



Aerial MD Paul Davis
flies into stratospheric
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business transformations."

The Comms National Awards
will be held on October 13th at
London's Hilton Hotel on Park
Lane (see pages 43-45).



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This month's movers and shakers



No bars as hosted market unleashes

BARRIERS to widespread cloud adoption continue to fall, releasing a wave of fresh demand for hosted solutions this year and record entries for CNA 2016.

SPECIAL REPORT

Traditional barriers to hosted telephony adoption such as concerns about security and resilience have been 'smashed' according to Chris Goodman, MD of Focus Group. "Almost 70% of systems sold last month were hosted," he said.

"Connectivity is cheap, the commercials are strong and you can reduce outbound call spend at the same time."

Witney-based STL has witnessed a steeper rise in hosted sales, noted MD Brendon Cross (pictured). "Hosted now accounts for 75% of our sales," he added. "The proposition is better understood, buyers are more aware of the cloud, their IT is probably hosted and the opex model is more attractive."

This trend is the driving force behind a record level of entries for the 2016 Comms National Awards (CNA) with a 60% increase in submissions for cloud-based solutions this year.

Chair of the judging panel Paul Cunningham stated: "The number, variety and quality of entries in the Cloud Solutions and Hosted categories has underlined the extent of the opportunity in this marketplace.

"The Cloud SME Solution category in particular yielded a record number of entries of high quality and demonstrable business impact, not just in terms of cost of ownership but in driving business transformations."

The Comms National Awards will be held on October 13th at London's Hilton Hotel on Park Lane (see pages 43-45).

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

WELCOME to the September issue of Comms Dealer which we hope will, again, raise everyone's spirits. Why? Because the pages of this magazine again reflect a robust, forward looking industry replete with potential.

The moral of our sector is that customers and technological development rarely behave in predictable patterns, so failure of foresight is not an option. Therefore those companies able to demonstrate agility combined with clarity of vision stand to gain most in the 'new world' of comms, as displayed by Cloudsource MD Carl Lowe (see page 42).

Replacing the old with the new demands true commitment and trailblazers such as pure fibre revolutionary CityFibre predict that copper will soon go the way of TV valves and tubes, and that a recipe for a perfect storm is in place following the widespread availability of dark fibre (see page 34). Meanwhile, promoting 'old' as better than 'new' is the mantra advanced by Clarion Communications, a visionary organisation that foresaw an opportunity to create a global PBX hardware refurbishment revolution from its premises in Billingshurst (see page 40).

As a media cheerleader for the industry, Comms Dealer is duty bound to feature growing levels of outside interest from organisations such as PE houses with an appetite to invest in the brightest prospects (see pages 52-53), and financial resource firms such as iwoca which, attracted by the growth potential of cash strapped comms companies, is offering a leg up to ambitious business owners wanting faster growth, enabling them to realise their strategic vision.

Where potential exists, it will not go unnoticed. What better incentive is there to ensure that you have a hand in whipping up the perfect storm that exists today, and raise a glass to the high spirited entrepreneurs that help to define and grow the industry.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Energy deal turns on gas



John Haw (left) with Account Manager Sean Dixon

FIDELITY Energy has secured a major tie-up with British Gas and Scottish Gas to help ICT resellers across the UK expand their portfolios into the supply of energy services.

The deal represents a breakthrough for the fast-growing energy business headed up by former Gamma channel boss John Haw.

"This strengthens our ability to help resellers serve a range of businesses in both the SME and corporate energy market," said Haw. "It also means we'll be able to sell Scottish Gas products, something our Scottish partners are keen on.

"British Gas and Scottish Gas supply gas, electricity and a range of energy services and the strength of the two brands will help our partners when offering energy services alongside the communications and IT solutions they provide.

"British Gas options have already been built into our Energy Management Portal and we share a similar CRM system in Salesforce.com which enables us to fully automate contract production for our partners."

Since its launch at the Comms Vision Convention held at Gleneagles Hotel last November Fidelity Energy has secured over 75 new reseller partners in the communications and IT sector.

SHORT CALLS

South West Comms Group is to be the sole UK outsource partner to resellers for Toshiba Unified Communications & Solutions (UCS) products. All Toshiba UCS parts, licences and support will be provided by the company. Resellers can also outsource maintenance contracts on a remote and/or field basis to swcomms.

Hull-based Pure Broadband has joined CityFibre's Gigabit City project as a launch partner in its home town. Rob Hamlin, Commercial Director at CityFibre, said: "Businesses in Hull can now capitalise on gigabit speed Internet connectivity to compete in a digital world." Pure Broadband MD Adrian Bolster added: "It is time for Hull to join the gigabit revolution."

Arrow points to acquisitions

ARROW Business Communications has geared up for a period of fast growth and M&A activity following an investment by Growth Capital Partners that sees both parties hold a 50% shareholding in the business. Arrow has completed seven acquisitions during the last six years and almost trebled in size, transitioning from its mobile roots to a broader based business communications supplier. The company is now on the hunt for larger acquisition opportunities to bolster its hosted, data and IT services portfolio. Arrow CEO Chris Russell commented: "This deal is testament to the hard work contributed by the Arrow team over the last six years."



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COMMENT: OPEN SEASON



Richard Carter

THOSE who know me will be aware that football is not a great priority of mine. However, I couldn't help to notice that all eyes seem to be on Manchester now that the new football season has kicked off, with vast amounts of money spent by both our clubs. Being Manchester based we've noticed a definite buzz around the city following the arrivals of Pep and Jose in the managerial hot seats. But it's more the mind blowing transfer

fees of star names such as Paul Pogba and John Stones that have created the biggest stir.

Record breaking TV revenues have prompted unprecedented levels of spending across the whole Premier League with almost £1 billion spent on transfers throughout the summer. It's a crazy figure with clubs up and down the country desperate for success. Those TV revenues are obviously driven by the fight between BT and Sky for subscribers which is just as fierce as the tussle between United, City and all the other teams fighting for trophies.

I've not got a clue who will come out on top at the end of the football season but one thing is for sure, the appeal of the Premier League is stronger than ever and the bubble shows no sign of bursting. This is, at least, good for sales as advances in technology enable fans to watch in more ways than ever, fuelling demand for ever more data bandwidth.

Richard Carter, Group Sales and Business Development Director, Nimans

- From car phones to PCI compliance: How Aerial Business Communications MD Paul Davis made it big in comms (page 32).
- It is a stroke of good fortune for Clarion that its mission is also its biggest opportunity – to change the culture of re-use and waste in the phone system marketplace, says MD Tom Hunt (page 40).

Onecom swoops on key Vodafone firm

TWO of Vodafone's biggest UK partners have combined following the acquisition of Evolve by Onecom. The deal is expected to bring new earnings of £7m in the first year.

Onecom will take over Evolve's operations in London, Cambridge and Shoeburyness, along with Cardiff-based The Word which is owned by Evolve and will become Onecom's first office in Wales.

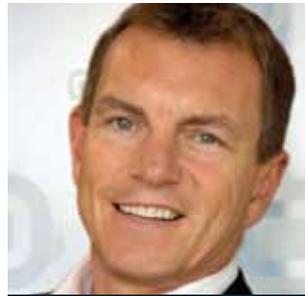
Evolve boasts annual turnover of £20m and is Vodafone UK's third largest partner. Onecom currently generates £60m a year and is the mobile operator's biggest UK partner.

Vodafone has no equity interest in either company.

The acquisition will bring additional investments in Onecom's 'total communications' drive which sees mobile, fixed line, data and IT services offered to businesses as one integrated package.

The deal also adds circa 100 staff to Onecom's existing 350-strong workforce and 65,000 UK Vodafone business connections to its portfolio of accounts, taking the company's total number to over 300,000.

A post-acquisition priority is to invest in the Welsh operation



Darren Ridge

and launch a recruitment drive to double the region's headcount. A number of new positions at Onecom's offices in the UK will also be created.

Darren Ridge, Onecom's CEO, said: "Evolve's customer

focused approach and expertise in UC reflects Onecom's own strategy and values. Evolve will continue to blossom and grow under the Onecom brand."

Nick Birtwistle, Director of Partnerships and Alliances at Vodafone UK, commented on the deal: "Onecom and Evolve have been a part of the Vodafone Partner Programme since its inception and have led the field. This move will see them grow even stronger."

The acquisition follows Onecom's £1m investment in a new distribution centre located in Hampshire. **See page 48**

comms dealer

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Wavenet now one to watch



Bill Dawson

BEECH Tree Private Equity has backed the £35m MBO of UC provider Wavenet and alongside the Royal Bank of Scotland provided an acquisition war chest that enables the company to make a number of strategic bolt-on buys.

Andrew Ashton joins the business as Finance Director and Edward Spurrier, former CEO of Alternative Networks, has been named Chairman.

Paul Franks (MD at Beech Tree Private Equity) and Adam Rudd, also from the investing firm, join the board.

Wavenet delivers unified comms solutions to over 2,000 customers and connects over 12,000 end points.

The business was founded by Chris Jones in 2000 and three years later the current CEO, Bill Dawson, invested and joined the business.

Dawson commented on the deal: "Beech Tree Private Equity is on board to support our growth plans, both organically and through acquisition.

"Furthermore, by tapping into its industry knowledge and network we have been able to strengthen our management team with the addition of Ed and Andrew."

Franks added: "Wavenet's management team have invested heavily in the technology and infrastructure that will make the delivery of our growth plans much easier.

"We are also backing a team that has successfully completed several acquisitions. With the capital we have injected we think we can significantly grow the business together."

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SENNHEISER hosted its 21st annual charity golf day at Bearwood Lakes Golf Club, raising over £15,000 for Make a Wish foundation, including £4,400 from guest donations and £6,400 from a silent auction and secret bids. "The support was staggering, and the amount raised shows that everyone was generous with their time and donations," said David Brisden, Director of Operations.

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

IT'S time for us all to Fix Britain's Internet. Our national communications infrastructure is not providing organisations with the best possible experience. From the moment a company signs up for an Internet connection it can take weeks, if not months, to get the business online. This wait is unacceptable as the Internet is critical to businesses, schools and the public sector.

Having to wait weeks for a connection to be installed can mean losing revenue. On top of this,

for our partners and their end customers there is not a great deal of transparency in terms of their connection progress. This puts our partners' reputation at risk. End customers hold their IT systems partners responsible, who in turn hold TalkTalk Business responsible. We then exert pressure on Openreach which is ultimately responsible for connections to the core network.

We have been working closely with Openreach to bring down the provisioning times for our connections and have had success, such as reducing our Ethernet installs to the point where they are 11 days quicker than the industry average. This is significant progress but it does not go far enough for our partners. That's why we feel the time has come to lead the campaign to Fix Britain's Internet. Find out more at www.fixbritainsinternet.com

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

- Jane Ashworth, MD for SMART Technologies UK&I, has only one purpose – to reclaim the firm's dominant market status (page 26).
- The availability of dark fibre has created a significant shift in the connectivity power balance, placing an unprecedented opportunity into the hands of those who are closer to customers and offering them limitless capacity (page 34).

Adapt seized by Datapipe



Stewart Smythe

US-BASED Datapipe has bolstered its presence in the European market with the acquisition of UK managed cloud services provider and Advanced AWS Consulting Partner Adapt for an undisclosed sum.

Datapipe CEO Robb Allen said: "Our similar approach to guiding clients on their cloud journey makes the acquisition a natural fit for us and will increase our scale and service capabilities in the UK and broader European market."

The acquisition bolsters Adapt's pure managed cloud proposition and global reach and gives its customers access to Datapipe's global data centres and cloud, compliance, security, governance, automation and DevOps solutions.

Stewart Smythe, CEO at Adapt, stated: "UK-only consolidations in our space can get

messy and be short-sighted. We have chosen a far more exciting path.

"We are seeing emerging customer requirements for a tactical and strategic presence overseas so it makes sense for us to advance the UK's capability in a global market rather than create more bulky domestic organisations. This agreement is about mutually enhancing regional and global capabilities."

The acquisition is part of Datapipe's strategy to gain ground in the management of multiple cloud platforms such as AWS, Azure and its own hosted private cloud Stratosphere.

Last year the company acquired AWS assessment, automation, and migration company DualSpark to simplify the complexity of migrating and optimising apps and infrastructure in public clouds.

SHORT CALLS

Cloud-based hybrid technologies are exerting an ever greater influence on the market according to Nimans. "For years people have been saying the PBX will die but it's just evolving," stated Paul Burn, Head of Category Sales. "Hybrid platforms tend to cover all bases and their influence is growing."

Andrew Set has joined Inclarity as Operations Director bringing 16 years telecoms experience to the firm. Previous jobs include operational, commercial and leadership roles at Luminet, Redstone and Centrica Telecommunications. "My key driver is to ensure maximum customer satisfaction and build a trusted relationship with our clients," said Set.

TeleWare has partnered with London-based banking and financial IT firm Linx Networks which will offer TeleWare's FCA compliant mobile call recording solution. Steve Haworth, CEO, TeleWare, said: "This builds on our strategy to work with partners to develop and provide integrated compliance solutions to a wider range of sectors and customers."

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COMMENT: POWER OF CONVICTION



Pete Tomlinson

A NUMBER of the team have just returned from the Microsoft Worldwide Partner Conference in Toronto. Unfortunately, I couldn't make it across in person this year but talking to them after they returned was fascinating. The first talking point was the amount and quality of the content provided, offering insights into the market, Microsoft's own plans and the customer

landscape. Office365 of course continued to be a big theme, but it really struck me just how far it's moved on from simply being a subscription-based version of the traditional suite of Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

Its integration of these authoring tools with mail and social, sites and content management, chat, messaging and voice plus analytics is nearly complete. That emphasis on BI and analytics was also interesting. It really seems like we are turning a corner where the mass of data we all have can be turned into useful business insights by real companies, without rooms full of dedicated boffins.

All this of course means Azure was high on the agenda, not just in terms of an IaaS platform but as the hub of an ecosystem for access and identity, IoT, machine learning and so much else – all reassuring in the context of our own hybrid cloud offering for the channel launching very soon.

However, it was the conviction the team came back with that impressed me most. They truly believe in the journey, the strategy and the difference it will make to peoples' lives. That's so important at this critical moment as we see that worlds of software and communications collide. It is also a warning to the vendors that sit on the traditional comms side who've been unable to instil such passion.

Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM

• Activity in the telco M&A market remains buoyant with a noticeable trend emerging during the past few months (page 52).

Marnham enlisted as new Timico CEO

TIMICO Technology Group's Non-Exec Ben Marnham is to take over the CEO role.

Former CEO and company founder Tim Radford becomes Executive Chairman.

Marnham boasts 20 years comms industry experience and began his career at Alternative Networks where he worked for 18 years, most recently as Chief Operating Officer. He joined Timico as a Non-Exec in 2014, a year after setting up 28 Capital, an advisory and investment firm focused on telecoms and technology businesses.

Timico, which made its debut as the new sponsor of the Cheltenham Gold Cup in March this year, has set its sights on ambitious growth following impressive 2015 financial results which saw group turnover increase by over 25% to £52.8m with pre-tax profit up by over 150% following two strategic acquisitions in spring last year – managed IT specialist Wirebird and the telecoms assets of Coms plc

Radford said: "Ben has taken up the challenge of leading the business into our next phase of growth and development.

"Advances in technology and changes in the way employees



Ben Marnham

and their businesses work and communicate continue to drive the unstoppable shift towards all things cloud. We are perfectly positioned to make further inroads in this space.

"Ben will develop a unified strategy based around the group's capability of delivering fully managed IT, network, UC and mobile solutions to business customers.

"His record in the industry and the strategic contribution Ben has made to the group since joining the board make him the perfect candidate."

Marnham added: "Timico is a truly independent player offering a broad range of managed

IT solutions to a long-standing base of SMB and enterprise clients. This longevity testifies to the team's commitment to putting its customers first and making the right investment decisions over the years in both infrastructure and expertise."

Timico was established by Radford in 2004 alongside a small but ambitious team, some of whom he'd worked with previously at Project Telecom (a company Radford set up in 1987 which achieved revenues of £330m before being sold to Vodafone in 2003).

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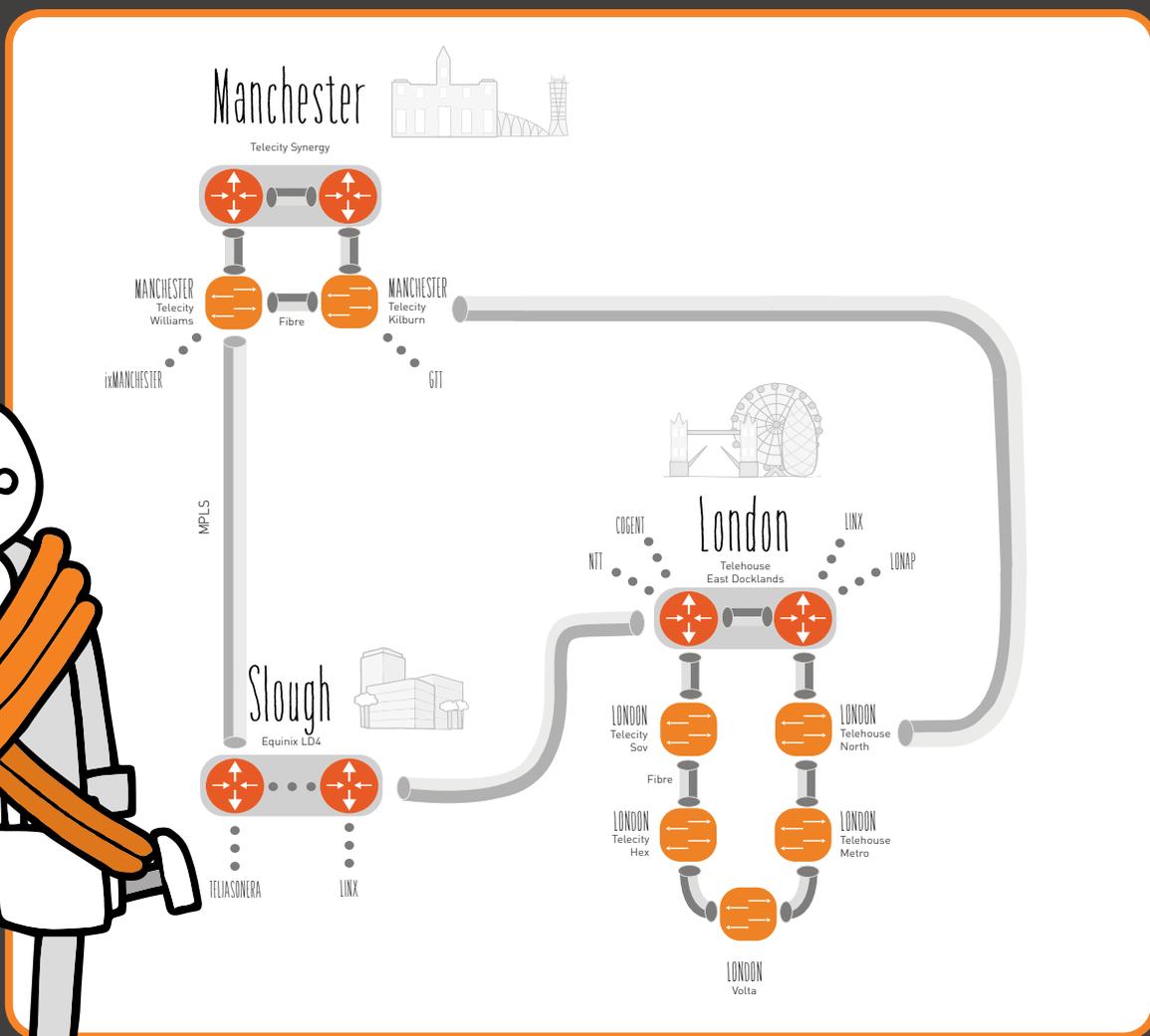


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It's time to talk to Simwood

iwoca offers cash to plug telco sector funding gap

A BUSINESS set up to plug the small business funding gap has swung its focus onto the comms sector where company founders Christoph Rieche and James Dear have identified a need for ambitious telcos with growth potential to leverage the financial resources offered by the firm.

The company has launched against a backdrop of shrinking financial solutions for needy smaller businesses as evidenced by BBA figures for Q1 2016 which show that banks approved £6.1bn of new SME loan and overdraft facilities in the period, 18% lower than in Q1 2015.

“Small businesses, unlike their larger peers, often don’t have the capital they need to invest in new opportunities while managing cash flow gaps,” stated Rieche.

“This is particularly critical in the telecoms sector where businesses are confident about their growth opportunities but they lack the resources to take advantage of them. That is why we launched iwoca.”

London-based iwoca operates independently of the banks and has developed a proprietary technology platform to eliminate the cost and complexity



Christoph Rieche

associated with traditional business finance. iwoca automatically collects thousands of data points on every business that applies. This is collected in real-time through integrations with major banks, accountancy software providers, payment processors and more.

“Analysing this data allows iwoca to approve a business for a credit line of up to £100,000 within hours,” said Rieche.

“A business can then draw down as much of the funding as they want, either for day-to-day cash flow management or to make an investment.

“Everything is managed through an online account and customers are free to repay early

or keep the funds for up to 12 months. It works on a pay-as-you-go model – companies only pay interest for each day they borrow with no other fees and no long-term commitments.”

Since it began its commercial life in 2012 iwoca has lent over £120m to more than 6,000 businesses including ACT Communications which uses funding from iwoca to achieve better deals on stock orders.

The firm’s MD Matthew Peach stated: “Bank finance has always been available to us. However, as the years have gone by and bank lending criteria has changed it has become much harder to achieve a good deal with minimal required security.

“We needed stock quickly and short-term cash was required to get the best price. With an approved credit line in place with iwoca we can commit to deals and orders that in the past we would have avoided due to potential cash flow issues.

“The business as a whole is now moving forward at a much quicker pace and this is simply down to readily available cash.”

iwoca has expanded beyond the UK to support businesses in Germany, Poland and Spain; and David Cameron highlighted iwoca as one of the UK’s most successful FinTech leaders in a speech to the Innovate Finance Global Summit. The firm was also crowned Alternative Lender of the Year for Commercial Credit in the 2015 and 2016 Credit Today awards.

“iwoca’s focus continues to be on fixing the underlying challenges that small businesses face in accessing finance,” added Rieche. “That means continuing to get our message out to businesses across the UK while working on building our platform to be more flexible.”

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IT Europa assembly aids MSPs

THE future outlook for managed services providers is bright but only if they are able to address emerging challenges, according to IT Europa MD Alan Norman.

“All indicators are pointing to the continued rapid growth of managed services with the world market predicted to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 12.5% to 2019,” he said.

“But the impact of new technologies and changing buyer behaviour in the face of evolving requirements is creating significant challenges for vendors and MSPs.”

Norman also announced the date and location for this year’s European Managed Services & Hosting Summit in Amsterdam on 7th December.

“Under the theme of the ‘Digital Dividend – The Role of Managed Services in a Digital World’, the summit will provide insights into how the market is changing and what it will take for MSPs to succeed as it evolves,” he added.

Key focus areas this year will be the IoT and M2M, the growing importance of security, trends in service delivery and how to create value both within an MSP and for its customers.



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COMMENT: THE HUMAN FACTOR



Chris Smith

OVER the past few years we've seen an increasing focus on the use of technology to drive efficiency and profits in the channel, with lean start-up methodologies pioneered in Silicon Valley being adopted to great effect. For example, technology has the power to turn manual paper-based processes into automated ones that take a fraction of the time to complete and require far less human intervention.

Whether in sales (where delays responding to a prospect can jeopardise a deal), account administration (where hours can be wasted plodding through spreadsheets) or across almost any other business divisions, the impact of properly considered and developed software can be significant.

At plan.com we're huge advocates of building software to solve problems. However, having put this into practice we've learnt that technology is only half the answer. Building and developing a team that can help partners, customers and stakeholders leverage the power of that software is equally important.

No matter how intuitive you think your proposition is, people appreciate (and sometimes demand) the human touch. They want to ask questions and receive an immediate and personal response. This is why channel companies should invest heavily in their training capabilities and ensure that every partner not only knows about the tools they've developed to help them grow and build their own businesses, but they know how to use them.

Investing in software cannot deliver returns until it's matched by a similar level of investment in people. Companies that define and execute an integrated development strategy of technology alongside teams of experts to support it will win-out in the long-term.

Chris Smith, Investment Manager, plan.com

MZA reports decline in Q1

ACCORDING to MZA's Q1 2016 analysis the global call control (PBX/IP PBX) extensions and licenses market (discounting micro PBX products) fell by 5% year-on-year and by 13% quarter-over-quarter.

"The market dipped to its lowest quarterly volumes since Q2 2009 when the financial crisis wreaked havoc on business investment worldwide," stated Will Parsons, analyst at MZA.

Parsons noted that the first quarter regularly shows lower volumes due to the high number of country markets with financial year-ends in the final quarter of the calendar year.

He attributed more of the decline to the enterprise market (over 100 extensions/licenses) which fell by 6% year-on-year, while the SME market (under 100 extensions/licenses) fell by 5% year-on-year.

"A slowdown in the global economy was exacerbated by currency fluctuations affecting worldwide exports for international vendors; and continued adoption of hosted multi-tenant telephony in developed markets prompted the global call control (PBX/IP PBX) market to register its lowest quarterly levels for several years," added Parsons.

Increasing political and economic uncertainties in Western Europe saw volume levels in call control solutions fall by 9% year-on-year in the region.

The top nine positions in the global call control market remain unchanged against Q1 2015, with Alcatel-Lucent Enterprise, Unify, Microsoft and Huawei placed from sixth to ninth respectively; while NEC leads the market ahead of Avaya and Cisco in second and third positions respectively.

In solutions under 100 extensions/licenses, NEC grew its share to 19% to stay ahead of Panasonic's 13% share. Cisco led the over 100 extensions/licenses market with a share of 20%. Avaya held onto second place ahead of NEC, Mitel and Microsoft with 14% share.

Analysis of the world IP extensions/licenses market registered a fall of 2% year-on-year with TDM extensions still representing a large proportion of the market. "Global IP penetration to the desktop rose to 50% in Q1 2016 from 48% in Q1 2015," said Parsons.

"Cisco continued to lead the global IP licenses market (19% share) with Avaya in second position (18%).

SHORT CALLS

8x8 has been accepted on the Crown Commercial Services' G-Cloud 8 framework. Kevin Scott-Cowell, UK MD, said: "Public sector organisations want to be treated like any other commercial business with employees to look after, customers to delight and a bottom line to protect."

Entanet aims to catalyse sales of Ethernet circuits by offering 100Mbps on 1Gbps Virgin on-net bearers for the same price as a 100Mbps on 100Mbps connections. The offer, which runs until mid-November, enables partners to extend bandwidth without paying the higher premium normally charged for a 1Gbps bearer.

The Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) has launched a consultancy service to help telecoms firms prepare for the apprenticeship levy which comes into force next April. "Our service takes away the headache of researching the implications for our industry," commented ITP CEO Ann Potterton. "The service will support businesses with all elements of the levy."

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Compliance service aids baffled CPs

A SERVICE to help CPs comply with confusing and changing industry regulations and prove compliance to clients has been rolled out by Train to Win.tv and the Federation of Communication Services (FCS).

The initiative is designed to help CPs check that their service delivery, marketing activity and record keeping complies with current industry regulation; and provide compliant organisations with an accreditation that forms an extension of the FCS Mark of Excellence programme.

“The service is based on a detailed review of the CP’s documentation in key areas where regulation applies,” commented Train to Win.tv founder and owner Julie Mills. “A report will be provided, highlighting areas of non-compliance together with recommendations on the action necessary to address any problem areas.

“Additional hands-on support is also available, including help with the drafting of key documents and provision of templates in some areas.”

Full accreditation will be awarded to companies that provide evidence to show that all non-compliances have been satisfactorily addressed.

The scheme builds on work already carried out by Train to Win.tv and FCS during the past two years, helping CPs to fully grasp their regulatory obligations in many areas such as sales and marketing, customer contracts, billing, codes of practice and complaints handling.

“These are all areas where Ofcom has recently carried out investigations to monitor compliance against its requirements,” added Mills. “In some cases substantial fines have been levied for non-compliance.”



Julie Mills

Ofcom also plans to overhaul the sector’s regulation as part of its Digital Communication Review, which is contained primarily in the General Conditions of Entitlement (part of the UK Communications Act).

In response to the watchdog’s regulations the new service will deliver updates on regulatory changes and offer two-yearly reassessments to ensure compliant CP’s retain their accreditation.

“The service is a logical development of our training,” said Mills. “Client feedback indicated the need for direct support and a structured framework to help make the necessary changes in their businesses.”

FCS CEO Chris Pateman added: “FCS welcomes any initiatives which help to improve the professionalism and the public image of the industry.”

HighNet is the first company to sign up for the service and gain accreditation.

“It can be difficult for companies to identify whether a telecoms supplier is reputable or not until they encounter a problem,” noted Katrina McDonald Service Delivery Director.

“This service provides our customers with the confidence that our processes and practices are fully compliant.”

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Business leaders to aid entrepreneurs

A GROUP of high profile comms sector business leaders have set up the Entrepreneur Panel, a CSR initiative established in partnership with youth-led international development charity Restless Development.

The scheme brings entrepreneurs from across the ICT industry together to work on initiatives that promote entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Solar Communications founder Mark Colquhoun and Virtual1 CEO Tom O'Hagan have taken leading roles, working with former Alternative Networks Director and current Virtual1 Non-Executive Director Jim Sewell who is a trustee at Restless Development.



The Panel hopes to raise £1m during the next five years to support its efforts across the ten countries Restless Development works in. That would fund around 35,000 young volunteers to help 280,000 people lift their own way out of poverty.

Virtual1 has entered into a three year partnership with the

charity and will be sending two staff members to visit Restless Development's projects later this year

O'Hagan commented: "We were looking to do something different in our charity work, something that involves everyone in our business, excites people and makes a difference in the world."

Colquhoun added: "I want to make a big difference in something outside my work. And I love the fact that I am helping people set up businesses. The Panel is a new concept, so I have the chance to play a part in its development. Who knows what its potential is"

To find out more about Restless Development and how to join the Entrepreneur Panel email Ella McNab at ella@restlessdevelopment.org

CityFibre hires product chief

CITYFIBRE'S incoming Head of Product Clayton Nash brings 20 years industry experience to the role including a stint at Openreach where he improved the build of NGA and managed a Carrier Ethernet, DWDM and TDM product portfolio worth over £900m.



Clayton Nash

Nash went on to head up Network Rail's internal telecom products and prior to joining CityFibre he worked on various projects at Vodafone, undertaking a full strategic assessment of consumer fibre network futures, advising on network investments plus technical input into regulatory programmes.

"CityFibre is approaching fibre with the right mind-

set, believing that bandwidth at gigabit speeds will become common and affordable and that we should stop managing scarcity and start delivering abundance," stated Nash.

"This aligns perfectly with my view of where the industry is going, so turning down the opportunity to be part of making that happen simply wasn't an option."

Zero touch service

A NEW zero touch IP handset auto provisioning service from Nimans gives resellers their own virtual warehouse and enables them to order ready-to-use Skype for Business handsets for the first time. It also offers zero touch provisioning for Polycom and Yealink handsets.

Ian Brindle, Head of Conferencing and Telephony Sales, commented: "These plans

are designed to make resellers' lives as easy as possible."

Resellers have access to a 'bonded warehouse' facility where stock is stored at Nimans until needed. They can also set-up and provision devices or have them delivered direct to customers ready to be plugged in.

The cross platform architecture spans data centre, in-house or hybrid deployments.



CHANNEL Telecom's eighth annual partner golf day received a big thumbs up from guests who enjoyed a welcome breakfast, 18 holes of golf followed by a gourmet BBQ with prizes for the longest drive, nearest the pin, team winners and the overall day winner. Clifford Norton, Channel Telecom MD, commented: "This event isn't just an excuse to squeeze in 18 holes, it's another way to thank our partners for their ongoing commitment and contribution."



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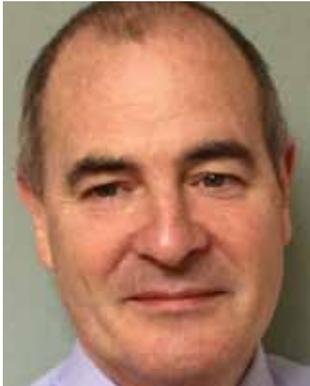
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Hires rev up sipsynergy's market drive



Toby Gold



Tom Kelly

TWO industry heavyweights has added significant leadership muscle to collaboration solutions provider sipsynergy.

Toby Gold has joined the firm as CEO and Tom Kelly has been named Chairman.

The duo are charged with accelerating the company's growth and customer base following a £2.75m investment from YFM Equity Partners.

Gold brings 25 years IT industry experience and has held management and executive roles at a number of hardware, hosting and cloud services companies. He joins from Dell Software where he was Director of Northern Europe.

He said: "As Tom and I take up our positions at the company, this new round of investment will enable sipsynergy to further expand its products. I can't wait to put all of my experience to great use as we continue enabling our reseller partners."

Kelly boasts over 30 years experience in the IT and communications channel and has held senior positions in a number of organisations, including a 10 year stint as MD of Logicalis UK, a large Cisco managed services partner.

Kelly added: "The company has its sights set on conquering the SMB space. We've cre-

ated a cloud hosted solution that we're taking to market through a growing partner base of IT and telecoms resellers and managed service providers."

sipsynergy works closely with Cisco and has developed a white labelled UCaaS 'business in a box' solution, enabling partners to deliver their own branded Enterprise class collaboration solutions to small to mid-sized businesses.

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

Metronet brings out new wholesale offer

A WHOLESALE wireless platform launched by Metronet (UK) offers channel partners an alternative to traditional ground-based fibre connectivity, along with reduced lead times, quicker revenue and no excess install charges, claims the firm.

The company hopes the platform will give reseller customers access to wireless connectivity in half the time than traditional fibre connectivity.

Tony Hughes, Sales Director, said: "Metronet (UK) has seen 33% revenue growth in the past

TeleWare adds skills in mobile

TELEWARE'S newly appointed Senior Channel Manager for Mobile has already set about building strong commercial partnerships and driving incremental revenues.

Darren Rawlinson brings 17-plus years industry experience and has held senior and consultancy roles at Ingram Micro Mobility and Compare52.

Rawlinson has particular expertise working with mobile virtual network enablers (MVNE) and he played a significant part in the launch of MVNO IQ Mobile.

Rawlinson said: "Enthusiasm and educate is my belief and the way I like to work. It's important to me that the industry is constantly pushing forward and developing. TeleWare has been at the forefront of this."

TeleWare CEO Steve Hawthorth said: "Quality partnerships have a key role to play in growing and maintaining a successful business, they allow us to share insight, risk and development.

"We're in a growth phase and I believe Darren will play a key role further developing our partnership programme."

More new appointments, p58



Tony Hughes

year and the channel offering is a big part of our business.

"We now see over 60% of new business come through partners and our wholesale platform will push this further."

US 'Pod' firm boxes clever

HENLEY-based Fidelity Group has been selected to help an upgrade of Britain's iconic red public telephone boxes gain industry traction.

New York-based Bar Works is set to launch Pod Works in London, Leeds, Bradford, Norwich and Edinburgh using old BT phone boxes as mini-work stations for workers on the move or for those who need a convenient place to work before a meeting or an interview.

Fidelity will provide the connectivity to the 'Pods' which will each have Wi-Fi and Internet connections, a printer/scanner, wireless mouse, a 25-inch screen, a hot drinks machine and a power bank of plugs.

A fee of £19.99 a month buys membership of the Pod Works 'club' and access to any work station. In order to enter, a link to a mobile App is sent which allows access any time day or night. Bar Works will gradually expand the concept into major cities across the UK.



CEO Jonathan Black said: "Entrepreneurs and others constantly on the move need a convenient, affordable and private place to work.

"Why should they sit in a coffee bar when using one of our Pods allows them to truly focus on their job before an important meeting or presentation at less than the price of two cups of coffee a week."

Pod Works intends to grow a network across the UK and membership will also allow access to Bar Works locations in New York with London and San Francisco opening soon.



A RELOCATION to new offices in Croydon has prepared ICUK for its next growth phase and recruitment drive. Director Paul Barnett said: "Croydon is attracting £5.25bn investment over the next five years and our new office location places us at the heart of this regeneration, giving us a spring board to aid business connectivity in the area. We can now open ourselves up to a wider workforce who simply don't want to endure the daily grind into central London."

Leslie Costar, Director, added: "ICUK has witnessed growth in excess of 130% in our portfolio this year. Although much of this has been managed through automation of our in-house portal, we recognise the importance of talented individuals and will be expanding our team."



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ITP urges action on apprenticeship levy ST2 to create 400 local jobs

THE Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) has urged the comms industry to urgently prepare for the Government's upcoming apprenticeship levy.

ITP CEO Ann Potterton warned that time is short with the scheme coming into force on 6th April 2017 despite calls for a delay from business leaders due to economic uncertainty.

"Despite a mixed reception, and some resistance from key business groups, the long awaited apprenticeship levy will go ahead," said Potterton.

"We welcome a scheme that encourages more apprenticeships for young people. However, with only nine months until it comes into play, and just



Ann Potterton

six months from guidance publication to set up, telecoms companies need to act now to make sure they are prepared."

The ITP has issued guidance on the levy which is designed to fund three million places for

apprentices, paid for by companies with a payroll of more than £3m and charged at a rate of 0.5% of their annual bill.

Full guidance on the levy is available from the ITP and Potterton has called on companies to look at recruiting apprentices either in-house or through an official scheme immediately.

Potterton added: "We are actively recruiting companies wanting to start apprenticeship schemes this autumn or next spring, and can help with the recruitment, funding and administration. We can also help businesses to understand what they will pay, what they are entitled to, and how to spend the levy or set up their own scheme to grow their own talent."

START-UP tech firm ST2's £100m development of a new data centre at the former ICI site in Redcar will create circa 400 local jobs.

Anne Stokes, CEO of ST2, stated: "This is an important step forward in our ambition to develop an environmentally sustainable data centre and technology services business in the north east.

"Not only will this be an important source of quality jobs for the area, but demonstrates that the technology sector isn't just a phenomenon for the south of England.

"Our planned development in Redcar is part of a 20 year investment that will create long-term skilled employment.

"Data centres have become an essential part of the country's



Anne Stokes

critical economic infrastructure so we will also be supporting a wide range of businesses and encouraging them to either set up shop or grow their existing activities in the north east."

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

Enterprise security boosts Symantec

SYMANTEC'S Q1 results revealed a better than expected performance despite the major task of integrating acquisition target Blue Coat.

The company is eyeing Q2 non GAAP revenue of \$960-\$990, a 4%-8% year-on-year rise driven mainly by enterprise security where it expects a 14%-20% year-on-year jump.

Consumer security is becoming less important and registered a 7% year-on-year fall.

Greg Clark, Symantec's CEO (who was previously CEO of Blue Coat), commented: "Symantec is now positioned to take advantage of the market opportunities in helping customers embrace the cloud, protecting the mobile workforce

and securing enterprises, governments and consumers from advanced attacks."

Thomas Seifert, Symantec's CFO, added: "Our revenue was above the mid-point of our guided range for Q1, driven by an improved performance within enterprise security and continued in-line results from consumer security."

EUROPEAN cyber security and managed security service provider SecureLink has established a strong UK foothold following the acquisition of Nebulas. Nick Garlick, Nebulas MD, joins the group management team and will report directly to Marco Barkmeijer, CEO of the SecureLink Group. "We share the same philosophy, have the same can-do mentality for our customers and believe this expansion is in line with our strategy to expand across Europe," commented Barkmeijer. Garlick added: "Our customers will benefit from greater security intelligence, managed services and expertise as we accelerate our growth and take the business to the next level."

SHORT CALL

The Networking division at Nimans is in expansion mode under the leadership of Solutions Sales Manager Judith Addison who is hoping to establish the distributor as a 'major networking player' offering thousands of product lines. "We are working on delivering a complete 'office in a box' proposition which encapsulates everything we do, from network connectivity right through to end points," she said.

Fluidata links up with Metronet

FLUIDATA and Metronet (UK) have agreed terms on a partnership that will enable Fluidata to wholesale Metronet (UK)'s Wireless proposition on a layer-2 basis to other UK ISPs and its direct customers.

The joint venture puts Fluidata into the upper tier of Metronet (UK)'s partners and positions the firm as a significant conduit for distributing its services across the UK for the foreseeable future.

Metronet (UK)'s wholesale wireless platform provides part-



Andy Tatlock

ners with an alternative to fibre in the ground.

Fluidata's Sales & Marketing Director Phillip Oliver com-

mented: "The ability to use a wireless delivery mechanism means that service providers using our platform can add fully

resilient services to their portfolio while being able to install ultra-fast services into locations within a month.

"Otherwise they may have long and difficult civil work requirements with traditional fibre technologies."

Andy Tatlock, who is the Head of Channel Sales at Metronet (UK), commented: "Our wholesale wireless offering liberates our partners from the typical constraints, limitations and lethargic nature of traditional Ethernet carriers."



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M2M man in Zest4 join up Luminet sees channel push

M2M channel builder Anton Le Saux is to head up Zest4's M2M Partner Programme following a three year stint leading Telefonica's IoT channel push.

The move is significant and reaffirms Zest4's commitment to driving M2M solutions through partners.

Le Saux brings 20-plus years mobile network experience mostly working with channel partners. His appointment is the latest in a string of M2M developments at Zest4.

In October 2015 the company formed a partnership with Arkessa in response to the growing demand by communications resellers looking to realise the growth opportunity in M2M.

The Zest4 M2M Partner Programme was officially launched in May 2016 and will be overseen by Le Saux who aims to recruit new partners, build bespoke M2M strategies and educate end users to make M2M 'a reality'.

He commented: "The Internet of Things (IoT) and M2M are phrases that are on everyone's lips, but in reality a large proportion of resellers don't really understand how they can profit from M2M or access the growing opportunity."



Anton Le Saux

"My prime focus will be on educating the channel and enable them to clearly see the bigger picture and understand the longer-term revenues that M2M offers and what it can do for their customers."

"M2M technology offers huge benefits to businesses in terms of automation and smarter ways of working, which can ultimately save them valuable time and money."

Mandy Fazelynia, Zest4's Operations & Business Development Director, added: "We have made great progress over the last year in adding M2M to our product portfolio."

"The appointment of Anton reinforces our commitment to M2M and the channel and will enable us to develop our in-house expertise."

LUMINET has aligned a new channel programme to its Fibre Air proposition, which is a wireless business Internet service that can be installed in just five working days and offers customers up to 1GB symmetrical broadband Internet connectivity almost from the outset. The programme is underpinned by a 100% SLA guarantee.

The wireless ISP says Fibre Air can be sold on an isolated fixed three month contract or kept as a back-up broadband service to ensure business continuity in case of broadband downtime or outages.

Luminet CEO Sasha Williamson commented: "Our proposition helps VARs to monetise their suite of OTT services quickly, bringing revenue forward while addressing the demanding connectivity requirements of SMEs."

"Because our Fibre Air service works over the rooftops utilising wireless microwave technology it avoids the need for unnecessary construction works such as digging up the ground, which means it can be installed quickly and sold in tandem with fibre leased lines."

"Luminet's ability to deliver a wireless solution with band-



Sasha Williamson

width as much as 1Gbps in as little as seven days has ensured that we stand out from the crowd on more than one occasion."

Luminet owns its own core and wireless network and has over 50 active channel partners ranging from large multinational distributors to bespoke London-based IT companies.

SHORT CALLS

Skyscape Cloud Services has renamed and relaunched as UKCloud. "In a short space of time we have experienced rapid growth," said Simon Hansford, CEO. "Our new name reflects our commitment to serving the UK public sector and supporting the digital transformation of citizen-facing services."

Bupa UK's four contact centres and satellite sites have been upgraded to a cloud-based system supporting 1,500 staff following a five year deal with KCOM. The service includes IVR call recording, screen recording, social media integration, quality management and analytics.



PROVU'S Sales Account Manager Gavin Sykes has skydived in aid of Weston Park Cancer Charity and in memory of his father who lost his battle with Cancer in January this year. He said: "Even now I cannot

get over this amazing experience. It was an honour to do this for Weston Park. The charity's work is vital to current and future cancer patients and it needs everyone's support to keep going. That's why I've committed to doing another skydive next year!"

SHORT CALL

Pinacl has cosied up to international customers who procure centrally from London with a move into new offices at 1 Canada Square in Canary Wharf. Liam Wynne, Global Account Director, said: "The move allows us to be more effective in responding to our customer base and expands our core solutions into the city." Pinacl MD Rob Bardwell added: "This puts us at the heart of one of our key customer markets."

TeleWare aids SME contact centres

TELEWARE has put visibility and control into the hands of SME contact centres following the launch of TeleWare Communication Manager (TCM), a new pay-as-you-go cloud-based, in-house configured and controlled solution.

Teleware Product Manager Terry-Ann Cocker commented: "Companies are increasingly understanding the need to have a complete overview and understanding of workflow, especially when staff are in a wide range of locations."



Steve Haworth

"We're seeing a large and growing market for contact centre lite solutions with over

5,600 small-to-medium contact centres employing less than 200 people to manage their communications and more coming online every day."

TCM is positioned as a telephone system agnostic 'contact centre lite' solution that offers central administrators a real-time view of all inbound and outbound activity wherever staff are based. Multiple dashboards can be configured in-house allowing companies to tailor data views. TCM has a minimum three month contract

period followed by a pay-as-you-go monthly contract.

TeleWare CEO Steve Haworth added: "TCM not only gives a view of what's happening now but helps companies to improve their performance by analysing historic data. Any company can then get more insight into their business and employee behaviour to make sure they're delivering the best customer experience possible."

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



All gain no pain from new 3CX

UK resellers who want to simply and easily offer their SME customers secure, resilient telephony they can manage themselves should investigate the shiny new 3CX Unified Communications solution.

Version 15, the latest version of 3CX's software-based comms platform, gives resellers a unique opportunity to help their customers eliminate PBX administration. Furthermore, 3CX claims that with more features, higher security, a modern look and easier integration with more applications v.15 has reduced ongoing maintenance to almost nothing.

"Many aspects of running a PBX have been automated, avoiding the need to move to an expensive public cloud service," said 3CX CEO Nick Galea.

"Companies can retain full control of their phone system either on premise or in the cloud. Security, backup and restore, update management and failover are automatically managed by 3CX.

"3CX V15 raises the bar on Unified Communications systems with zero admin, bulletproof security, integrated video conferencing, more applications integrations and more. We expect this feature set and our new pricing strategy to dramatically increase our market share."

Bulletproof Security

Within Version 15, 3CX believes it has set a new standard in PBX security. Automatic generation and management of SSL certificates:

- Provisioning of phones via HTTPS
- Connections to client and console via SSL
- A+ rating from SSL lab.
- Encryption of Voice Traffic via SRTP
- All traffic to clients and via SBC is encrypted
- More secure web server configuration
- Detection and auto blacklisting of SIP Attack tools

New Interface

Galea is also proud of the steps his development team has taken to improve ease of use and integration with other telephony solutions. "The 3CX client and management console interface have

“ Many aspects of running a PBX have been automated, avoiding the need to move to an expensive public cloud service. ”

Nick Galea



been made much more user friendly. 3CX now has a more UC like interface, whilst retaining its softphone functionality. More themes have been added, as has the ability to specify a custom background/logo."

"We've expanded our integration by supporting more applications out of the

box and by adding a scriptable interface that makes it easy to integrate with any CRM, Contact Centre or Outbound call centre solution," said Galea. "And we have made it easy to deploy network-wide and to maintain centrally."

3CX currently supports: Office

3CX is a 100% channel company and is the developer of a software-based and open standards IP PBX which innovates communications and replaces proprietary PBXs. 3CX cuts telco costs and boosts company productivity and mobility.

With integrated WebRTC web conferencing, softphones for Mac and Windows and smartphone clients for Android, iOS and Windows phones, 3CX offers companies a complete Unified Communications package out of the box.

50,000 customers worldwide use 3CX including Boeing, McDonalds, Hugo Boss, Ramada Plaza Antwerp, Harley Davidson, Wilson Sporting Goods and Pepsi. Maintaining its global presence, 3CX has offices in the U.S., U.K., Germany, Hong Kong, South Africa, Russia and Australia. Visit 3CX on Facebook, Twitter and on Google+.

365, Google Contacts, Microsoft Dynamics, Exact, Sugarcrm, Salesforce, act!, Zendesk and Freshdesk with more to follow.

With v.15 customers can:

- Install and update centrally via the management console and an easy to use scripting interface
- Easily adapt or create integrations for almost any CRM
- Create outbound call scripts

Standards Based Web Conferencing

Adding value to the sale is crucial to ICT resellers and the increasing popularity of video conferencing is a natural upsell, so the integration of open standards based VC within v.15 without the need for additional software, administration or licensing. will be music to their ears

The add-in includes:

- New single stream technology for less bandwidth usage
- New Android client
- Personal Click2Meet URL
- Brandable

Appliance Friendly

Further enhancements within v.15 mean 3CX can now run on smaller fanless mini- PCs with SSD drives and Windows license included.

"This will be perfect for resellers with customers that have smaller offices where no server is available for 3CX," added Nick Galea.

New FREE edition

In v.15, 3CX is re-introducing the popular FREE edition which includes an 8 simultaneous call license plus 1-year free maintenance, free web conferencing for up to 5 participants as well as a single SIP Trunk / Gateway. This is ideal for small companies which can later upgrade to a more feature rich commercial edition.

Lewis enters Conferencing next decade market boom

LEEDS-based Diva Telecom celebrated its 10th anniversary in July and has embarked on a mission to help organisations from start-ups to big enterprises raise their game and compete globally in the wake of Brexit.

“I’ve been in the telecoms industry for 30 years and witnessed many major changes over the years from the demise of Telex, the rise and fall of fax machines, and the rise and rise of mobile communications,” said MD Erica Lewis, who now heads a team of 11 who manage clients ranging from Coca-Cola, Maersk, Toshiba, and Panasonic to small businesses and schools.

Diva Telecom handles more than 12 million calls monthly with inbound international numbers its biggest selling service, demonstrating the region’s appetite for global trade.

“We are seeing increased demand now from organisations of all sizes and across all industry sectors for digital services that offer better scalability, resilience and most importantly, better cost efficiencies,” she added.

“Much of our success is down to our boutique portfolio of products including our in-



Erica Lewis

house designed SMS and audio conferencing services.

“Customer service, our knowledgeable team, a consultative approach and competitive pricing have all played a part in helping the business achieve year on year growth of 20-25%.”

Infrastructure provider CityFibre has chosen Diva as one of its launch partners for services running on its pure fibre network which will transform Leeds into one of the UK’s first Gigabit Cities.

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

THE case for selling audio and video conferencing solutions is stronger than ever and Nimans has urged more resellers to address the market with gusto.

Ian Brindle, Head of Conferencing Sales at Nimans, says conferencing is now easier to sell and there’s a rich seam of opportunity to be mined in the customer bases of most resellers as well as new prospects.

“In the majority of cases there will be an audio and video requirement,” he said. “Low cost of entry, plug and play technology and a more intuitive meeting room culture is changing the conferencing market.”

Brindle also noted that portable devices and the emergence of ‘huddle-style’ meeting rooms rather than traditional boardrooms are proving popular.

“From an audio conferencing perspective there are two big growth areas,” he added. “The traditional analogue desktop market is steady, but portable devices are flying out.

“They are more personal and flexible, connected via USB or Bluetooth, and all the major manufacturers are heavily involved in this sector. We shipped thousands last year and we’re selling even more now.”



Ian Brindle

Video conferencing is also going strong. “More traditional telecoms resellers are embracing video technology if it’s simple to deploy,” explained Brindle. “So we’ve developed a portfolio of plug and play devices, which combined with the cloud has driven a 38% increase in sales this year.”



SIX Degrees Group (6DG) has raised over £17,000 for WeSeeHope at its fourth annual pub quiz. WeSeeHope provides support for children in southern and eastern Africa who have been orphaned or isolated by extreme poverty. Organised as part of its CSR programme called Six Degrees of Hope, the quiz brings together teams from 6DG’s suppliers, partners and employees. Jonny Shanmuganathan, Director of UC and Data and WeSeeHope Ambassador, said: “The event is an annual highlight and this year was a great success due to the largest turnout we have ever had.”

SHORT CALLS

Westcoast has joined forces with telecoms finance firm Lease Telecom. Darren Seward, Head of Mobility at Westcoast, said: “More of our partners and their customers are looking for affordability and flexibility in how they finance for mobile products and services.”

NG Bailey has secured a £50m-plus MOD contract with Fujitsu to provide global connectivity services for the next five years. “Bob Dunnett, MD of NG Bailey’s IT Services Division, said: “The vital role that our partnership will play puts us at the heart of the future UK defence strategy.”

SHORT CALL

Astro MD Steve Hodges is limbering up to run the Maidstone half marathon in aid of Camp Cando, a charity that helps children and young adults with complex special and behavioural needs. “Camp Cando has been doing fantastic work for many years, making a significant difference to the lives of many youngsters, their parents and carers,” said Hodges. He is aiming to raise £1,500.

Traditional decline Lily reveals plan

A REPORT from benchmark-it confirms that comms providers focused on traditional fixed and mobile services for business customers are losing share as revenues decline.

Report author Rob Pritchard said: “Players that do not focus on the cloud, next generation services and managed solutions are losing out.”

The report also found that trends towards the digital enterprise have implications not just for portfolios but also for culture, systems and organisations.

“Exponential growth at the likes of Amazon Web Services and WhatsApp serve to underline the new nature of the market,” he added. “Service providers need to work out what their strategy is in a market where the value chain has been inverted.

“The old fashioned silo approach is no longer viable. While issues over the future of Openreach are important today, service providers need to look further ahead in terms of what they offer to their target enterprise customers in the future.”

LILY Comms has presented its strategy and vision to staff, stakeholders, clients and suppliers during an event staged at the firm’s offices and attended by 60-plus delegates.

A Strategy for Success (S4S) document sets out the company’s vision, success factors, values and culture. Lily hopes that it will help to drive significant growth over the near term, from £4.9m this financial year towards the £10m milestone.

“The S4S has been created to help Lily Comms push past the

£10m barrier and beyond,” said MD Chris Morrissey.

“Our strategy is part of a framework called The Winning Formula created by John Stein.

“This simple approach enables leaders to transform their organisation, lead and inspire change, deliver accelerated growth, improve operational efficiency and maximise the human performance potential of their people.

“Our S4S will guide and motivate Lily, and keep us focused on a day-to-day basis.”



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Wilkes raises £1 coin alert



Jeff Wilkes

SOLITAIRE MD Jeff Wilkes has issued a wake up call to comms resellers ahead of the introduction next March of the newly designed £1 coin, which, he warned, will have a significant impact on thousands of installed payphones.

All new Solitaire Payphones supplied since January this year will accept the new coin but others need to be updated.

"The new Bi Metallic 12 sided coin will be in circulation in March 2017 and the old pound coin will be discontinued in the autumn," said Wilkes. "The countdown is on."

"Demand for payphones remains strong in niche areas and the new £1 coin will have a big impact. Resellers need to

be advising their customers now about how to adapt their existing machines."

Nimans is the exclusive UK supplier of Solitaire products and is also urging resellers to plan ahead for the new Royal Mint design.

"Payphones 10 years old or less are capable of being updated," said Phil Collins, Head of Purchasing at Nimans.

"Depending on the payphone model, on-site, remote download and back to manufacturer updates are available. For larger sites Nimans' resellers can take advantage of a white label on-site service from Solitaire."

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

Major buy puts distie into cloud

SCANSOURCE has entered the telecom and cloud services market with the acquisition of US-based distributor of IT and cloud services Intelisys.

"Intelisys' two-tier model fits with our culture and way of doing business," said Mike Baur, CEO, ScanSource.

"We are entering a high-growth recurring revenue business that is complementary to our own and represents an opportunity for our VARs."

The all-cash transaction includes an initial purchase price of approximately \$83.6m plus earn-out payments.

Intelisys has demonstrated double digit growth which is projected to continue during the four year earn out period.

For the first full year after closing, Intelisys' net revenues, which reflect gross commissions less payments to sub-agents, are estimated to total over \$34m with a 45% to 50% estimated EBITDA margin.

The acquisition will close in the quarter ending September 30th, and ScanSource expects fourth quarter fiscal year 2016 net sales to be circa \$880m to \$885m, which is below the previously forecasted range.

SHORT CALL

Intercity Technology has secured a place on the G-Cloud framework. Andrew Jackson, CEO, said: "Our inclusion on the framework is a fantastic opportunity to develop our relationship with public sector organisations, including government, healthcare and blue light services.

The fact that we are one of only 3.5% of suppliers that have passed on all four classes of the G-Cloud shows the strength of the solutions that we can offer."

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CONGRATS to Phil Coley, Director of Yorkshire-based Duocall, who scooped a brace of prizes for best score and the longest drive at Union Street's first golf day staged at Moor Park golf club in Rickmansworth. Ben Turner, Customer Service Manager for Premier Choice Telecom, won nearest the pin. Vincent Disneur, Head of Sales and Marketing for Union Street, enthused: "I'd like to say a big thank you to all of our channel partners for joining us and for making this such an enjoyable event."



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Acquisition unlocks part

Interoute's acquisition of Easynet was a game-changing strategic move that made a real difference to its channel ambitions, according to VP for Strategic Partners Neil Downing.

The decision to acquire European managed services provider Easynet in September last year for £402 million was inspired and gave Interoute an opportunity to push for a stronger channel strategy. The move also offered the chance to make progress on measures such as widening the proposition and onboarding more scale, global reach, skills and new capabilities. The acquisition also expanded Interoute's networked cloud and communications services to national and multi-national enterprises across the world.

"Our biggest opportunity is to explore the channel more with our wider proposition and bring partners with us on this journey," stated Downing. "The potential is clear. We have a big partner business already and can grow it even more through the wider portfolio and increased global reach we now have."

Interoute provides a range of unified connectivity, computing and communications products and services to multi-national and national enterprises, such as UEFA, the European Space Agency, SCA and Saxo Bank, global telecommunications operators and Internet content providers. The company's commercial beginnings were born out of a vision to connect the business hubs of Europe with the continent's largest, fastest and most advanced fibre optic network which

was completed in 2002. Today, the network connects nearly 250 data centres and colocation facilities across Europe, while interconnecting America, Africa and Asia.

Interoute's channel success rests in large part on Downing's industry experience, insights and know-how. He first entered the comms industry after graduating, joining BT as an engineer in 1996 but he quickly moved into commercial roles having shown a deep interest in the profile of buyers and their purchasing habits. Downing has always worked in the telecoms sector and attributes his flair for business to his father who ran his own transport company and made a good living in a high volume, low margin business with demanding customers and time scales. "This maps well to my experience of the telco industry," said Downing. "Despite being dyslexic my father was successful and could spot a margin at 100 yards."

Downing junior also knows how to spot an opportunity and joined Interoute in 2005. "Interoute had strong revenues combined with a start-up culture where costs were meticulously managed and all roles focused on revenue growth," he commented. "The enterprise market was still in its early days for us, but we could see massive potential and were committed to changing our structure and products to maximise the opportunity."



Neil Downing

Our biggest opportunity is to explore the channel more with our wider proposition and bring partners with us on this journey

Interoute was originally designed to serve European telecoms operators with high capacity, big bandwidth services and it continues to support the major telecoms operators in Europe. But as demand for digital communications has grown, Interoute expanded its portfolio and expertise to provide international

enterprises with infrastructure products, managed solutions and applications.

Key turning points for the company include the launch of Interoute Virtual Data Centre (VDC) in 2012. However, 2004 was also a pivotal year as Interoute moved away from being simply the carrier's carrier to

provide enterprise services (now responsible for more than 70 per cent of revenue). This was followed in 2005 by the acquisition of VIA Networks which formed the basis for VDC. The launch of Interoute Cloud Connect in May 2015 was followed by the completion of a fully meshed global network with two new diverse network

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ner potential

routes between Los Angeles, Hong Kong and Singapore going live in August 2015. "The growth of VDC has been an important part of our portfolio development, allowing Interoute to capitalise on the Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) market by offering a flexible, scalable platform that customers can manage themselves," commented Downing.

Network reach

Interoute's network connects 132 countries and includes 24 metropolitan networks in Europe's main business hubs and 17 VDC zones across Europe, North America and Asia. "Interoute is continually growing both its operational presence and global presence," added Downing. "Expect more announcements around VDC zones in the near future. The market is constantly evolving so we have to move with it. We are also doing a lot of work in security, but have the core blocks required by most resellers."

Partners are a key focus for Interoute's proposition, enabling them to provide platforms and tools to add value. "Organisations are under increasing pressure to provide feature rich services and Interoute's software defined services give partners the flexibility to buy only what they need, then evolve and scale with the customer," added Downing. "Many resellers or SIs focus on connectivity-based services but the market is changing and moving to the cloud. While connectivity is important, Software Defined Networking is disruptive and has the potential to disintermediate this market, so SIs and VARs

should be looking at more flexible models and offering a more fully formed ICT infrastructure. They may not be able to separate voice, connectivity and apps in future propositions."

Downing's main challenge is ensuring that partners understand Interoute's wider proposition and how it matches their ambitions. "We are constantly innovating and developing new products and services for the channel," he explained. "Our networked cloud platform VDC has expanded to three new zones this year and gives channel partners one of Europe's largest IaaS cloud infrastructure platforms they can easily add a service wrap too."

"This is important because the sand is shifting for customers in terms of what and how they consume, and resellers need to respond to this change and evolve their portfolios. As well as the cloud there is a rise in demand for network integration. We help customers to overcome the big challenge of integrating existing legacy IT with new digital business application development. Another area of interest is how software defined Wide Area Networks (WANs) are evolving along with how people buy networking services."

Not surprisingly, Downing defines Interoute's culture as 'European and collaborative' combined with a focus on accountability. "We're responsible for a journey involving investment, spend and effort," he stated. "This is something that comes from management and permeates down, enabling us to change our culture and

skills to support customers in a different way. We see Interoute delivering combined communications, compute and connectivity through a platform defined by customers offering as much control as they need. This will resonate with the market as Interoute can provide the infrastructure and ecosystem, with partners delivering around that proposition." ■

Just a minute with Neil Downing...

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I'm a railway enthusiast

What talent do you wish you had? To see into the future

Comms industry bugbear:

Recognition for infrastructure is often glossed over in favour of software. More people should understand the value of an asset that costs a lot to build and offers a flexible element of control

What do you fear the most?

I have two small children and fear the kind of world and economy they will inherit

Something you have overcome:

The expectation that I should do well in life just because my father has done so

What possession could you not live without?

My camera

Lessons learnt:

To focus on developing a sustainable business model that differentiates rather than on what makes a product interesting

Your strengths and what could you work on?

I'm fundamentally committed to whatever I'm doing, diligent and focused. But I can be too detail oriented and need to work on zooming out at times

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Jane Ashworth: A woman

Jane Ashworth, Managing Director for SMART Technologies UK&I, has only one purpose – to reclaim the company’s dominant market status by developing staunch channel partnerships and working hand in hand with key resellers in core markets.

It took Ashworth just two months to overhaul SMART’s go to market strategy. She introduced a new distribution model, rebuilt the entire sales team and realigned the marketing operation. The extent of the transformation rendered the firm’s previous *modus operandi* almost unrecognisable. “The team has a start-up mentality, and we’re ready to reclaim our number one spot in the UK market,” commented Ashworth.

Given the recent history of SMART’s progressive action plan Ashworth is confident that she will quickly turn strategic vision into reality by working more closely with partners and supporting resellers directly. “Our new partner strategy revolutionises our approach to sales throughout the UK,” added Ashworth. “We’re seeing high demand for interactive flat panels throughout the education sector with a 37 per cent increase in 2016. Our whiteboards, interactive displays and software are designed for educators and businesses that believe in the power of collaboration, and a priority right now is working with our loyal partners who have helped build the market.”

SMART’s revamped channel strategy is based on a hybrid distribution system with partners Midwich and Westcon. “We now have



Jane Ashworth

a lighter touch distribution model,” added Ashworth. “We’re directly involved in the channel and showcasing a clear product roadmap. Our new partner programme has completely transformed our UK route to market. We’re looking to serve a growing customer base more efficiently and we’re

noticing an increase in demand for interactive flat panels throughout the UK education sector. We have high expectations for the market and will continue to invest in a dedicated sales team both from a channel and user perspective. Aligning with our partners more effectively to develop

and continue to drive the market is also a key priority.”

Magic touch

SMART specialises in touch technologies and software. The company was founded in 1987 and is perhaps best known as the developer of the SMART Board interactive white board introduced in

1993. The portfolio has expanded greatly to include an array of hardware and software for businesses and schools to collaborate. To date the company has installed over 3.2 million products worldwide and claims a 70 per cent interactive white board market share in the US and

n of purpose

UK. Over 2.8 million K-12 classrooms in 175 countries use SMART solutions and software to make education more engaging, effective and fun. SMART's flagship products include interactive whiteboards, projectors and flat panel displays that enable greater collaboration, productivity and performance. "The interactive flat panel market has taken off, particularly in the UK," commented Ashworth.

"We're synonymous in the education space, but looking at the enterprise opportunity, the launch of kapp iQ in 2015 laid down a marker."

Extended reach

The 4K kapp iQ is a smart display designed to expand the whiteboard's reach beyond those in the room. Users can walk up and use it, like any whiteboard, and it's accessible by up to 250 remote meeting participants at a time through a unique URL. Any drawings made by the presenter on the kapp iQ are pushed to each connected mobile device in real-time. The presenter and participants can click a camera button to save a snapshot of what's on the board, which then gets stored on each participant's mobile device. Another turning point was Bett 2016 when SMART launched Classroom-as-a-service, or ClaaS, a subscription model that allows schools to spread the financial cost of interactive displays and collaborative learning software into schools, upgrade technology as well as provide training and support while keeping within an education body's budget.

"We are not going to drive the market through hardware alone,"

We're freeing people to evolve their thinking, simplify sharing and explore unlimited ideas by creating spaces that intuitively connect across devices and locations

emphasised Ashworth. "Most opportunities are software led, and leading with software as a solution will make the most impact in classrooms and boardrooms. SMART empowers people to work and learn together in ways that simply make sense, enabling people to naturally collaborate and contribute in classrooms, meeting rooms and beyond. We're freeing people to evolve their thinking, simplify sharing and explore unlimited ideas by creating spaces that intuitively connect across devices and locations."

According to Ashworth SMART has a social responsibility to shape the classrooms of the future. "We now have an online store for teachers to buy one-off licenses, and we're making great steps to accommodate the challenges we face in the market today," she added.

"Working with partners like Midwich and Westcon is vital to reach organisations looking to capitalise on software and hardware for collaboration. We are poised to quickly gather pace and accelerate our new channel strategy. What's core to reclaiming our number one status is supporting our most strategic and loyal partners by working with the AV sector to drive a successful solution strategy. Resellers that sell solutions, not box pricing, are the future. They will deliver more margin for the business through add on services. Resellers that are stuck in the past and fixated on price won't survive."

Ashworth joined SMART in January 2015, moving from HP where she was Commercial Director for the Print and Personal Systems Group, managing the channel. Prior to her five year stint at HP Ashworth spent 13 years at Sony in various UK and European consumer roles.

"It was a great, creative time to be at the forefront of innovation," she said. "My career in IT began during an exciting time in the development of consumer technology, bringing an array of devices to market. Seeing first hand the high demand for Walkmans, MP3 players and integrated digital AV systems got me hooked. In the consumer market I had a great chance to see fast growth first hand, learn different cost models for various products and compete with Apple and Samsung. I've always loved being at the forefront of technology, from the excitement of major product launches to hearing the feedback from customers." ■

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Partners in innovation

The partnership between software communications specialist TeleWare and Microsoft is long standing and has developed into a one-stop-shop for resellers looking to grasp the Skype for Business nettle.

The relationship TeleWare has developed with Microsoft stretches back some 20 years and it has held Gold Partner Status for over a decade. It's no surprise therefore that CEO Steve Haworth firmly believes his company can become the central terminus for IT resellers wishing to step onto the cloud communications integration train and leverage one of the biggest technology brands on the planet.

Clearly the industry has its Microsoft naysayers and many comms providers remain firmly entrenched in the landscapes developed by Mitel, Avaya, Unify et al, but Haworth believes that there is a need for new UC providers in the market and it is exciting to see Microsoft making serious moves in this direction. "There are many benefits to our Microsoft partnership, specifically in how we can utilise Microsoft's technical innovation and become an active member of the partner ecosystem," he said.

"Our strategy is to work with Microsoft partners who are either currently selling or looking to introduce Skype for Business into

their portfolio and wish to differentiate their solutions by including tailored TeleWare services to create more value for their customers. We also work with partners who focus on core Microsoft products such as Dynamics CRM or Office 365 and are looking to differentiate from their competitors through enhanced offerings that are tailored to their requirements.

"We see Microsoft becoming a significant player in real-time communications as it already dominates the desktop and productivity tools. By bringing all these capabilities and more into a cloud-based platform focused on business performance, it is creating a cutting edge end-to-end solution that utilises technical innovation alongside the flexibility and



Steve Haworth

creativity that partners such as TeleWare can bring."

To this end TeleWare has launched an enhancement to Skype for Business which incorporates the best of its expertise in cloud-based unified communications. "Enabling users to add recording to Skype for Business voice as well as IVR and voicemail functionality is a compelling proposition," added Haworth. "We help to create differentiated partner propositions so they can access new

customer segments and increase revenue streams. Working together, we can accelerate the adoption and usage of Microsoft services by end users which is an important aspect of adding customer value."

Partner focus

Ian Woolner, Senior Product Marketing Manager (UK), Skype for Business, is a long-term supporter of TeleWare's ambitions and believes the time is right for potential partners to look at Microsoft's solutions with a fresh pair of eyes. Woolner explained: "Partners have always been a core part of our go-to-market and execution strategies. Our entire solution portfolio is focused on helping partners build their own Intellectual Property and TeleWare's solutions are a great example. As business and enterprises strive for greater agility and differentiation we reflect these customer necessities in the tools and programmes we have created to support our partner development."

Haworth and Woolner foresee the development of vertical market opportunities with partners in financial services, retail, education, professional services and healthcare, where customers are seeking high value deployments. "Our solutions add the most value to businesses with varying demand, high levels of customer interaction and driven by customer experience or regulatory pressures," said Haworth.

"Examples of this are betting companies that transact a large amount of their business from a few large sporting events in the year, and professional services firms helping to sort out compliance and miss-selling issues where encryption and security are as important as being up and running within one working week."

Woolner summarised by explaining: "We have three major new initiatives to support the growth of Skype for Business. We preview all new services in Skype Preview and we have launched Skype Operations Framework to provide a well structured adoption framework. Most exciting, perhaps, is the announcement of Skype Apps which showcases the applications that extend the value of Skype for Business into the enterprise.

"TeleWare has invested heavily and delivered a great set of tools that customers can use to optimise value from an investment in Skype for Business. These include analytics and call recording on any device. We will continue to support TeleWare in developing these services on the Microsoft Azure Development Platform." ■



Ian Woolner



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Redstone smartens up

Redstone's Managing Director Brendan Loughrey reveals how the company has strengthened its presence in the high growth smart buildings and smart technologies arena while leveraging cross-selling opportunities throughout the customer base, including many blue chip organisations.

Redstone has reinvented itself as a specialist in smartening up buildings and commercial spaces. This strategic shift was made possible through the acquisition in March this year of Connect IB, a smart buildings software and solutions business. Redstone now operates as an IT network and smart building systems integrator with a blue chip customer base and a 30 year heritage. Its roots reach back to 1986 when Cablesip was founded by two former BT engineers. Following a period of acquisition the company became known as Communica and during 2004-2007 won some key deals including Bank of America, HSBC and Merrill Lynch. Communica also cabled many of the major buildings in Europe.

The company was acquired by Redstone in 2007 and six years later it had evolved into three primary service areas – mobile and telecoms, managed services and converged solutions. Redstone sold to Coms plc in 2013 and has since been

developing and delivering smart building solutions, from cabling and infrastructure to smart building and then service and support. This year Coms plc changed its name to RedstoneConnect, merging the Redstone brand with the Group company.

Redstone has seen steady growth since its inception 30 years ago. The company has 300 employees including 185 engineers located on-site with customers. Last year revenues climbed 35 per cent to £40-plus million and profits rose 35 per cent to £7 million. "Redstone has delivered a number of new business wins that brought scale and breadth to the scope of our client engagement," said Loughrey. "For example, recent successes in our blue chip financial services customer base include a £5.4 million contract with a major global financial services client, delivering a smart building, ICT infrastructure and IT networking project."

The company also scooped a £0.9 million contract with an international financial services client to provide a Storage



Brendan Loughrey

Area Network infrastructure and ICT refresh, and a £0.4 million contract to deliver an IT networking project with a leading provider of audit, tax and advisory services. "Our focus has moved towards the office space, enabling customers to create an enjoyable experience within their working environment through the use of technology," added Loughrey.

Business transformation

In recent years Redstone has developed its service areas, appointed a new CEO, Mark Braund, and launched a fully integrated smart building solution that makes spaces work more effective and efficient. Also top of the agenda is developing and expanding the Group's annuity revenue streams in software, managed services,

support and maintenance, and rolling out its new occupancy management software solution called OneSpace. "In our always-on world employees expect to use their technology seamlessly," added Loughrey. "And with the explosion of mobile devices DAS infrastructures need to cope with this exponential rise in usage. The move to hot desking has enabled us to push our One Space product that allows employers to manage their space and report on its utilisation. This software also enables employees to engage with their workspace and ensure they can work in appropriate groups.

"The way buildings are now being constructed to include IT networks from the start

is key to the evolution of the smart building space. Over the last 18 months we have seen a rise in landlord networks being installed that help the tenant in their occupancy. The need to drive out cost and improve returns through the occupation and running of corporate businesses comes as a major positive for us. The Group will broaden its intellectual property applications to a wider spectrum of smart environments and invest in research and development."

Re-industrialisation, or Industry 4.0, is another key trend being closely tracked by Redstone, along with the potential impact of IoT disruption. Both are aspects of the market that are breaking new ground and this is reflected in Loughrey's career at a personal level. "Pushing boundaries is important in all aspect of your career," he said. "The development of people is important to me and seeing how they continue to grow is a special highlight."

Loughrey's own career path is a shining example of his work ethos. After completing an electrical apprenticeship he worked for BT and completed further studies in telecommunications. "I then started with Cablesip in 1987, initially as an engineer and moved swiftly through the ranks, running operations with a responsibility for 450 staff and delivering £55 million of projects. I completed an MBA in 2002 and this gave me a grounding in all aspects of business, from HR to finance. I still believe that working hard and doing the right thing, regardless of how difficult this can be, is the key to being successful." ■



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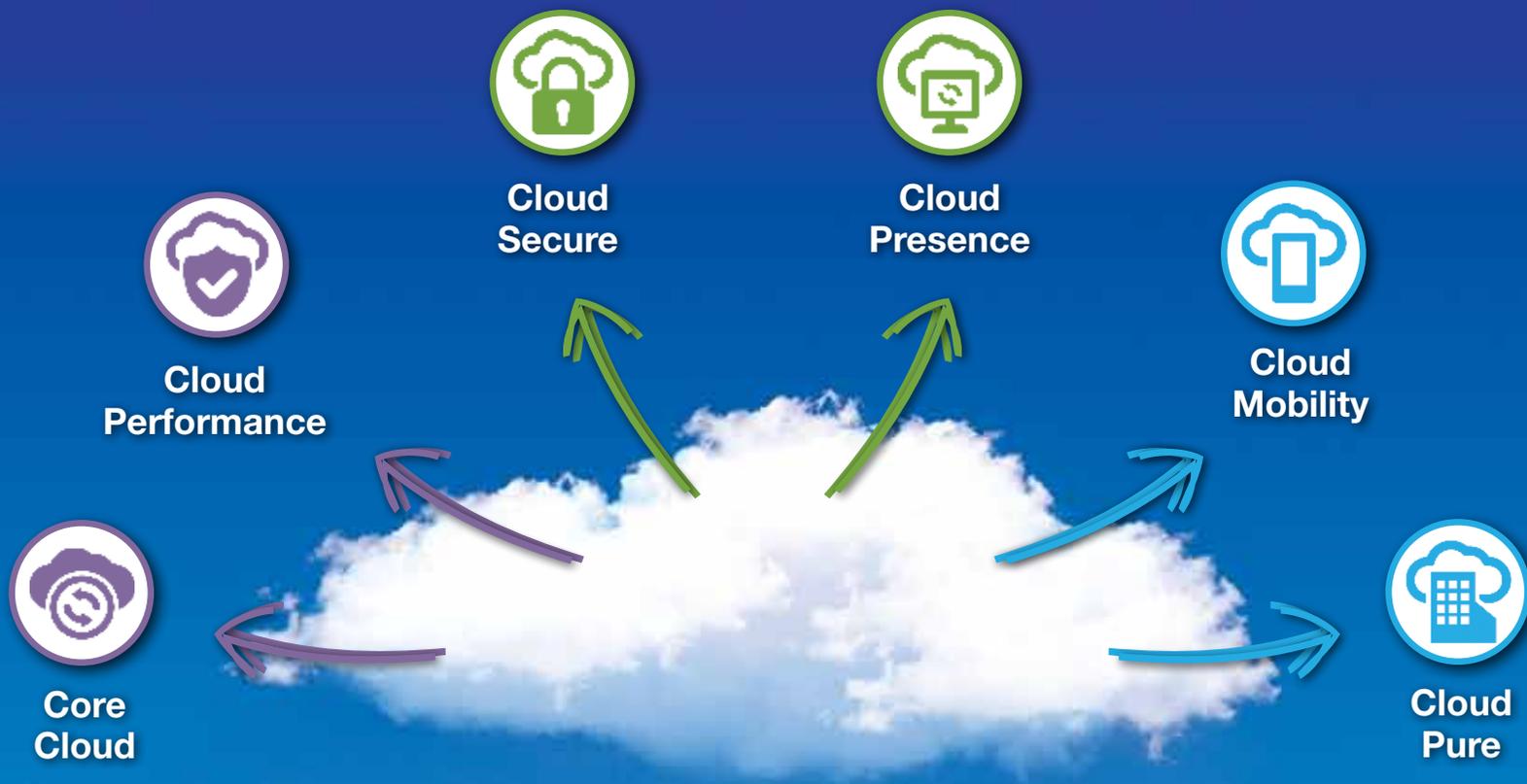
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Aerial flies into stratosp

From car phones to PCI compliance: How Aerial Business Communications Managing Director Paul Davis made it big in comms.

Portsmouth-based Aerial Business Communications celebrated three decades in business in June. The company, formerly known as Aerial Telephones, was founded by Davis and began life as a mobile and car phone retailer operating from a small shop and employing three sales staff. Aerial has since developed into a multi-award winning full UC company with a 50-plus headcount, supplying mobiles, telephone systems, IT and Internet connectivity services.

It all began when Davis, as an opportunistic 22-year-old, worked in the Middle East for a Dutch company selling reprographic equipment to the oil industry. His plan was to do this for three years, and with time running down he began the search for a fresh opportunity on home territory in 1985. "The Daily Telegraph was advertising sales jobs in the new car phone telecoms market," explained Davis. "I found myself talking to Jeremy Thomas who co-founded the Carphone Group (subsequently sold to Cable&Wireless). We struck a deal and I buzzed with exciting ideas."

The following year Davis approached the banks with a business plan but they

could not see the commercial case for car phones. "Banks have been wrong on many occasions, and this was no exception," added Davis. "I invested my own money and bought five car phones, one for myself and four for stock with a total value of over £8,000. I sold to local people with expensive cars and soon required retail premises and staff. This was the start of Aerial. Today, we are O2's biggest direct partner and part of Samsung's B2B partnership programme, accredited as a B2B Expert. Much of our business is now truly converged and we have some large well known public organisations as customers. This way we are not so reliant on the networks."

Key connections

Last year Aerial's mobile and data division grew by 65 per cent following a 40 per cent hike in new connections. "Although our base is predominantly business mobile customers we also saw a huge uptake in our fixed landline and broadband services with 279 per cent growth in this division in 2015," said Davis. "During the same period our IT systems and cloud services division grew by 16 per cent; and as awareness around the benefits of hosted phones and SIP trunks increases the demand



Paul Davis

for telephone systems also intensified, with 46 per cent growth in this division."

In just three years Aerial's annual turnover has ballooned from almost £9.4 million to £25.3-plus million and Davis is forecasting 2016 revenues of 30 million or

more depending on potential acquisition activity. Based on its performance, Aerial has achieved a number of awards including O2's Digital Excellence Award 2015 and the CNA Customer Service Award 2014. This year the firm scooped the Best Medium Sized Business award

and Overall Business of the Year gong in the local News Business Excellence Awards.

Aerial's customer base ranges from charities to blue chip companies. "The base is varied so we group customers into segments," commented Davis. "This



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heric growth

enables us to offer more bespoke support, marketing and assistance. The aim is to understand the issues and challenges common to these sectors. "Our sweet spot remains the 50-100 handset model, though we've recently had some larger wins nationally. Customer satisfaction is key. The main challenge is managing the considerable resources in terms of staffing, time and revenue that are invested into our support services, but providing first class support has given us the opportunity build a loyal customer base."

Applications

As the workforce becomes ever more mobile, Aerial provides an increasing range of the latest digital applications such as Office 365, McAfee, Tugo, Just Call Me, Evernote and Box, plus tracking, lone worker protection, security, workflow solutions and data recording. "These applications assist our mobile customers in maximising the value they get from their devices," said Davis. "Aerial is always looking to add valuable products and services to its portfolio. All new additional products and services need to pass a number of suitability and capability tests to ensure the whole team believe in the service and understand its strategic place within the business."

A particular area of current interest, noted Davis, is PCI compliance. The market needs educating about confusing legislation and there is a need for affordable solutions that combine with existing mobile, telecoms and IT platforms. Portfolio developments last year include the addition of a radio leased line service.

"Having a point of presence at our Portsmouth HQ means we can offer faster installs and more cost-effective connectivity packages," added Davis, also noting that Aerial offers Distributed Antenna Systems (DAS) technology which optimises in-building wireless, Wi-Fi and IP coverage in large buildings and isolated areas. The solution has proved popular in shopping centres, high rise offices and venues such as stadiums. Another recent addition to Aerial's portfolio is hosted call centre technology.

It goes without saying that an expanding product and services kit bag requires a sharp focus on in-house ICT skills development. "It is not enough to just offer these products, we need to create a solution-based service that offers what many talk about but few deliver – Unified Communications. Aerial approaches UC from a different angle. Our long history in business mobile means we are coming from the other side compared to most providers. By starting from the mobile framework we are able to create true UC solutions."

A key emerging trend is that customers now favour sourcing their communications from a single provider. Aerial's main growth strategy is to be positioned as a fully unified comms dealer, a one-stop-shop for all business communication solutions in terms of installation and ongoing support and maintenance. "This reaches into every department of the business from our marketing team who deliver a complete lifecycle marketing programme to the customer service team who

must adhere to our customer charter," explained Davis. "Customers generally want a total telecoms package which of course includes full IT support. Every one of our customers has their own dedicated account manager that can provide assistance whenever they need it." ■

Just a minute with Paul Davis...

Role model: Richard Branson: Successful and comes from a 'normal' family

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I was Head Chorister at Portsmouth Cathedral Choir

What talent do you wish you had? To play the saxophone

Comms industry bugbear: Dealing with the networks is my biggest challenge, aligning to their changing KPIs and their sometimes painful commercial decisions

What do you fear the most? Heights

Something you have overcome: Public speaking

Top tip for resellers: Work hard, play hard, respect others and never be frightened to ask for the order

Biggest opportunity? BT's intention to migrate customers off the ISDN telephone network by 2025

How would you like to be remembered? As a nice chap with a great sense of humour and a lovely boat!

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? In the marine sector trying to put right what is possibly the most unregulated, unprofessional and unreliable industry

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Dark fibre for all reasons

The availability of dark fibre has created a significant shift in the connectivity power balance, placing an unprecedented opportunity into the hands of those who are closer to customers and offering them limitless capacity.

To say that the wholesale availability of dark fibre has catapulted the industry into a new era of communications would be to greatly understate the seismic jolt that leaves bandwidth scarcity, costly MPLS platforms and ATM networks in the dust and crumble of times past. Today, the UK comms sector is on the cusp of a revolution that will drive a new explosion of bandwidth use, with incredible new solutions and applications, all fuelled by the availability of limitless capacity. Dark fibre is the ultimate solution if you're looking to keep up with the pace of change and innovation, control performance, strategically manage networks or scale up – all without suffering continual increases in cost as you do so.

What is dark fibre?

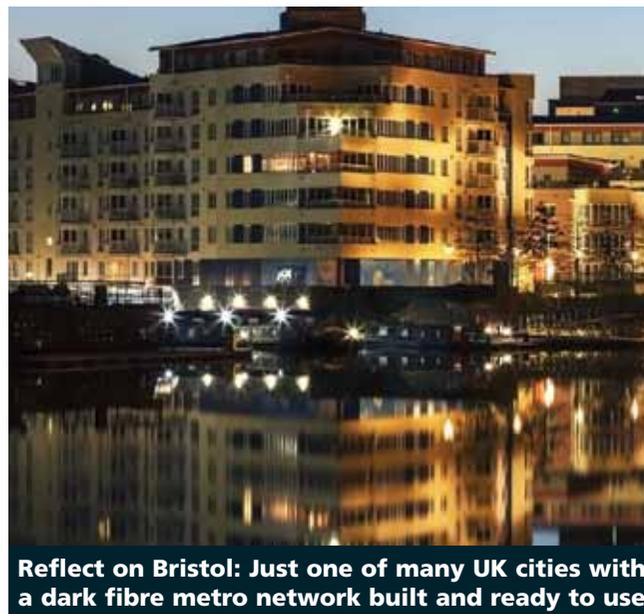
Dark fibre is simply unlit fibre optic cable. It's typically laid in bulk by a network builder for the purpose of leasing to others. If you choose to lease and light it up (rather than buying managed services) you can use it to build competitively priced enterprise network solutions for multiple clients, reduce prices by migrating existing customers or connect your own network assets in a more cost-effective way. You're also free to deploy your own breed of differentiated off-the-shelf

managed services at a much more competitive price.

Whatever the use scenario, the decision to consume dark fibre is usually driven by the desire for more control over solution design, service wrap, long-term costs or all of the above. The ability to choose the platforms, protocols, equipment and architecture is what delivers that control. It gives you the ability to eliminate unnecessary middleware and be directly responsible for how network performance and security are managed. This freedom of choice opens the door to building new bespoke services where you decide exactly what bandwidth is provided on day one, knowing that you can turn up the dial at low cost and overnight if needed. These services are so compelling that other providers will want to resell them for you, evolving your business model and turning competitors into valuable partners.

The growing accessibility of DWDM technology is very timely. It can be used to make the most of every strand of fibre, enabling just one fibre to meet the high bandwidth needs of multiple customers far into the future. There is a large number of DWDM equipment suppliers and they are keen to support in this area.

Dark fibre is analogous to a motorway. To an incumbent



Reflect on Bristol: Just one of many UK cities with a dark fibre metro network built and ready to use

network operator like BT the fibre in its network is the motorway, a means to a lucrative end. The real money makers for these operators are the Ethernet and DWDM based products they sell, representing the high margin grossing service stations and toll booths. Letting others use the motorway to build their own service stations erodes their revenue. But what's important is that it hands a game changing opportunity to those who better understand the end user, crave differentiation and control and who can operate in a more agile and customer-focused way.

Fibre made simple

Dark fibre is often talked about as if it's something new, or some kind of dark art. But that could not be further from the basic facts. It's just glass lying in the

ground waiting to be lit by someone who knows how to do it. What's new is the nationwide availability of metro dark fibre at a wholesale level. That's what companies like CityFibre were founded to deliver and what Ofcom is forcing BT Openreach to offer (albeit not until October 2017).

Why dark fibre now?

Quite simply, the world has changed. Mobile operators are looking for ways to backhaul small cells more cost effectively and increase overall network performance. Data centres want true resilience as well as more control over connections and costs. And key industries like finance and government want end-to-end network visibility, highest possible performance and maximum security, all of which commands a price premium.

Meanwhile, cloud and hosted applications continue to win votes from businesses of all shapes and sizes. They help them to cut costs, work faster, protect their data more reliably and compete on a level playing field no matter how small or large.

Key point

But the rub for businesses, especially SMEs, is that such applications are wholly dependent on reliable, high bandwidth connectivity. If their connections aren't up to the job after the cloud investment has been made, they have no choice but to upgrade their managed services and swallow significant cost increases for the privilege of something that should be on tap. Only dark fibre can break the relationship between cost and bandwidth that currently challenges all of these sectors.

Incumbent operators clearly need to offer it. But if you're looking for the early mover advantage or would prefer to work with a company that has made it their priority to provide it, then you need to look at alternative network providers like CityFibre. With CityFibre you'll also benefit from a capacity rich modern network build, on-demand extension, commercial agility and full support for your strategic objectives and business model. ■

How to brighten up your prospects in the dark, page 36

Start your dark fibre journey today

Whether you're ready to buy it direct, or want to partner with those who do, dark fibre is an exciting platform for innovation and change. It can be used to unleash the true power of cloud and hosted applications for customers of all shapes and sizes.

No need to wait:

We already have 37 dense metro footprints, fibre presence in over 60 towns and cities in total and 1,100 kilometers of long distance network. This means you can work with us right now to deploy differentiated services nationwide and gain end-to-end control and visibility across inter-city connections. We're always on the lookout for network build and extension opportunities too.

Modern networks:

Our fibre network is as modern as it gets. It's built to today's standards and is capacity rich, highly accessible, fully tested and fit for purpose. It's completely independent too which makes it ideal for providing true diversity.

Engineering excellence:

Every inch of network that we build is overseen by our city-based project management teams to ensure it meets strict network build standards and delivers the quality we promise, far into the future. The same quality control principles are applied to our acquired network assets too.

Flexible adoption models:

Trial a dark fibre model on a small scale first, deploy it across a whole city, shift existing bulk assets to it or become a dark fibre anchor partner for a brand new city-build. You choose.

We can also support long-term strategies by enabling you to deploy our active services into an area first, then migrate to a dark fibre model when it makes sense for you.

Attractive pricing and commercial flexibility:

We aim always to be the most affordable provider and the easiest to do business with. Commercially, nothing's off the table.

“One day, we'll all look back on the early 2000s as a time when things were slow and it was all about managing bandwidth scarcity. The journey starts right here with the approach that CityFibre is using to revolutionise the UK's connected future. A future fuelled by well-designed network build, limitless bandwidth and endless possibility.”

Clayton Nash, Head of Product, CityFibre

Contact our team

www.cityfibre.com/startmyjourney



Our dark fibre network currently reaches:

- **Customer Sites** - 260,000 businesses and 3.7 million homes currently addressable
- **Points of presence** - whether partner or CityFibre owned or located within datacentres
- **Datacentres** - over 90 already on net
- **Local exchanges** - built to 'near-net' as part of each well-planned city
- **Mobile towers/base stations and small cell sites** - 7,400 cell sites currently addressable
- **Street furniture** - including cabinets, pedestals, bus shelters, lamp posts etc

Brighten up your prospe

Dark fibre trailblazer Exa Networks and training company Copper Road UK show what is possible for CPs once they've seen the light.

Strategically, the move into dark fibre was a natural next step for Exa Networks and an evolution of the company's existing business model. Far more revolutionary are the great strides that have been made in how Exa Networks leverages dark fibre and the upsides are truly transformational for customers and channel partners. Until now there have been few if any dark fibre procurement options for companies such as Exa, due to scarce availability and high costs. But alternative pure fibre infrastructure providers such as CityFibre have unlocked the pent up potential for limitless capacity and end-to-end network control for smaller players with big ambitions.

"As an ISP we've been delivering connectivity services and content filtering into the business and education market for 14 years," explained Mark Cowgill, co-founder and Director, Exa Networks. "Although we have done well, we had no option but to use the same national and local infrastructure with the same restrictions as every other ISP. But running dark fibre and our DarkLight service is a game changer for us and our customers. It's not just opened new doors, it's kicked them off their hinges. Potential customers or partners we'd been trying to talk to for years, who simply

wouldn't take our calls, suddenly came knocking on our door when we launched DarkLight. We have gone from being a competitor to a market leader with an offering that other providers simply cannot match."

Open and shut case

To prove the point Cowgill cited two of examples. The price for Gigabit connectivity in the UK (for instance 1Gbps on 1Gbps leased line) is on average circa £13,000 per year. Exa's Gigabit on DarkLight is a mere fraction of that figure. "Another great example of dark over lit for customers is that if you take, for instance, a 100Mbps leased line on a 100Mbps bearer, if for any reason you needed to increase bandwidth for a couple of days (for example, a conference at a hotel) to 2Gbps, it is simply not possible. The customer would have to order a new 10Gbps line months in advance and then commit to the bandwidth and the line for a minimum of one year.

"On our DarkLight service, if a customer finds themselves in this situation they can give us a call and get a temporary increase, paying a tiny fraction of what the previous option would be, and just have it there for whenever needed."

Taking on dark fibre is technically not too far removed from adopting



Mark Cowgill

Running dark fibre and our DarkLight service is a game changer for us and our clients

lit, noted Cowgill. "Yes, you need to have an understanding of the optical and transmission side and expensive termination and network equipment, but the key point is to have the right network from the outset. We are fortunate to have

operated our own network and infrastructure from day one. Those wanting to start from scratch need to allocate time, expertise and money before they can deliver their first circuit. For this reason Exa's partner programme exists to help comms providers more easily deliver dark fibre to their customers.

"The concept of dark fibre is new to many end users and comms providers, but it is taking off rapidly. If you are not in a position to deliver these types of services soon, you are going to be in a bad place competitively speaking. Our reseller and partner programme gives CPs the ability to offer our DarkLight service right away, without needing either the network expertise or expense. The nature of the product means there is little to no competition and it is a unique opportunity for our partners to deliver a future proofed Internet connection to their customers today, and one that will generate recurring revenue for years to come."

For resellers wanting to climb aboard the rolling dark fibre convoy they should consider three important factors, advises Cowgill. Firstly, network availability. "It is no good having a product that only a couple of people can get," he stated. "You need as big a network as is financially and technically possible to reach as many customers as you can."

Secondly, price. To make a step change in Internet connectivity in the UK for business and education organisations there needs to be a competitively priced product. "It's not complicated," explained Cowgill. "If the investment for the CP or end user is too great, nothing will change. Finally, the ability to listen and respond is crucial. As an ISP we need be able to openly talk to our dark fibre suppliers and for them to listen to our requirements and concerns. Anyone who has been in this business for a long time will know this is a big ask, but it is vital."

ects in the dark

According to Cowgill, alternative network providers such as CityFibre are best placed to meet all of these essential requirements. "Having a single main provider stifles growth and does not generate competition or technological advancement," he stated. "The country needs alternative network providers who are willing to invest in the UK and help ISPs such as ourselves deliver world leading connectivity and services to organisations throughout the country."

The road to fibre

The undeniable benefits of dark fibre to the industry and customers are not the sole rationale behind its widespread appeal. The limitations of the copper-based infrastructure also reaffirms unassailable arguments in favour of a pure fibre future. Enter Copper Road UK, a company that specialises in helping ISPs of all sizes prepare for the journey from copper to fibre by refocusing their sales and commercial approach. Copper Road UK Director Marcus

Dacombe commented: "The legacy infrastructure that exists will always have a use but copper is not going to keep up with the exponential increase in demand for data. Fibre is the natural successor.

"As an industry we have never stopped developing more secure, faster and more cost-effective ways of transmitting voice and data, and a pure fibre future is within reach of the mass market. Providers that grab the opportunity to help their customers to develop a connected strategy are going to be in a stronger position than those who just resell comms products."

Access to dark fibre changes the discussion from how to make the most of a scarce bandwidth resource without losing control of costs, to how limitless capacity and flexibility can be leveraged to differentiate, drive efficiencies and prepare a business for the long-term future. "The conversation still starts with what a customer is looking to achieve, but it should then demonstrate

how fibre can grow and sustain the business, rather than a series of alternative connection technologies," added Dacombe. "Fibre is an enabler but the return on investment, perceived quality and ease of use are the real decision drivers. The savvy reseller helps customers to understand how fibre can underpin growth and then offers margin rich products based on OTT services. The provider becomes a partner rather than provisioner, pursuing an integrated approach where the connection and services are wrapped together in a value proposition."

Comms providers should sensibly question their current purpose and whether it dovetails with the needs of a fibre-based future, believes Dacombe, who pointed out that sales people will inevitably be required to adapt their approach to generating new business. "There is a great community of sales professionals within the provider community," stated Dacombe. "However, there are also a number of people who are reliant on their previous experience.

"A good sales manager doesn't treat the customer as a quick win sales prospect, but instead relishes the opportunity to build a lasting relationship and become that customer's go-to expert. Recruiting people who can learn and grow with the technology is essential. Fibre sold on its own is just another connection technology, but sold as part of a connected strategy it enables customers to operate in new ways that generate business growth."

Commsworld flourishes in the new age of dark fibre, p38



Top ten benefits of a dark fibre platform

1. It's charged by distance or circuit, not by bandwidth – setting you free from spiralling costs and slow upgrades.
2. It could be the last connection your customers ever need – with the ability to deliver any bandwidth requirement far into the future.
3. It gives you full control of architecture and technology – including the ability to separate networks and data traffic to meet regulations.
4. It enables you to sell with more confidence – knowing that more control reduces the risk of your reputation being impacted by the service shortcomings of others.
5. It sets you free from selling like-for-like services – by fuelling innovation and enabling differentiation.
6. It enables you to boost service performance and reduce costs – e.g. by migrating existing assets.
7. It focuses you on a pure-fibre future – at a time when copper is struggling to deliver and ISDN30 is becoming obsolete.
8. It can be a 'strategic bid' differentiator – offering better margins and helping you stand out from the crowd.
9. It's ideal for delivering fully resilient connectivity – alongside another provider if desired.
10. It can reduce opex and save money – with capex weighted or IRU capital leasing models available.

When to light up your own dark fibre

Seriously consider it if you tick any of the following:

- If you use network connectivity as part of large scale solution development
- If you're a SI supporting enterprise networks
- If you have an emerging or growing own-network vision
- If you need to upgrade or extend your core and access network
- If you have engineering, operational and NOC skills in-house or available to you

Not ready yet?

Then consider partnering with or reselling active services from someone who is! It could still give you access to many of the benefits – especially if you're looking for fast, affordable, independent network-based connectivity that can be upgraded at any time, without waiting around.



Marcus Dacombe

"Copper will not keep up with the exponential increase in demand for data. Fibre is the natural successor."

CityFibre

Putting partners first,
however large or small

Dark fibre era emerges

Denying an entire nation the benefits of dark fibre is simply not an option. But there is little that most comms providers can do against monolithic national operators dragging their feet, until now. Here, Commsworld CTO Charlie Boisseau explains how the availability of dark fibre enabled the company to master its own destiny and liberate customers from the constraints of an inadequate infrastructure model.

First question, what does the comms industry want? Answer, it wants massive national dark fibre availability followed by mutually planned routes to market based on staunch partnerships with alternative providers. Commsworld's response to CityFibre's dark fibre proposition has granted that wish. The second question is how to switch a higher number of comms providers onto unlit fibre and further advance a national connectivity revolution.



Charlie Boisseau

According to Boisseau, adding volumes of dark fibre to the armoury of the channel is a no brainer. "Throwing an abundance of dark fibre into the industry will make the supply chain richer, even if you're not able to consume it directly," he said. "The industry will attract new providers such as ourselves doing clever things with dark fibre, readily wholesaling it back to the rest of the market. For example, we're planning to launch national Layer2 access to 1Gb/s and 10Gb/s Ethernet using CityFibre under our Fluency network brand name. Alternative network providers are hugely important in this space."

Commsworld uses dark fibre as a means of backhaul between its metro PoPs as well as an innovative

access circuit technology for providing connectivity services to customers. "The traditional fibre and Ethernet/leased line carriers struggle to deliver against their SLAs, but owning and managing the service end-to-end puts us in control and allows us to deliver over and above the industry standard," added Boisseau. "Dark fibre also promotes innovation way beyond the scope of traditional metro Ethernet and leased line services which are the core component of most offerings from providers.

"If the sector continues to be shackled by the same old ubiquitous access networks with the same products and services underpinning the country's telecoms industry we will continue to be frustrated by the status quo.

With a lack of innovation and an obscenely slow drip-feed approach to the roll out of new products and services, we really can't rely on the usual suspects to revolutionise our national infrastructure. For this reason, companies like CityFibre, with its fresh approach to funding and investing in new build networks, are absolutely critical."

Flexibility

Commsworld already provides flexible bandwidth options to its customers, with the ability to go from 1Gb/s to 10Gb/s in just days instead of weeks or months and without the huge cost. "We are also selling our own brand of wavelength-based optical services for enterprise and service provider customers, all over our own infrastructure, under our own

control and with disruptive pricing," added Boisseau.

Adopting a full dark fibre strategy was a natural evolution for Commsworld, and a welcome progression from its former piecemeal use of dark fibre in its backhaul network. "On occasion we found the opportunity to use dark fibre for customer circuits, but the lack of a dark fibre asset to tap into was the main block to being able to deploy more dark fibre-based services," commented Boisseau.

"The likes of BT, Virgin, Vodafone etc don't currently sell dark fibre, so it was only an option in select areas in cities where one of our fibre partners happened to have network. But CityFibre arrived and built hundreds of kilometres into cities where we operate. It has been a game changer. Having an abundance of dark fibre asset to consume, and the ability to influence where it is built is an unprecedented paradigm shift in our space."

Access to dark fibre has greatly advanced Commsworld's capabilities. In the past the company had to rely on managed access tails from providers such as BT even though it had its own national MPLS network. "At that time our products and services looked similar to the rest of the industry

but we nevertheless achieved success in selling customers the benefits of our agility and willingness to do things you just can't buy elsewhere," commented Boisseau.

"However, our success was limited by our inability to take that innovation further and differentiate in new ways. But having access to a raw piece of glass between our network and our customers means there is no limit to that innovation. We are no longer seen as a tier 2 operator buying network components from others. Having our own on-net fibre capability with all of the flexibility and scope for innovation it brings puts us on a level playing field with large national operators. The only difference is that our network is the result of a partnership with CityFibre, and we didn't go bankrupt building it."

It is a boon to Commsworld that it has in-house optical expertise and the knowhow to install, troubleshoot and maintain networks consuming dark fibre. "If you're planning to take dark fibre as a component of your offering, I would recommend putting your engineers through a general fibre awareness course and invest in some basic tools," advised Boisseau. "No engineer should be without an optical light source and meter and a good set of fibre cleaners." ■

NIX COMMUNICATIONS GROUP ACQUIRES OPUS TELECOM AND PHIPPS COMMUNICATIONS IN A MULTI MILLION POUND DEAL

Ambitious, award-winning telecoms company, NIX Communications Group, has purchased Opus Telecom Ltd and its subsidiary Phipps Communications Ltd in deals which are set to double the size of the company and take its turnover to nearly £12 million a year.



This deal is great news for our customers who will enjoy access to the same quality of service that they've come to expect from Opus and Phipps



Marl Castle



We are set to embark on many more acquisitions in the coming years, so I would be very interested in hearing from any telecoms companies thinking of selling their base



Nick Zammit

NIX Director, Nick Zammit, said: "The first half of 2016 has seen yet more success for us, and the NIX brand is building fast. Completing on our first two acquisitions has made us stronger than ever. We have also just finalised our purchase of a large commercial building in Romsey, Hampshire, which we plan to turn into the first NIX Business Centre. This will be a hub for start-up and small businesses, helping them to hit the ground running. NIX will provide all telecoms, business calls, line rentals and a super-fast 100MG lease line for each room, for a fixed fee each month and all with no commitment. This will just take the NIX brand to another level."

The two acquisitions mark an important step in NIX's history as Nick Zammit intends that these are the first of many. He said: "We are

set to embark on many more acquisitions in the coming years, so I would be very interested in hearing from any telecoms companies thinking of selling their base. You'll be assured of a sensible discussion and a **'no churn'** offering."

Managing Director of OPUS and Phipps Communications, Mark Castle, has always had a good relationship with Nick Zammit, and they have remained in contact with each other since 1996 when they worked together. He said: "This deal is great news for our customers who will enjoy access to the same quality of service that they've come to expect from Opus and Phipps, with the added reassurance that we have the backing of a larger organisation with additional skills and expertise."

Nick Zammit added: "The key to

the NIX success story is our approach to customers, providing them with a solution that gives them an edge over their competitors. Every member of the NIX team is passionate about making customers, not sales, and this is what businesses love about us. We have been named Unify's top reseller, hitting the top spot for the third year running. We are smashing records and building a brand like no other company in the sector."

NIX is always on the look-out for high calibre staff, as these are fundamental to the company's continuing success. Nick Zammit added: "I would urge anyone in the telecoms sector who is thinking of a career move to get in touch; if you're a dynamic, self-starter, passionate about delivering the best service, I'd love to hear from you."

"The NIX family, as we describe ourselves, have deep rooted loyalty to the business and love the work ethic of the company and our plans to be the best. We look after our staff well, we recognise each individual's skill set and we don't take people for granted. We operate a 'work hard play hard' attitude so it's a fun place to spend your days."



Call me, Nick Zammit
(Senior Partner) on
0800 193 7700 today to
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Hunt issues PBX refurbish

It is a stroke of good fortune for Clarion that its mission is also its biggest opportunity – to change the culture of re-use and waste in the phone system marketplace, according to Managing Director Tom Hunt.

Clarion's responsibility dovetails neatly with its commercial ambitions and this perfect fit is reflected in Hunt's long-term association with CEO Ben Bradbury with whom he has been a friend since childhood. Prior to joining Clarion in 2003 Hunt worked as Chief of Staff for an MP for four years focusing on environmental and technology issues. This experience was transferred to Clarion and helped to establish the company as an 'envirotechno' trailblazer with Hunt and Bradbury leading a phone system hardware re-use revolution across 50 countries – and they recently refurbished their millionth handset.

Clarion was set up with just £7,000 and currently generates circa £4 million annual turnover and employs 40 staff. The company moved from London in 2013 to 40,000 sq ft premises in Billingshurst, providing enough space to set up a remanufacturing plant. "We now have a state of the art test, refurb and repair centre and process over 3,000 IP and digital handsets a week," said Hunt. "Our current challenge is convincing people not to be wasteful and that high quality Grade A

refurb kit is not the same as second hand. We are often stripping out motherboards, relaminating and recasing handsets. That is why we call it better than new.

"Our products go through an extensive refurb bench testing process and are given a warranty that is double the length of a new one. We also replace faulty handsets the next day, unlike manufacturers that require phones to be returned for repair which can take weeks. Our resellers don't pay to have their handsets maintained, which gives them more margin to play with when they are quoting for maintenance. Furthermore, to underscore our commitment to the refurb revolution we invite people to take part in our Pepsi Cola challenge by sending out new and reconditioned phones so they can make their own judgement."

Clarion began its commercial life at a time when the market was awash with VC money and cash was being spent on the very best of everything to set up new businesses. This extravagance played into the hands of Clarion's founders. "When the bubble burst much more used kit came onto the



Tom Hunt

market and we approached receivers and liquidators to purchase it, paying a fair value and indirectly returning more money to creditors while creating a market for people who needed heavily discounted comms," said Hunt.

"Reusing the equipment meant that it was not being sent to landfill, which was still happening back then. Today, with our suppliers and purchases worldwide, we know what is in demand and what is coming into the marketplace and can create fair value so that both parties gain."

What stood out most to Hunt was the extent of waste and the opportunity to create something remarkable in a new market. "Companies pay a high price for new kit that devalues quickly," said Hunt. "If a company goes bust the

chances are that its ICT kit will be skipped. On the flip side, companies wanting to get off the ground need comms equipment but their pockets may not be deep enough to buy new products. We saw a market for trading used telco kit so we also started scooping up deals at the auctions."

Bargain hunt

Clarion's first purchase was an old Argent Branch system with many DT3 handsets bought from an auction house in Croydon. "I had a buyer in mind so I could outbid others who were chancing their arm for a bargain," recalled Hunt. "I carried it away with difficulty in four hessian sacks and managed to get it into the car. Since those 'rag and phone' days we have developed into a fully fledged partner to the telecoms trade providing

telephone systems, cards and handsets, plus repair services for resellers. We configure IP handsets for hosted providers and ship emergency maintenance parts to our customers around the globe.

"The icing on the cake for our customers is that the Grade A reliable equipment we provide is also helping them to decrease their carbon footprint. This helps them target sectors such as the NHS and Local Government which are some of the fastest growing markets for refurb in the UK. We also give the money we make from recycling to MIND, a charity close to our hearts."

Clarion's all singing and dancing refurb and repair facility houses a team of engineers who provide technical advice to resellers; while the sales team supports resellers in

winning Clarion call

winning hosted and on site telephone system deals. Hunt explained: "We do this in two ways: By buying back the old telephone system and allowing the reseller to subsidise the deal, and we help them undercut the competition. Most deals on new kit come with a discount, let's say 20 per cent. If we then provide the handsets at 70 per cent of the new price resellers win the deal."

Perhaps not surprisingly, manufacturers and distributors were perturbed by the attraction of Clarion's proposition to resellers, and it didn't take long for some to follow its lead. "Cisco and Avaya entered our market with their own certified refurbished offering," stated Hunt. "This move by the manufacturers has helped to expand the market, reinforcing the message that refurbished is just as acceptable as new."

A key growth area is the supply of IP handsets for use on hosted platforms. "We have several partnerships with hosted providers and resellers," added Hunt. "They send us their equipment and our engineers configure it as they wish. Servicing hosted VARs is the fastest growing part of our business. We continue to stress to them the importance of the benefits of equipment re-use to win business and save their clients needless expenditure, and to take some responsibility in protecting the world's resources by reducing their carbon footprint. We stock every type of IP handset."

"There is no doubt that most if not all business comms will soon be in the

cloud. But we should not be getting ahead of ourselves. For years we were told that the introduction of IP would mean the death of traditional fixed line business. That was back in the mid-noughties but look where we are now. There is a huge chunk of the market still invested heavily in on-site telephony. So we continue to focus on supporting our resellers in providing heavily discounted refurbished telephone systems and handsets to their large corporate clients and the public sector."

Cost savings

Hunt cited one such example, an organisation with a legacy system which is rolling out 5,000-plus refurbished handsets saving the business over £330,000. "There's plenty of margin to be shared between us, the reseller and the customer," said Hunt. "But large corporates and the organisations our clients service and maintain are now moving their data into the cloud. The voice will soon follow. The big question is whether they go straight to the headset/PC set-up or keep the handsets. Current trends suggest the latter. But we are also moving more into the headset market."

Another growth area is the repair division. "We have a team of qualified engineers with a broad range of technical skills," said Hunt. "Some of the vendors support us and provide their schematics, otherwise we work it out. One of our next steps will be to roll out a 3D printer division for helping produce hard-to-find parts."

Hunt advises resellers to embrace refurb whenever and wherever possible. "Being a reseller is about

adding value, and with a reliable refurb and repair partner resellers are adding a significant amount of value to their offering," he commented. "In simple terms, resellers gain a competitive edge and reduce their carbon footprint." ■

Just a minute with Tom Hunt...

Role model: My father. He's always been there for me, has the qualities of a true gentleman and he's a great mate

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I've run a number of marathons in a variety of stupid outfits

What talent do you wish you had? To choose which side of the pin I hit my golf ball

Comms industry bugbear: Everyone seems to wear suits. How do you work in a suit?!

What do you fear the most? Fear

Top tip for resellers: Embrace the refurb revolution

Biggest career achievement? Keeping harmony with my wife and three children and maintaining friendships with the people I work with

One thing you could not do without in your job? Sanebox, the email management system that helps me manage the ridiculous number of emails I receive daily

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Working hard to get into this thrilling marketplace

Lesson learnt: I now have the right balance between my work and family, but wish I had achieved this sooner



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Lowe finds cloud level

Carl Lowe, Managing Director at Cloudsource Technologies, shows why youngsters would do well to act on the sound advice of a parent.

Lowe's father showed remarkable foresight when he advised his son to establish a career in the telecoms industry, which he believed to be replete with commercial promise. "After school I got a customer service advisor job with a big Manchester-based telecoms company just to get my foot in the door," said Lowe. "I soon moved up to the telesales department, progressing through internal sales to field sales. I then became Sales Manager, Sales Director and ultimately Managing Director. Working at every level helped me to set up and manage Cloudsource. I have a good overall view of how all the elements work together."

Like his father, Lowe displayed a similar knack for acting on foresight when he set up Cloudsource in May 2014 and was joined a few months later by Sales Director Paul Mahon. "I had been keeping a keen eye on the development of cloud technology but sometimes felt like the only one in the industry who could see its potential," added Lowe. "Cloudsource was born from a desire to bring cloud telephony and IT solutions to everyday businesses, and to be ahead of the

curve in introducing new technology to the market.

"We began as a team of four but within the space of two years have grown to a headcount of 16 with plans to take on additional staff across engineering and sales over the next few months. Our customer base has grown to circa 145 clients in the SME market across the UK, including Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands."

In its first year Cloudsource turned over £435,000 and almost doubled revenues to £858,000 in year two. "We're predicting that we'll double turnover again this year," added Lowe. "We're growing our sales team and launching a number of new solutions such as a Cloud Media platform that we've been developing in-house for the past 18 months. We're also becoming a virtual service provider for Ericsson-LG. As a relatively small company to be chosen is a huge recognition by Ericsson-LG of our achievement."

Other achievements include contract wins such as a 17 site cloud deployment for Blue Diamond Group. "This gave us the confidence to win bigger deals and



Carl Lowe

deliver a successful solution to a number of sites with different needs," said Lowe. "The result was a happy customer and a boost to us as a business."

Key challenge

In the fast developing cloud market it is inevitable that bringing new products to the table generates the challenge of overcoming consumer scepticism. "With cloud technology, although many businesses are already using elements of it without them knowing, there is still some reluctance to invest in a full cloud or even hybrid telephony solution," said Lowe. "We're addressing this through our sales and marketing efforts, presenting first and foremost the business benefits that speak for themselves, and then discussing the technology."

Lowe is keeping a close eye on cloud adoption

and industry issues such as the ISDN switch off. "Everyone wants to move some, if not all, of their business to the cloud along with UC and collaborative working practices," he said. "I'd like to see more eagerness to jump on new technologies and a shift away from traditional mindsets and approaches."

"We're a youthful and dynamic company with driven people and a real belief in the technology we provide. We have a strong sense of community, but building a close team is easy when you're a small organisation so it's important as we grow to keep this sense of togetherness, particularly as we're now spread over two offices."

Lowe's strategy is to continue winning more large scale contracts with a London-based office to help expand

the firm's reach. "We'll get there by continuing to do what we're doing, investing in new technology, R&D and staff, and building close relationships with our customers," he said. "Our core values have always been at the heart of our growth, offering advice and solutions by simply listening to the customer. This strategy has helped us to grow organically through recommendations. We will continue to add new solutions to our portfolio, and invest in the research and development of new products such as Cloud Media software and services, and capitalise on becoming an Ericsson-LG Enterprise virtual service provider." ■

Just a minute with Carl Lowe...

Role model: My dad. He brought me up on his own while holding down a career

What talent do you wish you had? Patience

Your strengths and what could you work on?

I'm ambitious, positive and a visionary. But I could work on listening more and improving my general people skills

What do you fear the most? Failure, but the fear of it is also what motivates me

Name three ideal dinner guests: I don't do dinner parties, but I would like to go training with Paul Scholes, Justin Rose and Mike Tyson in their respective sports

Name one thing you couldn't do without in your job: My contacts both in and outside of the industry

If you weren't in comms, what would you be doing? Personal trainer



HAVE YOU BOOKED YOUR TABLE FOR THE COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS YET?
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Join the industry diamonds



On October 13th the great and the good of the ICT industry will gather for the most glamorous, exciting and fun packed evening on the 2016 calendar – The Comms National Awards finals night!

Whether you have participated in the award process or not, this is your opportunity to reward your team or your customers, reflect on an amazing year, enjoy top notch entertainment and hospitality, celebrate success and network with industry peers and colleagues.

Don't miss out on the industry event of the year - book your table or place now!

Premium Table of 10 places in the 'Golden Circle'

with great view of the stage at £3,850 + VAT



Give your channel partners and your team the VIP treatment this year with an unforgettable evening at the industry awards. A premium table package puts your company-branded table in a prime location in the 'Golden Circle' with a great view of the stage, 8 bottles of wine, bucket of beer and Bottle of Grey Goose Vodka with mixers and dinner for your guests.

Standard Table of 10 places at £2,700 + VAT

The cost of a table includes dinner, 1/2 a bottle of wine per person and all entertainment.



Single place(s) at £295 + VAT each

The cost of a place includes dinner, 1/2 a bottle of wine per person and all entertainment.



Contact

Sophie Timms

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BE A CUT ABOVE

BOOK NOW FOR THE INDUSTRY

- Call **01895 454476** to secure your place at the Comms National

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

We are proud to announce another record entry for 2016 and as we went to press our esteemed judging panel were making their final deliberations on the finalists and winners. This sets the tone for a spectacular finals night on October 13th where our finalists will gather and celebrate their success at the industry night of the year.

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 Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre and Ronnie Corbett. Guests can be assured that once again this year the entertainment will be of the highest calibre.

This year the Comms National Awards returns to the lavish ballroom at London's Hilton on Park Lane Hotel 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 themselvesso don't miss it, book your table or place at the event now by calling **Sophie Timms** on **01895 454 476**.

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Nine takes top position again as headline sponsor



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."

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Category sponsors recognise power of CN Awards



8x8 Global Cloud Communications

"At 8x8 we're delighted to yet again be sponsoring the Comms National Awards. The event is always a fantastic evening that celebrates the very best our industry has to offer and the achievements made over the past year. We're proud to have sponsored these awards for the last couple of years celebrating the top talent in our industry. The Comms National awards have long been known for excellence in communications, whether rewarding vendor solutions, resellers, innovative technology or outstanding customer service. At 8x8, we know how important the channel is and value the unrivalled expertise of our partners.

"Our success is intertwined with the success of our channel partners. We know that without the strong relationships we've built over the years, we wouldn't be able to deliver our world class service. We'd like to wish everyone who's entered the best of luck and can't wait to celebrate your achievements in London."

CHARLES AYLWIN – DIRECTOR OF CHANNEL AND PUBLIC SECTOR, 8X8
SPONSOR OF
THE PARTNER SERVICES CATEGORY



TalkTalk Business

"TalkTalk Business is honoured to be a part of the Comms National Awards, sponsoring this year's Reseller of the Year – Enterprise category. We are eager to see the nominations which make it to the final of this prestigious award and who will ultimately take home the trophy.

"There is so much to celebrate when it comes to the brilliant work that our partners and others in the reseller channel are doing every day. Here at TalkTalk Business, we are proud of the unrivalled experience we have built up over the years by supporting our partners with a resilient, reliable service and developing a strong and compelling product portfolio.

"There are so many resellers with a real passion for our industry. In the same way that we are keen to make a difference by giving resellers the tools they need to succeed and make the most of the opportunities to grow their businesses, we love seeing the incredible ways they are able to innovate and thrive.

"We are thrilled to see excellence in all areas of our industry, and the Comms National Awards are a fantastic opportunity to recognise years of hard work and dedication. We wish the best of luck to all entries and look forward to seeing you on the night to celebrate your achievements!"

ALEX TEMPEST – DIRECTOR OF PARTNERS, TALKTALK BUSINESS
SPONSOR OF
THE RESELLER OF THE YEAR – ENTERPRISE CATEGORY



CONTENTGURU

"Content Guru is delighted to be sponsoring the Unified Comms Category at this year's Comms National Awards. The unified communications market has grown significantly in recent years and is predicted to continue its expansion, tripling in value to £66 billion by 2023.

"The channel, too, is undergoing rapid change as the multi-channel customer engagement hub overtakes the traditional contact centre, introducing channels such as social media, video chat and IM into business-facing interactions for both customers and colleagues.

"It is therefore essential that resellers can differentiate themselves within such a competitive market. High quality platforms, such as those based in the cloud, give resellers the opportunity to gain access to functionally-rich unified comms capabilities.

"The Unified Comms category recognises the work of those outstanding resellers who are pioneering the unified comms solutions that are transforming the communications channel. It is an area we've invested in heavily and we are particularly pleased to have the opportunity to celebrate those resellers at the forefront in this area. We wish all the entrants the best of luck."

MARTIN TAYLOR – CMO, CONTENT GURU LTD
SPONSOR OF
THE UNIFIED COMMS CATEGORY



Voiceflex

"Voiceflex is delighted to once again be a sponsor of this year's Comms National Awards.

"We're proud to be part of the continued success of Comms Dealer and the Comms National

awards. Our partners are just as important to us as the technology we use and we value the relations we have across the industry and support the channel 100% with significant investment in product development and enhancements and sales & technical training. We're dedicated to supporting our growing partner community and ensuring they have everything they need to capitalise on the huge opportunities.

"The Comms National Awards are a highlight event of the year and we're pleased to be part of it in Comms Dealer's 20th year – we look forward to sharing their and the industry's success and help make it an enjoyable event.

"We wish everyone the best of luck and look forward to seeing everyone on Thursday 13th October."

PAUL TAYLOR – SALES & MARKETING DIRECTOR, VOICEFLEX
SPONSOR OF
THE DISTRIBUTION CATEGORY



UNION STREET

"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



channel telecom

"Having attended the Comms National Awards for many years and experiencing first hand it's phenomenal impact on the industry, Channel Telecom are delighted to be sponsoring this year's event. Far exceeding the industry standard for award ceremonies, the Comms National Awards have gone from strength to strength and are now firmly established as the most prestigious our industry has to offer.

"What is particularly impressive about the CN Awards is their recognition of the ever changing, forever growing reseller channel. At Channel Telecom we have resellers varying in size, stature and direction. The team at Comms Dealer do their utmost to ensure they appeal to as many as possible and have worked with us on many occasions to ensure our resellers are able enter and have on many occasions been finalists!

"We look forward to another fantastic evening, and fingers crossed it's a win for us or one of our many nominated partners!"

CLIFFORD NORTON – MANAGING DIRECTOR, CHANNEL TELECOM LTD
SPONSOR OF
CNA TV



Network Category



SME Reseller of the Year



Enterprise Reseller of the Year



Unified Comms Category



Comms National Entrepreneur of the Year



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Meeting the challenge of



Digital transformation will soon be on the agenda in every business, but therein lies the challenge, writes Comms Vision Convention Content Director Paul Cunningham, who discusses the importance of a shared view on business and technology trends.

Digital transformation is underway in more than two-thirds of businesses according to research by Nemertes. But the scope of those initiatives and their degree of success is not easy to read. Businesses might deploy all the radical new technologies they can get their hands on (and of course cost justify), but if they do not materially improve a process or establish a breakaway innovation, no value is generated and the required transformation won't materialise.

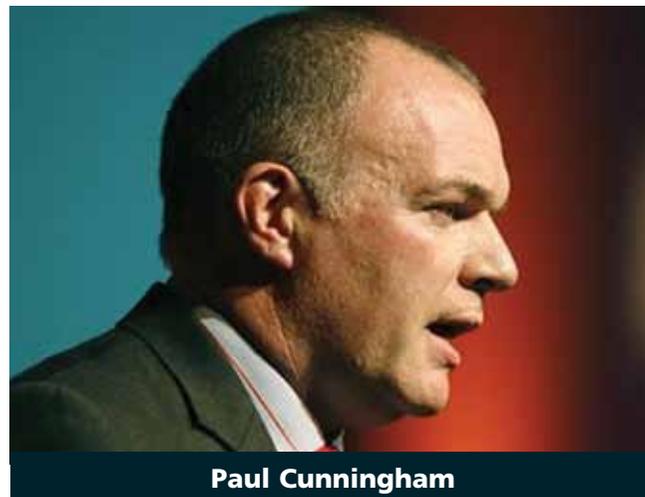
Every business is at a different milestone in its understanding and execution of digitisation. And even within those already embarked on the journey, the leadership team will comprise laggards on one side of the boardroom table and blue-sky digital freethinkers on the other. It's easy for business leaders to get enmeshed in debates about current 'hot' technologies.

A more appropriate starting point is a shared perspective on business and technology trends and a consensus on which are business critical

and, just as importantly, which can be put aside.

Stereotypically it has fallen to the CIO or their equivalent to build this shared view. Increasingly, line of business leaders, whether in finance, sales, marketing or operations are being given (or taking for themselves) the lead in defining and responding to drivers for digital transformation. Changes in business models, consumer behaviour and workforce expectations will have a significant impact on the shape and momentum of digital enterprise transformation in the next five to ten years.

Customers, even in the B2B market, are increasingly looking for products and services that align with their preferences and traits as individuals rather than as collective and homogenous market segments. To achieve this degree of customisation, businesses are turning to digital innovations in research, manufacturing, sales and service. On the other hand, customers want simple, non-intrusive interactions that deliver their desired results. This will



Paul Cunningham

Changes in business models, consumer behaviour and workforce expectations will have a significant impact on the shape and momentum of digital enterprise transformation

remain a challenging balance for business to achieve, but the chances of success are enhanced by digitisation.

Organisations across every sector are accelerating their efforts to build, deliver or partner on information-based services which in turn drive

the adoption of subscription and bundled models of consumption. This will require sophisticated interfaces where customers can source combinations of products and services from a range of providers. This concept of partnering and brokering of services via published

interfaces reflects a major change that is characteristic of Digital Transformation. A perfect example of this can be seen in the heart of our own industry. With the high penetration of smartphones and the rapid evolution of Internet services as the basis for business tools, service providers have been forced to seek alternative revenue streams.

As customer reliance on over-the-top (OTT) services grows, they pay more for their bandwidth as compared to traditional telecom services. To the chagrin of the established providers, this Internet bandwidth is a relatively insignificant component of their revenue model, regardless of the increased demand. In response, many service providers have started to expose valuable APIs to both internal as well as external application builders. In doing so they can offer high value application-ready data such as billing, location and messaging and generate an incremental and reliable source of revenue.

What's more, we are only at the beginning of this.

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enterprise digitalisation

Research indicates that less than 25 per cent of mobile applications use APIs, creating significant head space for telecom API providers. With the predicted further growth in mobile applications, and the IoT behemoth entering stage right, the demand for telecom APIs is inevitably going to increase in the immediate and mid-term future.

Data consumption

A vast well of data in all its forms is now available for consumption, and in consuming it and allowing it to drive behaviour, businesses and individuals generate yet more data. As this model of consumption spirals upwards, customers, business leaders and their partners and employees will rely more on data to make decisions. Universal access to data will inform preferences and ideas, but will simultaneously put brakes on the rate at which decisions and action follows, as the glut of inconsistent data of variable value makes it difficult to reach answers quickly and correctly. Businesses that don't align with the information

expectations of their customers will be challenged (and challenged publicly).

Advanced automation, not just of discrete and rigid industrial processes but of 'soft' creative and social tasks, is now a reality. Businesses must increasingly examine these for opportunities to drive efficiency and achieve growth. Clearly, automation has already fundamentally and irrevocably changed the form and nature of work in less skilled areas. It is increasingly replacing or enhancing activities that demand a degree of social and emotional intelligence, contextual knowledge or judgement.

When automation takes on the activities once performed solely by skilled employees with a high sense of self-worth, everyone involved will need to adapt how they assess and demonstrate value, collaborating with and being guided by technology agents that elevate judgment, creativity and flexibility and not just accelerating outcomes.



IT TAKES VISION TO BE A LEADER

COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates representing the premier league of the UK partner community. Places are limited: If you would like to join us this year, please register your interest to attend at www.commsvision.com

Recognised boundaries across organisations, functions and roles are more fluid than at any time and are a defining characteristic of the digital enterprise. Cross-industry models are drawing strategic players in historically isolated industries together, and long-standing industry 'identities' themselves may need to be redefined. For example, the automotive industry

finds itself at the point of needing to redefine the very nature of its product, not by BMW or Ford, but by Apple and Google. Yet all parties to this radical and pivotal change, both incumbents and arrivistes, will need to collaborate with each other in order to reach their goal.

Most organisations, especially those 'incumbents', are challenged in trying to keep up with the dizzying rate of change in customer behaviour and competitors who were 'born digital' and not yet even teenagers. Risk assessment, regulatory compliance, governance, legacy IT systems and globalisation can all serve as roadblocks for enterprises, while customers and competitors appear to move faster than ever. Larger companies must be adaptive, developing flexibility in

the face of uncertainty and above all must avoid creating monolithic organisations and processes that are only optimised to a single outcome.

Assessing and determining which of these seismic shifts are critical to your specific company and context is the necessary stage for digital transformation programmes. Leaders who can enable this shared vision will not just be rewarded with a starring role in the unfolding drama, but will be in for a decent share of the take and the royalties to follow.

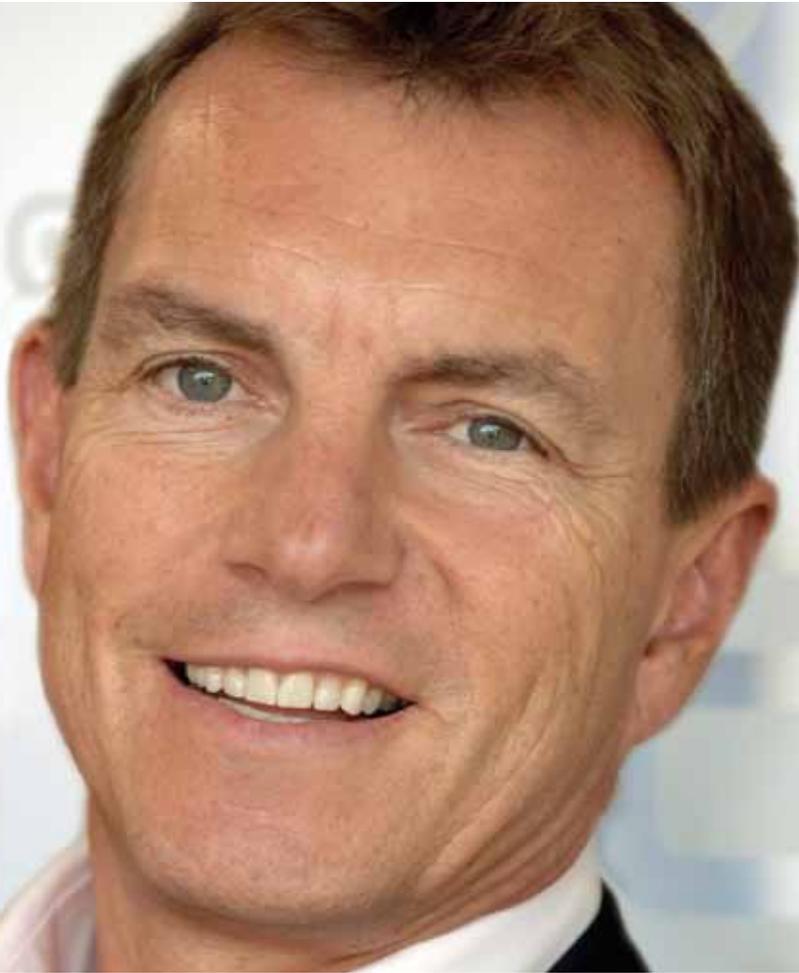
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Ridge targets £200m

From Europe's largest council estate to systematic consolidator of the independent channel. Meet Onecom CEO Darren Ridge whose entrepreneurial vitality was again on display last month with the deeply significant acquisition of fellow Vodafone partner Evolve.



Onecom's acquisition of Evolve unites two of Vodafone's largest UK partners and Ridge has signalled his intent to pursue more strategic buys in tandem with organic growth to create a £200 million business within five years. "With the acquisition of Evolve our staff numbers have gone up from 300 to 450 people and our turnover in 2017 will be £100 million," stated Ridge. "The size of our customer base on mobile is now 350,000 users and the target is to reach 500,000 on the fixed plan side. We want the fixed segment to grow to the same size as our mobile business, if not larger."

Onecom has taken over Evolve's bases in

London, Cambridge and Shoeburyness, along with Cardiff-based The Word which is owned by Evolve and now operates as Onecom's first office in Wales and will be expanded. The deal also bolsters Onecom's total communications strategy which offers an integrated package of mobile, fixed line, data and IT services. "Onecom's biggest change has been becoming a communications business rather than a purely mobile business," added Ridge. "Our customers are looking to have their total communications delivered by one provider."

Ridge was brought up on the largest council estate in Europe, Leigh Park, but now he aims to be the driving force behind one of Europe's

fastest growing comms firms. His first business venture was co-founding a retail store called KJC selling TV and electricals. "A customer of ours asked to buy a car phone, that's when it all started in 1987," he said. "The lessons I learned at the KJC business have been implemented at Onecom, which is to ensure that we have a solid executive management team in place. The shareholders are not critical to the day-to-day running of the company. And Joe Case, my business partner at KJC, taught me that your word is your bond."

Onecom was established in 2013 following the merger of Premier Telecom, a company Ridge founded in 2002, and Business Phones Direct where he was a major shareholder

and Director. "Premier's solutions were targeted at the middle and upper end of the SME market while the entry level was catered for by Business Phones Direct," added Ridge. "The rapid development of these businesses into the unified world of communications prompted the amalgamation of the two."

According to Ridge, Onecom's USP is customer service. "We take the services that are most relevant to our customers' needs and supply and deliver them ourselves," he commented. "The biggest trend we see is the move towards the Internet. Everything that you use has to have some kind of SIM card and needs to be connected to the Internet to really work."

Just a minute with Darren Ridge...

What talent do you wish you had? To sing
Your strengths and what could you work on?

My greatest strength is building relationships. My weakness would be impatience

What do you fear the most? Losing

One thing you could not do without in your job? Samsung Galaxy S7

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Selling something

What possession could you not live without? My wedding ring

How would you like to be remembered? As an inspirational leader



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Epsilon in cloud drive

As Epsilon Telecommunications transitions from a network firm into a software specialist delivering connectivity services, going digital and equipping the company with the right skills and mindset is key to its roll out strategy, explains CEO Jerzy Szlosarek.

Epsilon has made a long-term investment in its proposition and partnering strategy, and an equal measure of commitment has been placed on making the business fit for the future. Processes are being improved, employees educated, customers integrated and better supported, and the back-end rebuilt to manage high volume on-demand transactions. "We are not constrained by legacy cycles if we give our customers a platform model and position our connectivity solution as an application," stated Szlosarek.

Epsilon has circa 120 staff and maintains double digit year-on-year growth. The company has come a long way since it was launched in early 2003 in London by a group of entrepreneurs including co-founder Szlosarek. Epsilon is still 100 per cent privately owned and has subsidiaries in Singapore, Hong Kong and the UK. "From the outset our business plan was to offer a simple connectivity product in the voice market which was known as eConnect," stated Szlosarek. "It was

one of the first products of its kind and enabled carriers to interconnect more easily for carrying voice traffic."

Epsilon has witnessed three milestones since beginning its journey. The connectivity product, Guru, filled a gap in the market for customers who wanted a simple connectivity solution that could reduce lead times, remove risk from the commercial framework and provide a high level of customer service satisfaction. This connectivity product grew well for a number of years and enabled Epsilon to build over 45 PoPs across Europe.

"We then saw an opportunity to integrate colocation business as part of the interconnection, allowing us to operate a colocation and physical data centre environment," said Szlosarek. "It was about giving customers a combined colocation and interconnect solution. This was a turning point because we got into a much broader skill set and capability, and also acquired assets in Asia. We then opened in global markets and ramped up our



Jerzy Szlosarek

brand which allowed us to attract a large number of customers and connections."

Having built a standard product in a global market Epsilon is now well into its third phase which is the transformation of the telecommunication business into a cloud-centric network – an interconnection for customers to simplify global connectivity while also having access to high quality infrastructure and preparing for the digital economy.

Market push

"The cloud phenomenon is changing the landscape and how we manage our media, communication and applications," commented Szlosarek. "The main change we see is more push coming from OTT services and the IT sector. New operators such as AWS and Microsoft are growing. We need to think about how we can adapt to the cloud and embrace IT to

transform our systems and processes in our back-end as we transition from a telecoms business towards Platform as a Service (PaaS). Our current priority is to grow as a PaaS service provider. We are beginning to see customers take up services through our software portals and APIs."

As a provider of global connectivity solutions Epsilon is already leveraging software to provide a simple way for customers to build global connectivity infrastructures immediately. "We are transitioning more towards APIs, allowing our customers to have direct control over our resources," noted Szlosarek. "We are becoming an OTT network provider, positioning our applications and connectivity to the cloud market giving SaaS companies access to a global connectivity solution, while addressing traditional carriers, data centres and the managed services segments

by providing more efficient, leaner and scalable services."

Epsilon is focused on the whole connectivity experience and is closely following the IoT/M2M story, evaluating the possibility of integrating solutions for such applications. "For now, we are focusing on the cloud access piece, providing support for real-time communications and simplifying connectivity into the last mile," confirmed Szlosarek. "The next step may be IoT and M2M enablement, but there are currently no clear solutions."

Epsilon also offers a white labelling service for its platform, enabling customers to reach new markets. "As a result, our customers are realising new opportunities and business models for themselves," added Szlosarek. "That allows us to innovate and build network and software solutions while enabling our customers to be more successful in their markets. The landscape is shifting and we are talking about partnering for success, working together through an application-centric model, while enabling new opportunities through white labelling.

"Resellers and SIs play a valuable part in the ecosystem, and we will form much stronger relationships with them. Resellers should embrace the power of the cloud and platform services to enhance their own capabilities. White labelling and platforms create a more dynamic and intimate customer experience. But the journey starts with understanding cloud and how it creates opportunities for customers." ■



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Industry trends in M&A

Activity in the telco M&A market remains buoyant with a noticeable trend emerging during the past few months, observes Paul Russell, Corporate Finance Partner for M&A at BDO.

In the second and third quarters of 2016 telecoms M&A saw previously struggling assets changing hands and according to Russell this development is a notable trend. "We attribute this to ambitious management teams seeking to grow by acquisition, rather than due to any sign of distress in the sector," he said. "The obvious deals being Maintel's £48.5 million acquisition of Azzurri and GCI taking over Outsourcery's assets."

Meanwhile, noted Russell, the sector continues to attract private equity interest with Livingbridge and FPE investing in Southern Communications and Optimity respectively. "Fund raising activity has also been strong, including Maintel's £24 million to part fund the Azzurri deal and Gigaclear's £24 million for its rural broadband roll out," he added.

The appetite for M&A has not, perhaps surprisingly, waned post-Brexit. "It has largely been business as usual," said Russell. "The market fundamentals remain strong. We estimate that only 10 per cent of M&A transactions have been lost due to Brexit. The vast majority of deals have not been falling over

and new business M&A activity is at good levels."

This positive outlook is underpinned by £50 billion of dry powder in the private equity space. "We anticipate that PE houses will keep spending as evidenced by the recent Southern Communications (Livingbridge), Sabin (Lyceum) and IT Labs (ECI) deals," added Russell.

Numerous international and UK trade buyers are also actively looking to acquire and debt markets remain open. "We see overseas bidders spotting an opportunity in the UK with the fall in sterling outweighing the risks of Brexit uncertainty," noted Russell. "In particular, US private equity money is coming into the market which perhaps is not surprising given the pound's three decade low against the dollar. The acquisition of Lyceum backed managed services company Adapt by US PE house Abry backed Datapipe could be an early example of this."

The drivers of M&A activity will remain as they have been over the last few years, believes Russell. These are firstly a chance to diversify into new areas that can provide future growth.



Paul Russell

Alternative Networks' acquisition of Control Circle and Pulsant's acquisition of Onyx are good examples of this. Secondly, companies will continue to acquire bases or similar companies to provide organic growth, which is sometimes hard to generate across the industry. "What will probably emerge as a trend post the current deal flurry is an increased appetite for bolt-on companies to propel top line and EBITDA growth," said Russell.

Healthy appetite

Despite some previous high profile company plans not working out as expected such as Outsourcery and Azzurri, there is a healthy appetite among existing and new investors in the wider tech and telco space. "ECI, Lyceum and Livingbridge have all had previous experience in the space and invested in the last quarter in new deals," added Russell. "All of these plans will probably assume inorganic and organic growth and a desire to get to the magic

£100 million turnover, circa £10 million EBITDA level."

There are two pricing models at play. Established, larger and growing companies such as Sabio and Southern Communications attract high valuations that are close to or at double digit multiples. However, this will not translate to a smaller base or company that is, for example, lower margin with single/few customer dependency, where the multiples will be much lower. "What is interesting is that I expect a bidding war to ensue for the right assets from the companies that all have new funding, and hence the prices of the smaller players may inflate," said Russell.

Clearly, there are some big shifts in the market at the top level with BT/EE, but the mid-market is also going through a change with companies that have been privately owned taking on investment for the first time, and companies that have been through their

first PE cycle finding new homes such as Selection Services, Adapt and Onyx. "This means the lower mid-market gets consolidated, the players become bigger and the fight for juicy bolt-ons intensifies," noted Russell.

In terms of acquirers pursuing a diverse approach to the evolving market, with M&A in the area of new business segments (such as M2M) as a means to strengthen overall digital offerings, Russell expects to see this trend continuing with broad based players acquiring specialist companies to add further services to their offerings, and ideally cross sell across the existing base. "Clarinet's acquisition of the gaming specialist Ardentia is a great example," he said. "This type of acquisition both locks in customers through the specialist services and protect margins."

In such a buoyant M&A environment Russell expects the market to refresh itself. "The current generation of mid-market businesses that are being transacted came about as talented individuals left big companies to establish nimble start-ups," he explained. "As the market consolidates quickly I believe this will happen again, so in five years time the mid-market companies that we are talking about may not then exist."

"Deal activity in recent years has been driven by the convergence of voice and data and the battle to deliver UC. As both of these have been achieved from a technological viewpoint, we wonder what future technology and innovation will enable companies to outpace their peers." ■



Marcus Allchurch

Comms sector still a big deal

Positioning today for tomorrow's market is a key driver of telecoms M&A activity, according to industry experts.

The telecoms M&A market remains buoyant despite Brexit and concerns about a slow down in the economy. This is because technology companies, especially in telecoms and IT services, thrive by helping their customers to do more, to be more productive and efficient, and often to remove costs. "There is now so much talent, capability and financial capital within the sector that we expect a strong continuation of M&A at, or above, the levels of the last few years," stated Marcus Allchurch, Partner at Acuity Advisors.

"The vast majority of telecoms M&A we are seeing is about buyers positioning for the future, whether at network operator consolidation level (EE/BT or the aborted 3/O2 transaction), equipment vendors (such as the merger we advised on between Sub10 and Fastback), through to solution providers including the transaction Acuity advised on between Sipcom and Rigby Group. A common theme is the creation of a business that

is able to thrive in a fast evolving market. This is also true with private equity investors who continue to gain more experience in telecoms and build on some excellent deals done."

Post-Brexit M&A activity has not waned. Instead, overseas buyers are attracted to the UK because of a considerable price reduction in home currency terms. "In some cases we are seeing renewed competitive tension," commented Allchurch. "Trade consolidation is likely to continue as a result of bigger players bringing on new skills and capabilities such as UCaaS or fixed wireless access, where we would expect to see strategic pricing and customer base acquisitions."

There continues to be a wall of private equity money focused on the telecoms and IT services sector, observed Allchurch. "More and more we are seeing PE houses setting up their own specialist teams focused on this sector which has delivered some stellar returns over the last decade," he said. "Even more exciting,

there are a number of US PE houses looking to invest their funds into the UK."

Factors likely to propel M&A activity in 2017 and beyond are the continued positioning for a strategically relevant set of services, revenue growth and defensive M&A should churn or ARPU come under pressure. "From top to bottom, the comms sector continues to be one of the most innovative in terms of technology development, growth drivers and its ability to generate attractive returns for investors," added Allchurch.

Counting on advice

"Alongside the success stories however there have been some high profile aborted deals, and there has also been a number of notable distressed deals this year which reinforces the importance of taking advice from experienced and sector focused advisors well in advance of making a decision to buy, sell or raise finance. Cash generation and growth are still king when it comes to exciting potential investors, and these should always be critical items on any management team's business plan."

Trends in valuation are also clear. For must-have strategic, fast growing and highly cash generative businesses multiples are at an all-time

high, but for others they can be lacklustre. "As a selling shareholder or buyer there is no substitute for working with an experienced and trusted advisor who understands the sector and who will provide a realistic, rather than flattering, view on value," added Allchurch.

The private equity backed 'buy and builders' will continue to build scale as they start to approach their own exit windows, observed Adam Zoldan, Director at Knight Corporate Finance. "We are also seeing some strategic deals with buyers looking to add expertise rather than simply scale, particularly in the face of falling spend on traditional comms," he added. "The market is lively with a higher number of well funded buyers than ever before, driven by investment from

private equity such as Sabio, Wavenet and Southern Comms, and continued confidence from the banks which are happy to make debt available to fund deals."

M&A is driving consolidation but a high number of players in the market has not narrowed the choice of acquisition targets. Meanwhile, driving convergence through strategic deals has become a natural progression as customers are now more familiar with cloud and the as-a-service model, observed Zoldan.

Another notable aspect of the UK telco M&A market is the amount of funding available. "It's such a turnaround from a few years ago," said Zoldan. "And valuations are holding up well, but clearly scale is now driving value. There has been far more competition for the larger businesses with turnover of £15 million-plus as investors and trade buyers compete. This materialises as a value premium. We are therefore seeing a significant value gap between larger and smaller deals. But all deals are a complex process and due diligence is an area where they can trip up. Good preparation and access to clear and consistent management information will help any company fly through the due diligence process." ■



Adam Zoldan

"Deals are a complex process and due diligence is where they can trip up."



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ISDN's demise hastens

BT's intention to switch off the PSTN and ISDN networks by 2025 is a step into the future, and distinctive paths are being taken by providers such as Gamma to ensure resellers wind the clock forward and bring about an imminent post-ISDN era based on the stellar rise of SIP trunking.

The fast expanding SIP trunking market registered strong growth in 2015, up 31 per cent, one of the biggest growth periods reported by Cavell. Now, the SIP versus ISDN tipping point has been reached, and with 1.5 million ISDN channels left to transition Cavell estimates that one million of these will convert in the next two years. Not surprisingly, competition in the channel is hotting up and this has led to some providers looking at ways to differentiate their proposition and open up new areas in the market.

"Voice services are still critical to the business market with reliability and availability absolutely key," commented Paul Wakefield, SIP Trunks Product Manager at Gamma. "ISDN's end-of-life by 2025 is a catalyst for businesses to look at alternative technologies in the hosted and SIP space. With a number of new entrants and services coming into the market, the growth we're seeing continues to keep everyone on their toes, driving value and innovation."

SIP is now widely recognised in the market for its flexibility, scalability and features, including business continuity and access to free calls. "SIP delivers tangible business benefits and cost savings that ISDN cannot match, so it's clear to see why businesses are choosing SIP as their ISDN replacement," added Wakefield. "The technology also has scope to evolve, so the future is bright."

Choosing the right SIP partner is more critical than ever so Wakefield has prepared a guide for resellers wanting to select a partner that's right for their business, including 'questions to ask' when speaking to potential providers.

Does size matter?

Voice is a business critical service. When looking for a SIP partner, a proven track record is essential, especially if a reseller is new to the technology. It's crucial when selecting a partner to balance the business size with the quality of service. What's their market share and placement within the market? How long have they been in the SIP trunking market?



Paul Wakefield

Own network

With only a small number of major carriers operating in the UK, many providers are simply reselling infrastructure that's beyond their control and is designed for multiple activities and markets. Do they own and operate their own dedicated infrastructure to support SIP trunking? What level of control do they have over the core infrastructure?

Value added services

It's important to differentiate a SIP proposition rather than joining the race to the bottom (on price). Do they supply just SIP connectivity? Can they offer additional overlying services to give added value to SIP Trunking and offer greater margin opportunity?

Fault handling

When things go wrong, as occasionally they do, customers will expect a fast and efficient fix. To cut costs, many providers operate from

overseas contact centres which can offer an inferior level of service. Where are their contact centres based? What percentage of their support is based in the UK? Ask to see the support SLAs. Is the support desk available 24/7? Conduct a demo call into the support centre to test them out.

Billing

It's crucial that billing is accurate and timely. If not, the impact can be felt financially and through resource allocation. Do they have daily Call Data Records (CDR)? When are their CDRs made available?

Business continuity

SIP trunks can handle emergencies easily. They are inherently disaster recovery/business continuity ready, allowing resellers to re-route calls to an alternative location automatically. How do they build business continuity into their solutions? What level of control do they have

over the core infrastructure? How do they ensure geographical resilience?

Fraud management

Hacking and abuse of business telephony is becoming as big as credit card fraud. With this type of abuse, the cost of the call falls to your business. How does their solution protect against hacking and call abuse? Will they offer a financial commitment to not pass on the cost of fraud?

Cost savings

Moving to SIP trunking can result in savings of up to 50 per cent on line rentals and 25 per cent on calls compared to traditional ISDN services. What cost savings do they envisage following deployment? How do they compare with other offerings?

Provisioning and support

The ability to provision and manage services directly is a pre-requisite for any successful relationship. What portal control does their solution offer? Can you access an immediate health check and advanced diagnostic tools to support fault resolution?

Conformance testing

There are many manufacturers and devices that provide telephony services. Whatever their preference, resellers need to ensure that their SIP trunks will work as expected. Which manufacturers and products are they approved to interoperate with? For example, are they integration tested and approved to interoperate with Skype for Business? Does their service allow you to directly connect to the Microsoft SfB platform to make external calls? ■



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When it comes to growth



LORRIN WHITE
TOTAL

“ Frustration as a leader is a given – it’s very difficult to make a large team move as quickly as you can on your own. Often ideas and strategies take much time and effort to be fulfilled. They require constant focus on employee engagement. Preparing, communicating and executing plans does not bring quick growth when you have substantial change on the cards. As for growing successfully – that requires the right people in your team, the right decisions at the right time and a constant flow of talent that can meet the business and market needs. The biggest challenge is enticing great, experienced people away from great, experienced employers for something a little different. ”



CHRIS GOODMAN
FOCUS

“ The greatest challenge that impedes our growth and business development is the lack of office space locally. The bulk of our staff work from 9,000 sq. ft. offices in Southwick, West Sussex. We ideally need in the region of 25,000 sq. ft. but due to relaxed planning regulations it is hard to find office space that is not already earmarked for conversion to houses or flats. Other than this the usual challenges apply. Access to acquisition capital without releasing equity remains a challenge and the speed at which we can access bank lending, with the hoop jumping required is proving to be as onerous as ever. ”



The ICT industry has a rich vein of highly driven entrepreneurs that are creating business growth by developing compelling sales propositions, partnering with top pedigree suppliers and motivating staff to perform at the highest level.

That said, each and every day these channel business leaders face the perennial problem of sustaining growth against a plethora of business issues. These can range from attracting loyal and skilled sales and support staff, increased regulation and taxes, the performance and support of supplier partners, keeping up with constant technological changes, getting access to funding when its needed and, of course, economic bombshells like Brexit.

Surprisingly enough, many businesses simply aren’t operationally ready for growth – this could be due to lack of skilled staff, poor hiring decisions, a lack of competitive intelligence, and so on.

Good managers and business owners look at Key Performance Indicators regularly. These



FRASER FERGUSON
KUBE NETWORKS

“ The political landscape and FTSE instability creates nervousness within any sector and technology is no different. Brexit has most certainly been unhelpful and if I’m brutally honest, did people really understand the implications? We’ve grown year on year against a number of 100 year events, the Scottish Independence vote, Brexit and now the possibility of indyref 2 (another Brexit poll). This, without question, makes customers twitchy, particularly the mid-market. Buying in dollars is driving down margins, borrowing looks like it may become more expensive with taxes rising and the pound is looking as if it’s going nowhere soon. All this means a re-drawing of targets however, as ever, we must and will see it as an opportunity. ”



CHRIS MORRISSEY
LILY COMMS

“ A recurring frustration is that due to the evolution of technology in everyday life, clients expect BMW quality for Kia prices. They want what can sometime be complex business communications to work as simply as an iPhone. It’s an exciting challenge and one that we’re rising to, but it is not without its difficulties. As we grow and our product portfolio expands we find it a constant challenge to deliver the breadth of skills necessary to support our clients. Imparting knowledge across the business is something we spend considerable time and resource doing. Employee recruitment is another frustrating area for us due to our rapid expansion. There is a lot of competition for the best talent out there and we face a constant battle along our growth journey to bring top quality people on board. ”



ANDREW SKIPSEY
M12

“ M12 Solutions is fortunate with its own differentiating ISP service aiding our steady growth. Developing new ‘solutions sales’ talent is probably our biggest challenge. It isn’t a short process and the sales skills to present on ‘value’ need a professional who can properly talk at board level, gain early trust and buy-in and maintain resilience and professionalism. We are sure that nurturing our people through our development programme will ultimately help with bigger ticket ‘solutions sales’ and also get them to a high earnings level. It’s been a two steps forward one step back experience. We’re evolving our approach, which is hard when we’re damn busy with our day jobs, daily distractions and customers to look after. ”



PAUL BURN
NIMANS

“ One of the biggest challenges resellers face today is to identify at what stage they move from one technology or product set to another. Do they do this on the basis of what their customers are telling them, what they read in the press or their own gut feelings? There’s a lot of different branches to their businesses these days and everywhere requires investment. That could be hosted telephony, networking and data and even voice. It comes down to which horses they want to back and put their money on. We give them the opportunity to try before they buy. Resellers can go into new markets, test the water, see if their customers want it and then invest further. ”

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BRENDON CROSS
STL

“ STL enjoyed revenue growth of 18% FYE ending March 2016 and a corresponding increase in profits of 41%, but identifying and hiring good people remains the barrier to even stronger growth. To try and counter this we have a very successful sales development programme, which continues to produce excellent sales professionals. We’ve also tried apprenticeships, with mixed results, although the recruitment of support staff for Finance, Billing and Operations seems to be a little easier because we have a reputation as a good employer locally. Whilst poor performance from manufacturers and network operators will always present challenges, we should also remember that this is one of the reasons we prosper...in this painful space between ‘incompetent carriers’ and ‘impatient customers’.



JAMES EMM
OAK INNOVATION

“ For Oak the key issues affecting growth are as follows: Uncertainty after Brexit and the media – particularly the BBC - exacerbating this. The FTSE is up and we are still quoting loads and getting orders; but the atmosphere of uncertainty is still not helpful. We plough on; Disruptive technologies, with hype, which confuse the marketplace, while benefitting few; any internal or external activity which can potentially detract from the main aim of continuing to run a profitable and happy company - although there is a balance here – time spent on structure and planning can lead to longer-term benefits, and these things are necessary.



can include the sales pipeline, conversion rates and market trends. They look out for success in one market or location and the potential to expand into another. Is a big sales deal on the horizon? Is the pipeline trending favourably? Is success in one area of product development opening new doors of opportunity for others?

Ignoring business indicators can mean a business won't be able to capitalise on the opportunity or effectively prepare for that growth when it presents itself.

We asked our contributors which are the most frustrating issues that are holding back their growth and the answers were inevitably a mixed bag, but many were unequivocal on one key point: you ignore your people at your peril.

Don't leave it to the point of expansion before you start thinking about the people in your business who can help you grow. Always be on the lookout for industry talent and remember your stable of trusted suppliers, mentors or funders, who should know your business well, should be able to step in and help you meet your growth goals.



BAHMAN RAHIMI
BDR VOICE & DATA

“ The rapidly and technologically changing face of our industry creates a continuous shortage of skilled staff. We combat this through the BDR academy; appropriately designed internal training courses and internal up skill opportunities for BDR staff. Successive governments have campaigned, but not delivered, on reducing red tape for SME's. As a businessman I have grown to accept that red tape will remain at great cost to SME's. Like a defeated sportsman I have learnt to accept it. There is funding to support SME growth and expansion but access to it is never easy or straight forward. When trying to raise funds towards expansion, BDR's shareholding and independence becomes central to lending criteria. That puts me off.



STEVE HAWORTH
TELEWARE

“ The first key issue that I feel is currently affecting the growth businesses is access to growth funding which can be a frustrating and time consuming process. I believe that this is in part hampered by venture capital and bank options for exit which is easier in the US. AIM and the main markets are more restrictive and costly than in the US which flows down to the lenders appetite for risk. A reducing appetite for risk and innovation has led to prolonged decisions and the amount of people involved in making decisions is larger than it has been historically. When we speak to partners and non-partners alike everyone seems to have elongated sales cycles from this.



ROD TONNA-BARTHET
ANNODATA

“ The UK is suffering from a IT skills shortage, and while it hasn't affected our growth, it is something that we are mindful of and manage. The skills we need can often be quite specialist and in short supply, so finding the right staff can be challenging. It's important that we make ourselves as attractive as possible to staff to secure the best talent. We also invest heavily in training to ensure that the staff we've got are equipped with the right skills and are up to date with the latest technologies. This is an industry-wide issue, and one that needs to be properly addressed in schools/ colleges, as the current IT curriculum doesn't appear to be satisfying the needs of businesses today.



MARK SHRAGA
NSN

“ The major issues affecting our business are pretty much always down to keeping the new business sales engine pumping whilst not taking our eye off the existing customers. We work hard to develop the partner relationships and the customer relationships at the same time as much as possible, which so far has worked well. Developing our products is a continual challenge and provides some good returns, but we are starting to develop some new ideas which should be ready for launch first quarter of 2017. We have developed two new independent businesses to add further value to our partners both in terms of selling energy with NSNrg Ltd and providing IT contact centre support with Cloud 100 Ltd.



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Gibbs in director role



Paul Gibbs

TELCOSWITCH has added 15 years comms experience to its pool of industry knowhow with the hire of Paul Gibbs as Sales Director. Previous roles include stints at MTV Telecom, Westcon, Veropath, Gamma and most recently HighNet.

TelcoSwitch was launched late last year by serial entrepreneur Russell Lux as a provider of turnkey open standards hosted telephony solutions, offering a product and service suite that includes CallSwitch, SimSwitch, NetSwitch and SipSwitch, all designed for large and small businesses. Since its launch the company has been busy recruiting channel partners with circa three resellers on-boarding every week.

Lee Reuben, COO at TelcoSwitch, commented: "Paul joins the company during a period of rapid growth as we seek to consolidate our position within the market. In order to make sure we continue to advance at a steady rate it's important that we have a strong senior management team in place. Paul is well versed in the telecoms environment and has extensive knowledge within this arena."

Gibbs added: "I look forward to using my skills and experience to capitalise on the great strides that have already been made and to drive the business."

Sales boost for Entanet

ENTANET'S partner sales support team has been boosted by a trio of promotions that see Paul North become Sales Manager, Emma Fisher named Sales Support Manager and Lee Hill appointed



Emma Fisher

Pre-Sales Technical Manager. Entanet's sales team now numbers 16 while the total company headcount stands at over 100. Last year Entanet grew its sales by seven per cent to £32 million.

Stephen Barclay, Sales Director, stated: "As our business has grown we have continued to invest in partner account management. These new appointments have been made so that we can give partners more time and assistance in turning new opportunities into real business.

"We are responding to demand. Our partners are growing both in terms of sales and stature and we are being asked to bid for more complex and challenging solutions. They need us to support them and it's in our interests to show our commitment by responding in kind and giving them that support."

Also on the move...



Nifa Vaz

VOICEFLEX has welcomed Nifa Vaz to the role of Channel Account Manager with a remit to develop existing and new partnerships in the south and south east region. She brings 15 years comms experience

in channel development and account management and joins following an eight year stint at Swyx. Vaz also held positions at Voiplicity, Nimans and Weston. Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director, said: "Nifa's experience and industry knowledge has already made her a key addition to the channel sales team. I'm confident that Nifa will play a key role in supporting our partners and their growth opportunities."

AVAYA'S ambitions to digitally transform the SME and mid-market sectors have been advanced by



Ioan MacRae

the appointment of Ioan MacRae as Mid-market Director for Avaya International, focusing on Europe and the Africa, Middle East and Asia (AMEA) region. MacRae joined Avaya in 2014 as Mid-market Director for Europe. He was previously General Manager at Westcon

Group. "Avaya is delivering tailored solutions that help mid-market organisations achieve their digital transformation goals at their own pace and path, in a model of their choosing," stated MacRae.

Unify names product boss



Luiz Domingos

UNIFY has appointed Luiz Domingos as Head of Product House for Software and Platforms. Domingos assumes responsibility for the entire Unify product portfolio as well as Atos' social collaboration

technology blueKiwi. Jon Pritchard, CEO, said: "When the time came to appoint a new Head of Product House, Luiz was the obvious choice given his successful role as Head of Development of Circuit, our first pure cloud offering, and his leadership in developing the OpenScape portfolio."

Domingos has spent more than 20 years managing product development teams in enterprise VoIP, UC, collaboration and contact centre platforms. Domingos added: "We are already building a roadmap that meets the biggest issues facing companies big and small including cloud, BYOD, SaaS and the requirement to have all information available at any time."

CHRIS Wallace has moved from Gradwell to Swyx where he now operates as a Channel Account Manager. He brings 14 years experience in the IT and telecoms sector across technical and sales roles. Wallace also worked at IT maintenance and support company Trisoft and IT distribution firm Bechtle.

TeleWare hires channel leader

VICKY Ryder has joined Teleware as Senior Channel Manager responsible for sourcing and driving partnership opportunities, working primarily within the Microsoft product suite.



Vicky Ryder

Her experience in mobile and telecoms sales is significant and she has held senior roles at Symantec, Outsourcery and Telefonica.

Ryder commented: "I'm passionate about UC and have been watching TeleWare and its growth for some time. I'm looking forward to bringing to bear my expertise in cloud services, SaaS and Microsoft partner experience to develop ever-stronger working relationships with TeleWare's partners."

Steve Haworth, CEO at TeleWare, added: "Vicky is the right person to take our work around Office 365 to the next level and develop the right strategic partnerships to offer value, not just to us, but also to our partners and end users."



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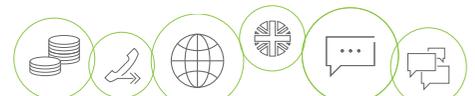
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