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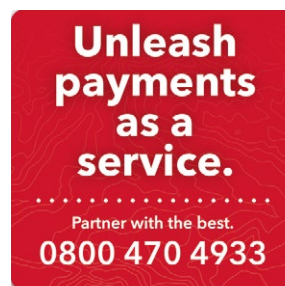
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Comms People

This month's
movers and shakers



DWS evolves with Giacom rebrand

THE launch of a single platform experience, move to a cloud-first brand and retirement of the DWS and Union Street names meets the needs of partners seeking greater simplicity, says COO Nathan Marke and CEO Terry O'Brien.

SPECIAL REPORT

O'Brien and Marke (pictured) have set out how the firm's brand repositioning and new unified Cloud Market experience provides a growth platform for technology resellers as they evolve into digital MSPs.

O'Brien explained that Giacom aims to drive channel growth by addressing two major problems faced by technology resellers and MSPs... how to effectively offer a broad range

of products and services, and how to find more customers.

"Our strategy has two goals," he stated. "First is to be a one-stop-shop and the launch of our unified platform experience is the start of this journey, creating one portal through which partners can access comms, cloud, hardware and billing.

"Secondly, the channel finds it hard to get noticed by potential customers. So we are using our scale and presence in the market to advocate for our

partners, ensuring SMBs and Government are aware of the channel as a powerful force to drive UK productivity. Getting the channel noticed opens a £5bn growth opportunity."

Marke added: "DWS evolved as a wholesale telecoms provider but today our business is so much more than that.

"In a couple of years more than half of our sales will be cloud software. It's a journey the channel needs to go on."

Full story on pages 26-27

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

ALTHOUGH still shackled to legacy technology and traditional thinking in some quarters, all the signs indicate that we are working in such a progressive sector with more and more business leaders taking a stance on the big issues of the day. So bravo to

BT, Openreach, Sky, TalkTalk, Three, Virgin Media O2 and Vodafone which have joined forces with Ofcom to increase the number of women in tech roles (see opposite page).

What's more, this welcome development raises another critical question: Is it also time for Ofcom to take a strategic lead on the comms sector's sustainability priorities? That would create an even more progressive and trail blazing industry and build on the great advances already made by the channel's sustainability champions (see pages 14-16). Meantime, hats off to those founding members of The Joint Alliance for CSR which aims to accelerate the reduction of Scope 3 emissions across our sector (see page 10).

Also at the vanguard of positive transformation is Giacom which, as you would have seen on the front cover (and pages 26-27), has evolved with a cloud-first brand and launched a new unified platform experience for resellers in what is tipped to be a gamechanger for partners. It's a big and positive statement that underscores the future direction of the channel. And as with all change-making decisions the move required vision and commitment supported by strong and decisive leadership.

It's easy to trot out that the industry has reached a watershed moment on this, that or the other issue. But it is clear that business leaders may need to reassess their decision making around the big priorities that are gathering a head of steam. And when it comes to making those decisions and assessing the factors to be taken into account, we should not bother ourselves with the unresolvable challenge of trying to strike a balance between today's stark realities and hangovers of legacy thinking.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Telcos drive for diversity



Dame Melanie Dawes

IN A BID to hike up the number of women in senior tech roles Ofcom and a group of telco giants have joined forces, pledging to increase the presence of females in the male dominated comms sector.

BT, Openreach, Sky, TalkTalk, Three, Virgin Media O2 and Vodafone, along with the regulator have agreed a three year plan that also incorporates a broader push for more women in their workforces generally.

The Ofcom-led pledge includes sharing best practice, accountability and transparency with members publishing data on progress made including performances against diversity and inclusion strategies and KPIs.

"Having a diverse workforce is crucial to the success of any organisation," stated Ofcom

CEO Dame Melanie Dawes. "It drives creativity, innovation and ensures we as employers attract the skills we need from the widest possible pool.

"But for too many women, climbing that career ladder in a male dominated industry can be a real challenge. It's great to see so many companies committing to helping more women launch long lasting and rewarding technology careers."

Stephen van Rooyen, CEO, Sky UK&I, said: "A more inclusive tech industry is fundamental to a thriving UK tech sector and critical to realising the full potential of innovation. But to achieve wide scale progress industry collaboration is key."

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

NEWS ROUNDUP

RIGBY-backed MSP CloudClevr, which launched in November 2022 with a £50m investment and an ambitious strategy to secure a strong UK foothold before moving into Europe, has secured the first in a series of major deals, kicking off with a significant investment in NGC Networks. NGC's Dean Harrop and Nikki Guest continue as joint MDs, supported by CloudClevr's cloud-based propositions, investment in sales and marketing and shared business services.

MODERN Networks, a provider of IT and telecoms to the UK's commercial property market, has acquired south west based SME focused IT services firm Bluegrass Group. The deal boosts Modern Networks' team to more than 165 employees operating out of Hitchin, Cambridge, Guildford and Exeter. The MSP is backed by private equity firm Horizon Capital which acquired a majority stake in April 2021. Modern Networks founder and Chief Executive Officer Matt Reeve commented: "Our intention is to expand the business in the south west region. The acquisition also enables Modern Networks to realise operational efficiencies through scale while providing faster onsite response times."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

CONNECTIVITY and business managed services partner Connectus Business Solutions has secured new funding with Time Finance. Connectus CEO Roy Shelton said: "We've had a strong start to 2023 and this funding allows us to make more investments into our fibre network and hosting environment. It also enables us to extend our cybersecurity capabilities and invest in more engineering and support staff. We have plans for additional acquisitions that are progressing well." See page 24

A NEAR 20% headcount boost this year (taking staff numbers to 60) has prompted ICT solution provider Smart IT to move into bigger premises in Gateshead, with capacity for over 150 staff. The company also generated 28% revenue growth. Director Tony Wilson said: "We are going from strength to strength. Our end-to-end support and networking services help businesses to embrace the new hybrid and work from home models and we anticipate more growth in the coming years. This is the right time to create the space to realise our plans." Smart IT delivers IT infrastructure, IT support, data, voice, mobile and Internet services to over 1,000 UK clients.

Vodafone to merge with Three

THE agreed merger of Vodafone and Three UK's operations will create the UK's biggest mobile network with a combined 27 million customers and a plan to offer fixed wireless access to 82% of UK households by 2030.

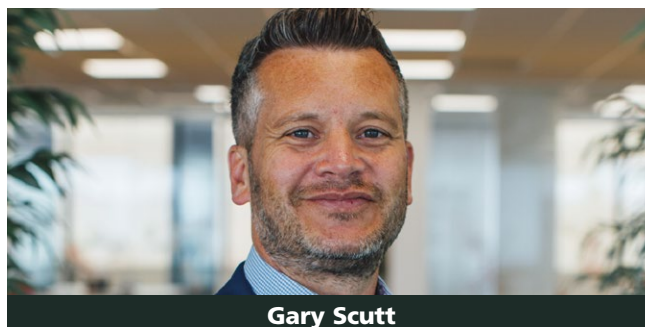
The deal is expected to boost investment in 5G networks and deliver more than £700m of annual cost and capex synergies by the fifth full year post-completion. Vodafone takes a majority stake with 51% equity.

Margherita Della Valle, Vodafone CEO, said: "The UK will benefit from the creation of a third scaled operator with a clear £11bn network investment plan driving growth, employment and innovation."

Canning Fok, Group Co-MD of CK Hutchison (Three's parent firm), added: "Three UK and Vodafone UK currently lack the necessary scale to earn their cost of capital. This has long been a challenge for Three UK's ability to invest and compete."

"Together we have the scale needed to deliver a 5G network for the UK, transforming mobile services for our customers and opening up new opportunities for businesses across the length and breadth of the UK."

SBC sells up in 4Com deal



Gary Scutt

SOUTHERN Business Communications (SBC) is the latest target in Bournemouth-based 4Com's buy and build campaign and its sixth acquisition in 14 months, with more pipelined.

Hampshire headquartered SBC began its commercial life in 1990 and provides cloud telephone systems, Internet, mobile and WiFi solutions.

4Com CEO Gary Scutt said: "Our acquisition strategy continues to play an important role in accelerating growth. Southern Business Communications came directly to us through a recommendation from previously acquired business owners."

"We're hearing that other acquirers are getting through due diligence then changing the deal at the last minute. That plays into our hands. Once we know it's a fit and a deal is agreed, we stick to it."

The SBC deal follows the purchase of Midshire Telecom, Eastern Voice and Data, Reach Digital Telecoms and the business telecoms customer bases of Bluebell Cloud Solutions and Meridian IT Communications.

NEWS ROUNDUP

BDR Group's SD-WAN expertise has received a boost following its acquisition of Loughborough-based TFM, which was established in 1995. The deal adds circa £5m revenues and puts BDR ahead of its planned results for 2023. TFM also bolsters BDR's mobile offering, doubling its mobile and IoT base. BDR MD Malek Rahimi stated: "TFM is our second transaction this year and we will shortly be announcing two further acquisitions." Headquartered in Stratford-upon-Avon, owner managed BDR was founded in 1991 and operates out of several offices with over 200 staff.

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Paving the way for a neuro diverse workforce

How far is neuro diversity a 'forgotten child' in the D&I conversation? Why is it important to consider neurodiversity? Why do we need to amplify the neurodiversity message?

To what extent does neurodiversity represent a pool of untapped tech talent? What are the various challenges facing channel businesses wanting to embark on a neuro diverse recruitment campaign? And which support strategies/programmes

work best to overcome them? Is it an over statement to say that neurodiversity can provide a competitive advantage? As part of a company's bigger 'purpose', is helping disadvantaged, routinely ignored neuro diverse people simply the right, moral, thing to do?

All these questions and more will be covered in our next 'Channel Forecast' editorial round table session.

Join the debate!

To participate in this editorial round table contact **Heather Miles** on **01895 454405** or **hmiles@bpl-business.com** for full details.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

MSPs and ICT resellers have access to Evolve's global SD-WAN, business grade connectivity and guest Wi-Fi solutions following the launch of a partner programme and portal. The firm is best known as a provider of end-to-end managed network solutions and has direct relationships with five altnets which extend its FTTP reach. It also has an exclusive hardware relationship with Mako. Evolve has already signed up a number of resellers and its development team has pipelined mobile and IT launches during the coming 12-18 months. See page 18

MORE firms are turning to outsourced IT services in response to economic uncertainty. Research by Kaseya found that 80% of businesses surveyed outsource one or more IT service to an MSP, up from 64% in 2022. The top three outsourced services are IT security, network monitoring and cloud infrastructure management. Kaseya believes that the trend will continue with a growing number of IT professionals being overworked: 40% said they are working 50-plus hour weeks consecutively, and 18% reported a decrease in their 2023 IT budget. See pages 30-32

MSP swoops on Extrinsicica

CLOUD computing business iomart has added Microsoft Azure expertise with the acquisition of Extrinsicica for circa £4m, with a potential further £0.3m in cash payable on the achievement of certain key customer targets during the calendar year.

The deal also brings a customer base receptive to iomart's product offering.

Extrinsicica began life in 2010 as a cloud services provider to micro businesses. In 2017 it was invited by Microsoft to become one of the first 25 Azure CSP partners worldwide. The company is now solely Azure public cloud focused.

In its most recent financial year Extrinsicica generated revenues of £7.4m. CEO and



Reece Donovan

co-founder Simon Smith will continue to lead the business.

iomart Group CEO Reece Donovan commented: "Simon and the team have been at the forefront of market developments of Azure since 2017 and have deep skills and expertise in this in-demand area of cloud computing, which will accelerate the initial investments we have made in our own Microsoft resources and capabilities.

"This is a meaningful strategic step as we position the group for its next growth phase."

Smith added: "iomart provides us with a strengthened platform for growth. It allows us to leverage joint capabilities, capitalise on our understanding of the markets we operate in and build upon our achievements."



Simon Smith

Spending on cyber falls short

CYBERSECURITY budgets fall short of protecting against threats in over half of the businesses surveyed by IT service provider Auxilion (in partnership with Censuswide).

The research covered over 100 C-suite executives in companies with more than 250 employees, and also revealed a lack of cyber preparedness, with nearly 40% of respondents feeling their organisation isn't adequately prepared to respond to a cyber breach. Also, 35% of leaders feel they don't have enough skills within their organisation to guide them through a potential cyber attack, which means there is an open door for security resellers to exploit.

Auxilion CEO Philip Maguire commented: "Despite the warnings and news coverage of cyber breaches, it is alarming to see leaders feeling like they don't have the adequate budget, buy-in or expertise required to protect against threats.

"Cybersecurity should be one of, if not the number one, priority for business leaders. The damage that can be caused from a reputational and financial standpoint means this should be taken far more seriously at leadership level."

NEWS ROUNDUP

HATS off to Herefordshire-based Redline Telecom which is celebrating 25 years in business. Director Colin James enthused: "Forming Redline all those years ago, we couldn't have imagined where we'd be 25 years later. We've never lost sight of what we're doing and what's important, essentially helping customers find the best products."

AVIATRIX Systems has swooped on ex-Splunk CEO Doug Merritt to lead the firm as Chief Exec ahead of current leader Steve Mullaney's departure this month. Merritt is credited with transforming Splunk's technology roadmap, financial model and go-to-market strategy, taking sales from \$100m to nearly \$3bn in 2022.

SYSGROUP has returned to growth helped by the acquisitions of Truststream Security Solutions and Orchard Computers during H1 2022. According to its latest figures sales jumped 47% to £21.6m with managed services making up circa 80% of revenue. In the prior financial year the MSP reported a 19% sales slump. In more news, CEO Adam Binks is stepping down while Heejae Chae joins as Exec' Chairman with responsibility for running the business.

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Creswick's in Human touch The ITP Chair beats portals



Tim Creswick

VORBOSS CEO Tim Creswick has taken over The Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) Chair position from Kevin Paige who held the post for five years.

Vorboss worked with The ITP to launch its training academy in 2021 and employs apprentices from all backgrounds.

Creswick's responsibilities as Chair involve collaboration with regulators, government associations and other bodies on projects that are important to the future of the industry. He will also share ITP best practice with global businesses and educational institutions.

Creswick said: "In the last five years I have worked closely

with The ITP which has been an instrumental component to Vorboss' growth.

"I'm passionate about improving access, diversity and equality in a traditionally rather stale sector.

"While we've been able to make great strides at Vorboss, the ITP role provides an agnostic platform from which I can champion these ideas across industry with a far greater reach than we could ever achieve as just one company."

ITP CEO Charlotte Goodwill commented: "In his new role as Chair, Tim will drive change and help more companies and people in the industry do exactly what he's done with Vorboss."

DESPITE big advances in partner portals and automation a survey of channel leaders by Voip Unlimited points up the importance they place on human interaction, with 68% of respondents valuing the human touch.

Of that number, 36% prefer only human interaction while 32% are happy with a mix of portal automation and people interaction. Just 32% are satisfied with a portal-only service.

"It's clear that channel vendors must balance the need to find operational efficiencies with old fashioned relationship building if they are to find success across their partner bases," stated Voip Unlimited Director Mark Pillow. "Vendors need to provide genuine channels for partners to connect through.

"Dedicated account managers and support teams, access to SLT and regular catch-ups – as well as the occasional informal event where everyone can have a good time – are all powerful tools to align businesses, drive KPIs and ensure all are working as one."

Pillow reiterated that striking the right balance between automation, which provides many upsides, and the channel's preference for people interaction is



Mark Pillow

especially key in times of tech change and economic uncertainty, which is creating more demand for resource optimisation among end user businesses.

"The unpredictable economy is prompting businesses across the UK to innovate and reduce operating costs," he added. "And recent advances in Machine Learning, integrations and automation have made those savings accessible for all, with many businesses looking to the channel to guide them through the process."

NEWS ROUNDUP

FORMER NEC Sales and Marketing Director Andrew Cooper has joined Nimans as Sales Leader for the distributor's Beyond Connectivity division, covering a portfolio of solutions including UC, connectivity and mobile. Cooper brings 30-plus years experience in the tech and comms sector and is credited with increasing growth, market share and profitability. "The opportunity to share my experience is an exciting prospect and will lead to the acceleration of growth within the Beyond Connectivity and UC sales business units," commented Cooper.

STRATEGIC Imperatives has pulled in Carl Borman as Head of Business Development. He moves from Sycurio where he was Partner and Alliances Development Manager. His prior experience includes notable stints at Tollring and Samsung. Strategic Imperatives MD Wail Sabbagh said: "Carl's track record and deep understanding of the telecoms industry makes him the perfect fit for this pivotal role." Borman said: "My focus is to drive our growth strategy, forge strategic partnerships and deliver value."

More new appointments on p40

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Industry body sets out strategy to cut Scope 3 emissions

An industry body made up of 26 of the world's biggest telecoms companies – including BT, Vodafone, Deutsche Telekom and Telefonica – has called for supply chains to prioritise decarbonisation based on the latest scientific climate evidence. The Joint Alliance for CSR (JAC) claims to be leading from the front having switched to tendering processes more aligned to carbon reductions, and outlined 10 key actions it wants to see implemented across industry to reduce Scope 3 emissions.

A survey by epi, on behalf of JAC, shows 93 per cent of JAC members have committed to net zero or science-based targets, compared to 43 per cent of Forbes 2,000 members, meaning that the telecoms industry is bucking the trend.

John Spear, Director at epi Consulting, said: "This reflects a recognition of the growing need to address Scope 3 emissions across telecoms. The majority of a company's overall carbon footprint falls under Scope 3, making it the single largest area of potential impact for organisations working to combat climate change."

Just 31 per cent of the world's largest 2,000 companies have set a Scope 3 emissions reduction target, while 88 per cent of JAC members have Scope 3 targets in place. Dr.



Carlo Drauth

Carlo Drauth, Chair of JAC Climate Change Workstream & Head – Sustainability and Responsible Business, Telefónica, believes that joining forces across the telecoms sector and value chain is vital to realising a net zero future.

"As an industry we have already set ambitious targets and taken concrete measures to reduce our

emissions and mitigate climate change," he said.

"However, most of our carbon footprint lies beyond direct operations. Our supply chain is a significant contributor to emissions and to achieve our targets we must work together to reduce our collective carbon footprint. With the right mindset and actions it is achievable." ■

Ten point plan for Scope 3 success

1. Understand your carbon footprint: Assess emissions from operations, energy use and the value chain.
2. Develop a carbon reduction plan: Set a net zero goal with interim targets and board oversight.
3. Align carbon reduction to SBTi standards: Establish valid, science-based Scope 1, 2, and 3 targets.
4. Analyse supply chain emissions: Prioritise areas with significant carbon footprints.
5. Maintain LCAs for your products/services: Identify major decarbonisation opportunities.
6. Report emissions reduction activities: Use recognised standards like the GHG protocol and ensure external verification.
7. Use green energy as available: A simple and effective emission reduction strategy.
8. Set power efficiency goals: Incentivise employees to improve product and operational efficiency.
9. Support your customers' carbon reduction goals: Understand and align with them.
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Creating an advantage in How sharp is your competitive

Having a differentiated competitive advantage is essential for business success, especially in a challenging economy. But do you truly understand your competitive qualities and how to balance out the drive for growth with differentiation-led objectives and strategies? To bring greater clarity, Comms Vision 2023 (8th-10th November, Gleneagles Hotel) will take a multi-faceted research-led approach to exploring why many organisations may only be scratching the surface of their competitive potential, and share insights into what is required to forge a long-term edge over competitors.



The then Minister for Implementation Oliver Dowden
CBE opening 2018's Comms Vision Convention

Striking the right balance between leadership priorities and gaining a competitive advantage is key, and Comms Vision 2023 will make a deep dive into how strategic action on key leadership priorities could combine to form a matrix for competitive development and lasting success. Comms Vision research will provide unique insights into the current thinking of high level channel execs and the issues at the forefront of their minds. The research will also identify leadership challenges with a big emphasis on responsibilities linked to

culture, sustainability, talent retention, inclusion priorities and decision making, all of which contribute towards building a super competitive boardroom as well as a force for good. Does your leadership and competitive strategy stack up in times of profound change?

Balancing business growth objectives with sustainability priorities, D&I agendas and customer-led strategies to revolutionise organisational culture and differentiation is an absolute priority. But to secure a competitive advantage we must ask what leadership, people and

organisational capabilities are required? Therefore Comms Vision 2023 will put a spotlight on how to fire up cultural enablers for an advantage. Again, based on the findings of unique Comms Vision research the conference will provide insights into the cultural enablers underpinning competitive advantage and the extent to which business leaders need to amplify them.

We will also identify leadership attitudes and approaches towards culture and whether the most important cultural enablers that strengthen and

differentiate an organisation, and its people, are being leveraged – also highlighting how and why culture can weaken businesses when not prioritised.

Accelerating growth

Seizing technology disruption as a strategic driver of growth will be another major consideration area at this year's conference, because finding the middle ground between accelerating growth while harnessing emerging technology disruption means managing new risks and challenges as well as opportunities. Is your business fully prepared to

leverage fast-emerging and disruptive technologies? To help chart a course forward Comms Vision will aim to map the landscape of innovation and disruption and whether business leaders in the comms space need to consider accelerating out of their comfort zones.

Comms Vision research will also form the basis of a delve into the technology factors that will deliver a competitive advantage across today's and tomorrow's ICT channel marketplace. The conference will explore the channel's go-to-market strengths and weaknesses, ask whether we

times of change e edge?

are getting the most from today's technology solutions, whether more value add should underpin partnerships, identify untapped and underserved opportunities and unearth where we need to pay closer attention if we are to maximise and accelerate growth across a range of existing technologies and markets.

Comms Vision will also aim to provide an understanding of new and emerging markets requiring our attention, the challenges and opportunities they will present, while exploring channel readiness and looking closely at the levers of competitive advantage and whether reseller/MSP awareness and preparedness is aligned with vendor developments and roadmaps. We'll assess the possible impact of new and disruptive market players – and how culture and leadership could be key to adaptability and success as part of a systematic approach to harnessing emerging opportunities as they arise.

Securing an advantage through partnerships and industry collaboration is also high on the conference agenda. Strategic business needs and pressing societal imperatives can only be met through industry collaborations and partnerships that accelerate change, bring more agility to the supply chain and respond to opportunities quicker. Whether pooling resources to work together on software development,

combining with strategically aligned resellers with differing skill sets, meeting net zero commitments or addressing societal challenges around 360 degree digital inclusion, it is within the channel's grasp

It is within the channel's grasp to collaborate to innovate, create more value and deliver an improved performance that elevates our underappreciated sector head and shoulders above other industries

to collaborate to innovate, create more value, empower Digital Britain and deliver an improved performance that raises the bar and elevates our underappreciated sector head and shoulders above other industries.

Collaboration matters

Based on unique Comms Vision research the conference will explore the most important challenges and opportunities that can be solved through game changing collaborations within the channel, how combining ingenuity and strategic intent

can be achieved and supported in practice – and how best to drive the collaboration agenda for a competitive advantage.

Against the backdrop of this year's Comms Vision

conference themes and insights it is clear that the matrix of leadership and competitive success must evolve to remain relevant and create a long-term competitive advantage. But what leadership qualities will play a pivotal role in making a real difference to the success of your business in these transformational times? Comms Vision will explore the various dynamics today's leaders face, assess how to create competitive momentum in the boardroom and help you ensure you're never on the outside looking in. ■

It takes Vision to be a leader

Comms Vision (8th-10th November 2023, Gleneagles Hotel) is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. Places are limited and by invitation: If you would like to join us this year, please register your interest to attend at www.commsvision.com



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How AI Can Boost Your Lease Sales Conversions



Dan MacKrell

AI has been around for years, from asking Alexa to tell you the weather forecast to getting your FAQs solved by a chatbot on websites. The IT and comms channel are no doubt early adopters of AI. Channel solutions are constantly evolving and it's exciting to see the developments and integrations being added to existing solutions or launched in new products, bringing new features and optimising processes more efficiently.

But with the public release of ChatGPT at the end of 2022, AI is now at the forefront of conversations across most of the business world this year. In 2020, it was estimated the UK business adoption rate of AI was at 15.1%. By 2040, the overall adoption rate was predicted to more than double to 34.8% (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), and this is likely to be drastically higher given the recent advancements.

So where do leasing companies fit into the AI revolution?

The UK leasing industry has been limited to some advances in technology due to regulations, especially when looking at the evolution of the consumer finance market. However, innovation has always remained a core value at Shire Leasing. We invest heavily in our technology and employ a strong team of in-house IT developers. As far back as 2001, we introduced automated underwriting, which at the time was only seen in the consumer finance industry. This was then made accessible to our vendor partners through our Shire Online™ portal.

Many providers within the leasing sector offer 'portals' that vendors can use to quote and submit finance applications for their business customers. A few offer automated decisions, typically these portals only offer acceptances for established limited companies with the strongest financial accounts. Where this isn't the case, it's often a simple 'computer says no' decline.

Shire has made use of AI over the past 3 years, bringing new functionality and disruptive technologies to an industry that is still relatively slow in adopting new technology. We now have a Director of Transformation who leads a dedicated team to analyse all systems from proposal, to payout and collections. As a result of this, earlier this year, we introduced another industry-first to our vendor finance proposition.

Our Shire Online portal now enables channel vendors and resellers to revolutionise the way they serve customers, with an enhanced ability to deliver immediate, automated acceptances for a wide range of trading entities including Sole Traders, Partnerships and even new-start Limited Companies where a guarantee is required.

The new AI technology enables more types of business customer to receive a first-point finance acceptance, improving decision times, enabling sales teams to increase overall conversions.

As the AI revolution continues, it's important to think about how you can improve your own processes, but also to understand what the partners in your supply chain are doing to add value to your products/services. By working with a forward-thinking finance provider like Shire, you can gain a competitive advantage and improve your overall sales proposition.

To learn more, contact Shire Leasing's Dan MacKrell on 07484 116930, or visit www.shireleasing.co.uk/commsdealer.

Accelerating net zero

Net zero momentum is building as major channel companies write their own success stories following big steps taken towards delivering on sustainability commitments. But getting your net zero stance right is a challenge, so last month's Channel Forecast session put the spotlight on how leading comms firms are addressing the priority issues that make their net zero ambitions more meaningful and realistic, providing key insights that will help you to advance your own ESG journey.

The comms industry has reached a critical point in moving the sustainability agenda forward with the evolution of carbon reporting and transparency across the supply chain coming into sharper focus. But gaining an understanding of the green metrics that sit outside an organisation's own operations is a big challenge, not least because Scope 3 data needs to be ascertained as robustly as Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions. "One of the greatest challenges for us has been data availability and complexity around the collection of data from a number of different sources," said Maria Voukia, Sustainability Manager, BT.

"Scope 3 accounts for 95 per cent of our total emissions so it is important to engage with our supply chain to understand where they are on their journey, and how we can help each other. We have also started to incorporate lifecycle assessments as a tool to understand the emissions of our products and services. And we are developing tools to help customers and partners understand their emissions too. This will gradually increase data accuracy across the whole



Maria Voukia

supply chain, enabling us to be more accountable and transparent."

Practicalities

While establishing a Scope 3 target has merit, practical issues must be fully understood before targets can be considered achievable and realistic,

different courier partners around distances and weights for every delivery, and establishing an ongoing method of tracking this has been a big challenge.

"In terms of upstream emissions, gaining an understanding from all of our suppliers, and there are many,

It's not incremental change we need, it's transformation

noted Matthew Smith, Senior Marketing Manager, Nimans. "Being in distribution, quantifying Scope 3 is the most challenging task, both upstream and downstream," he explained. "Looking at downstream, being able to analyse the historic data from

of their methods of transport is quite an undertaking. But it's not impossible. When we talk to suppliers and couriers you'd be surprised how many are on this journey and have started to gather this data. There are challenges but they are not insurmountable.

You need to take that step and get on the journey."

Despite the impressive work undertaken by many firms around ESG, getting to grips with Scope 3 emissions still presents an enormous challenge for all organisations driving their sustainability agenda. According to Fiona Ball, Sustainability Director, Sky, a granular approach to detailing a company's carbon impact holistically is vital. "To get to net zero we all have to follow science in terms of the absolute emission reduction required across the value chain," she stated. "We've carried out lifecycle assessments on all of our products. This gives us a clear and accurate carbon breakdown of products from design, manufacture,

the shipment and use of the product, enabling us to identify how we can reduce the overall carbon footprint."

There is a growing opportunity to achieve supply chain alignment in reporting, with collective efforts resulting in companies being able to take effective action on the biggest priorities. "We found that 10 per cent of our supply chain accounts for 80 per cent of our emissions," said Stephen Warburton, Managing Director for Partners, Zen. "The challenge is finding the data and understanding where they are. The process of gaining greater clarity is ongoing."

Ball also pointed to the major sustainability impacts

Continued on page 16



Matthew Smith



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Continued from page 14

of certain suppliers on Sky's net zero ambitions. The full extent of their emissions represents the most critical data, and the biggest challenge to gather and analyse. "We've identified the suppliers that produce the most carbon in our supply chain – that equates to 200 suppliers out of 14,000," said Ball. "Focusing on these suppliers means you can start engaging on how to work together. You need to measure to understand your focus areas, but also to see how you are doing and whether you are moving in the right direction."

Accountability

There are many reasons why understanding the supply chain's impact on the planet is important, and to gain insights the role of transparency and accountability cannot be overstated. "It's key to ensure that the supply chain is aligned to what you're seeking to achieve," commented Jamie Hughes, UK Sales Director, Evolve IP. "You've got to look at the whole chain and there needs to be a ripple effect pushing suppliers and partners to work together. We are all trying to achieve the same net zero objective while taking full accountability for emissions."

It is worth reiterating that transparency and accountability is vital to the net zero actions companies are taking now

and in the future, not least to enable more informed net zero related decisions. "Businesses need to ensure transparency through clear processes, data tracking mechanisms, appropriate KPIs and regular reporting in line with standardised frameworks," added Voukia. "This is important to track progress, take responsibility and benchmark success."

"Strong corporate governance structures are also essential along with board level oversight of climate related issues and the integration of climate considerations into decision making processes. Furthermore, it is important to have dedicated teams or executives responsible for driving sustainability across the business and being held accountable for results and progress. Regularly communicating progress strategies and challenges with customers, investors and employees is important because these stakeholders also have a role to play. They are essential in holding businesses and governments to account for any progress or lack of progress."

The pace of change in terms of pushing forwards with sustainability initiatives is accelerating but it must move quicker still, according to Ball. "It's not incremental change we need right now, it's transformation around how the business operates," she added. "To that end, Sky's business transformation



Fiona Ball

and governance process is led from the top. We also have ten working groups across the business with plans in place to understand their part in the transformation. This ladders up to the executive steering group, enabling us to look closely at measurements and performance."

Pillars of sustainability

The work done by Sky is reflected in progress made by Zen which underwent a steep learning curve as it sought to establish the strategic pillars of sustainability that would support the company's carbon reduction future. "We're 15 years into this journey," explained Warburton. "Initially, we thought there were two or three big things we needed to do, but quickly realised that we had to take smaller steps over a number of years. We thought we could do it all ourselves, then realised we needed help. So don't be afraid to ask for help from consultants and third parties."

net zero, observed Smith. "It's about creating a base line and having robust systems in place to track and measure emissions," he said. "Establishing that baseline has been key for us to demonstrate our progress. Having internal oversight and governance from the top is also vital. It's easy to assign tasks and make ESG a box ticking exercise."

"But having fully integrated governance from the top and accountability throughout the entire business is important. We work with partners who verify and help us to understand the data which means we can be transparent and credible by making available the reports we generate."

Data centres

Another challenge to assessing a company's impact within the supply chain relates to data centres, and taking action on this issue has become central to Evolve IP's sustainability

strategy, noted Hughes. "A key consideration is our data centre resource," he stated. "We're currently consolidating from four across Europe and we are in the process of taking two of those offline this year. We put a plan together that will reduce data emissions across the organisation by circa 30 per cent. We need to be smarter and not make decisions that impact the customer."

Transformation

In this way, Evolve IP can drive the transformation required to overcome vital sustainability issues and challenges facing the comms channel. Assessing impacts such as data centres helps providers steer towards where they want to go, making their net zero ambitions more meaningful and realistic not just for themselves, but for partners too. Yet no matter where you sit in the supply chain the key is to have experts in the business who know how to do lifecycle assessments and measure carbon footprints, pointed out Ball.

"That said, it creates a barrier if these activities are retained within the sustainability team," she added. "It needs to be owned and understood across the whole business and everyone in the organisation needs to understand their role. It's about communicating and building sustainability into the culture through as many ways as possible." ■



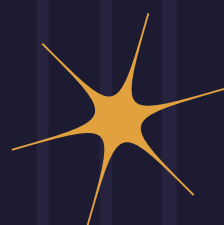
Stephen Warburton

"We also found that changing peoples' behaviours isn't easy. It takes time – that's been our experience. Be realistic about what you can achieve. We originally set out to achieve net zero by 2025 which in hindsight was clearly unachievable. But we were learning and wanted to be ambitious. So be realistic with those targets."

Baselining is a logical starting point on the road towards



Jamie Hughes



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Market developments are opening up transformational opportunities for resellers and SD-WAN expansion is one of the hottest, but a key strategic precondition for driving growth is technology and channel partnerships, according to Evolve Business Group CEO Alan Stephenson-Brown.

Resellers are facing a significant opportunity to capitalise on the growing popularity of SD-WAN, a market that's forecast to grow from \$3.4 billion to \$13.7 billion by 2027. And by leveraging strategic partnerships, fostering strong relationships and embracing the growth of SD-WAN, resellers can navigate the changing comms market to their great advantage, believes Stephenson-Brown. "In this dynamic landscape strategic partnerships are more important than ever," he said.

Evolve has forged close relationships with key partners including SD-WAN specialist Mako Networks. The collaboration spans more than a decade and according to Stephenson-Brown enables Evolve to 'stay ahead of the game' in terms of providing secure and flexible networks. "As Mako's only Platinum Partner worldwide we work in close collaboration to enhance

its product offerings with new features," commented Stephenson-Brown.

Evolve also has a strong partnership with ANS Group in a relationship that combines portfolios to create mutually beneficial opportunities for customers. In fact, partnerships are top of the agenda and Stephenson-Brown noted that Evolve has made a significant investment in the reseller channel, with 200 hours per week going into designing a channel that unlocks new opportunities. "The new reseller channel and portal advances our mission to help multi-site brands unleash their potential through network technologies," stated Stephenson-Brown.

"Our immediate priorities are to support the businesses that have already signed up to use the portal. At the same time, our in-house development team continues to work on the channel. Looking ahead we will



Alan Stephenson-Brown

By leveraging strategic partnerships, fostering strong relationships and embracing the growth of SD-WAN, resellers can navigate the changing telecoms market

carry a growing number of products including services for mobile and IT in the next 12-18 months."

Growth strategy

The growth plan includes increasing Evolve's network management footprint from 9,500 locations to 15,000 within the next three years (the company has expanded its services into 11 countries), with a focus on creating local jobs. "Our ultimate objective is to foster strong and meaningful partnerships with our customers worldwide," explained Stephenson-

Brown. "To achieve this goal we are focused on enhancing our service and solution offerings."

Giving partners and customers what they want and need was the catalyst for establishing Evolve in 2005, to address a gap in the market for a fully managed network solution under one roof. "We recognised that businesses often struggle to find a single provider which can manage all aspects of their network, from design and implementation to maintenance and support,"

explained Stephenson-Brown. "By bringing together a team of experts in various areas of network management we can offer a complete solution for all customers."

Evolve's three primary services – namely business connectivity (EvolveISP), SD-WAN (EvolveWAN) and Guest Wi-Fi (EvolveODM) – combine to meet the connectivity requirements of all organisations, noted Stephenson-Brown. He said that patented SD-WAN Level1 PCI-certified technology offers hardware



vantage is key

with software-defined WAN paths, ensuring layers of redundancy, high availability and cloud-based control. "Our goal is to seek out partners which share our values and mission, and are equally dedicated to tailoring solutions," added Stephenson-Brown.

The growth strategy is also built on important acquisitions including Preston-based IT firm GB3 from EG Group in 2022 which created an IT services hub in Lancashire (EvolveIT). The following year Evolve swooped on

PCI Level 1 certified secure network management solution to the UK market. Stephenson-Brown's career spans 28 countries and includes securing major contracts with Barclays, the Royal Bank of Scotland, Tesco and co-founding TNS. He also spearheaded the corporate side of Tuxedo Money Solutions and headed the international sales and business development for Phoenix Managed Networks.

As well as leadership expertise underpinning Evolve's expansion, the company follows a policy of ongoing development around its 24/7/365 Network Operations Centre which is housed within its head office in Wigan. "We have invested in a team of skilled engineers who have driven a customer satisfaction score of 98 per cent over the last 12 months," added Stephenson-Brown. "Eighty six per cent of all fault tickets last year were raised proactively to

inform our customers that, while they were still live and able to operate, they had in fact failed over to either their back up fixed or wireless connectivity."

Proactivity is also key to maximising the 2025 PSTN switch off opportunity, pointed out Stephenson-Brown. "But our biggest opportunities lie in the connections we make with like-minded individuals and organisations in the industry," he added. "Evolve's team, partnerships and connections are our greatest assets and we intend to establish many more in the coming years." ■

Just a minute with Alan Stephenson-Brown...

Role model: My boss from more than 30 years ago, Jack McDonnell. He taught me the value of looking after customers and respecting employees.

Your biggest fear? Heights!

Your main strength? I'm a positive person and would like this strength to rub off on my team. You must stay positive in life.

Three ideal dinner guests: Whitney Houston, the love of my life! Winston Churchill, it would be great to understand him as a person rather than a politician. And Martin Luther King, to understand his inspiration and drive to do what he did.

In hindsight: I would have taken more business risks at a younger age.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? Probably in hospitality.

How do you relax when not working? Walking, cooking, researching malt whisky and eating at amazing restaurants.

The biggest risk you have taken: Leaving a great career at HSBC to join a start-up to transform the payment industry at TNS.

One example of something you have overcome: A fear of speaking in public. I overcame this when, aged 14, I was asked to read a citation for Violet Carson at Manchester cathedral. Now, public speaking is something I enjoy.

Best advice you have been given: Take a breath before responding to anything.

Biggest achievement: Completing my specialist Masters degree (MACD) while working full-time growing a new business and bringing up two young children.

Top tip for resellers: Adapt to industry changes to remain competitive.

The new reseller channel and portal advances our mission to help multi-site brands unleash their potential through network technologies

Sheffield-based mobile telecoms provider 4G Voice and Data (4G VD) which was best known as a provider of 4G and 5G mobile SIM cards and devices. "This transaction was the latest stamp in our footprint across the north of England that spans Yorkshire, Lancashire and Greater Manchester," added Stephenson-Brown.

Under Stephenson-Brown's wing, Evolve (which has a headcount of 99) currently generates 43 per cent year-on-year organic growth, has increased revenues to £18.3 million and (as mentioned above) introduced the first



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Triton diversifies into Energy

Founded in 2011, Triton Telecom are a team of connectivity and telecoms experts providing award-winning customer service. Director Dean Billington explains how the Fidelity Energy partnership began a couple of years previously, "We faced a number of challenges and changes within the business. Three years ago, we restructured and focused on becoming specialists in telephony and VoIP and that's worked well for us. We were looking at energy because we wanted to diversify slightly, and we didn't want to do the usual telephony thing which was to branch out into IT. We decided to offer energy services after a meeting with Jason Fernyhough of Fidelity Energy at a Margin event. We had a good conversation; I liked the Fidelity Energy offer and the fact that we have a lot of control means that we can maintain the relationship with our customers. Even though the customers will be contracting with the different suppliers, they remain our customers and that was key for us. After the restructure, we were finally able to add this to our products and service offering.

When we were onboarded, we were somewhat dubious of the process. Typically, navigating a new portal can prove difficult and energy, on the surface, seems very complicated. Jason has been a great help and has been in the office showing us how to use the portal and everyone in the team was surprised at how easy it is to use, so it completely changed our perspective. The fact that it is so simple and that you don't have to do a great deal in order to generate a quote. The team are there if we need them, but when we want to take more ownership, provide quotes and set the margins, we can do so ourselves."

Triton Telecom have only recently been pushing their energy offering to their



Triton Telecom, Dean Billington, Director

customers. Dean commented, "We had our first bill across from a business in Wales: you never know where you're going to find your first customer. It shows you are not restricted to local customers who could even be located in a different country and that is something I found really interesting.

We are working on building our energy pipeline by talking to existing customers, upselling them until we get to grips with how it all works. But the support has been amazing and the fact that we can either rely solely on our account manager or we could even provide quotes ourselves, allows us the freedom to take on as much initiative as we would like to.

We have found energy to be a better fit with our business than expected. It's a necessity for all businesses, just like telecoms and IT, so it makes sense to offer energy to your current customers and you can always branch out further if you find success with it. It's a no-brainer and working with Fidelity Energy makes it so easy to diversify into. If we were to try and break into IT, for example, then we would have to employ and train more personnel. With Fidelity Energy we don't have to do that, it is really easy and we definitely have plans in the future to branch out and start serving it as a sole product once we have found our feet."

Postcard from Margin

Having stood firm in the face of economic headwinds the channel's ICT providers are eye to eye with an unprecedented opportunity to build on their resilience and accelerate growth in key markets – and according to speakers at this year's Margin conference (22nd June, Forest of Arden Hotel) those acting fastest stand to gain most.

Keynoters at last month's Margin conference, staged by Comms Dealer, put a spotlight on how the channel's resilience and entrepreneurial spirit should serve as a springboard to further leverage existing and emerging market opportunities. However, underpinning success across all aspects of market development is the customer experience, emphasised Aaron Fox, CEO, TelXL. "A CX stack can deliver great impact if used correctly with 42 per cent of customers willing to pay more if they receive a great customer experience," he stated. "These experiences are rare and 88 per cent of customers cite a negative customer interaction as a reason for shifting to competitors."

Fox also noted that the SME sector requires a CX boost and he dispelled the misconception that they are too small to benefit from

CX technology. "Customer behaviours have changed and SMEs have to evolve to stay competitive," he added. "Good customer experiences can add 15 per cent to a company's revenues and this will inevitably reflect on the bottom line."

Voiceflex Chief Commercial Officer Paul Taylor also urged delegates to keep pace with the speed and scale of communication applications moving online. In particular he highlighted the growing popularity of WhatsApp which currently has 30 million users in the UK, with 81 per cent of them using the app daily. Significantly, the platform boasts a 98 per cent open rate.

"This represents the biggest development in the consumer relationship," he stated. "Most customers will use WhatsApp but script-basing an application like this presents a massive revenue opportunity." He



Bringing margin making opportunities to life

The channel's resilience and entrepreneurial spirit should serve as a springboard to further leverage existing and emerging market opportunities

contrasted this trend with the decline of traditional comms, forecasting that fixed line communications will see a 75 per cent slump in the next decade. In mobile, Taylor expects an 11 per cent drop in the next two years.

Cloud-software growth

Giacom COO Nathan Marke framed the shifting picture in worldwide comms, identifying high growth in software, cloud and IT services. He pointed out that the market for outsourced IT services is currently three times larger than internal spending. And he believes the three pillars

of software, cloud and IT services will be at the centre of digital transformation conversations during the coming years. "If you aren't moving in this direction then things are going to become much harder and very soon," he warned.

Marke also pointed to the decline of fixed line and the general waning of legacy services, and reiterated that the adoption of substitutional technology will gather pace and create big opportunities for resellers. "There are pockets of growth to be had in traditional comms and it is all about driving

the fibre rollout and capitalising on the PSTN switch off," he commented. "These are opportunities that will not wait."

The door is also wide open for resellers to capitalise on the burgeoning IoT and intelligent mobile data market. Pangea CEO and co-founder Dan Cunliffe highlighted that there are over 200 types of application requiring network access that will be impacted by the PSTN switch off. For example, there is currently 500,000 point-of-sale machines yet to move from PSTN, as well as over one million telehealth devices.

"It makes sense to replace these with mobile as it is more reliable, more flexible and faster," claimed Cunliffe. "Engaging with these technologies will help resellers move faster in a shorter period of time."

He says the valuations of ICT providers doing well in the intelligent mobile space sits at 6-8x profit. "This opportunity is big, it is here and it is growing," he added. "That looks exciting to anyone in private equity."

Multiples like this are a key consideration for ICT providers with and exit in mind, and Knight Corporate Finance Director Adam Zoldan shared insights into the current M&A landscape, indicating that the channel has again proved its resilience despite a slow down in deal activity with 57 transactions in Q1 and 55 in Q2. "These figures were in the 70s and 80s last year," he said. "But PE remains strong with 14 new platform investments and five secondary buyouts in the last year." ■

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Nothing to stop women v

Leadership pipelines in the ICT sector are still dominated by men despite the benefits of engaging with a more diverse range of people. Here, Annette Cunningham, TD SYNnex VP for Sales UK&I, discusses how channel companies, and high-potential women themselves, can play a bigger role in encouraging a greater female presence in the boardroom.

What got you into the ICT channel?

My first job

was as a secretary to a sales manager in a company that did IBM mainframe installations. From there I went into sales, moved to a software company and was out on the road selling software to resellers. I have been working with partners ever since. I've launched start-ups in Europe, worked for some of the largest vendors and managed teams of pan-European solutions sales consultants.

I've been managing teams of salespeople for more than 30 years and I'm bringing to my current role all of that accumulated expertise plus strength and confidence. I also aim to instil a greater sense of unity and enthusiasm, motivation and knowledge sharing. I try to be very approachable.

What have been your experiences during your career in terms of being female?

In the early days, it was hard. There weren't really any women in sales positions, so you had to be strong and stand your ground. You were not treated fairly and had to work twice as hard to prove yourself. My experiences have given me a lot of strength, confidence and determination to succeed. I hope some of that rubs off on the team.

What are the benefits of a strong female presence in boardrooms?

A female presence at every level of management is good. Women can bring different opinions and perspectives. The presence of females in the boardroom provides encouragement for women to keep on striving to achieve their goals. At TD SYNnex we are clearly doing that well. We have



Annette Cunningham

In the early days it was hard. There weren't many women in sales positions, so you had to be strong and stand your ground. You were not treated fairly and had to work twice as hard to prove yourself

four females on the UK & Ireland board (out of ten), and it's important that they are visible and audible. I try to make sure I am both.

Most people would say I am. Female workers can see that the business takes elevating women to reach their full potential seriously.

What action needs to be taken to boost the number of women on boards?

Every company should be more proactive and have a



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stated goal on gender equity – as we do. We're setting an example with positive steps, ensuring that every senior management position has female candidates on the shortlist. The interview team will also have an equal gender balance.

How can ambitious women influence their own ability to reach a board level position?

It's about being the best. Being good enough to get there and wanting to get there. If you're an ambitious woman you need to carry on being successful. Make a plan and stick to it. Do well. Be confident. Go for it.

Do leadership pipelines include enough women?

This goes back to being proactive in making sure there are enough opportunities for women to step forward for management roles. If there are not enough women in your leadership pipeline you need to look at why that is and what needs to be done to increase that number. A lot of companies

talk about having enough women candidates but don't actually follow through. They need to have a plan and set a goal. They need to look at the actual numbers at every level and take positive action to change.

What advice would you give to an ambitious woman coming into the industry now?

Do not let anything divert you from your goal because there is absolutely no reason why a woman should not rise to the top in the ICT industry today. I think many more businesses now realise that there are real benefits to having full equality with women at every layer of management. I hope – and expect – that we will get to the point quite soon where having women on the board is not seen as anything exceptional.

Has the sector made progress on increasing diversity at leadership level?

We've definitely come a long way from my early days. We have some really good women in senior positions in our industry. People like Gill Holloway at Insight, Penny Williams at CDW, and Celeste Lee at SHI, are great examples. We need to see more of those. But a few years ago, I wouldn't have been able to name one female leader in the industry, so it's great to see those women in top posts.

Attitudes have changed – and not just in our industry. Equity is something that people are a lot more familiar with. We've got strong women in our industry and there's nothing stopping them now. You just have to want to do it and have a plan. ■

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Funding deal green lights

Connectus Business Solutions has kick-started its latest development phase with a revolving credit facility from Time Finance that will enable the fast growing MSP to expand on a number of fronts, including acquisitions, according to CEO Roy Shelton who provides us with a business update.

While Shelton's growth plans are underpinned by a new funding opportunity, his strategy is ultimately propelled by an ingrained will to win in the marketplace – a competitive streak that can be traced back to his sporty past. Shelton's determination and ambition is also reflected in the Time Finance partnership, because today's economic challenges mean that cost-effective funding lines are becoming far harder to secure. Having won the deal, and in terms of how Shelton can best impact the growth and development of the business, he says his primary focus is ensuring that the senior management team is well supported and has a clear understanding of his strategic objectives.

This will be key to the success of the next phase of Shelton's business plan, just launched and called Project Shrigley (named after the venue where Connectus

held its planning workshop). "The plan outlines our objectives, KPIs, roles and responsibilities," explained Shelton. "With this in place I focus my time working with our Chairman and advisers on new acquisitions, additional potential funding and business development."

Meeting demand

With more cash in the war chest Connectus can meet increased demand for its managed services portfolio in a number of ways, including additional fibre network design to build and operate models across several business parks. "We are also investing in more capacity for our hosting which is now across two locations in Doncaster and Salford," added Shelton. "And we want to upscale tooling and staff training on cyber, network and data security."

When Shelton joined the business in January 2019 revenue and profits were declining. Over a year



Roy Shelton

There are lots of great companies out there with good offerings that fail to scale due to a lack of collaboration. I would welcome MSPs coming together more to share ideas on growth, resourcing and technology roadmaps

of hard work followed, rebuilding confidence in the organisation, rebranding and extending the product and service offer. "We had just started to gain increased traction when the challenges of Covid hit us all," stated Shelton.

But despite the pandemic Connectus has created 12 full-time jobs and two apprenticeships, opened an additional office at the AJB Bell stadium, and grown the client base by 400-plus per cent. The customer profile is predominantly SME, mid-size

enterprises and professional sports clubs, all helping Connectus deliver 47 per cent year-on-year growth with EBITDA sitting at 18 per cent. "We foresee significant growth in our current customer base with the launch of our client success



Project Shrigley



It's all about winning and creating value for our team, customers and partners

understand their business needs," added Shelton.

The task of building out services is ongoing and Shelton's main focus areas right now are cyber, data and network security solutions leveraging AI. Power BI and Dynamics is also on the radar screen. Against this backdrop of emerging opportunities, Shelton urges the channel's business leaders not to be afraid of more collaboration. "There are lots of great companies out there with good offerings that fail to scale due to a lack of collaboration," he stated. "I would welcome MSPs coming together more to share ideas on growth, resourcing, technology roadmaps and much more. Other industries do this well and create a lot of value."

programme and customer charter," added Shelton. "We are not desperate to find new clients and partners but will seek out the ones that bring significant and mutual value."

He noted that demand for cloud services, secure hosting and security is booming and will increase due to the need for more collaboration and the growing cyber threat. "Companies want to consolidate the number of vendors they work with and are looking for more trusted partners who take time to

Maintaining a competitive cost base can be challenging in the current economic environment. To help with the cost of living crisis Connectus has awarded all staff above inflation pay rises with year-end bonuses. "On the flip side, utilities costs have risen sharply along with third party equipment costs," stated Shelton. "We have been forced to pass some of these increases on to clients but much lower than the current CPI rates, and these are the first price increases since 2019."

Complete vision

On today's primary leadership priorities, Shelton says that having a vision to create something special, which blends people, process and technology into a compelling proposition, is key. He also values the power of mutual trust between teams, customers and partners. "Setting and managing the right expectations with a huge degree of empathy and respect is crucial to building trust," he said.

A former rugby player and boxer, Shelton is motivated by winning and instilling a competitive edge in those around him. "It's all about winning and creating value for our team, customers and partners," he added. "I also try to bring the best out in our team by being honest about what I expect from them and why. And I don't ask anyone to do anything I am not prepared to do myself. Being passionate about what you do is also vital but it's most important to just say 'thank you'."

Balancing competing priorities is a challenge for all business leaders and Shelton accepts that 'we can't be all things to all people', so qualifying priorities quickly is key. "We always look at low cost high value priorities which have a compelling ROI," he stated. "Cash is king and ensuring we remain good stewards of capital is crucial to any organisation's long-term success."

Shelton's top tip...

Put the customer first, focus on quantity outcomes, invest in the right people, tools and infrastructure. Profits will follow.

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In an increasingly saturated market how can you stand out from the crowd and continue to win new business and nullify the threat of a commoditised channel?

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With channel margins constantly being squeezed, other than price what can resellers do to differentiate themselves? One of the best ways forward is to focus on value rather than the cheapest option - to drive business efficiencies and maximise return on investment over a longer period of time. Everyone can make a phone ring but it's about applying different layers of service and tools that can streamline business operations to make them more productive and successful.

This could be call analytics or CRM integration for example. It's about saving businesses money and adding value. Turning conversations to value rather than just a cost transaction. Services can be consumed in different ways. It's about what's best for a customer.

Technology differentiation is one of the keyways to differentiate in the channel, however with so many providers providing 'much of a muchness' that can sometimes be tricky too.

For us it's about removing any barriers to entry which can open the doors to successful business partnerships. For example we

don't lock in partners to any minimum terms or long term commitments. This can make a big difference because they are not having to chase any targets or work under pressure. They do business with us because they like doing business with us. Flexible licensing and commercial models make a big difference.

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Knowledge Is Power

End user knowledge has increased massively in recent years and this is driving change in the channel. Resellers need more technical skills to act as trusted advisors as part of a consultative sale. Three years ago Covid lockdowns changed everything. Panic buying is over and the channel is entering a pivotal moment. Resellers with the knowledge and a deep understanding of both technology and their customers' needs will have a competitive advantage. Many end users know what they want so resellers need to adapt and change too, rather than just selling a product.

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Giacom rebrand accelerates

Enabling the rise of digital MSPs, revolutionising the tech procurement habits of small businesses, driving UK productivity and advocating for the channel are all central to Giacom's new cloud platform strategy, according to CEO Terry O'Brien and COO Nathan Marke.

The strategic importance of DWS's acquisitions of Giacom and Union Street in 2020 were crystal clear at the time but deliver a whole new dimension following the unification of all group businesses under the Giacom brand and the launch of a single platform experience for partners. "The Giacom acquisition was about creating breadth," stated O'Brien. "Channel partners are so much more than resellers. They are evolving into digital MSPs and trusted technology experts for UK small businesses. Partners were increasingly wanting a one-stop-shop with cloud services alongside telecoms.

"Meanwhile, Union Street delivered a great piece of billing software, but more critically it started the journey towards developing a toolset that helps partners to become digital MSPs in a more automated world. The time to rebrand is now."

Giacom is an established and respected name in the IT MSP, Microsoft and SaaS communities, and is increasingly a brand telecoms partners recognise. Moreover, cloud is growing significantly faster than other product categories. "DWS evolved as a wholesale telecoms brand," explained Marke. "Telecoms is a critical enabler for UK business and remains a core



Nathan Marke and Terry O'Brien

Channel partners are so much more than resellers – they are evolving into digital MSPs

focus for us, however today our business is so much more than that. End user decision making is increasingly focused on cloud-enabled software applications to solve challenges such as remote working, customer service improvement, automation, extracting value from data, security etc.

"It's primarily a cloud-software decision set and telecoms, while still critical, is increasingly a utility decision to enable access to software applications. In a couple of years more than half our business will

be cloud software sales. In Giacom we have a known and trusted 100 per cent channel cloud brand that will help position us as a high growth cloud-first platform company. It's a journey the Channel needs to go on."

Channel pedigree

The overarching Giacom Group works with around one third of the estimated 15,000 technology resellers and MSPs across the UK.

"Channel resellers typically have a heritage in either telecoms, networking or IT service desk, and the vast majority are broadening their

portfolio and moving into the digital MSP space," observed O'Brien. "Our fastest growing partners are driving the outsource model with monthly recurring revenues. The anchor products tend to be Microsoft, then IT services, security, backup and recovery, wrap around telecoms services plus value added services. They are increasingly becoming a one-stop-shop for small business' technology needs."

Marke cited the latest statistics from the ONS that shed light on small business' contribution to

the UK economy. There are approximately two million businesses in the UK employing between one and 250 people that buy business technology. Small businesses account for 60 per cent of UK employment, represent 52 per cent of UK GDP and deliver 60 per cent of UK value add, or profitability. "It's an important sector," he stated. "However, for all the brilliance of our small business sector it could be contributing so much more.

"The UK economy has the second lowest productivity in the G7 and one of the best ways to improve business productivity is through the effective use of technology – this is where small businesses really struggle. They are not confident when it comes to procuring and delivering new solutions, in the most part because few employ a dedicated IT person.

"As a consequence of this, small businesses are still buying their technology on a product-by-product basis on the high street, direct from carriers or online on their credit cards. We estimate that at least 50 per cent of all available small business spend is misdirected in this way, in the main because small businesses just aren't aware of local MSPs that could help them fix their technology problems. And, given the reliance of every small business

ates rise of digital MSPs

on technology, it leaves them incredibly vulnerable to cyber security risks."

O'Brien sees potential to transform the entire small business market dynamic following the launch of Giacom's single cloud-first platform experience for partners. "The channel is growing, but can grow much faster," stated O'Brien. "Industry experts tell us that our addressable channel market is at least £10 billion, growing at a healthy four per cent per annum. We know that at least £5 billion of this is not spent with the channel today. If we can advocate for the channel, get the channel noticed, get the channel brilliant at this, it opens a £5 billion growth opportunity. We want every small business in the UK to buy their technology from the channel."

The rise of digital MSPs holds the potential not only to improve the value of the channel and accelerate the digital transformation of small businesses, but also close the productivity gap. "These are serious issues for our economy, particularly post-Brexit," added O'Brien. "Small businesses face big challenges with productivity, and we believe fundamentally that a good channel partner will help fix those problems."

But there are significant challenges associated with realising this opportunity, not least of which is that most small businesses do not know of a local MSP that can help. "Nobody is advocating for the channel," stated O'Brien. "Our role is to help MSPs support small businesses with technology. We are really focusing on using our scale to make the



The unified Giacom executive leadership team

In Giacom we have a known and trusted 100 per cent channel cloud brand

UK business community and Government aware of the channel as a powerful force to drive UK productivity."

For example, Giacom is working with a major Combined Authority on an online project to match small businesses with MSPs that operate in the region. "This work will scale up across the UK and drive advocacy for the channel," affirmed O'Brien.

Strategic pillars

Four pillars underpin Giacom's strategy to enable digital MSPs and make the channel more visible to small businesses: Choice, Scale, Enablement and Opportunity. Choice is delivered via the One Platform Cloud Market experience, with Giacom seeking to become 'the Amazon of the channel'. In terms of Scale, the combined spend of Giacom's 5,000 partners through its platform has enabled it to spend more than £250 million with suppliers in the

last year alone, enabling the company to deliver tremendous value to partners as well as provide access to 'channelised' collateral and content coming out of large vendors. Giacom's strong, consistent compound organic revenue growth of 13 per cent over the past five years is testament to the growth delivered by the channel, which is winning market share from carrier and vendor direct models.

The third pillar, Enablement, helps partners to diversify and take on new capabilities and certifications. Giacom partners benefit from a complete range of services such as training, specialist support, white label collateral and networking events to help them grow. And to realise opportunities, Giacom is leveraging its scale, influence and market position to be an advocate for the channel, driving home the message that local MSPs are a powerful force to drive productivity in the UK.

O'Brien is keen to emphasise another critical factor in enabling digital MSPs to thrive. "To grow a business that serves SMBs to a meaningful scale, MSPs need to deliver lots of products to lots of customers," he added. "This means that they need to take advantage of the innovation available in OSS and BSS systems that underpin the delivery of their offerings to their customers. Our portal and billing software are key components of that stack, as are integrations into PSA, RMM and other systems. Building a toolkit and a set of automations on top of the billing capability helps partners to deliver subscription-based managed services that can scale to hundreds or thousands of end customers.

"Our fastest growing partners are getting their heads around these automations, the modern suite of products, the services that add value and the toolkits to automate

and deliver time and again to small businesses. We are developing our Cloud Market platform with a focus on enabling digital MSPs to grow by delivering consistently effective managed services."

Underpinning everything is Giacom's unified Cloud Market platform which incorporates all the functionality of four existing portals – DWP (wholesale telecoms), DPP (the portal for mobile distribution partners), Cloud Market (the SaaS Cloud marketplace for IT partners) and Techstore (hardware as a service). Until now, they looked and operated differently. "Prior to launching our new One Platform experience we redesigned the four underlying portals to make them look and feel identical with a single user experience for the partner, modern, improved navigation and better performance," explained Marke. "We have built a single knowledge base for all products, with the menu tailored for partner type along with discovery of adjacent products to aid cross sell opportunities."

But this is just the beginning as a significant capital investment will be made into the platform over the next three years. "The launch of Cloud Market represents the first wave of investment," added O'Brien. "We have a clear vision and investment plan for supporting the channel in this converging technology world, to make it increasingly simple for partners to access everything they need to create brilliant technology solutions for their customers – and to help partners grow by supporting their evolution to digital MSPs." ■



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The Comms National Awards, widely recognised as the UK ICT Channel's top awards event, is back and bigger than ever at our new venue at the Park Plaza Hotel in the heart of Westminster, London on the 28th of September 2023.

And the good news is, we have extended the entry deadline to July 10th so there's still time to go for gold!

Now in its 22nd year, the Comms National Awards is the ICT channel's most respected and coveted awards process, recognising the success of UK resellers and the suppliers who support them in providing top class solutions to public and private sector business customers.

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Giacom and independently judged by our selected panel of distinguished industry experts, the process rewards quality across the channel spectrum with awards in both reseller (customer solutions) and vendor (service to the channel) categories.

As ever, the entertainment at the CNA finalists' night will be top notch. Last year, broadcast and journalist, Jeremy Vine was the consummate awards host, and who could forget the 2018 event, when Spandau Ballet legend Tony Hadley provided a 'Gold' curtain raiser. Previous presenters have included Anton Du Beke, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre, Marcus Brigstocke, Vernon Kay, Gabby Logan, Stephen Mangan and James

Nesbitt, so guests can be assured the entertainment will be top drawer.

All these ingredients add up to the Comms National Awards being acknowledged as the evening the channel assembles in style to recognise success and network with industry friends and colleagues. "The Comms National Awards is the UK's leading awards process for the ICT channel and whether companies are winners or finalists, the prestige and PR they can gain from participating is huge. In these challenging times I would urge everyone in the channel to get involved and put their name into the hat," said Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent. The CN Awards is the ultimate channel celebration.

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I'm thrilled to be announcing Giacom as Headline Sponsor of The Comms National Awards 2023. The CNAs are a highlight in the calendar year as they give the ICT industry a platform to get together for a memorable night of celebration.

2023 has been a year of evolution not only for us as a business as we've brought together our Cloud, Comms and Billing portfolio into one offering, but also within the wider ICT sector

especially now the Nationwide Stop Sell of WLR has taken effect. Our industry is now faced with incredible opportunity as we move towards the 2025 Switch Off, and I encourage you all to grab this with both hands and continue to make a positive difference as we move towards a digital future.

I'm sure you'll all agree with me when I say evolution and recognition is what motivates us to do the best we

can, and we should all be so proud of our contribution to the ICT industry.

The Comms National Awards evening is set to be one of the biggest yet, so let us raise our glasses and toast to another amazing year and the incredible efforts of our teams. We look forward to celebrating with you and I hope you all have a fantastic time.

Terry O'Brien – CEO of Giacom

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Uniting for The Big Goal

A nationwide football tournament for ICT resellers combined with a top-quality programme to help disadvantaged young people will be launched at St Georges Park, the Home of England Football, on 4th October 2023. The Big Goal initiative is a joint exercise between The Street Soccer Foundation charity as main organiser, Giacom as headline sponsor and Comms Dealer as media partner. The project will give ICT resellers the chance to play in regional five-a-side football tournaments to take place at Premier league and EFL venues nationwide, culminating in a finals day to be staged at St George's Park next summer.

Importantly, every channel team that commits to paying the tournament entry fee will become a sponsor of a Street Soccer Foundation Academy within their area. This will give up



Terry O'Brien

to 10 vulnerable young people the chance to learn valuable skills and build confidence in a football-based environment. At the end of the programme, sponsoring resellers can then offer opportunities to their academy members to gain further experience within a place of work and turn their lives around.

The Street Soccer Foundation, in partnership with several Premier league and EFL clubs, is a national award winning sport-for-change

charity. Founder and CEO Keith Mabbutt is delighted the ICT industry is getting behind his aims: "I'm incredibly thankful to Giacom and super excited by The Big Goal which aims to be a true catalyst for positive social change, allowing ICT companies to play a part in collectively making a tangible difference to the lives of others."

Giacom CEO Terry O'Brien urges resellers to get involved as he believes The Big Goal represents the most exciting opportunity to unite the ICT channel under a common goal: "I love our industry and I have long believed there is a time where we should unite on a common goal, where we could make a substantially bigger difference if we do it together. That is what The Big Goal is all about."

Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent commented: "We

expect The Big Goal will attract a lot of interest and spaces at the launch at St George's Park will be limited, so register without delay. You won't want to miss out on these unique football tournaments and ESG programme."

If you are a member of the ICT channel community and are interested in finding out more about The Big Goal, please scan the QR code below.



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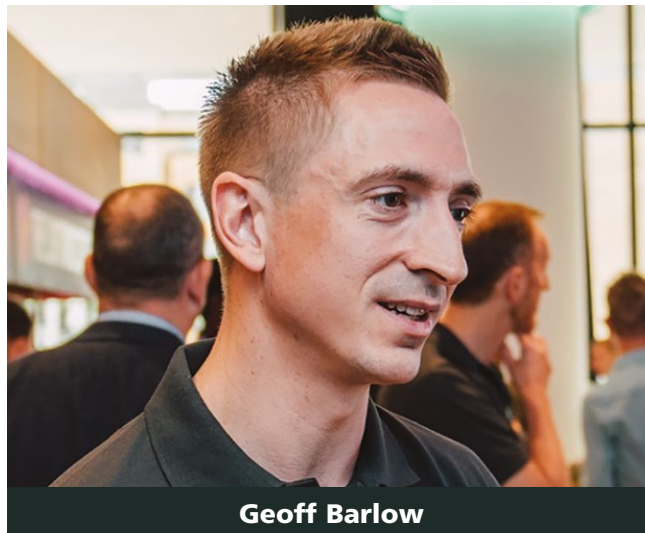


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How MSPs are evolving

The rise of consultative partnering is becoming a major driver of MSP projects, and mastering the new complexities around outsourcing is key to success, according to Geoff Barlow, Technology Practice Lead – Strategy, Node4.



Geoff Barlow

All markets have a need to do more with less and every sector is turning to outsourcing, with finance, healthcare and manufacturing leading the way, observed Barlow. Perhaps the biggest traditional drivers, he says, are the IT skills shortage and requirement for cost efficiencies. "Outsourcing can plug skills gaps that businesses are finding difficult to fill with full-time employees," he stated. "Outsourcing delivers expertise and knowledge from the outset and reduces the costs associated with hiring and training new or existing employees."

The skills shortage around cloud and cybersecurity is a particular pain point, with a notable rise in demand for third line support or out of hours cover. "Core tasks such as purchasing and procurement management are increasingly being outsourced, particularly around end user devices – mobiles, tablets, laptops, peripherals," added Barlow. "There is also more demand around compliance and

other regulatory matters as customers look to shift their accountability and risk."

Another trend noted by Barlow is growing concern around public cloud spend which is prompting businesses to look for MSPs to help drive efficiency and introduce cost controls. "During the pandemic everyone rushed to the cloud to enable remote working and collaboration, but businesses are starting to realise that the move was not cost-effective over the long-term," stated Barlow.

"There was also a widespread perception that hyperscalers did everything and would take the job of architecting and managing cloud environments away from customers. But the realisation is kicking in that customers still have the same responsibility and accountability as if the systems were on premise, so many are turning to MSPs to share the load."

There is a significant opportunity for MSPs with the capacity and knowledge to take on these outsourced

High collaborating MSPs have the most to gain, embracing new tech, driving innovation and digital transformation, and helping businesses evolve no matter where they are on their IT journey

tasks, including compliance and regulatory matters.

"We are definitely seeing a rise in adoption of a cloud-first strategy and security is always a hot topic with the ever-evolving threat of cyber attacks," added Barlow. "Both of these, alongside the lack of skills and resources in the technology sector, are driving demand for outsourcing and MSPs."

Other hot topics pointed out by Barlow are automation and artificial intelligence. He is also seeing Power Platforms become central within MSP contracts.

"However, it is important for MSPs to realise that having problem solving and project-based skills is one thing, but if they cannot consult,

design, build, support and develop all capabilities they will quickly get left behind."

Customer demand

The need for businesses to do more with less is creating an extra challenge for service providers. Not only are they feeling the pinch themselves, they are also experiencing downward pressure from customers who also want more for less – a wider scope and longer service hours, for example – which means the MSP taking on more responsibilities and accountability.

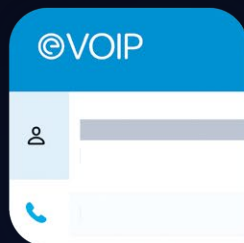
One example of this trends stems from the rise of self-serve platforms, SaaS and PaaS, where responsibility resides with the customer

to leverage and provide portals and tools. "This takes resources, time and training to manage effectively and efficiently, so we are seeing lots of businesses asking MSPs to manage these instead," added Barlow. "This has created a challenge for the managed service providers who then take on the burden of training, reskilling and resourcing staff across multiple platforms, then integrating them into easy-to-manage consoles or single panes of glass."

Perhaps the most challenged MSPs are the ones that operate a traditional transactional model. They are typically based upon service credits so a transactional model keeps their revenues high and consistent while still meeting their aims. "But outsourcing is shifting away from this model and innovative MSPs have always had a collaborative approach," commented Barlow. "High collaborating MSPs have the most to gain, embracing new technology, driving innovation and digital transformation, and helping businesses evolve no matter where they are on their IT journey."

Barlow also noted that outsourcing is starting to expand into non-traditional areas like innovation and R&D, albeit a slow moving trend. "This is a more cautious shift compared to what we see in core areas," he said. "Outsourcing can provide access to cutting-edge knowledge and solutions that drive innovation more quickly. This is where the shift is, in having skills such as DevOps and containerisation to help with R&D, rather than outsourcing core R&D itself." ■

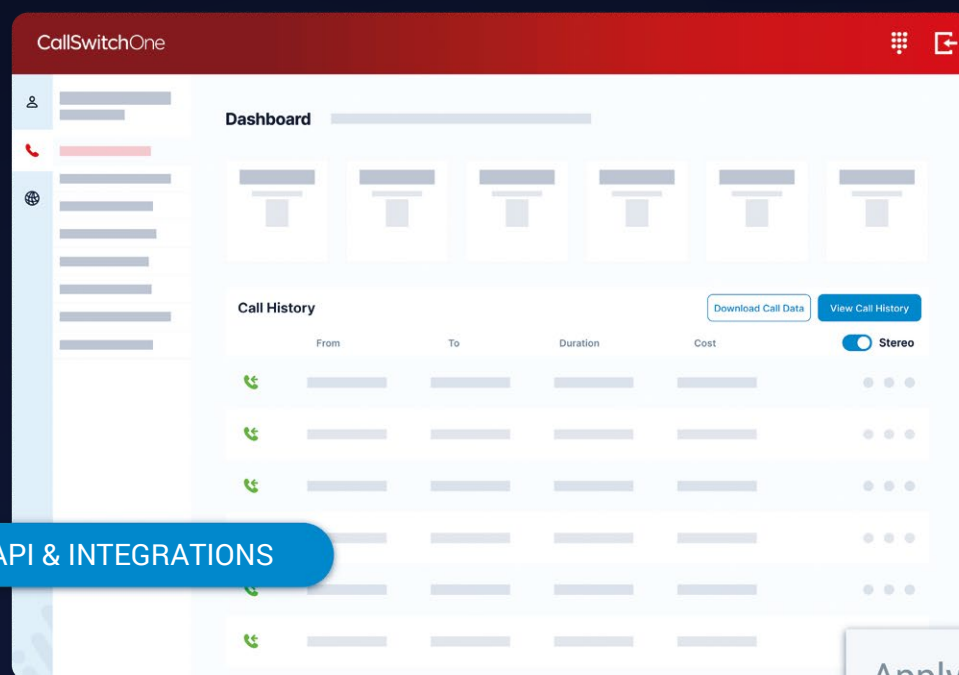
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Trends in outsourcing

Maintel CTO Dan Davies puts a spotlight on the main market drivers catalysing the outsourcing agenda and explores how far these trends are pushing demand for the MSP model.

Business process and ICT outsourcing is fast evolving, and among the latest sourcing strategies observed by Davies is customers wanting to focus their IT teams on delivering innovation, differentiation and efficiency around core business activities, prompting them to outsource in other areas. "We also see a drive to outsource complex or niche skillset activities in areas such as contact centre and the broader customer experience space, cloud networking and security, to avoid having to recruit, train and retain those skills internally," stated Davies.

He has also witnessed more organisations seeking consultancy and advisory services to inform or ratify their strategies and R&D programmes. But the outsourcing trends that interest him most, and that he tips as hot spots for future growth, are cloud networking and security. "Following the proliferation of cloud applications and infrastructure, and more latterly the drive for hybrid working, the need for SD-WAN and SASE-based security technologies has grown significantly," added Davies.

Outsourced managed services is Maintel's core business, and not surprisingly it focuses on industries where demand for its services is highest, including retail, financial services, utilities, healthcare, housing associations, government organisations and higher education.

Among its customer base, Davies noted a trend where organisations attempted to build DIY environments to simplify the world of connectivity. However, most customers taking this approach with early proof of concept deployments quickly realised that once up and running there is complexity in the initial design, set-up and ongoing troubleshooting when things go wrong.

"Customers ended up stuck between the different circuit, hardware, software and monitoring providers and needed to recruit or train their teams to obtain the necessary skills, adding cost or additional load on their already busy teams," commented Davies. "This has accelerated the trend towards outsourcing the full stack to a Managed Service Provider. MSPs can deliver richer solutions at a better price point due to their economies of scale."



Dan Davies

Larger organisations need to collaborate with MSPs who understand their business

Another hotbed of opportunity is the contact centre space, which is dominated by public cloud platforms enabling customers to contract directly with their chosen platform provider. "This often seems like the logical approach due to their simple, GUI driven configuration and management," observed Davies. "However, this isn't the area where a managed service provider adds the most value."

"The consultancy, use case design and integration of these platforms with a customer's wider ecosystem of business applications and workflows is where MSPs, with the right skills, come into their own."

"We're seeing a growing trend for organisations looking for an MSP partner to deliver these public cloud-based contact centre platforms and to have a single contract and provider for the core platform itself, the wider ecosystem such as SIP trunking, inbound calling platforms, analytics solutions and CPaaS development capabilities."

Complexity

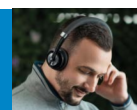
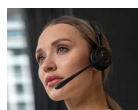
The contact centre market shows that complexity is ever-present in the technology sector and continues to increase as new technologies emerge. Therefore, MSPs would be wise to continually evolve their skillsets to keep pace. "The need for traditional core skills of

installation, commissioning and field engineering have been in decline for some time, replaced by skillsets such as software development and integration, DevOps automation, consultancy and customer success," stated Davies.

Furthermore, as core platforms move away from the service provider's data centres and into the public cloud, delivered by global platform providers and hyperscalers, MSPs face the challenge of staying relevant and adding value in other ways. "The focus moves to the breadth, depth and quality of the service wrap, and how MSPs can differentiate through consultancy, intellectual property that complements core platforms, automation that drives down deployment time and costs, along with an increase in right-first-time delivery and in-life service," stated Davies.

But the extent to which outsourcing is shifting away from being transactional towards a collaborative business model depends on the markets that the MSP serves, believes Davies. "The SMB market and smaller end of the mid-market are still receptive to vanilla off-the-peg services that can lead to a more transactional engagement," he noted.

"However, larger organisations need to collaborate with MSPs who understand their business, their strategy and the outcomes they're striving for, to deliver a personalised and tightly integrated set of infrastructure and applications within a common and consistent managed service framework." ■





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Ofcom's approval of Openreach's Equinox 2 pricing offer prompted mixed responses from industry. The regulator's green lighting of the scheme in May followed a period of industry consultation to ascertain whether Equinox 2 is anti-competitive, and according to some stakeholders Ofcom got it right, others say it made the wrong decision.



GUY MILLER
MS3

There is little point in our industry crying over spilt milk as the decision is made. What's important is how altnets continue to play their role in the supply chain with faster speeds, better commercials, better customer service and a better understanding of their local markets. The faster switch to full fibre is extremely important, whether the wholesale saving gets passed on to end customers is a different matter which so far has not been evidenced by the larger ISPs. Ofcom is between a rock and a hard place as you cannot favour either BT or the altnets without the other side crying foul. Its job now is to ensure that Openreach and BT Group do not take advantage unjustly of their monopoly position.



OLIVER HELM
FULLFIBRE

There are concerns over continued iterations of the offer going forward. If CPs see that there is more margin in lobbying Openreach for further price reductions, than from working with altnets, competition in the market becomes more theoretical than actual. The UK Government made infrastructure-level competition a pillar of the Strategic Priorities laid out to Ofcom because these competitive tensions benefit consumers. There's some assurance that Openreach won't move prices again until 2026, but three years isn't long when you look at the market through an infrastructure-level lens. Openreach is cutting prices, but BT is sticking inflation-linked price hikes for consumers. Altnet's have proven that we know how to compete by building leaner more agile businesses, and what Ofcom must decide is how much of the UK should benefit from that.



PETE TOMLINSON
WINDSOR TELECOM

Equinox 2 will help drive the adoption of full fibre broadband which is important to underpin the cloud technologies that are already enabling better, smarter and faster ways of working for everyone. The key aspect of the offer is that retail providers must order Openreach's full fibre products over its legacy copper solutions so there are no anti-competitive practices against the altnets. If they had to prioritise Openreach's full fibre over other altnets' services, this would be a very different conversation. So yes, Ofcom got this one right. My advice for altnets who want to grow in this new phase of adoption is that they need to focus on being easy for resellers to do business with. This decision should be seen through a wider lens that considers other recent measures by Ofcom, such as Passive Infrastructure Access which has significantly reduced the cost of competitors accessing Openreach's ducts as poles.



RICHARD TANG
ZEN INTERNET

Ofcom's decision to allow Openreach to introduce Equinox 2 pricing will make full fibre broadband more affordable and accessible for millions of UK households. Far from creating a barrier to altnets, this decision will help to stimulate demand for faster and more reliable connections and support ongoing investment in gigabit-capable networks. Ofcom made the right call in letting free market competition operate as it should, rather than intervening unnecessarily. We support Ofcom's commitment to ensuring a level playing field for all fibre investors.

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offer draws mixed response



JON DANIEL
GLIDE UK

For BT to encourage users onto fibre services, it needs prices on a par with copper. These lower prices create a barrier for altnets which cannot afford to offer this level of pricing. BT will not suffer from this due to its existing revenue base and may become the last man standing. Even consolidation of the altnets may not prevent this. This is likely to be very bad for consumers since there will be little incentive for innovation or competition to keep prices low. Longer term foreign investors may well be put off by what they might see as government passivity in supporting the interests of British incumbents against them. Ofcom clearly wishes BT to succeed in maintaining its position as the largest access player in the UK and is happy to look the other way should there be any suggestion that this is not in consumers' long-term interests.



SOHINI RATHATHA
REDSQUID

The Equinox 2 offer is likely to speed up the UK's digital transformation by accelerating the rollout of full fibre and encouraging consumers to make the switch sooner. The market is already highly competitive, but we are seeing altnets coming in just as price competitive as Openreach, even with the new discounted prices. The rollout of fibre across the country is a billion-pound investment for the networks, and this will help mass volume uptake of full fibre services. With Ofcom approving Equinox 2, it is enhancing competition among the networks by putting businesses and consumers first who now will be able to benefit from greater choice, innovation and value.



TOM O'HAGAN
TALKTALK WHOLESALE
SERVICES

Equinox 2 will benefit consumers, competition and the ongoing rollout of full fibre. This decision will mean that full fibre remains affordable, while securing rollout investment and maintaining thriving competition. Far from threatening competition, Openreach prices remain significantly above those of efficient altnets, and we have seen from the original Equinox pricing that more FTTP is sold more generally, which benefits all fibre builders. TalkTalk is connecting consumers and businesses to full fibre through both Openreach and alternative fibre builders.



SIMON WILLMOTT
NEOS NETWORKS

The introduction of Equinox 2 is going to choke competition and Ofcom is naive if it thinks it does not create a barrier to using altnets. The new offer means greater reliance on Openreach, locking in ISP customers to the incumbent. The commoditisation of connectivity has created a race to the bottom which will be accelerated by this change. It does mean lower prices for Openreach customers, but it does not support the intentions of altnets which have been faster to build fibre for underserved communities. The reduced pricing may also stifle further investments by altnets forcing them to lower costs where they have already built to compete against BT, at the same time reducing ROI and limiting their ability to invest in further network growth. The additional fees of Equinox 2 create more challenges for the altnets and further slow the effectiveness of plans to meet Gigabit Britain targets.



JEREMY CHELOT
NETOMNIA

Netomnia competes at the wholesale level and this Equinox 2 pricing offer will make it more difficult to have infrastructure competition. Openreach stated, 'this is good news for customers as it means lower prices and long-term certainty, encouraging the switch to faster, more reliable broadband connections'. I would agree if the statement read, 'this is good news for retailers like BT' - but with the price hike of 14-plus per cent it is still more expensive for consumers. I would love to have Openreach increase its pricing, but it would not be fair for consumers. I think the decision from Ofcom was good and now we have certainty for the foreseeable future.

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Carter hangs his boots

As a one-company man for almost four decades Nimans Group Sales Director Richard Carter has made loyalty his brand, but this month the distinguished industry veteran and channel pioneer is calling it a day, retiring as planned one year ahead of his 60th birthday.

Carter's long and groundbreaking career in comms is steeped in the thrills and spills of being at the vanguard of industry and business transformations – and he remained a man of consummate distinction throughout the decades. Here, he shares his career highlights and milestones, lessons learned and key takeaways...

How did you get into comms?

After being dismissed from Leeds University in 1983 for persistent non-attendance I saw an advert in the local Sheffield paper for a job in a phone shop. The liberalisation of BT had happened that year and it seemed an exciting prospect. I got the job selling long range illegal cordless phones for a very 'entrepreneurial' company called Superfone.

How did you meet Julian Niman?

Julian was a customer and I joined him in January 1986 when Superfone went bust. I started as Showroom Sales Manager with three sales staff and that year Nimans went national and started shipping telephone products across the country which quickly accelerated the turnover to £1 million. Then, in 1987, we started selling PBXs, launching the London 12 and 32 from NTS. I remember training engineers



Richard Carter

despite never having installed a phone system myself. I was appointed Sales Director in 1988, aged just 24.

What were the key milestones in your career?

A big milestone was taking £5.5 million revenue in 1990 to £11.7 million five years later. We hit £37 million in 2000 and kept on increasing throughout the noughties. In 2005 I fell out with Julian and joined arch rival Bob Old's Rocom as Sales Director. Rocom was subsequently sold to ATC which made me MD of Rocom in 2007. Then, in a strange twist, Julian bought ATC, we made

up and I was back with Nimans in 2010. Another milestone was reaching a peak of 25 per cent of the PBX market shortly after. We continued to grow and when the pandemic hit sales of home working kit exploded. Our sales reached £121 million with headset shipments approaching one million. Shortly after when Nimans was acquired by the Midwich Group in February 2022 I agreed to stay and ensure a smooth transition.

What's your next milestone?

July 31st 2023, my 59th birthday, and after 40

years in communications I've decided it's time to call it a day. I aimed to retire before 60 and I am fortunate to be able to do so.

What have been the biggest challenges in your career?

Bouncing back after my rift with Julian. And then again years later after we lost the Plantronics headset brand which was 25 per cent of the business.

Your main successes and career highlights?

The highlight has been working with such a fantastic bunch of colleagues,

customers and suppliers over the years. I can honestly say almost every day has been a laugh.

What experiences and memories stand out most?

Beating all comers in a public vote to be awarded Comms Dealer Industry Personality of the Year 2008. Not bad for a boy from a council estate.

Who has had the biggest influence on you?

Julian Niman and Bob Old. Enough said.

What will be your lasting impression of Nimans and the channel?

I'm tremendously proud to have been part of the team that built Nimans into the institution it is today. And proud of the channel to have grasped the nettle back in 1983 and become the force that it now is.

Define your time at Nimans in one sentence:

Never a dull moment.

What values and lessons do you want to highlight?

Never give up. Persistence requires no training and trumps all other capabilities.

And from your career, what single takeaway do you have for readers?

In the end, loyalty does reap its rewards. To have been a one-company man for 37 years is rare but I can highly recommend it. ■

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Five minutes with...

Paul Stevenson, Managing Director, One Connectivity

Castle Donington-based comms and IT provider One Connectivity marked its tenth year in business with the opening of a new office in Sheffield. We caught up with Managing Director Paul Stevenson to find out more about his strategic thinking and what makes him tick.



Paul Stevenson

What got you into the comms and IT sector?

I fell into ICT unexpectedly. I'm a qualified Management Accountant by trade and around 15 years ago was made redundant due to the company relocating. A close friend offered me a sales role while I was looking for work and I never looked back. My finance background helped in the early days to make sure the books balanced, and we didn't over commit ourselves. It's also helped build our accounts team and I still like to help produce the accounts.

What market trends interest you most?

Customers used to choose their telecoms partner and managed IT partner separately. In today's market, services are becoming integrated and provided by one supplier.

What are your immediate priorities?

We recently opened an office in Sheffield and

recruiting is our top priority, which is certainly tougher that it has been in the past. We've always prided ourselves in having great staff with longevity and we need to continue this.

What have been the main milestones for the business since inception?

One Connectivity started out predominantly as a mobile reseller. We added phone systems into our portfolio in 2018 which was a key milestone and decided to partner with Pragma to sell the LG Ericsson solutions. This year will see another key milestone as we add IT into our portfolio.

Name one thing you couldn't do without in your job

Excel, from my days as an accountant.

What is your growth trajectory?

One Connectivity has grown organically over the last 10 years, starting with four members of

My wife Carmen and I set the business up 10 years ago and it was a stressful time. Over the years we have learnt how to best support each other

staff. We now have 30 employees across two sites.

Which new technology areas are on your radar screen?

AI is at the forefront of everyone's mind and how it can be built into processes and service models. Technology has come a long way in the last 10 years and we need to make sure we are ahead of the game.

Looking back across your career, what is your biggest achievement?

Striking the right home and work life balance. My wife Carmen and I set the business up 10 years ago and it was a stressful time. Over the years we have learnt how to best support each other and also try to switch off

from work during evenings and weekends, and just enjoy family time with the kids.

What would you have done differently with the benefit of hindsight?

I've made mistakes – big ones! But you learn from these and hopefully make better decisions moving forward.

What talent do you wish you had?

To sing!

What do you fear the most?

What the future will be like for the next generation.

Who inspires you most?

I don't have one role model. If I like what someone says or does in life, I tend to

remember that one thing from a variety of people.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know

I don't like chips or cake!

What are your biggest strengths, and what could you work on?

Listening and being open to ideas is one of my strengths. I also try to see the good in people, which can be a strength and a weakness.

Best piece of advice you have been given

Make yourself a priority once in a while. It's not selfish, it's necessary.

Top tip for resellers

Find good partners and never take on a project without knowing you can deliver it. ■



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Trade sale to Babble

Mandy Fazelynia, CEO of Zest4 commented "It was clear that Knight had strong relationships at CEO level with every party we wanted to include in the process and were able to deliver a genuinely diverse range of offers from some fantastic businesses."

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Channel Forecast Editorial Round Tables 2023

In the Comms Dealer round table sessions, ICT vendors can share their insights on the key challenges, strategies and technologies that channel partners will need to adopt in order to thrive in 2023 and beyond. The content of these high-level discussions will form a key part of our 2023 editorial calendar and provide a fantastic blend of editorial content in Comms Dealer magazine, online and via social media with the release of a series of 'Video Shorts' highlighting the key points/questions from the discussion.

Programme for Q3/Q4 2023

July 2023

- Paving the way for a neuro diverse workforce: How far is neuro diversity a 'forgotten child' in the D&I conversation?

September 2023

- Women on Boards: Their experiences and what the ICT channel is doing to strike the right balance in the boardroom

October 2023

- Unravelling the growing staff welfare and preferences dilemma.

November 2023

- How will Next Generation Networks create new prospects for the channel?

Join the debate!

To participate in these editorial round tables contact: **Heather Miles** on **01895 454405** or **hmiles@bpl-business.com** for full details.

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Top hires boost ITP



Joanna Parker

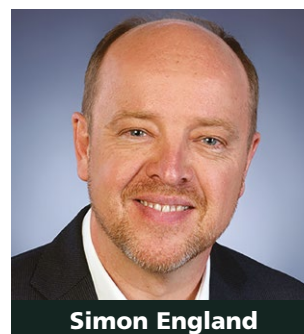
THE Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) has appointed three new members to its board: Ricoh Business Development and Delivery Director Joanna Parker, GTT Process Analyst Joshua Fowler and Nigel Linge, Professor of Telecommunications at the University of Salford.

Linge, who is Chairman of the ITP's Journal Editorial Board, brings experience in research and publishing and in his role as Professor is supporting the next generation of telecoms professionals. Parker has relevant experience and a strong understanding of the ITP. Also, Fowler was one of the first apprentices to join the ITP's apprenticeship scheme in 2013 and was awarded ITP Apprentice of the Year the following year. He aims to help drive the ITP to create more job opportunities for young people, supporting them throughout their professional development.

ITP CEO Charlotte Goodwill commented: "Each brings a fresh perspective, as well as varying experiences and knowledge."

Also on the move...

Ex-NUVIAS CEO Simon England has joined the Infinigate executive management team as Chief Growth Officer. He takes responsibility across vendor strategy and portfolio development, cloud services, professional services, marketing and branding, reseller strategy and analytics. England is credited with steering Nuvias through an upscaling phase and supported its acquisition by Infinigate in 2022. He most recently acted as an advisor to the Infinigate Group's CEO. Before joining Nuvias England held roles at Ingram Micro, Westcon-Comstor and TDSynnex. Infinigate Group CEO Klaus Schlichtherle said: "Growth has been our constant trend, surpassing industry averages with 25 per cent average growth. We plan to sustain this."



Simon England

TELCOSWITCH'S incoming Chief Financial Officer Henry Wu brings significant executive experience having worked across EMEA and APAC in a variety of leadership roles within publicly listed, PE and venture backed tech firms, including Deloitte, Prudential and Vix Technology. Most recently he was Director of Finance at Charles Taylor InsureTech, a specialist in SaaS solutions for the global insurance market.

PINNACLE Computing's client focus has been sharpened by the arrival of Louise Moyiseyenko as Customer Support Director. She brings



over 20 years experience in managing customer support teams in the SaaS arena. Managing Director James Spencer stated: "Louise's background in customer service, coupled with her strategic mindset, will strengthen our customer support capabilities."

ANDY Bell has joined ITS Technology Group as Head of Public Sector Sales with a particular focus on local authorities, government bodies and frameworks to drive fibre roll out and



Andy Bell

uptake. He will build on a track record of public sector delivery at Telefonica O2 and latterly Neos Networks. ITS CEO Daren Baythorpe said: "Connectivity and digital infrastructure are crucial for local authorities in the UK, enabling the provision of better and more efficient services to communities, tackling digital inclusion as well driving economic growth and job creation. Andy will bring valuable insights, connections and strategies to help navigate this complex and ever-changing field."



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