the heavy financial burden bearing down on young people going to university, opportunities to 'earn as you learn' are becoming ever more attractive. This is demonstrated in the rise of sites like www.notgoingtouni.com and more than 45k Twitter followers to the National Apprenticeship Service. What's more,



Crissi Williams

We have successfully created more than 60 jobs in the industry through our scheme

during this year's National Apprenticeship Week, 30,000 employers across the country pledged to create apprenticeship roles. We are working to close the gap between education and work by offering an alternative to university, where often graduates are still not 'work ready' after

completing their studies. The apprenticeship route gives young people the skills, training and knowledge they need to be work ready by the time they have completed their apprenticeship.

The forthcoming Apprenticeship Levy, coming into effect in April 2017,

will undoubtedly change the apprenticeship landscape. It will install a 0.5 per cent tax on companies with a wage bill of more than £300 million, but will affect SMEs too as companies with a lesser wage bill will be able to draw from the fund. The response to the levy has been mixed. Some see it as a way of increasing the quality of placements across the country, while others argue it could force businesses to look at quantity rather than quality. Our advice would be to get ahead of the game and start employing apprentices now, and to engage with your payroll software provider now to ascertain how the money will be taken and avoid any potential hiccups.

Ultimately, apprenticeships are vital to the development of the industry. Not only do they bring fresh talent, but greater staff retention and more tailored skills. We continue to welcome two full cohorts per year to our programme, and hope to see this grow over the next few years – creating more telecoms jobs.

Awards programme

The ITP's Apprentice of the Year awards programme was launched to help exceptional apprentices stand out from the crowd, and recognise their hard work and commitment. It also gives the young people a confidence

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itp | apprenticeships

Laying the foundations
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call Liv Haywood on 01932 788861

or visit
www.theitp.org

Continued from page 48
boost and looks great on their CV. Past winners have told us that it has really helped their career prospects.

An important element of our awards programme is the Chris Seymour Women in Telecoms award, launched to recognise the outstanding contribution that women make to the sector, despite still being in the minority. Women currently make up under 30 per cent of the ICT workforce, and only 15.5 per cent of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workforce. According to a report from the Select Committee on Digital Skills, increasing the number of women working in IT and telecoms could generate an extra £2.6 billion each year.

The University and Colleges Admissions Service found that in 2014, 17,300 more men than women entered computer science, and 20,300 more men entered engineering. In both of these fields men made up over 85 per cent of acceptances. Lack of careers guidance and education are noted as the main stumbling blocks, something we hope to address in the telecoms sector. This information shows that more needs to be done to address the imbalance within our industry.

Nathalie Vafiadis, Director of Technology Delivery at EE and winner of The Chris Seymour Award for Women in Telecoms in 2015, said: "If you look at the engineering side of telecoms it is dominated by men, and many times throughout my career I've been the only woman in the room during meetings. It's a fact that women are under-represented in this industry. Yet I haven't ever focused on gender during my career and have just concentrated on doing the best job I can in whatever role I'm doing.

"The Chris Seymour Award for Women in Telecoms demonstrates that women can have successful careers in comms. My aspiration is that within the next generation, Chris Seymour's wonderful award will be changing its name because there will no longer be a need to limit it by gender. The industry will have moved on significantly and women in senior positions across the telecoms industry will be the norm.

"We absolutely need to tell young women as they're growing up that there's no reason they can't be involved in this industry. A successful career in any field should be an output of the passion and energy you put into it. That's why mentoring schemes are very important. They help to develop an individual's belief and ultimately drive the end result. It doesn't matter whether you're a man or a woman. We want the telecoms industry to be filled with enthusiastic people focused on delivering an exceptional service to customers.

"We're living in a technological age and all children are growing up using technology as second nature, so there's every reason to be encouraged about more women developing an interest in technology and moving into engineering-based industries like telecoms and ultimately achieving their full career potential." ■

Key points

- The ITP's apprenticeship scheme has created more than 60 jobs in the industry and continues to seek out companies and employees who wish to take part.
- Now is a better time than ever to take on apprentices before the introduction of the levy and due to the abolition of the employer national insurance contributions.
- The ITP can provide access to training, professional registration and mentoring. www.theitp.org

How to build a p

Who could possibly argue against the severity of the industry's skills shortage and the potential of young people to shape the sector's future? Not for nothing, therefore, have apprenticeships become the vital clincher in addressing both issues.

To help plug the UC skills gap Freedom Communications created its own Unified Communications Apprenticeship scheme working in partnership with Microsoft and a local college. This collaboration has resulted in a sustainable talent pipeline that enables Freedom to handle a growing portfolio of IT and communications solutions. "We have realised the benefits of positioning young people at the heart of our skills strategy," commented Lisa Clark, Operations Director. "Technology is part of their lives and they're fearless about pushing buttons and experimenting. The adoption of these inherent skills into any organisation will result in innovation and insight."

Freedom identified a lack of readily available expertise in hybrid voice, IT and business skills. So it took a structured approach to training and development. "A blend of internal and external accredited training programmes supported by coaching and mentoring delivers tangible results," said Clark. "Apprentices have been able to find mentors with practical business experience who they can look up to for advice and support as their apprenticeship progresses."



Lisa Clark

"We've realised the benefits of positioning young people at the heart of our skills strategy."

Freedom's apprenticeship scheme is based on a partnership with West Herts College and provides a stream of talent. The company says tech-savvy young people are attracted to the industry and want to learn leading edge skills while earning money. "The 'earn while you learn' element makes this an attractive proposition for young people who wish to avoid the debt that comes with a university degree," added Clark.

In January 2016 Freedom Communications was recognised in the Top 100 Apprenticeship Employer list compiled

annually by the National Apprenticeship Service. Apprentices make up 15 per cent of Freedom's current workforce and because its Unified Communications Apprenticeship scheme was so successful the company continues to hire additional apprentices for other departments as part of its talent management strategy.

Career opportunity

Daniel Bruce, IT Sales and Marketing Apprentice at Freedom, commented: "Even after getting strong A-Level grades I still didn't feel that university was the right option for me. I wanted to prove myself

pipeline of industry talent

in a growing organisation while getting the necessary qualifications and experience that is required in today's competitive job market. Freedom's Apprenticeship Scheme, which has now broadened into the marketing, sales and project management departments, provides me with an amazing career opportunity."

The most needed training areas in distributor ProVu's business are networking skills and the development of specific product knowledge. "As a niche business we would need to provide in-house technical training for our staff," said Darren Garland, Managing Director. "This is something we are continuously developing. We have also developed an apprenticeship scheme in conjunction with our local college to enable us to bring in new staff on a structured training programme. This helps to successfully support our company growth.

"We have worked hard to forge strong links with our local college. This enables us to educate students and staff about ProVu while also allowing us to get to know potential future employees. We are involved with work experience placements, speaking to groups of students and helping with mock interviews. In the past we have identified suitable candidates who have then progressed into ProVu as apprentices while simultaneously continuing to work with the college to advance their development."

Recruitment is the single most difficult challenge that we face in the IT industry, believes Darren Briscoe, Technical Director at Comms-

care. "While we recruit at all levels we also bring in apprentices on an annual basis and have recruited engineering apprentices for the past four years," he stated. "Recruiting up to six trainees per cohort provides the best results as it encourages loyalty and enables the apprentices to train and learn as a cohesive and supportive group.

"Our apprentices start their employment with an intensive induction and shadowing programme that covers all the skills they need to complete the common IT engineering tasks for their role. The scheme also covers the back-end systems and soft skills they need to allow them to work within the department. We aim to prepare apprentices for work within two years and ensure they all qualify for a diverse set of industry recognised certifications."

Engineering and sales skills are particularly in demand, and Comms-care has introduced structured development paths for



Daniel Bruce

"I wanted to prove myself in a growing organisation while getting the necessary qualifications and experience that is required in today's competitive job market."

every individual to help drive retention. "We also introduced a regular business update session and a monthly newsletter to keep everyone informed," added Briscoe. "People want to stay with companies that can demonstrate a clear direction forward and progress towards goals.

Skills development

"The issue of skills shortages in the technical and engineering sectors is well understood. By providing apprentices with the skills, experience and certifications they need to contribute to the future of the industry, apprenticeships offer the opportunity to feed new talent into the IT engineering pool."

The pace of technology development means finding or developing people with the right suite of technical skills, particularly skills in integrating complex systems, is a constant challenge and a barrier to growth. The education sector and business both have a responsibility to develop these skills, agrees



Darren Briscoe

"By providing apprentices with the skills, experience and certifications they need to contribute to the future of the industry, apprenticeships offer the opportunity to feed new talent into the IT engineering pool."

Anna Guest, Director of Training Services at 5i.

"The ICT skills issue is not simply restricted to technical requirements," she pointed out. "We need more people with the broad skills needed to truly bridge and align technology with business and commercial needs. Suppliers need to engage credibly at a business level to guide customers through the possibilities and create compelling business cases; and end users need to develop more dialogue between IT and business. This is key to successful ICT projects."

Candidate availability within the telecoms sector has declined significantly over the past ten years for three pivotal reasons, observes Clive Jefferys, Director at recruiter JMA Network. "There has been a reduction in the number of supply companies following merger and acquisition activity in the sector," he said. "Secondly,

changes in technology have impacted on the number of people required. And the credit crunch of 2008 put the brakes on recruitment for several years."

Jefferys says the demographic impact of these factors has created the current skills shortage. "The onus is on employers to accelerate the recruitment, training and development of younger age groups," he said. "All areas are under pressure from lack of resources, and common sense dictates that we must invest heavily in technical, sales and marketing skills.

"The need to balance staffing against productivity is paramount. However, companies should raise their commitment to increase the level of trainees in their workforces. Modest over-staffing provides a foundation for the future and a buffer against higher staff turnover. This is key to building the workforce of the future." ■
Report continues on page 52

Novices are just the job

Ongoing developments in comms technology, products and services are a regular health check for the channel's level of expertise, and the results often reflect an ailing industry in need of a skills boost. But according to Graeme Duncan, Managing Director of Xtreme Business Solutions, we can take comfort from the growing role of apprentices in the sector.

Duncan, a former apprentice himself, attributes much of Xtreme's success to taking on young people. "I know first-hand how beneficial apprentice schemes are," he said. "They are a great way to learn a trade while gaining a valuable qualification. That is why we have invested in bringing on so many apprentices over the past 13 years. All of our apprentices gain an NVQ that is relevant to our area of work. We also offer all of our staff, not just school leavers, the opportunity to gain a national qualification that is relevant to their role. Many have years of experience but no formal acknowledgement of their skills. It is important that we do this so that we empower the whole workforce."

Xtreme Business Solutions has been operating since 2003 and in that time technology and methods of communication have advanced rapidly. The increasing reliance on email and the Internet to conduct business means that having robust IT systems and networks within a building are crucial to the future success of a business. In order to deliver that, an ICT workforce with the relevant skills needs to be maintained.

Duncan's advice is to fully appreciate that apprenticeships play an



Graeme Duncan

Apprentices are, and will remain, a cornerstone of our recruitment policy

important role in society. "I will always be a passionate advocate of them," he stated. "Apprentices are, and will remain, an important cornerstone of our recruitment policy. We see the valuable contribution that these young people

bring to the business. Their enthusiasm and fresh outlook always adds a new perspective that feeds into the rest of the workforce."

Xtreme has established partnerships with secondary schools close to its offices

in Westhill, Aberdeenshire and Dalgety Bay, Fife. Staff have visited the schools to speak to pupils about potential career paths and relevant qualifications. These relationships allow Xtreme to recruit, develop and retain young people who often come recommended by their teachers.

"We give them hands on training, mentoring from our experienced team and a range of opportunities that ensures they can quickly make a positive contribution to the business," noted Duncan. "The diverse range of projects that we work on, including some on offshore installations, ensures the apprentices get good variety in their work. These experiences provide real world examples for their classroom-based studies."

There's nothing new about the skills shortage in the ICT industry, it's just that the dominant technologies today are different. And as a growing and progressive Scottish network infrastructure specialist Xtreme has noticed in particular a significant lack of qualified and well skilled data, fibre and security engineers. It is not just a UK problem.

"When we've undertaken work overseas, particularly in America, we have witnessed similar shortages," added

Duncan. "There is strong demand for cabling to be installed or upgraded, but a limited supply of personnel with the right skills and knowledge to complete projects. Ultimately, this skills shortage has the potential for cabling projects to be completed inefficiently or incorrectly, and could result in a negative knock-on effect for the wider industry from a reputational perspective."

Every business has a role to play in addressing any skills shortage that exists in its industry sector, believes Duncan. "At Xtreme we have employed over 20 people as apprentices," he commented. "That is a significant investment for a company of our size. Vendors and manufacturers could perhaps provide businesses such as Xtreme with interactive training tools or bursaries to support training apprentices on installing or working with their equipment."

Technology will continue to advance and it is critical that the industry keeps pace with developments and skills-up its workforce accordingly. Suitably qualified and highly skilled data, fibre and security engineers are crucial. "They, like the networks they are installing, are the backbone of the sector," stated Duncan. "A resilient and robust network has such an important role to play in business today." ■

3CX: The future of UC

We constantly talk about the future of things. The future of VoIP, the future of business communications, the future of UC. The fact is that when it comes to business, implementing certain processes, procedures and infrastructure, there is no time like the present.

Encouraging businesses to go for full-featured UC solutions rather than the standard PBX setup may sometimes be a battle lost from the start. However, as the communications market continues to flourish, and as more companies are becoming aware of the benefits of unified communications, there are some key issues that should be addressed in order to make the most of the growing interest and sales.

Of course for hardened CIOs, CEOs, network managers and whoever else is making the IT and communication decisions for a company, convincing them of the benefits of UC and why they need to adopt it can be a daunting task. Unified communications is, and always has been about people. Not only in how it can connect colleagues on a more efficient level, but also in how customer service can become a more personable and enjoyable experience for all parties involved.

For instance, business decision makers may fail to see how video conferencing can lead to improved sales and more effective customer service as well as more efficient collaboration between colleagues. However, research conducted by the European Center for Training and Development has shown that personal, face-to-face communication makes all the difference in closing a sale.

Implementation, though, is only the first step in the process. In order for companies and their employees to really benefit from what UC has to offer, they must ensure that its features are being used effectively. Solution providers play a role in this, and should ensure that employees are educated in how to use their

system as, according to TechTarget research, large numbers of employees are failing to use basic features such as VoIP, instant messaging and conferencing.

A great example of collaboration being more effectively achieved with the help of UC, is 3CX healthcare client Avant Care, a UK charity that provides high quality personalised home care and support and residential care services across Bexley, Greenwich, Kent, and Medway.

With 3CX, Avant Care and Support is able to bridge all its sites so that, among its 14 locations, doctors and care staff are able exchange vital information, hold video conferences, share documents, and even hold webinars and make presentations. The associated care teams report a sharp rise in productivity and speed of decision making.

Similarly, in online commerce, sales are facilitated as customer queries are fielded on web landing pages or on mobile apps. Web click2calls make it easy for potential clients to talk directly with an agent, or even to engage in an online sharing or video session.

Customer interest is moved towards conversion at the first available opportunity; more than 85 per cent of consumers online are more likely to buy in a video chat, according to data from customercare.com.

UK retailer Doggscooters saw this happen, and watched sales increase. The Paignton, Devon-based online scooter producer began using 3CX last year and has taken advantage of the full set of Unified Communications solutions to achieve what the company's manager called 'a real business benefit'.

Traditionally, communications systems have been sold as on-premise solutions which include substantial hardware

“ 3CX, for example, offers softphone clients for Windows and Mac as well as smartphone clients for Android, iOS and Windows Phone. ”

purchases as well. Although software solutions, such as 3CX, have already helped to move away from proprietary PBXs and their costly implementations, we are seeing further change with the increased adoption of cloud solutions.

With more and more system upgrades proving to be cloud-based or at least software-based, resellers need to be prepared to firstly support such solutions, and secondly to cope with the fact that less hardware will be sold as part of the package. It seems that the 'death of the deskphone' is largely a result of the inception of the cloud. Since such systems can be subscribed to and hosted on the cloud with very little change to existing infrastructure, it seems somewhat counterproductive to then install numerous deskphones which in many cases are just not needed.

With this in mind, offering and supporting a reliable and easy-to-use softphone option

is crucial in order to stay relevant in the market. Not only do softphones eliminate the need for deskphones, and offer various UC features to boot, but they provide impressive mobility capabilities when combined with cross-device compatibility. 3CX, for example, offers softphone clients for Windows and Mac as well as smartphone clients for Android, iOS and Windows Phone. Once installed on any chosen device, the client can be configured to the user's extension, which they can then take with them and use wherever they go, just like they never left the office.

UC, telecoms and technology in general are ever-changing. The future of UC is now and the evolution of it, and how it benefits its users, is defined by how we embrace unified communications and how we work as innovators and proponents of the technology and what it has to offer.

Learn more about 3CX's Unified Communications solution www.3cx.com.



Mobile: Replete with oppo

In this era of 'mobile' the opportunities are rampant, but only if legacy delivery models are kiboshed and resellers fully grasp the voice and data convergence baton in the race to gain market share.

Mobile market developments come thick and fast, and a big change over the past two years has been the introduction and adoption of 4G, noted plan.com's co-founder Keith Curran. "The channel has also witnessed big changes with some networks either taking 100 per cent ownership and control of their distribution route to market, while the distributors themselves continue to consolidate," he observed. "Some MNOs have opted to focus on their direct dealer business, with a chosen few dealers given favourable terms in return for 80-plus per cent of the MNO's connection volume.

"But the constant MNO focus on minimum connection targets creates a dilemma for dealers who know the targets will be difficult to hit when dealing with multiple networks. The result is more dealers aligning themselves to a single provider for the majority of their activity. In such a saturated market, retaining customers is key and to that end many dealers spend 75 per cent of their monthly activity renewing customer contracts, leaving them little time to further develop and grow their business."

According to Curran this legacy scenario is holding some dealers back from becoming truly converged players, wary about jeopardising the relationships they have with their existing customers through selling unfamiliar products. Curran's strategy is to help these companies evolve, consulting with them at each phase of their development. "The net result for our partners is a technology platform designed to offer simplicity, flexibility and control," he said. "Partners of all sizes are winning and retaining larger or more complex deals that would previously have been won only by the networks."

Tailored solutions

plan.com's proposition has evolved to provide tailored customer acquisition packages and offers other forms of communication, not just mobile. As a result, plan.com has appealed to a wider target market including fixed and IT resellers. "IoT also represents a fantastic opportunity for creating value and return," stated Curran, noting that plan.com has developed its portal platform to provide partners with the tools required to embrace this opportunity.

For Curran, the most interesting trends are not



Keith Curran

related to a specific product or service, rather the desire in a saturated and consolidating market to maintain and retain existing subscriber bases. "Price, as the single USP, is not sustainable," he stated. "As prices bottom out and bring increasing pressure on margins, partners and customers realise the value generated by strong, consistent and relevant customer service propositions. The in-life support propositions are equally, if not more important than the competitiveness of the package. We focus on the ongoing development of real-time and valuable support propositions."

Not surprisingly, mobile is seen as one of the most cutting edge technologies, noted Curran. "But the way the industry generally delivers, maintains and

reports on mobile solutions is stuck in the 1980s," he added. "Held back by manual processes and spread sheet overload. Our vision is centered around technology and its ability to deliver a single, fully automated real-time solution for all forms of communication."

A big influence on the future look of the mobile landscape will be large network mergers and their impact on the industry in terms of competition and pricing, pointed out John Pett, Managing Director for Chess Partner Services. "I also believe there will be a marked increase in the wearables sector, both from a product innovation standpoint and consumer uptake," he stated. "The interconnectivity of handsets, wearables and other devices will continue to be a focus of product

development as the end user demand for data increases. Greater 4G availability will facilitate this. The fact that voice is slowly becoming less relevant in terms of mobile communication is also of significance. Networks and businesses closely linked to the mobile market are preparing for the time when data may be the most sought after commodity."

The decline in mobile call spend means there is growing demand for data and connected devices. Concepts such as the IoT are further adding fuel to this demand, which Pett believes will become a big focus in the B2B world. "As such, Chess Partner Services launched an IoT proposition to the channel in March," he explained. "I'm also strong in belief that the affordability and expanding capabilities of CRM solutions for small and medium businesses will be bolstered by the power of mobile technology. More and more employees will be able to conduct business through these systems and voice will become a less critical component in terms of management and communication."

Pett's mobile vision is primarily centred around data, interconnectivity and the world of digital. In much the same way that PCs were once considered the hubs of communication for all data and office needs, mobiles will gradually take on that mantle, he believes. "Technologies such as IoT will become more powerful and scalable, opening up new avenues in regards to what a mobile device's potential is in the world of business," he added. "Our mobile vision is to gain a

Opportunity & ripe for change

competitive edge by investing in digital and developing a product portfolio that enables our partners to offer a range of mobile solutions.

"While our movement towards cloud-based and digital solutions is exemplified by the investment we have placed into products such as Cloud PBX and our own partner portal, mobile is still very much a large part of our business. We've introduced a raft of mobile airtime commercials for our partners as we want to add long-term value to their businesses."

Research carried out by Gamma found that 83 per cent of businesses experience an increase in productivity from employees

using mobile when away from their desks. "Today's businesses need to know that when their employees are not in the office their ability to communicate will not change," said Rob Davis, Head of Converged Services at Gamma. "The unfortunate reality, however, is that it does. Most mobile users today experience variable connectivity with their signal dropping out when they hit their provider's not-spots."

Following its acquisition of a core network in 2014 Gamma has been working hard to build a new service that addresses the needs and challenges of today's business market. "This gives us full control of the mobile service in addition to the

control we already have over our fixed voice and data network," stated Davis. "We're about to launch our new Gamma Mobile service. It has been designed with the business mobile user in mind and gives our channel partners direct access to the core of the Gamma Mobile network, so they can easily make changes to the mobiles within their base, in real-time, without having to involve a third party. With our MultiNet bolt-on users gain access to multiple networks in one SIM. So, provided there is coverage from an available mobile network users can always make and receive calls with MultiNet."

Gamma Mobile forms a foundation for convergence,

noted Davis, enabling the firm to take its portfolio of voice, data and mobile solutions to the next level, while offering channel partners and their customers greater flexibility and control. "The new service also includes 4G, improved data monitoring with near real-time mediation and billing, as well as more flexible data usage alerts," added Davis. "With this new capability we believe Gamma Mobile is well placed to help the channel provide converged fixed and mobile services."

Abzorb has a strong mobile-centric background with white label mobile propositions delivered on Vodafone and O2. The company has evolved into

a UC provider and in just five years its partner base has grown from 23 to 370-plus UK resellers. Abzorb has built its own data and DSL network to offer a unified white label solution.

"Being able to support our partners with solutions requiring mobile data and fixed line services on a single bill and owned by the partner is our driver for the future," said Mark Riddell, Head of Indirect Channel. "Future mobile offerings will be part of a network delivered FMC solution. Mobile, fixed and hosted will work as one to provide the customer with a unified solution, offering cost savings, scalability, flexibility and functionality within a single proposition." ■

A Comms Dealer Webinar in association with Gamma



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The benefits for improving business voice, data and mobile network performance are clear – better customer service, enhanced productivity, collaboration and better commercial flexibility cited as just a few.

However, the road to improvement is challenging, with eight out of ten businesses finding it more and more difficult to manage their voice, mobile and data services, according to a recent survey conducted by Gamma. In addition, 70% believe the rise in working trends (such as BYOD) has placed increasing pressure on network performance. Seeking network efficiency in an age of increased demand for mobility presents a big dilemma for many businesses.

Join our webinar to find out:

- Key drivers for change in the business mobile market
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- Lessons from other countries
- How mobile and fixed services need to evolve to meet real business needs

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A strong identity is vita



LORRIN WHITE
TOTAL

“ The age old, first question associated with any form of marketing, but specifically when undertaking any exercise around brand, is almost always ‘How much did that cost?’. It is true that cost, expertise to deliver, consensus of opinion and ROI are challenges faced when considering brand as a developing business, but your strategic positioning is inextricably linked with the quality of your brand and thus planned and sustained investment is essential. With the right quantitative and qualitative research at the outset of a brand project, it is easy to dispel myths of how well you thought you were represented by your brand and vice versa. Branding is expensive, but in my view, a highly weighted critical success factor. ”



TOM METCALFE
CHANNEL TELECOM

“ Your company brand is almost a tangible asset and creating a strong, reputable brand identity requires months, often years of development. Often when a company starts the company brand sits with the individual or individuals at the head of the company. As a company grows beyond one-on-one relationships, the necessity for a strong company brand takes over. Your customers and staff need now buy in to something bigger. Essential to a strong brand is constant development. Listening to your customers, re-evaluating the market, where your company sits, where you wish to be and adapting accordingly. Extending far beyond your logo and advertising, your tone of voice, your sales pitch, your customer service process, all contribute to your company’s brand identity. ”



The Ford Mustang logo which took 100 hours from all over the world. It can be recognized

Many years ago, a big telco proudly announced its new brand identity via the columns of this magazine. It was a squiggly ring which, we were reliably informed was part of a rebranding exercise that had cost the company around £200,000, which was a lot of money back then.

When reporting on the rebrand we cheekily suggested the designer behind the brand identity had ran out of ideas but at the 11th hour had spotted a tea stain on his or her blotter and a eureka moment had followed.

The ‘tea stain’ moniker we gave the brand became synonymous with the design but was not taken with any sense of humour by the PR company behind it, who promptly proceeded to make the situation worse. They quite pretentiously advised us in a formal statement that the ring represented the company’s strength and sense of community via the shape of a ‘Ring of Fire’. Needless to say we ran the statement in full, with some obvious embellishments (we will spare you the details).



JOHN PETT
CHESS

“ At Chess, our branding goes way beyond our logo; everything from our website, our social media and the way we answer the phone is critical. Our brand reassures our customers, builds loyalty and provides motivation and direction for our staff. We’re really proud of our Blueprint for success. Written by our people it tells the Chess story to our staff and customers. It helps us focus on our mission, vision, the critical areas we focus on and the importance we attach to our culture and values. The blueprint gives us an identity, you can’t tell anyone about a brand you can’t remember, our blueprint is critical in generating referrals, it’s consistent and clear and puts our customers at ease. ”



HELEN BELCHER
KCOM

“ A brand is never just about your logo or what you say, it’s about what you do and how you do it. I believe brand investment is best spent through ensuring inspiring leadership, employee recognition and an amazing customer experience; and although the deliverables of loyalty and advocacy are difficult to measure, employees who stay longer and work harder, customers who are loyal and recommend or more effective sales people who benefit from the brand ‘selling itself’ are all examples of brand return. So, for me, the most important element of my company brand is that it’s honest and lives its values from the inside out so whenever you see our logo you know exactly what you’re going to get. ”



CHRIS WIDOEKES
NIMANS

“ Brand identity is becoming increasingly important to connect with customers inspire, trust and ultimately generate the confidence to buy. Get it wrong and the consequence can be dire. In the telecoms industry it’s important to stand out from the competition with a brand that’s easily recognised and identifiable. At Nimans we place great pride in our branding which has been a key component of our business success for over 30 years. We feel it’s synonymous with quality and support; a trusted name for reliability and service excellence. It’s much more than just a logo or graphic. It’s a reflection of our complete business – a high profile interface with customers - and its impact shouldn’t be underestimated. ”



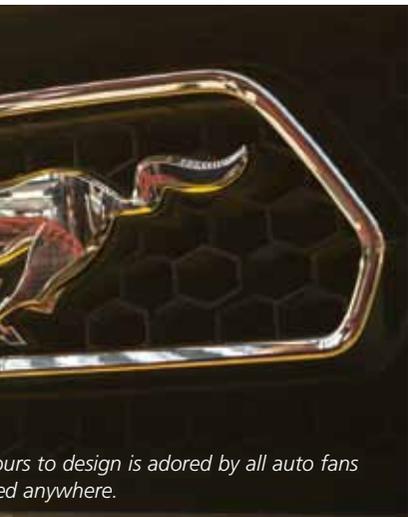
MARK SAUNDERS
NINE

“ Following a major re-brand in 2012, Nine has continually developed the freshness and relevance of our brand identity across all media. I believe this is super important because our brand provides the lens through which customers view our business. The Nine brand is a focus for our ethos, while representing the ebullient personality and culture of our organisation and our people. We know it is commonplace to dislike people who say one thing and do another, so our brand works hard to avoid this type of perception. Our staff love the ‘purple’ brand, which makes them proud to work for Nine, while our customers understand our brand values and enjoy the reassurance that they have backed a winning horse. ”

OK, let's grow

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PHILLIP REYNOLDS
OAK INNOVATION

“ Getting your branding right is desperately important. Your brand creates a culture within your business and a trust relationship with your customers. It also reflects your positioning in your chosen marketplace, whether a cost effective and affordable solution or an expensive premium brand. Your brand should run through everything you do, there should be a consistent message in your marketing and a consistent attitude given by all your staff. At Oak we have the strap line ‘innovation in business communication’ and we use that as a litmus test in everything we do from designing products, running our helpdesk, supporting our resellers, in fact we’re in the middle of a rebrand for our new mid-market products and doing all of the above right now!



ADRIAN ROBINSON
PLAN.COM

“ Our brand is our reputation. And our reputation is our business. It’s that simple. Therefore, everyone we employ is responsible for its maintenance and development. Branding (our logo, visuals and words) is a fundamental element of our brand, but it isn’t everything. In many ways, it’s only a mirror. It frames and reflects our values, qualities and vision. However, as Marty Neumeier said, “Brand is not what you say it is. It’s what they say it is.” So, any time we spend developing a brand in isolation – failing to take into account what we stand for or what ‘they’ think – is wasted. We focus our time and energy on developing our brand by living it, capturing it and communicating it.

By all accounts, on reading our piece, the company’s MD threw our magazine across the room, incandescent with rage.

The point in relating this story is that creating a meaningful brand really does matter and becomes a very emotional process to get right. In an ever-competitive world, a good brand identity will make you stand out and helps customers and prospects understand and remember what’s unique about you. A bad one will give people the impression that you are out of date, conceited or at worst unprofessional.



DUNCAN WILKINSON
TMS

“ Branding is very important to TMS! It’s not just about the logo, company colours and graphics ...it goes way beyond that for us. It’s about the whole customer experience: Our web site, social media, the way we answer the phone, our total interaction with customers. There are a number of reasons why we think it’s important: It promotes recognition of TMS; sets us apart from our competition; provides a direction for our staff i.e. tells them how to act and meet the company’s goals; generates referrals for us; and helps the board stay focussed on what we are about! It essentially wraps everything up built on a strong idea... in our case ‘Enabling the channel to focus’.



KATRINA HOPEWELL
TRICCA

“ To put it simply, your brand identity is the face of your business. It’s what your employees should live and breathe and it’s why your clients choose you over your competitors. Investing in creating a unique identity is increasingly important to communicate how you differentiate your values, services and ideas. You need to be able to enthuse your channel partners and their end customers. Why should they be selling your products over another, in an increasingly commoditised market? Brand can also influence how your employees learn and perform at work. At Tricca, we believe in keeping it simple to clearly communicate the elevator pitch for your brand. And if you get this right, the rest will follow across all levels of your business.

Branding is more than a logo or a website or a business card or the colours and typefaces you choose to represent your company. Your brand is your voice in the marketplace, and it is your proposition for disruption. It is how you tell your story, and it is absolutely key to market reputation. Some of the contributors to this month’s Kaleidoscope have recently gone through a rebranding exercise and all agree the time invested in the process is entirely worthwhile and crucial to success.



VINCENT DISNEUR
UNION STREET

“ Developing a clear brand identity that reflects trust, confidence and quality, whilst communicating the company’s core values to its employees, is critical to any business. Customers, in most cases, come into contact with a company’s brand long before its staff. The rise of the internet means this is true now more than ever, and the perception a customer forms of a brand through online research will determine whether or not they make contact. Last year, Union Street conducted a brand refresh with the objective of updating our brand to reflect the sophistication of our solutions and our commitment to being a valued partner that helps clients realise the potential of their businesses. This approach was encapsulated by our strapline, ‘powering your potential’.



ANDY GRANT
BOWAN ARROW

“ Most successful businesses spend a lifetime developing and maintaining a brand identity; some even try to re-invent their brand which I always think is an unnecessary waste of time, budget and resources. Personally, I have spent that last seven years crafting my brand and identity as @channelman the guy who runs that B2B Marketing Consultancy, Bowan Arrow. Starting from scratch a business needs to create a direct connection to their target audience and make it easy for them to connect your brand with the service or product that you are offering. A brand acts as an enabler not a barrier and it helps to build successful customer relationships and increase your reputation which should then ensure that your staff motivation and business generation goals are achieved.

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CFO for IP Solutions



Olly Garland

IP SOLUTIONS has beefed up its leadership team with the appointment of Olly Garland as CFO. He joins soon after Matthew Parker was appointed CEO by PE investor Livingbridge. Garland has held a number of high profile leadership positions including CEO and CFO of Direct Wines, and CFO and COO of Infracast, a provider of mobile messaging for large corporates.

Parker commented: "We will leverage Olly's strategic skills and M&A experience to accelerate the growth of our business. The telecoms market is undergoing enormous change and we plan to be one of the winners by delivering both organic and acquisition-led growth."

Garland said: "I was attracted to IP Solutions for two reasons – the drive of the team and the ambitions of PE backer Livingbridge. This combination provides the ingredients we need to build a stand-out leader in this industry."

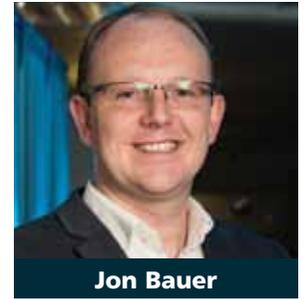
IP Solutions has also appointed Jeremy Langley as CMO. He brings much commercial leadership experience having worked in fast-growth technology companies including CMO and MD roles at Lumesse, a SaaS-based business he helped to grow from start-up to revenues in excess of 100 million euros.

Zen names tech leader

Jon Bauer's remit as incoming Technical Director for ZEN Internet is to lead the firm's next generation network strategy.

He brings 15-plus years experience in the technology, media and telecoms sector, and prior to joining Zen he was Director of Technology at TalkTalk, having held many other senior positions within the company.

Bauer will head up the Network and Infrastructure division at Zen Internet as it kicks off a multi-million pound investment programme to build a new national network. "I have joined Zen to advise and deliver on the evolution of its network from a reliable and efficient one to a carrier grade telecommunications infrastructure that will deliver and support the next generation of connectivity, IT and telecommunications services," commented Bauer. "When complete, the new Zen network will provide the company with a solid platform on which to further build its credentials as a wholesaler."



Jon Bauer

Also on the move...



Will Kennedy

WILL Kennedy has joined Solar Communications as Sales Director, moving from Intercity Telecom where he was Sales and Marketing Director, and formerly Sales Director at Daisy. He brings more than 17

years experience in the telecoms and managed services sector. CEO John Whitty said: "Will's experience and strong vendor relationships means that he is the ideal person to support our ambitious plans." Kennedy added: "The market opportunity is huge and Solar is well primed for growth. I share John's vision and ambitions for the company and I look forward to leading our sales team."

KEVIN Greener has joined Sunderland-based CCS as UK Sales Manager, bringing more than 27 years telecoms sales experience to the role. Greener said:



Kevin Greener

"CCS has a strong heritage and is one of the most well-established IT and telecoms firms in the north east, which is one of the reasons I was attracted to this role. Another is the retention rate, both for customers and staff, with many of our

clients having been with us for more than 10 years. IT and telecoms is a sector that is always evolving and my role is to ensure CCS keeps up with that and builds on its foundations."

Ellis secured by Exclusive



David Ellis

FORMER Computerlinks and Arrow ECS executive David Ellis has joined Exclusive Group as Director of Global Services. "Increasingly we're seeing more and more global deals and our ability

to support these will add more value to both our vendor and channel partners," said Barrie Desmond, COO of Exclusive Group. "Global services are a key part of our growth strategy and David will play a crucial role in this."

Ellis added: "I've identified and brought to market a number of new technologies and services, and have seen the cyber security market evolve at speed. I can't wait to start helping our vendor and channel partners achieve more value from their relationship with Exclusive Group through new global service offerings."

He joins Exclusive from Arrow ECS where he was part of the senior leadership team in EMEA responsible for vendor business development and the roll-out of new propositions. Ellis was formerly Director of New Technology and Services at Computerlinks before its acquisition by Arrow. In his 13 years with Computerlinks he built an e-Security offering before assuming responsibility for services, emerging technology and market sectors.

Williams makes career Advance

EX-DELL high flyer Andy Williams has been appointed Head of Professional Services at Advanced. Since joining Advanced in April 2015 as VP of Strategic Projects he has overseen a



Andy Williams

number of business transformation initiatives. His software market career includes six years at Dell, and prior to joining Advanced he was a Consulting Director with Vista Consulting Group, part of Vista Equity Partners which acquired Advanced last year.

Following its acquisition, Advanced has implemented new company-wide systems, realigned its business units, opened two new offices, undergone a major rebrand and embarked on a recruitment campaign.

Williams said: "I'm looking forward to creating a strong professional services community within the company. I will also be reviewing and standardising processes as well as ensuring we are using our new internal systems to best effect."



The channel's best celebrate success

THE channel's top sales and marketing stars were recognised at the 2016 Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards held in the magnificent surroundings of the Sheraton Park Lane ballroom in London last month.

Brilliantly hosted by BBC March of the Day and Breakfast Time presenter Dan Walker, the awards gave top performers from the channel's leading companies the chance to celebrate success and let their hair down at the industry's favourite day time event. This

year the stand out teams were VoIP distributor ProVu, network provider Entanet and fast growing reseller Focus. ProVu and Entanet both secured a unique double, picking up Sales Team of the Year and Marketing Team of the year in the Distributor and Vendor categories and South Coast based reseller Focus also celebrated twice, netting Reseller Sales Team of the Year (£7.5m plus turnover) and the coveted Comms Dealer Reseller Sales Team of the Year.

Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent said: "All our winners and finalists should be congratulated for the efforts they put into these awards which genuinely proves that this industry is in great shape because of the talented people that work in it."

The Awards celebrations continued into the evening at Comms Dealer's 20th 'After Show' Anniversary Party kindly sponsored by Fidelity Energy.



Pete Tomlinson from Awards sponsor Kcom gave an inspirational introductory speech.



The BBC's Dan Walker was an amusing and quick witted host.



Distributor Channel Account Team of the Year. PROVU.



Distributor Channel Marketing Team of the Year. PROVU.



Distributor Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year. PRAGMA.



Vendor Channel Account Team of the Year. ENTANET.



Vendor Channel Marketing Team of the Year. ENTANET.



Vendor Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year. BT WHOLESAL.



Service Provider Channel Account Team of the Year. PLAN.COM.



Service Provider Channel Marketing Team of the Year. CHANNEL. TELECOM.



Service Provider Marketing Campaign of the Year. FIDELITY GROUP.



Reseller Sales Team of the Year (Up to £2.5m). LOOP VOICE & DATA.



Reseller Sales Team of the Year (£2.5m to £5m). NSN.



Reseller Sales Team of the Year (£5m to £7.5m). BERRY.



Reseller Sales Team of the Year (£7.5m Plus). FOCUS GROUP.



Reseller Best Marketing Campaign. LILY COMMS.



Channel Marketing/PR Agency of the Year. BLABBERMOUTH.



Comms Dealer Sales Team of the Year. FOCUS GROUP.



The Virtual1 team enjoy the after show party.



Fidelity Group celebrate their marketing success.



The Comms Dealer team commemorates the magazine's 20th birthday.

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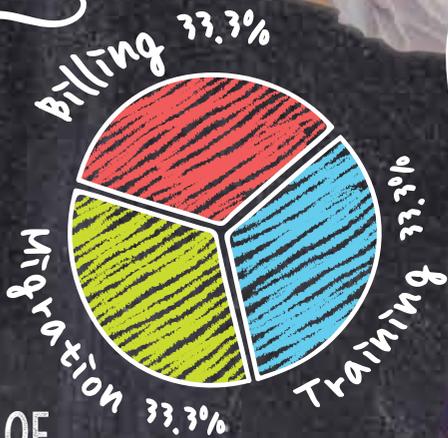
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