Paving the way for women in technology p14

Gamma CFO on strategic growth priorities p16

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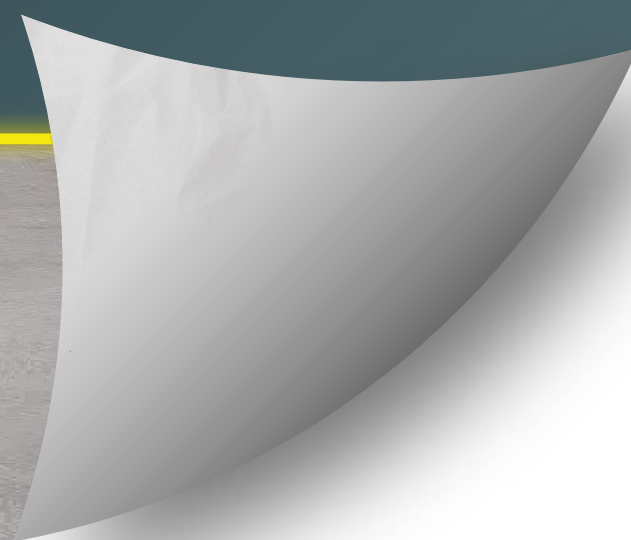## dealer

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THE HEARTBEAT OF THE UK ICT INDUSTRY

CMA scrutinises UK cloud market

OFCOM has raised concerns about a growing lack of competition and customer choice in the public cloud infrastructure services market and called on the Competition and Markets Authority to investigate.

SPECIAL REPORT

In October last year Ofcom launched a study under the Enterprise Act 2002 into cloud services in the UK and concluded that certain anti-competitive practices in favour of hyperscalers AWS and Microsoft, including high data egress fees, are stifling competition and choice.

"It's been infuriating to observe such incredible market growth in a space without control," stated eve Networks MD Steve Barclay. "The fact that over 80% of the cloud market is dominated by two players shows a need for change."

Cloud Industry Forum CEO David Terrar also believes that action should have been taken earlier. "I'm surprised it's happening now rather than five years ago, but the objective of a fair marketplace that encourages innovation, rather than stifles it, has to be supported," he said. "We need open competition for a healthy market."

Vapour CEO Tim Mercer (pictured above) pointed out that the lack of controls has made it harder for Ofcom and the CMA to create an impact.

"A colossal degree of change is now required to shake up the market," he said. "But we have to leverage this opportunity to empower the buyer with knowledge, especially around the hidden costs of cloud, including egress charges and the inability to move simply." **More industry reaction on pages 10, 30-32**

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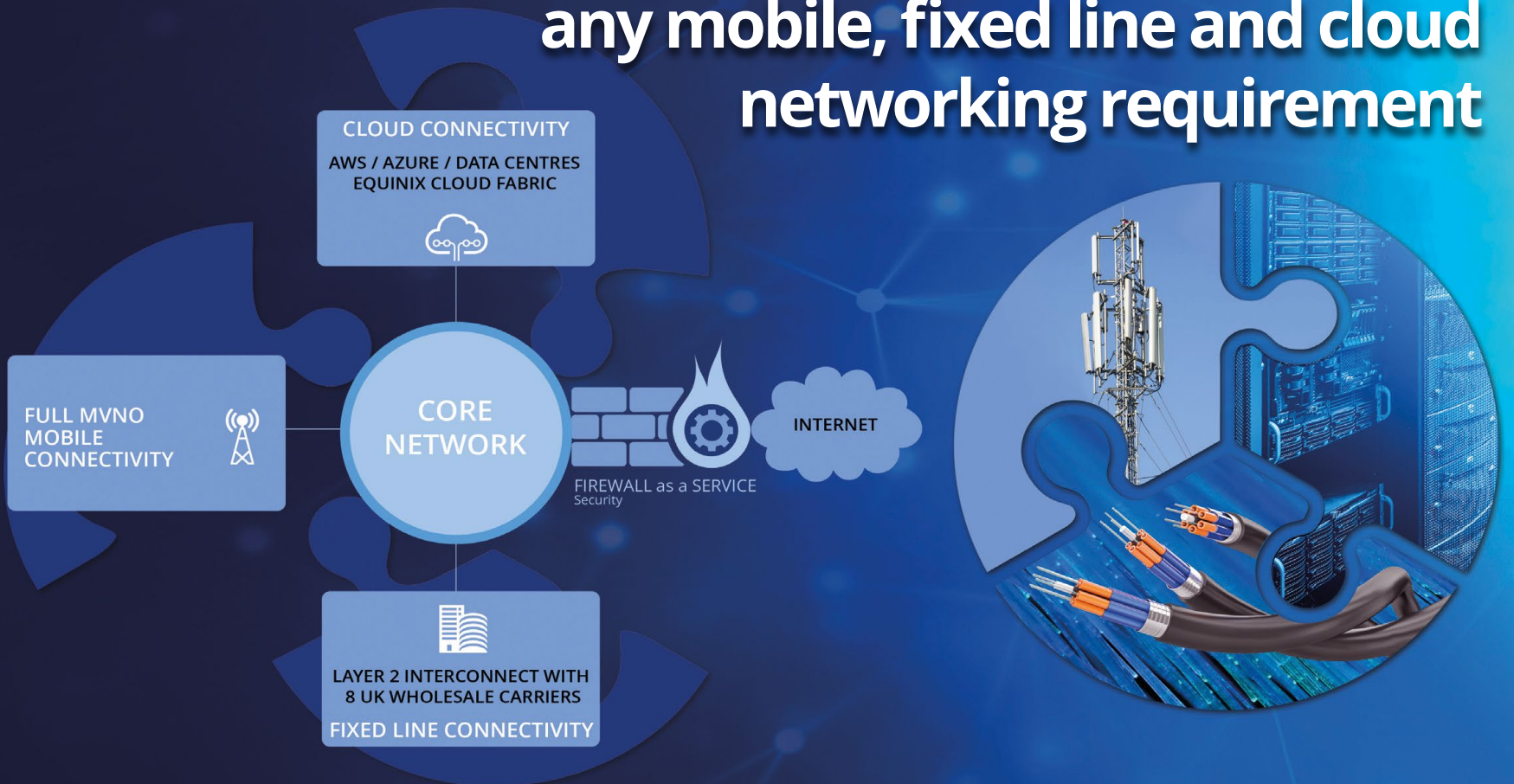
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EDITOR'S COMMENT

Stuart Gilroy

AS AN EDITOR I make choices – choices about what to include in the magazine, how it is included and presented, and what not to give the light of day. Choices about how something is written, plain words matter, and ensuring we are professional about everything we do editorially.

Ultimately, a magazine should reflect the experiences of its readership, provide meaningful insights into business leaders, as people, while pointing up what's coming down the tracks, and shedding light on what's residing between the lines of everyday life in the comms sector – and how that will read in the future. And of course, report on the important news stories and market trends with insight and industry reaction (page 30).

Comms Dealer also aims to help drive forward certain agendas, like women in technology (page 14) and neurodiversity inclusion (page 24), for example, and we support good causes like The Big Goal (page 12).

We bring what matters front of mind: For instance – in a recent reseller survey we carried out, not a single respondent cited 5G as being part of their future strategy. But 5G is a reality that needs to be considered now (page 8 col 5). Perhaps you haven't given much thought to the sustainability agenda, but that too is now emerging as an everyday reality, reflected in Weston Comstor's Responsible Business report (page 8). We will be seeing many more of these comprehensive and analytical updates from upstream channel companies. We choose to publish stories such as these to raise greater awareness of what's important right now, because such matters may not be blipping on radar screens in general. After all, to be competitive it is key to be one step ahead in this fast moving industry.

There is a reason for everything in this magazine. And, more broadly, it's well worth having an understanding of the rationale that underpins all of your choices, especially in the context of your own company's raison d'etre.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Rigby Group rides crest of record sales

James Rigby

RIGBY Group reported record annual sales for the year ended 31st March 2023 with group turnover hitting £3.9bn, up 16% on the previous year.

Adjusted operating profit more than doubled to £163.2m, boosted by the sale of cybersecurity and networking distribution business Nuvias.

SCC continued as the principal driver of growth, witnessing a 23% sales hike to £3.287bn, with 7% growth in operating profit to £68.9m largely driven by a strong performance in France where revenues rose 26% to over 2.6bn euros.

In the UK, revenues were up 13% to £877m.

The group's latest division, Rigby Technology Investments, is focusing on investments in technology related businesses outside of SCC operations.

James Rigby, co-CEO of Rigby Group and EMEA CEO of SCC, commented: "Being family owned, we are able to remain agile and throughout FY23 we continued to take decisive action and deliver initiatives that align with our long-term vision. This will remain the case as we look ahead to 2024 and beyond."

NEWS ROUNDUP

THINCATS-backed Windsor Telecom has acquired Gloucester-based Connexus Networks and Connexus Technology, adding circa 400 customers. Windsor CEO Pete Tomlinson commented: "It has been a busy three years with multiple acquisitions and a broad business transformation, and the acquisition of Connexus is a key part of our strategy." Connexus MD Gulam Patel added: "This will benefit the Connexus business and customers with Windsor bringing a scaled team and complementary product set."

FIXED wireless network operator and B2B connectivity provider Luminet has been acquired by Gresham House-backed Telcom Group. The deal expands Telcom's regional footprint, adding London to its roster of metro networks. Telcom Group Chairman Christopher Baldock stated: "Luminet's London footprint and channel proposition will complement and integrate into Telcom's network infrastructure, and provide a platform for our product portfolio of applications, products and services aimed at the business market."

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

Channel Forecast: How are Next Generation Networks creating new opportunities for the channel?

The comms sector is undergoing a transformational period of growth and disruption and the rise of Next Generation Networks is at the forefront of these exciting changes. In this Channel Forecast Insight Session we explore the key aspects of this burgeoning market and how best resellers can tap into the opportunities on offer.

Look out for coverage from this editorial debate in the December issue of Comms Dealer magazine and via our series of 'video shorts' on the key questions addressed on Linked-in.

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

comms dealer | **Forecast** Sessions

NEWS ROUNDUP

WESTCON-Comstor has posted record H1 revenue of $1.85bn, representing a 15% year-on-year jump. The increase has been attributed to the tech distributor's shift to a software and data driven approach which it says has unlocked new opportunities for partners and vendors. Gross profit saw a 33.4% year-on-year rise to $203.7m, with gross margins increasing to 11% (up from 9.5%). CEO David Grant said: "Our shift to software and services means we are positioned to thrive in the subscription-based, everything-as-a-service platform economy of the future." Grant also noted that Westcon-Comstor is maintaining its growth trajectory in H1 FY24.

IN ITS full year update Softcat reported a 14.2% increase in profit to £374m, while revenue fell below the £1bn mark by 8.6% to £985.3m. Operating profits were up 3.5% to £141m. The total number of customers broke through the 10,000 mark (up 2%), and gross profit per customer increased 12%. Services revenue grew 43% to £186m with a large portion generated through partners, including cloud services via AWS and Microsoft Azure. Headcount increased 20% during the period to 2,300.

Boxx deal delivered by Focus

FOCUS Group's expansion campaign continues unabated with the acquisition of comms and connectivity firm Boxx Communications, which operates across Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. The two businesses first crossed paths in 2018 when Focus purchased a customer base from Boxx.

Ralph Gilbert, co-founder and Director at Focus Group, said: "Our long-standing relationship and shared vision will provide a springboard."

Boxx CEO Dean Burgin commented: "Over the years our rapport with Ralph, Chris and the wider team has matured into an important relationship."

James Green, co-founder at Boxx, said: "The team on all sides moved fast, enabling us to complete the transaction in a way that has minimised impact on day-to-day operations."

Ralph Gilbert

US tech firm in distie buy

Michael O'Hara

US-BASED tech business Climb Global Solutions has secured an Ireland and UK foothold with the acquisition of Dublin located distributor DataSolutions in a $16.3m deal.

The transaction adds approximately $3.3m revenues and brings established relationships with key vendor partners including Check Point, Citrix, Neustar, HPE Aruba, IGEL and ColorTokens.

"The acquisition strengthens our line card with new technology vendors and bolsters our geographic footprint in western Europe," said Climb CEO Dale Foster. "This is conducive for cross-sell opportunities.

"DataSolutions has a robust recurring revenue base with over 90% of fiscal 2023 revenue coming from reseller partners."

DataSolutions MD Michael O'Hara added: "Climb's commitment to a focused line card and track record of brand evaluation aligns with what our customers have come to expect."

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

NEWS ROUNDUP

GLOBAL investment firm Permira has become the major shareholder of managed service provider CSI Group. Permira previously had a minority stake in the firm. Founded in 1983, CSI is headquartered in Birmingham with more offices across the UK and North America. Following new ownership, Simon Fisk is stepping down as group CEO.

US-BASED Park Place Technologies has bolstered its UK presence with the acquisition of Derby located IT firm Xuper. The move also strengthens Park Place's influence in the US and Germany. Following the deal, Xuper's Chairman and MD Peter Grogan is to retire.

Making broadband fault frustration a thing of the past

While the last ten years has seen our reliance on the internet deepen and the applications that depend on it become more sophisticated, the service standards of yesteryear have sadly persisted. Matt Walker, Director of Customer Delivery and Assurance believes meaningful change is possible and explains how CityFibre is leading the way.

Matt Walker

Whether you spend your days on back-to-back video calls, monitor your security and heating with connected cameras and devices, or smart-manage your energy consumption to reduce your cost of living, a broadband connection that just works and keeps on working, is now vital. But this also means that if something goes awry, the frustration of reporting a fault and waiting days for a repair also needs to become a distant memory.

All of this and more, is why CityFibre is on a mission to eradicate all but the rarest need for anyone to contact their ISP about a fault or performance issue on its network. As a concept in our industry, proactive repair isn't new, but achieving it to a point where ISPs can rely on it and reallocate resources elsewhere, presents some big hurdles. That's exactly the kind of challenge that has CityFibre's name all over it though!

When things go wrong…
A broadband connection can fail for all sorts of reasons. It could be the result of accidental damage when laying or repairing other infrastructure, or even overzealous gardening that sees a spade smash a wall box. What happens next though, is where we're working to stand out from the crowd, and so far, we're seeing some fantastic results.

Typically, when something isn't working, an impacted customer notifies their ISP. The ISP then spends time triaging the issue to see if there is a simple fix. This stage can take 35-40 minutes, and if things can't be resolved, a trouble report gets raised to the network operator who often despatches an engineer.

While this reactive approach finds and fixes the problem eventually, it is inefficient, labour-intensive and the polar-opposite of customer-friendly. It puts the onus on the end customer to report the fault, describe everything they are experiencing and even try a bunch of suggestions. Handling issues in this way is part of the reason UK customers who experience a broadband fault, can be without service for three to five days – or sometimes more. This is despite the majority of 'trouble reports' that we see typically only take an hour of engineering time to fix. None of us would accept this without complaint if it was our water or gas supply pipe that failed, and we shouldn't be expecting people to accept this as standard for their broadband service either.

From 'waiting in' to 'getting on'
Thanks to our modern built systems and diagnostics, we have always had the ability to proactively monitor our fibre network and see faults as they happen. What's new is that over the last few months, we've worked with a number of ISP partners to trial and roll out an innovative new platform to enable proactive fault repair.

The platform is designed to ensure that as soon as a service outage 'red flag incident' happens on our network, 'Auto Create' and 'Auto Resolve' incident responses are activated. This allows us to begin investigating and resolving the issue almost immediately, while notifying our ISP partners and end-customers in parallel that something's up and we're already on the case.

Over half of the proactively managed faults identified during the trial were fixed on the same day, meaning service loss is only a few hours, rather than that three-to-five-day industry average.

It's not just about end customer experience benefits though. Operationally, ISPs have been able to redirect human time spent on triaging connectivity issues to other important areas. And because we look for the source of the issue, we can often identify when problems are related to ISPs own equipment too, for example their Wi-Fi router.

The combination of commonly defined datasets, accurate real time diagnostic information and high levels of process automation is delivering something that operators of legacy networks cannot currently match. The automation element enables us to react quickly and appropriately, but it also improves accuracy and reduces the potential for human error caused by lack of knowledge or experience.

Preparing for expansion
With a collaboratively created proof-of-concept in place, we're now preparing to scale up and expand out. Next steps are keenly supported by our ISP trial partners, who have already adjusted their in-house processes to maximise the platform's benefits. We've also engaged with additional ISP partners who are keen to participate. In addition to scaling up our proactive repair capability, our roadmap also includes predictive maintenance. The platform can already see if parts of the network are degrading, so preventing faults before they even happen is in our armoury.

At the heart of our mission are customers who need and deserve the most reliable and robust network we can deliver. Benefits are felt by all though. The more improvement we can deliver through smart automation, the more power we and our partners have to help keep consumer prices low. And, the more successful CityFibre is, the more we drive others to follow our lead; ultimately bringing benefits to consumers nationwide and further enabling our digital economy to flourish.

For more news from CityFibre, visit **www. cityfibre.com/ fibreleadership**

Two elite Googlers join forces

GOOGLE Premier Partners Cloud Technology Solutions Group (CTS) and Appsbroker have merged to create what is claimed to be the largest Google Cloud-only digital consultancy across Europe.

The company will be led by CTS CEO Tom Ray, with Mike Conner, founder and CEO of Appsbroker, joining the group's investment board.

"From countering cyber threats to unlocking the true potential of AI, there is a huge opportunity to leverage the full spectrum of Google Cloud capabilities," commented Ray.

Conner added: "With little overlap across our combined customer base and shared values it made real sense for us to come together.

"We both deliver high-impact projects so scale is important to ensure customers have access to the skills and training to fully leverage the AI, data and security opportunity."

The companies will initially operate under their existing names, with a single moniker for the merged entity planned to be revealed in the future.

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

£100m fund boost for ITS

Daren Baythorpe

ITS has secured £100m in financing to accelerate its UK full fibre growth strategy.

The debt financing deal with Avenue Capital Group provides a boost to ITS' ambition to reach 50% of UK commercial business premises and supports its overall organic growth and M&A strategy.

The investment builds on the significant existing facility provided by Aviva Investors.

ITS CEO Daren Baythorpe said: "This additional funding recognises the strength in our business plan as we continue to expand our network, as well as consider strategic acquisitions, as the fibre market adapts to

changing technology and undergoes consolidation.

"Following last year's follow-on investment from Aviva Investors and the acquisition of NextGenAccess we have worked with partners to drive connections with businesses and public sector organisations.

"In addition, we've had a strong focus on service, investing in systems and delivery to drive improved experience, providing agility and assurance alongside our business growth."

With a dedicated channel focus on B2B fibre, ITS now claims to have the largest business fibre footprint outside of the incumbents.

Kingland brings in first deal

NEWLY established private equity business Kingland Capital has made its debut investment into cloud service provider Dynamic Networks.

Kingland Capital was founded by mid-market investor Paul Landsman and supported a management buyout at the Leeds-based CSP.

Former Maintel CEO Eddie Buxton is to join as Chairman and the company aims to become the fastest growing SME-focused cloud managed service provider in the UK.

Dynamic Networks has generated organic growth with revenue CAGR of over 40% between 2021-2023.

The company's Chief Executive David Smith, who led the MBO, stated "Dynamic Networks has spent the last couple of years investing in people, systems, processes and product portfolio and this investment will allow us to support the demanding needs of SMEs."

Landsman added: "We will help Dave and the team develop the business organically and through acquisitions over the next few years."

As part of the MBO, Hay Wain Group invested alongside Kingland Capital.

NEWS ROUNDUP

DIGITAL services firm Version 1 has outlined plans to open a technology hub in Birmingham city centre and create 500 jobs. CEO Tom O'Connor said: "Our work with organisations in the west Midlands area has grown considerably in recent years. This local expansion will allow us to embed our presence."

DONNA Torres has taken the CRO role at CloudM. Her career experience includes notable spells at Xero and Mercedes. CloudM CEO Tom Ray commented: "Donna's breadth of experience is exactly what we need and it's exciting to have a fresh perspective on the company to help us uncover how we can expand further." Torres added: "CloudM focuses on culture and talent, two values that perfectly align with myself."

NODE4'S channel strategy is to be spearheaded by incoming Channel Sales Director Ashley Butcher. He brings over ten years experience working in the telco and carrier sectors. His prior roles include Senior Manager, Strategic Accounts at BT, and Senior Account Lead, Carrier and SI at TalkTalk Business. More senior appointment news on page 36

EXERTIS'S Ethnicity Employee Resource Group marked Black History Month with webinars featuring four high profile speakers selected to inspire, enlighten and empower its staff (and external parties) – namely Yemi Elegunde, Alesia Hendley, Dame Kelly Holmes and Piers Linney. Vish Chhatralia, Chief Digital and Marketing Officer, said: "This series of webinars was not just about celebrating the remarkable achievements and contributions of black individuals throughout history, but also about fostering unity and progress. The webinars were an opportunity to collectively move forward on our journey towards a more inclusive and equitable society."

FORMER Infinigate Marketing VP Wayne Gratton has joined Nuvias UC as CCO. He co-founded Clarity Technology which grew to £200m in eight years before being acquired by Avnet. He also brings experience from senior roles including tech director and VP positions in digital, marketing and business development. Nuvias UC CEO Joel Chimoindes said: "Wayne brings a track record in driving growth and his experience aligns with our vision for the future." More new hires on page 36

Stone app processes used tech

STONE'S 360 app has helped organisations across the UK save over 1.5 million units of used tech from going to UK and international landfill sites.

The Stafford-based circular IT provider launched Stone 360 in 2020 to help organisations with their sustainability goals and e-waste challenges.

Since launch the app has been downloaded more than 42,000 times and has enabled more than 2,450 organisations to dispose of their unwanted, or outdated, hardware responsibly.

According to Uswitch the UK generates the second highest amount of e-waste per capita in the world, and by 2024 the country will likely overtake Norway in becoming the world's largest contributor.

Craig Campion, Stone's Director of IT Asset Disposal Sales, said: "We want to encourage more organisations to see the value of sustainability and show how much of the tech we discard can be put to great use."

Stone also provides a number of incentives including in-app cash rebates, social value reports and a tree planting scheme. It claims to be the only UK tech reseller with an on-site recycling facility.

Distie prints GHG report

WESTCON-Comstor's just-published Responsible Business report (covering the 2023 financial year ending 28th February) provides a breakdown of its latest annual carbon emissions and shows that Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions fell by 2.2% to 3,276 tCO2e.

Meanwhile, Scope 3 emissions saw a 17.4% year-on-year increase to 785,953 tCO2e, due in part to the current use of a spend-based emissions calculations methodology that reflects the company's 18.3% revenue increase over the same period.

To reach its goal of reducing Scope 3 emissions by 25% by 2030 against 2022 levels, Westcon-Comstor will make its data more robust by shifting from a spend-based methodology to using product-specific data in emissions calculations.

The report also reveals that 54.5% of the firm's suppliers globally have set science-based emission reduction targets, against a target of 80% by 2025.

"The fact that 99% of our overall emissions globally are within our supply chain shows the importance of collaborating with vendors and partners as we work towards our long-term goal of achieving Net Zero by 2050,"

David Grant

said Mark McLardie, Head of ESG, Westcon-Comstor.

"We recognise the need to de-couple our business growth from emissions growth which is why we are prioritising engagement with vendors and partners, including improving the robustness of our supplier emissions data with a particular focus on their products."

CEO David Grant added: "These figures demonstrate the scale of the challenge we face in meeting the ambitious targets we've set ourselves.

"As well as reducing the carbon emissions that we own or control, we aim to leverage our position at the heart of the IT ecosystem to lead those around us into more sustainable practices as part of a shared journey to Net Zero."

INTEC Group and Microsoft Tech For Social Impact are staging a quarterly tech knowledge and networking group for the north west and west Yorkshire not-for-profit sector, kicking off with an inTEC Impact event on November 15th in Manchester. Subjects covered include a deep dive into boosting productivity, reducing costs and improving efficiencies through technology.

HOME Telecom, the consumer brand of Telecom Acquisitions, has acquired the customer base of Neatley and signalled that similar transactions are in the pipeline. "In just over three years we have added more than 75,000 customers, and the next three months will see further acquisitions," stated CEO Nigel Barnett. "Times are changing fast in this land grab of passing homes. Funders are now taking into account the real numbers of homes connected into their forecast, which is a totally different number to the homes passed and affects the drawdown of funds. So watch this space as we partner with more altnets and increase our footprint across the UK."

TD SYNNEX is poised to launch a 5G Project Service that will support partners in deploying comms solutions from Cradlepoint. Mark Best, Senior Director, Managed Services, Europe, TD Synnex, said: "Investing up-front into learning about a new technology like 5G is not always easy for partners. Our 5G Project Service removes the barriers." TD Synnex is accredited for Cradlepoint's 4G LTE and 5G services. Best noted that the distie is giving partners a leg up to 5G with support on device staging, site surveys and installation, with follow-on management and support for customers.

NTA lifts curtain on portfolio boost

NTA's partner conference held last month showcased wide-ranging portfolio enhancements including additions to its exclusive handset line, call recording bundles and updates to the MobeX softphone which now incorporates group chat facilitates for team collaboration along with integration of Google and Outlook contacts.

NTA also introduced its WhatsApp integration solution, called Whatex, and revealed details about the new MobeX UC Softphone roadmap, a

Windows Desktop application that initially intends to replace NTA's UC+ express license.

Enhancements to the partner portal were also unveiled include Text-to-Speech, TPS (Telephone Preference Service) and Transcriptions.

NTA Marketing Manager Tom Rogers stated: "By equipping partners with tools such as the UC integrations, TPS, and call recording capabilities, we are empowering them to succeed in the rapidly evolving telephony industry."

All smiles: Team NTA celebrate a successful event

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Ofcom instigated CMA inquiry long overdue says CIF

A UK cloud market study undertaken by Ofcom concluded that it's high time the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) stepped in to conduct a root and branch investigation into the state of competition in this space. It's a move that Cloud Industry Forum (CIF) CEO David Terrar believes should have happened long before now, not just on the basis of establishing a level playing field, but also to unleash greater innovation as a driver for growth. "I'm surprised it's happening now rather than five years ago, but the objective of a fair marketplace that encourages innovation, rather than stifles it, has to be supported," he stated.

Terrar cited the CMA's statement on the scope of its market investigation, in which Kip Meek, Chair of its inquiry group, noted, 'Cloud services are an essential part of how businesses in the UK operate and they underpin many aspects of our daily activities, from banking to communications. This is why effective competition in this market is so important'.

In its official statement on the matter, Ofcom highlighted egress fees, technical barriers to interoperability and portability, plus discounting as key areas for the CMA to look at. "These issues certainly exist," added Terrar. "Hopefully the investigation will uncover the scope and impact of any unfair practices. As we have always

advised, the key is both transparency on the part of the vendor and education and awareness on the part of the customer. Only then can businesses go into a contract fully informed of all the ingredients, potential barriers, benefits and risks."

Open competition
As a trade body the Cloud Industry Forum is technology agnostic, but it 'fiercely supports' the solutions its members deliver. "We have members who use Microsoft, AWS and Google infrastructure, members who partner with them, and members who compete with them," stated Terrar. "We need open competition for a healthy market, and for the agility, scalability and innovation that cloud provides businesses. We support any interventions that promote fair practices and a more level playing field. And I look forward to the CMA's report when it's published in April 2025."

Terrar has worked in the cloud space for longer than most and witnessed waves of new technology approaches – all united by a common factor. "In all of these waves there has always been one, two or three dominant players," he commented. "I don't see today's competition as any different. So much of this is business as usual.

"However, I'd argue that the technology market is at the start of a new inflection point with the explosion of generative AI, mixed reality metaverse-like experiences, the rise of FinOps... those practitioners of cloud financial management – and more – all coming at us and all supported by cloud as an enabler. Much will depend not only on the findings of the investigation, but also on business expectations, needs and demands, and the providers' ability to meet them in a fair, efficient and effective way." ∎

More reaction on pages 30-32

David Terrar

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with our next generation network, enabling our partners to shape the future for their customers

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The Big Goal kicks off!

The Big Goal industry initiative to help young homeless people in the UK kicked off in style at St George's Park last month, getting under way with the best possible start.

THE BIG GOAL.
HEADLINE SPONSOR GIACOM.

The Big Goal founder members create a winning team at St George's Park

ICT organisations from all over the country attended the launch at the home of England football where over 25 teams signed up to The Big Goal as founding members. This commitment will fund the creation of 25 new Street Soccer Foundation academies helping over 200 homeless and disadvantaged young people. It also means that 25 teams are signed up for The Big Goal football tournament which commences in spring 2024.

"The official launch of The Big Goal was just incredible," said Street Soccer Foundation founder and CEO Keith Mabbutt. "Speaking to a packed room at St George's Park, alongside the Premier League Trophy, was a privilege and I was overwhelmed by the support we received with many companies committing to The Big Goal."

The Big Goal has arrived, and I know that together we'll make a big difference

Terry O'Brien, CEO of head sponsor Giacom, believes the launch was the start of 'the most unifying ESG project the ICT channel has ever seen'. "What a great launch day at a fantastic venue," he enthused. "The day really brought home to everyone attending what a massive difference we can make working together as a community.

"It's great that we're doing something big to help end youth homelessness together with Keith and The Street Soccer Foundation. Thanks to all the founding members who signed up on the day and agreed to motivate so many more in our amazing Industry to join the Big Goal initiative."

The Premier League Trophy was provided courtesy of sponsor Sky Business Wholesale and Sky Sports News were there to record proceedings. Academy graduates spoke poignantly about how The Street Soccer Foundation academies have helped them find directions in their lives. Jonathan now works at Tottenham Hotspur FC, and Jodie is poised to set up her own painting and decorating business.

Launch host Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent said: "Over 300,000 people are homeless in the UK today. Action for Children says at least 120,000 of these are young people. That's a record... driven by the cost-of-living crisis. These figures are not just sad. They are an outrage in our so-called civilised society. We are proud to be part of an initiative to alleviate this massive problem."

Mabbutt added. "With the amount of founding companies on board for The Big Goal, we are already in place to help more than 200 young people through our academies in 2024, which is just amazing. What a start! What an industry. The Big Goal has arrived, and I know that together we'll make a big difference." ∎

For those companies who couldn't make the official launch event, there's still time to become a Founding Member by signing up here: www.thebiggoal.co.uk.

Founder members go for Goal...

The Street Soccer Foundation's work is a vital lifeline for young homeless people, using football to boost self-belief and transform lives. It's heartening to see the channel working together as a force for good. **Matthew Riley, Chairman, Daisy Group**

Rydal Group is passionate about playing its part. Together as one, we're stronger and can tackle homelessness and create a brighter future for UK communities. **Steffan Dancy, Managing Director, Rydal Group**

Fifteen Group is proud to be part of this ground-breaking initiative to help local young homeless people get their lives back on track through the power of football. **Ian Walker, Director, Fifteen Group**

We must fight homelessness in the UK, particularly amongst young adults. I am keen for InTEC's people to get involved and see how we can make a difference. **Simon Howitt, CEO, Intec Group**

This truly is an exciting project and I'm keen to explore other ways to inspire our staff to make a difference. **Tony Wright, Head of Internal Sales, Daisy Corporate Services**

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Paving the way for wome

With just three per cent of CTO positions currently held by women we are privileged to introduce Prasanna Gopalakrishnan, Group Chief Technology Officer at Sky, who shares insights into the measures she is taking to drive diversity in the tech sector and increase the percentage of high calibre women in boardrooms.

Prasanna Gopalakrishnan

What was your route into the comms sector? I have over 25 years of experience in technology, information systems and digital transformation but spent most of my career in the banking sector before joining Sky in Sept 2021. Prior to Sky, I was CIO at Bank of America where I helped to drive digital strategy and implementation for 70 million customers and over 100,000 employees worldwide. I also served as Executive VP and Chief Digital and Information Officer at Boston Private and on the advisory boards of a number of Blockchain and cybersecurity start-ups.

What is your current remit? My responsibilities now include leading the Technology Executive board at Sky, and my team oversees all the technology systems underpinning Sky's broadband, mobile, customer, digital and enterprise management platforms as well as workplace technology, data centres and cyber security.

How do you advocate for a stronger female presence in boardrooms? As a woman of colour in such a role, one of my focuses has been to create a culture where people from every background feel that they can bring their whole selves to work at all levels. This means ensuring everyone feels empowered and has their voice heard. This is so important to me because my own different life experiences have allowed me to bring new perspectives and viewpoints in the boardroom, and it's only by encouraging everyone around you to do the same that we can create truly representative leaders. However, we have some way to go. Only three per cent of CTO positions are currently held by women.

I believe at my core that a more inclusive technology industry is fundamental to a thriving UK tech sector. There simply cannot be innovation if we can't include every part of society within the process

en in technology

What have been your career experiences in terms of being female? And have they helped shaped who you are today?

Alongside my roles in tech, I've had a number of roles within financial services which can often be a predominantly male industry. I had my fair share of challenges during this time

We need more CEOs and board Chairs to seek diversity within the board room and make it a commitment

and for a while I struggled to find my voice. However, I've had incredible leaders who put their trust and enabled me to grow and reach new heights. Now, this is who I want to be as a leader and I see my role here at Sky to be more than just enabling people to do their best work day-to-day. I want people to feel supported and able to progress in their careers and do so in a style that stays true to who they are.

What more needs to be done to increase the female talent pool?

There is a serious conversation to be had regarding women in STEM. According to Tech Nation just 19 per cent of the UK tech workforce is made up of women. There are many reasons behind this with inequality of pay, lack of career mobility, the need for flexibility and a lack of role models being key ones. But my advice to women who desire to develop a career in tech is to stay authentic to yourself and don't try to

emulate the behaviour of others. It's never too late to start a role in technology.

What initiatives and developments do you participate in to help increase the presence of women on boards in the wider industry?

I'm committed to help women start and develop their career in tech, whether that's up-skilling, re-skilling or forming industry collaborations to enable them to succeed. We've also created the Get into Tech initiative, a free 15 week programme designed to help women get into tech by developing their skills in software development. Since the programme launched in 2017 we've brought representation in the division up from 17 per cent to 26 per cent. We also have a programme called 'LIFT as we CLIMB' in collaboration with Vodafone and IBM. This programme is to support Women in tech to pull through and move into senior leadership roles.

Externally, I'm part of a global non-profit group called T200 which is made up women CXOs in tech across the globe. We have a program called T200-LIFT and T200-LIFT Plus which helps women help into CXO roles by educating, nurturing and supporting women who aspire to get into Chief Information Officer, Chief Technology or Chief Digital Officer roles. We also give them access to CXO searches and coach them during their candidacy stages. We also help women CXO get into board roles.

Our ultimate objective is to bring more women into STEM careers. I believe at my core that a more inclusive tech industry is fundamental to a thriving UK tech sector. There simply cannot be innovation if we can't include every part of society within the process.

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

Historically, the telecoms sector has always been male dominated, especially in more senior positions. However, I have definitely been seeing a shift in this. We've seen Ofcom partner with the biggest UK telecoms firms, including Sky, to launch a new pledge committing to help get more women build technology careers across the industry. It is a first step, but it also means that having a talented and more diverse workforce is recognised across the telecoms sector as a priority and crucial for the success of the industry.

The European Union's adoption of the 'Women on Boards Directive' mandating 40 per cent representation of women is targeted to achieve gender equality in boards. In 2023, The proportion of women in board roles in Britain's biggest listed companies has risen above 40 per cent for the first time. There is still more work to be done. We need more CEOs and board Chairs to seek diversity within the board room and make it a commitment. We also need organisations to coach, encourage and train more women to be board-ready. Women bring completely new perspectives and a new way of thinking to the board and add tremendous value. ∎

Gamma CFO spotlights st

Here, Gamma Chief Financial Officer Bill Castell provides insights into the life of a high profile CFO, the transformations happening within the Gamma business, and the leadership issues he is prioritising as the public listed UCaaS provider continues its growth journey both in the UK and across Europe.

Bill Castell

What was your route into the comms sector?
Having started to cover the TMT sector as an investment banker at Goldmans back in 2000, and then as an auditor at Deloitte, I have seen the many different waves of convergence across the market, and I am passionate about the sector. The most relevant previous experience was when I was Deputy CFO and then Acting CFO of Virgin Media prior to the JV with Telefonica's O2. I spent three years working for Virgin Media and the parent Liberty Global on both the B2C and B2B evolution including Project Lightning, the build out of Gigabit Britain and fixed mobile convergence which came to a head with the JV. Not forgetting Virgin's own B2B business.

Why did you take the CFO role at Gamma in May last year?
I have spent most of my career split between the TMT sector and financial services, with 12 years in operational and CFO roles at Barclays. I decided to leave Virgin Media to become CFO of the privately owned and PE backed OVO Energy which had just completed a reverse takeover of SSE's energy retail business. I enjoyed learning the energy sector and jumped in at the deep end with two feet during the energy crisis.

I was also in charge of all the hedging and pricing decisions which was interesting when energy prices went off the scale. I knew Gamma from my time at Virgin, a smaller competitor which was and still is held in high regard. When the Gamma opportunity arose, I enjoyed meeting the board and management, welcomed the chance to be a public listed CFO, and was also excited to get back into the world of communications. Gamma ticked all the boxes including the growth potential of the company in the UK and in Europe.

I am partly here to challenge the status quo, and to help lead and support Gamma on its journey from a medium sized UK company to an expanding European organisation

As CFO, what is your most important challenge over the next year?
Specifically, as a CFO, a constant challenge is capital allocation. As a gatekeeper you work alongside the CEO to ensure stewardship of capital, working through the investments that will deliver the optimum returns, considering all stakeholders and ultimately delivering on the strategy.

How can you personally impact the growth of the Gamma business?
One of the great things about Gamma is that the executive committee is full of people who have been part of Gamma's success since IPO. I would like to think I could help bring different perspectives from the various CFO and operations roles I've held both within this industry as well as across different industries. I am partly here to challenge the status quo, and to help lead and support Gamma as it continues its journey from a medium sized UK company to an expanding European organisation.

What are the three main challenges for a CFO in the future?
Talent: The secret of all successful businesses be it the past or the future is talent. Everyone is rightly excited by AI but for me the H in HI (Human Intelligence) is still the key. Retaining, developing and attracting the best talent for the company and ensuring technology evolves so that the 'H' can focus on the most value accretive work is key, which is often the most enjoyable part of their roles.

Adaptation: A generic challenge for all leaders is the accelerating pace of technology and therefore market change, and making sure as a leader you grab the opportunities this provides. Resilience to macro events and knock on effects is also a challenge. For example, the last few years with Covid, Brexit, world events in Ukraine and Israel-Gaza, and the energy crisis all combine with the need to assess the impact on the company and address challenges and in some instances, the opportunities that arise.

rategic growth priorities

What's the key to improving finance and accounting processes?

Evolution not revolution, and hearts and minds... ensuring the finance team understand what you are trying to achieve and that they are fully engaged and part of the change. We are currently putting in a new HR and ERP system. The

A generic challenge for all leaders is the accelerating pace of technology and market change

absolute key is to understand what the goals are up front, and investing the time in improving the data and processes before you launch so the opportunity is not wasted. An ERP system is an enabler – the quality and structure of your data and processes are what makes the real difference. AI is certainly the buzzword, but AI is nothing without HI.

To what extent does ESG reporting fall in your remit?

We have a dedicated ESG team who work across all of Gamma, across all regulations and across all of our activities and, as a leadership team, we have group wide and individual ESG objectives. As the procurement function is under my remit, I am fully engaged in ensuring our suppliers support us in our Scope 3 emission targets. We also work closely with the ESG team on our TCFD (Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures) reporting requirements which will be in this year's annual report.

What trends are you seeing in the market that interest you most?

The rate of change as technology and communication converges and new technologies coming to the market. The obvious one is AI, but Covid also accelerated the use of technology across many industries, including comms. Some of these technologies we will adopt and use within finance. In respect to wider Gamma, it comes back to capital allocation, organic and inorganic, and working alongside the board and fellow executives to ensure Gamma, along with partners and suppliers, rides the technology waves fast emerging on the horizon – including the 2025 PSTN switch-off.

How do you balance competing priorities?

Balancing priorities is key in all roles as there will always be a scarcity of some sort that needs to be managed. The one that usually gets the most focus is funding, but often the scarce factors are time and resource. Balance is about having the right decision making framework so you can flow down from your key strategic priorities. On a personal note, I use a framework called the 5Fs which I created after an intense period working at Goldmans. It ensures I have balance across Family, Friends, Fitness (mental and physical), Freedom (financial and thought) and Fulfilment.

What are today's primary leadership priorities?

On a macro level I believe in responsible capitalism.

There have been too many examples in the last 20 years of irresponsible capitalism. Having been in financial services through the financial crisis and in the energy sector during the recent energy crisis, I feel passionately on the subject. You could say that compassionate capitalism has never been more important. I am a NED on the Financial Ombudsman Service as well as the Whitgift Foundation which helps provide me with perspective.

What is your biggest career achievement?

The greatest career choice was going to Deloitte as I met my wife there. Biggest achievement, probably my first real large team leadership role when I became Managing Director at Barclays. I was relatively young at 32 and took on a role as MD of Operations for Barclays Western Europe and had 500 people in my team. It was a very steep learning curve.

In hindsight...

I would have been more patient and balanced. In my career and everyday job, I have always been in a rush and actually I have found being reflective and patient often results in a more balanced and better outcome.

If you could transform any area of the ICT industry what would it be?

There are structural issues in the world of infrastructure and overbuild from altnets. At Goldmans I remember the demise of Telewest and NTL and it looks like we have not learnt our lessons. Competition is a good thing but the level of overbuild must be inefficient for the country. On a wider point,

regulation is a tough one but with social media and now AI I do think there is a need for more of a collective debate and some tough decisions to ensure our children are net beneficiaries of the future rather than some of the negative externalities I am seeing today.

Role model

Deanna Oppenheimer: One of my bosses at Barclays, who has had and continues to have an amazing career in financial services. Her style of leadership, customer centricity as well as her ability to get to the top of the career ladder in what was a male dominated industry is hugely impressive.

What talent do you wish you had?

The superpower of flight, but in the real world it would be a musical talent. I am amazed by my wife and children who play multi-instruments.

What do you fear the most?

I still have a fear of failure, but as I fail more and come out the other side this is getting easier.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know

I became a British Army Officer just after my 18th birthday. I played schoolboy rugby and football against Jonny Wilkinson and Frank Lampard. I was not on the winning sides!

What's the biggest risk you have taken?

From a corporate perspective it was some of the decisions made during the energy crisis. Fortunately, I got them right and, within acceptable risk appetites, we were long not short on commodity when prices spiked.

What motivates you the most?

Making a difference. I am an extrovert by nature, so am motivated by people and interaction, by challenges and by working as a team to improve things so as to leave a positive legacy.

Name three ideal dinner guests (past or present)

My paternal grandfather, I never met him and it would be great to hear his life stories; Winston Churchill, I am fascinated by history and politics; and Cleopatra to have a first-hand conversation about a different civilisation.

What are your main strengths and what could you work on?

I have an ability to get things done, lead the team into execution and action, look at numbers and spot the trends, make decisions, and I have broad experience. But I need to work on being patient, listen more and reflect.

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing?

Teaching. I am a school governor and passionate about history, politics, economics and geography. I recently gave a talk to 300 Year 11 female students at a high school in Manchester. I presented for 25 minutes and then answered questions for 40 minutes. The students' aspirations, energy and openness to the world was inspiring and made it the best workday I have had all year.

How do you relax when not working?

Time with my family. And I took up padel tennis two years ago. I must always have a challenge so just did my first Triathlon, and looking for the next thing. ∎

Backing British technology

Michael Lloyd, industry stalwart, straight talker and CEO of Nuvola Distribution explains why he's backing British by partnering with UK based technology vendor, eve Networks.

Michael talks UK tech trends, the significance of Teams and why the channel is booming.

Michael Lloyd

Steve Barclay

Nuvola Distribution recently announced their appointment as a distributor of eve Voice and eve Connect, the hosted voice and connectivity solutions from eve Networks.

This powerful partnership allows Nuvola's channel partners to offer a truly British Unified Communications solution to their customers.

What's better? Nuvola is celebrating the partnership and backing British by fixing eve Voice pricing, for 12 months.

Why back British?
Michael states "Signing up eve Networks is exciting for us, as they're such a different vendor. I know that them being a British-based organisation will appeal to many of our partners.

The tech industry is inherently global. While we're incredibly proud to work with our international vendors, I'm pleased to introduce a pure UK brand into the mix.

Non-British tech companies see the UK as a perfect base for expanding their operations across Europe, but it's important for us to back British brands to win too.

British vendors like eve Networks help us, as an industry, to protect and develop the incredible tech talent our country is known for the world over.

The global tech industry is notoriously competitive and dynamic. The UK plays a major role on that world stage, as a central tech hub.

Adding eve Networks to our offering gives our channel partners the option to back British, while retaining the choice they have today through our wider vendor portfolio".

Our British vendor, eve Networks
Led by Cityfibre alumni, Steve Barclay, eve Networks provides eve Voice, their cloud-based phone system and eve Connect, their range of connectivity solutions, designed to be intuitive to use and simple to sell. They're the people who are all about 'exceptional voice everywhere.'

With SIP, Teams Direct Routing and a range of collaboration solutions, their entire focus is on helping businesses streamline their communication infrastructure, improve collaboration, and adapt to the evolving demands of the digital age.

Michael says "Despite industry wide price increases, inflation and general cost of living challenges, new Nuvola partners will make huge savings, and increase the margin they make from hosted voice sales".

Steve Barclay has praised Nuvola Distribution's forward-

thinking and service-focused approach, emphasising the compatibility between the two organisations.

"We're extremely pleased and proud that eve Voice has been selected to help Nuvola deliver value to resellers across the UK. Nuvola has an impressive reach, with a significant, established partner community and a very active approach to attracting new resellers to do business with. Their energy, commitment, and ambition make Nuvola a perfect fit.

Together with Michael and his team, the team at eve Networks and I are committed to meeting the evolving needs of our channel, extending Nuvola's market reach, and helping more end users connect and communicate with eve Voice."

What's the outlook for the UK ICT market?
Michael states "The UK's ICT market is the largest and arguably the most dynamic in Europe - in fact, the UK represents around a fifth of the total European ICT market.

The market's growth has been driven by increasing digitalisation and the adoption of emerging technologies. The future market opportunity is huge and analysts predict further growth over the next five years.

The sector within ICT that's expected to make up the largest share of that value? Telecommunications".

Teams and other trending tech
"The big trends right now include the adoption of AI and mobile technology, the growth of fintech, the expansion of e-commerce and digital services, plus the focus on sustainability and green technologies. The future for our channel is bright.

Tools that support collaborative working and that give people the freedom and security to work from anywhere have been trending since the world changed back in 2020, and that's not going away. That's a big part of the reason why we're focussing on Teams integration, and Teams Direct Routing".

When you integrate Teams with eve Voice, or another solution, you open up a whole new solution to add to your portfolio. Michael says "we're proud to be the 'go to Teams distributor'. We help channel partners integrate the Microsoft Teams platform into various solutions. Even those with little experience can handle this with ease, with support from our Professional Services team".

eve Voice presents a platform for customers to make Teams voice calls over the eve network and provides them with better call quality.

Direct Routing also allows Teams users to make calls from Teams to numbers outside of their organisation. This can mean mobile, landline and international numbers.

A very British event
Nuvola is inviting channel partners to join them at one of the UK's most significant venues, Bletchley Park.

Their chosen venue holds immense historical significance as the central site for British codebreakers during World War II.

This historical backdrop will add unique and very British context to their channel partner event, which will be hosted on 23rd November 2023.

The event will include presentations from eve Networks, 8x8, ALE, CC4ALL, Sangoma, Snom, Spectralink, Sycope, Yealink, a special guest speaker from Microsoft Teams, with an exclusive viewing of an original Enigma machine.

If you're interested in attending Nuvola's event, please register your interest by emailing **sales@ nuvoladistributon.com**.

Note that all places are subject to availability and will be approved at the discretion of the Nuvola Distribution Executive Board.

Make more, with eve Voice

Nuvola celebrates eve Networks partnership with
exceptional pricing for eve Voice, fixed for 12 months.

eve voice

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Five minutes with...

Carl Barnett, Chief Executive Officer, Global 4

Our 2023 Comms National Awards Reseller of the Year winner Global 4 also bagged the Best Enterprise Vertical Market Customer Solution and Reseller Business Transformation gongs to complete a memorable hat-trick of awards. Here, CEO Carl Barnett shares insights into his winning formula.

What does winning the Comms National Awards Reseller of the Year crown mean to the business? This was a huge achievement. It demonstrates that all of the small wins, the attention to detail, the putting our customers first, and the focus on maintaining our 5 star Trustpilot reviews is recognised. As part of developing our brand we revisited our core proposition. We looked at what makes us tick, what differentiates us and we came up with four core values – We Love Tech, Exceptional Service, Work Hard Play Hard and Grow Together. The Comms National award proves that we live all of those values to the full.

Carl Barnett

Every business can take one or more of our products. The opportunity to grow is massive

When was Global 4 established?
Global 4 is a family company and began 25 years ago when my dad, and founder Nigel Barnett, set up a telephony business from his garage. He secured a number of customers across multiple verticals but especially gained an early foothold in the estate agency market, which remains a key strength to this day. A management buyout in 2023 saw 'Communications' removed from the brand name as Global 4 transitioned into its next phase of growth with me at the helm as CEO.

What was the rationale behind the MBO?
The MBO was all about growth. In parallel with Global 4 as a B2B brand, our B2C business Telecom Acquisitions required the same level of focus to maximise its potential. The decision was therefore made to split the businesses with me taking control of Global 4, enabling Nigel to focus on growing Telecom Acquisitions.

What is your biggest opportunity?
When we talk about market sizing we are in a fortunate situation as every single business can take one or more of our products. The opportunity to grow is massive.

Which new technology areas are on your radar screen?
AI is a big area for us as we look to improve our customer experience. We have an internal work stream developing propositions and onboarding suppliers where AI can improve the solutions we offer to the market. Our role is to stay one step ahead and act as customers' trusted partner to advise, guide, and future proof the technology in their business.

What are today's comms sector leadership priorities?
For us they sit around continual growth whether through acquisitions or organically via the cross sell and upsell model, while maintaining the culture of the company. We are acutely aware that as teams get bigger we don't want to lose the fundamentals that have got us to where we are today.

Where do you see Global 4 in three to five years time?
Our goal is to achieve triple growth through a mix of acquisitions and organic activity. Ongoing development of the team is vital to ensure everyone is on the same path and being provided with growth opportunities.

In hindsight, what would you have done differently?
We would have transitioned to a recurring revenue model faster and embraced new technology earlier.

Industry bugbear?
The race to the bottom. It's vital to keep value in the market.

How did you get into comms?
Straight out of school I wanted to get into the working world at Global 4 and start earning money. Sales has always been my passion and I learnt my trade by watching closely and taking note. Then, working my way through the ranks enabled me to gain a clear understanding of every facet of the organisation. This

Collaboration Lab

Team Global 4 celebrate winning the Reseller Business Transformation award

Winning the Comms National Awards Reseller of the Year accolade demonstrates that all of the small wins, the attention to detail, the putting our customers first and maintaining our 5 star Trustpilot score is recognised

gave me insight into all the challenges my teams face.

Role model
My dad, Nigel. What he has achieved is outstanding. His drive and determination to build a business and continually grow is a testament to the work ethic he has taught me. If I can be half the businessman he is I will be delighted.

What talent do you wish you had?
To be a better golfer.

What do you fear the most?
Needles and heights.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know
I have run the London marathon.

Name three ideal dinner guests
Tiger Woods, a legend who could give me tips to improve my handicap; Boris Johnson for his stories and

views on the decisions he's made; and Paul Gascoigne, he knows how to party!

Your main strength?
I can empower my teams, lead from the front and I'm ambitious for everyone in the business to achieve their professional and personal goals. I want everyone to feel they have the ability to run their own agenda and deliver in their style while all driving towards the same goal.

Best piece of advice you have been given?
Know what the exit looks like, and work back from there. Planning takes the emotion out of decision making.

One example of something you've overcome
Covid was one of the biggest challenges any business leader has had to overcome. The rules, the uncertainty, keeping everyone safe, understanding everyone's views, all while

growing a business with customers needing to adapt and make changes to the way they did business.

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?
A professional golfer. But in reality, some sort of sales role.

What's the biggest risk you have taken?
The management buyout of Global 4 still sometimes feels like a big risk. It obviously comes with additional responsibility but we have a belief that we can succeed. With the right team, anything is possible. I took the risk because I believe we can make a difference, that we have the right proposition, the right team and the right culture to grow.

How do you relax when not working?
Time at home with the family. I am a lucky to have three awesome children and we love a holiday. I try to do that as often as possible. ∎

Why carbon accountability is a 'win win' opportunity

Developing an effective environmental sustainability strategy has become a critical component in today's evolving business world.

As well as caring for the planet it can also lead to bigger sales opportunities in a win-win scenario.

But choosing the right pathway to 'go green' can be a tricky process for some organisations and their workforces – to maximise impact and inspire, rather than restrict growth.

As a forward-thinking global collaboration provider, Evolve IP EMEA is determined to be a leader where sustainability is not just a force for global good, but a commercial differentiator that marks an enterprise out as culturally aware and socially responsible.

In today's increasingly competitive world, companies must often prove their green credentials in order to win new business, including demonstrating that they partner with other organisations that share the same commitments and ethos.

As a channel, we already hold a 'trump card' since the technology we sell contributes massively to reducing emissions from travel and energy consumption. But clearly, we need to go much further and address the impact we all play throughout the supply chain, individually as well as collectively.

For technology providers and their partners, the opportunities to turn a strategic sustainability strategy into a win-win for both them and their customers are almost limitless. So how can you take bigger strides forward? Our EMEA division has just entered its second year of an ambitious programme aimed at carbon accountability.

Significant Value
We believe having a Corporate

Carbon Footprint scheme is not only the responsible thing to do, it can also add significant value to your own brand and the brands of those organisations with which you partner – we are only just getting started but it already feels like we are making a difference.

As well as demonstrating our own green credentials, our programme also benefits our resellers by awarding them a certificate which shows they partner with an organisation committed to sustainability.

Internally, the programme has a lot of support. Colleagues at all levels want to help the environment and are happy that they now work for an organisation that takes the same view. It means the programme is also contributing positively to our workplace culture and has positive implications for talent acquisition and retention.

Evolve IP (EMEA) has also begun creating the next phase – offering its reselling partners and vendors access to our sustainability programme so they can benefit too. We are all part of the same journey!

Carbon Emissions
Evolve IP EMEA partners can take advantage of expert support from our climate action partners, and measure their own carbon emissions - taking the first steps in becoming carbon accountable.

We recognise, for some it's a journey you may not have considered taking but it provides a host of key benefits – certification, brand value, and employee buy-in. We want to work with our partners for the good of everyone and the world we all live in.

To learn more about how Evolve IP (EMEA) is taking accountability for their emissions visit **www. evolveip.net/en-gb/ sustainability**

Customer mindset must be front of mind to supercharge growth

From navigating a global pandemic to supply chain issues and a skills shortage, the channel has faced a number of challenges in recent years. Despite this, channel partners remain optimistic, open-minded and determined to weather the storm. With the channel set to take a lion's share of the global IT channel market this year, businesses of all sizes are keen to reap the rewards.

BT carried out research with 300 business decision makers to get to the heart of what is important for customers. We believe that by better understanding end-users' priorities and challenges, we can help partners seize the selling opportunity and supercharge success.

How channel partners can provide value

It's no surprise that the research shows that the number one priority for UK businesses in today's economic climate is cost control – especially for SMEs. Our partners must therefore consider how to help their customers minimise costs and keep in mind commercial flexibility at all times. Ultimately, no company wants to be burdened with products it can't sell or be tied into inescapable long-term fixed costs.

The main driver of business customer satisfaction is value. It's a combination of value for money and reliable technology, underpinned by tech expertise and customer service, and marketing crucially unlocks this dialogue between customers and partners.

Thea Tanner
Commercial and Propositions Director
BT Wholesale

It's clear that end-users are looking for support, and that alongside flexibility, commercial transparency is central to this. Whether it's understanding budget priorities to identifying ROI and business risks, customers are keen to get one step ahead of the channel landscape. It's suggested that industry jargon can often act as a barrier to understanding investment, so our partners need to break down business.

The move to all-IP adds a new layer to the conversation between channel partners and their customers too; many businesses are looking for specific PSTN guidance, particularly now the national stop sell has come into force.

Putting value – the overall service beyond just a cheap price – at the helm, ensures that channel partners can navigate the vast ocean of business challenges, always stay on course and reach a destination of business satisfaction.

Mobile is more essential than ever

The survey found that digital investment is high on the agenda by most organisations. Technology is key to business operations and strategy, and is seen as critical to business success, which resulted in respondents outlining clear investment priorities. There is so much room for spending – but only if you can prove the technology's value.

Mobile connectivity was a clear winner, followed by cybersecurity, digital phone lines, and broadband. Three in five British business owners consider their mobile phone to be the most essential item when it comes to running their company – even over their laptop. So, capitalising on the mobile connectivity opportunity is wise as its role is cemented in the future of work.

This is the reason behind BT Wholesale's launch of Complete Mobile. Enabling access to EE's 4G and 5G network – the best mobile network in the UK[1] for ten years running – Complete Mobile marks the first time EE Mobile SIMs have been available to enterprise resellers via a direct channel model.

All-IP is here to stay

Three in ten respondents to the survey see a move to IP solutions as an immediate priority, noting simplicity, speed, flexibility and reliability as the key business drivers. What's more, the expected timeline for the transition is largely positive. One in eight said their business had already migrated, five percent said it was underway, and two thirds planned to migrate within the next 12 months. However, to remain competitive and maximise the rewards, channel partners should look to accelerate this.

With the 2025 PSTN switch-off edging closer, now is the time for channel partners to check in with customers, learn about their evolving portfolio and put customer satisfaction first. Education is an important piece of the puzzle too; where the move to IP solutions isn't a priority, partners can take control of the situation and educate and inspire their customers to its benefits and potential.

To succeed in the all-IP marketplace and make the most of opportunities, we recognise that BT Wholesale needs to ensure solutions are seamless and our technical expertise is continually growing. Together we really do mean business, and that's why we wanted to get to the heart of what UK businesses need.

Our full report is extensive, with many valuable insights into the risks and opportunities for your business and customers. If you are already a member of Partner Plus, our team can take you through the data in depth to help you understand how to boost your sales, marketing and business development. Email **partner.plus@bt.com** to set up a meeting.

If you are not a member of Partner Plus, you can read the full report and get access to other exclusive benefits by signing up at **btwholesale.com/join**.

BT WHOLESALE

ND and the bottom line

Neurodiversity champion Julie Mills, CEO of Support to Win, discusses how ND appeals to the all important profit motive as well as business leaders' sense of doing what's right.

Nothing quite matches that feeling of awesome responsibility, knowing there are peoples' livelihoods and mortgages resting on the decisions you make as a leadership team. It's what comes to mind wherever I hear people talking about 'purpose versus profit'. To that I say unashamedly that making money is the primary responsibility for board members and executive leaders. After all, profits fuel growth and stability for thousands in our industry. So where does neurodiversity inclusion fit into the equation? Good question. Such a good question in fact that all businesses should be asking it. Specifically, does ND inclusion in the workplace make business sense? If you did go for it, would it be worth the time and effort?

Raising a son with autism, I can say that ND is personal for me. It's why I'm so passionate about it and would want to pursue it no matter the cost. But Tamsin, my business partner and Managing Director at STW, doesn't have that same background. Compassionate, yes. Committed to equality, of course. But not personally invested in dismantling the unfair treatment of neurodiversity like me.

When it came to making the decision, I couldn't expect her to blindly support the idea
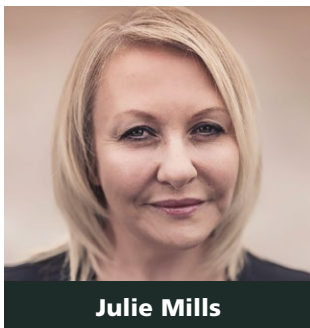
Julie Mills

of becoming an ND-inclusive workplace. I'm sure other management teams are very similar – some being led by their hearts, others by their heads – and everyone being equally accountable to business priorities.

There were downsides and risks: It would take time and focus away when we were already rushed off our feet. It would be a leap into the unknown because, frankly, back then we had no idea what it could mean in reality. And we weren't being compelled to change anything... there are no laws saying we had to do this, nor a groundswell of public opinion making pariahs out of companies that aren't on the ND bandwagon.

As Tam explains, two things fired her up to make our business a beacon for neurodiversity. "The first was a colleague's mental health crisis related to his undiagnosed and untreated issues around ADHD," she said. "The way we had him working made it worse. Seeing the link between ND and mental health was a

real eye opener, as was the realisation that we could do something about it.

"The second was finding out that only seven per cent of ND people are in full-time employment. What a waste! But also, what an opportunity! I did my own research and found that comparatively small adjustments to working practices can fully unlock that capability. And when we tried it on a small scale, we saw people going from being unhappy, unmotivated and contributing little, to becoming hugely motivated with far better mental health and knocking it out of the park workwise."

Get your leadership team onto the same page and you'll grow to realise what you stand to gain as a business from ND inclusion. For example, being based in the south east, we have found recruitment tough in the past. Now, we've massively increased the pool of talent we can potentially bring onboard. Plus, we're delivering great work, gaining productivity, efficiency, quality and accuracy since we started on our ND journey earlier this year.

It is a fact that neurodiversity brings bottom line benefits. You really can be passionate about righting wrongs and resetting inequalities, while also sticking to your business instincts. ∎

ND AND ME:
By Georgia Gray, Migrations Specialist, Support to Win

Georgia Gray

Before joining Support to Win, I had never felt comfortable talking about my autism and ADD at work. Neurodiversity is never openly discussed, and if it is then you get judged for having something wrong with you. Managers generally have no idea how to cope and don't have the tools to get the best out of you. I found it isolating and exhausting, and it really took a toll on my mental health.

When I joined Support to Win on the 1st of February, my approach was the same, to keep it under wraps. But within a week, we were sat in a meeting and CEO Julie Mills announced that the company would be committing itself to embracing neurodiversity. I burst out crying. The relief was extraordinary. Ever since that first week it's been such a supportive environment and I've been given tools I can use to be as effective as possible.

For example, I often struggle with focus and prioritisation, so we have short regular check-ins. And the big game-changer is my priority squares – a visual tool for agreeing

which tasks to focus on next. It's so helpful. In my role I feel like I'm challenged every day, doing something different, which is great brain training. And it led me to being recognised by my colleagues with a Special Achievement Award. I contrast that with previous jobs where I've been pigeon-holed as 'difficult', had my opportunities to do new things limited, and ended up being given the same tasks day in day out.

Neurodiversity is not a feared topic to talk about, and we even joke about it at Support to Win. For example, we did a quiz about some of the things people have done to mask their neurodiversity in public, which was very funny. It would be nice if other companies were happy to talk about neurodiversity like this, especially at the interview stage.

It's been a liberating experience and I'm much happier being open about neurodiversity. In the past, work was very much about worry and just getting through the day without being caught out. Now I can see a longer-term future in a professional career. ∎

Capitalise on the cloud opportunity

Why now is the right time to embrace cloud solutions and find the right partner to transition with.

With the switch-off around the corner, there is a lot of change happening within the channel community. However, with change comes opportunity. Now is the best time for channel partners to offer more to customers with exciting new technologies and real digital transformation.

"We're obsessed with being easy to do business with. This is why our platform offers end-to-end integration through a robust API and easy to understand, static pricing."

Ryan Martin
Indirect Sales Manager
ANS

Ryan Martin

As the digital landscape continues to evolve, businesses have no choice but to adapt and embrace modern technologies.

"Whilst majority of the focus has been centered around transitioning customers' broadband services, at ANS we believe that digital transformation is more than just better broadband. It's what better connectivity enables that opens the door for real digital transformation." Said Ryan Martin, Indirect Sales Manager at ANS.

With all the pivoting in the market, there's a lot of uncertainty from an infrastructure layer. Many within the channel are seeking to make the transition from fixed line connectivity and telephony to cloud-based services and are looking for a partner that can help them on that transition pathway.

"There's a fantastic opportunity to do the full digital transformation for your customers, make them sticky and improve business. ANS is a cloud first organisation – we're building on 25 years'

experience of making cloud simple for our partners and their customers. What we're bringing to channel is what is fundamentally at our core; cloud, digital, and security." Martin

Launched July this year, ANS' eCloud platform is the only Sovereign accredited cloud platform available in the channel. ANS eCloud utilises their enterprise-grade UK based data centres and infrastructure to deliver a true public cloud experience without the need for advanced expertise.

"We're obsessed with being easy to do business with. This is why our platform offers end-to-end integration through a robust API and easy to understand, static pricing to provide a simplified experience for channel partners and their customers" said Martin.

"We've seen an incredible uptake with our Dynamics and CRM Rescue offering, where we can help resellers accelerate their customer's digital transformation with Dynamics 365 and secure their customer relationships."

When transitioning into

this new digital world, your customers will become increasingly aware of security as a key priority and will lean heavily on a trusted partner to advise and implement a security solution across their estate.

"As you embrace digital transformation, prioritise working with security experts to ensure you and your customers are always protected. We're excited that our next launch will be our security offering. We have the highest level of threat monitoring and protection, that is simple, affordable, and deployed rapidly that resellers can tap into."

Partners need to explore cloud solutions which offer scalability, flexibility, and advanced features. Cloud solutions can streamline communication processes and support digital transformation initiatives.

"Companies are migrating swiftly to the cloud for overwhelming reasons, including cost, scalability, and ease of maintenance. Now

is the time to be offering your customers more. Our channel offerings make reselling cloud, security, and digital services easy."

With simple commercial models, flexibility, ownership, and control; ANS have solutions for all business needs, whether it's a customer looking to start their cloud journey with our own ANS eCloud offering or a customer looking to transition into Azure/AWS or deploy Dynamics CRM.

"We provide our partners with the best marketing and sales support to help them grow. From cheat sheets to full white labelled toolkits and more. We have an incredible team of over 30 pre-sales as well as five MVPs – our team of experts are on hand for anything they need" said Martin.

The switch-off presents a critical juncture to embark on a transformative journey. Businesses in the channel need to be ready with the right technologies to thrive on this change and

unlock the potential for improved experiences and enhanced collaboration.

"Launching our cloud services to channel resellers comes at a pivotal point in ANS's journey. With several exciting product launches on the horizon, our partners need a scalable, easy to use, and flexible way to deploy services to their customers and generate a sticky revenue stream." Martin

ANS works with an ecosystem of tech partners such as Microsoft (Gold Partner), AWS, VMWare, Intel, Cisco and more to bring the biggest and best cloud solutions to their partner base. Resellers can provision cloud and digital services in minutes without delay.

At ANS, we are committed to delivering digital transformation to all and supercharging our channel partners to achieve this. Interested in reselling cloud to your customers? Get in touch with our friendly team today at **www.ans.co.uk/channel/reseller**

Merger spurs FullFibre

Following FullFibre's merger with fellow Basalt-backed Digital Infrastructure, CEO Oliver Helm says the increased footprint will provide an advantage to channel partners. Helm's short-term priority is to combine the two networks (with a joint footprint of 270,000 live premises) and create a single wholesale platform available for ISPs to sell on from Q4 this year. "Combing networks brings competitive advantages for us," said Helm. "The greater scale of our footprint means we'll have significantly better routes to market for our partner ISPs."

With a combined build rate of up to 40,000 new ready for service premises per month, and 67 towns in build or nearing completion, Helm has doubled FullFibre's ambitions to deliver 500,000 live premises by the end of 2025 to one million. This will predominantly target more rural

Oliver Helm

build locations that join up FullFibre's existing footprint in rural towns and villages. Helm says that part of the altnet's ethos has always been to lessen the digital divide by addressing typically digitally underserved areas.

Urban coverage will come from the addition of Digital Infrastructure's footprint, and according to Helm, the two networks have no UPRN overlap. "Our wholesale footprints are highly complementary," he added. "So there's no crossover, only a large contiguous footprint for ISPs to sell on."

Best practices

As well as combining physical footprints, the merger provides the opportunity for Helm to blend best practices and efficiencies from both teams. He acknowledges that this process will not be completed overnight. "Any merger comes with inherent challenges, especially when it comes to reinforcing the people aspects," he commented. "The rest is highly technical but can be managed well with planning."

In the longer term, this will help Helm put a sharper focus on continuing the company's trajectory towards an EBITDA positive business. He will specifically focus on using the larger network to continue attracting and offering value to communications providers to drive penetration.

As the third major PE-led merger in the fibre sector this year, the deal indicates that the starting gun has been fired for consolidation in the fibre space. With over 100 altnets in the market at the start of this year, 2023 always looked like the year that would see rationalisation kick off. And the rise in interest rates increased the trend for this process to happen sooner rather than later.

Helm noted: "It's the only rational move for the market, whether that's through opportunity or necessity. We are lucky to be able to do this out of opportunity rather than need, because it's a good strategic move for both businesses." ∎
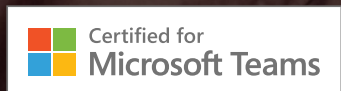
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Bryce on cloud strategy

Node4 began its cloud journey far early than most and continues to work at the forefront of digital transformation, according to Managing Director Paul Bryce.

Paul Bryce

We are refining our channel portfolio to make it sharper and more targeted

Cloud is the driving force behind digital transformation and partner success hinges firmly on aligning customer strategy with current cloud technology trends and capabilities, according to Bryce. "Organisations have come to understand the importance of not merely adopting the latest technology but ensuring its relevance and alignment with key objectives," he stated. "The cloud-first approach, for instance, has often been likened to putting the cart before the horse, but it's essential for organisations to first comprehend their objectives and then determine how technology, like cloud services, can be leveraged," he added. "Similarly, while AI stands out as a major trend its adoption must align with an organisation's broader vision.

"Our job is to facilitate these tech-enabled outcomes, ensuring that tech solutions deliver on organisational goals. Furthermore, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors are gaining prominence in boardroom discussions and the focus is also on how technology can be applied to address these concerns."

Node4 launched in 2004 with a team of three working out of an office in Derby. It had a strong emphasis on network capabilities and as its reputation grew so did demand for its UK-based data centres. Subsequently, a shift towards the as-a-service model led the business into the realm of cloud offerings. "The vision was to deliver cloud, but no one called it cloud at the time," stated Bryce. "It was hosted applications. Today, we are supporting private and public sector organisations across the UK to deliver positive outcomes through our portfolio of fully managed services."

Formula for success

Node4 currently employs circa 1,150 people serving 1,800 clients from 15 locations in the UK and internationally, and has a turnover in excess of £200 million. It owns its own network of data centres, points of presence and operates what it says is best-in-class integrated tooling. "Our philosophy emphasises ownership and control, which is why we have built our own data centres, networks and infrastructure to underpin cloud services," added Bryce.

Scaling the business has been achieved through a blend of organic growth and strategic acquisitions, with 10 made to date. "Our acquisition strategy is holistic," stated Bryce. "It's not just about financial alignment but also ensuring a like-minded approach, shared values and culture. This often involves acquiring skill sets, innovative technologies or access to fresh customer segments, but always pursued with the integration of like-minded teams as a priority. This underlying ethos has been a catalyst for our acquisitions.

"We understand that every organisation has distinct objectives and many of our clients want to work with an integrated and reliable tech partner. This informs the strategic choices we make. We also place high value on our partner community. We've been working hard behind the scenes to rejuvenate our channel programme, including bringing in a new leader and launching a new channel website later this year. We are also refining our channel portfolio to make it sharper and more targeted, including engaging with partners to equip them with the tools and resources to solidify their positions as trusted tech providers."

Another of Node4's focus areas is its security offering, supported by the recent acquisition of ThreeTwoFour, a specialist in information security and technology risk. "While Node4 already had security offerings with its own SOC, we identified the need for a deeper investment in this area," commented Bryce. "ThreeTwoFour bridged a specific gap, particularly in consultancy and investigative professional services, enabling us to advance in these areas." ∎

CMA investigates public

High fees for transferring data, committed spend discounts and technical restrictions are blocking many businesses from switching cloud provider or using multiple CSPs, according to a UK cloud market study by Ofcom. Left unchecked, the regulator says competition will deteriorate in this critical space, prompting it to refer the public cloud infrastructure services market to the Competition and Markets Authority. Here, comms channel experts provide a mix of reactions to a move that ultimately underscores the customer advantages offered by MSPs.

It was in October 2022 that Ofcom launched a study under the Enterprise Act 2002 into cloud services in the UK to assess how well this market is working, and published its interim findings in April this year. "Some businesses told us they're concerned about it being too difficult to switch or mix and match cloud provider, and it's not clear that competition is working well," commented Fergal Farragher, Ofcom's Director responsible for the market study. "So we're referring the market to the CMA for further scrutiny, aiming to identify any potential competition concerns early to prevent them becoming embedded as the market matures."

Farragher pointed out that there are two leading providers of cloud infrastructure services in the UK – Amazon Web Services (AWS) and Microsoft – which had a combined market share of 70 to 80 per cent in 2022. Google is their closest competitor with a share of five to 10 per cent. Not surprisingly, eve Networks Managing Director Steve Barclay says Ofcom's move has come not a moment too soon. "It's been infuriating to observe such incredible market growth in a space without control, or recognition that it needs to be controlled," he stated. "The fact that over 80 per cent of the cloud market is dominated by two players shows that there's a need for change. Every market needs effective competition, otherwise it becomes distorted by extreme pricing and lack of choice. In these scenarios customers take the hit."

Price gouging and lock-in strategies that make it difficult for businesses to migrate to an alternative solution inevitably creates a walled garden, noted Barclay. "When customers find themselves trapped in a situation where they are forced to commercially 'just make it work', it feels wrong. In fact, it feels unethical," he added. "Ultimately, the CMA is responsible for promoting fair competition and ensuring the cloud market functions effectively for the benefit of customers, businesses and the wider economy."

Steve Barclay

It's been infuriating to observe such incredible market growth in a space without control, or recognition that it needs to be controlled, until now

Despite the current state of the UK cloud market Barclay pointed to a 'surprising number' of smaller cloud providers doing an 'impressive job'. "While a review should have happened long before now, there's still plenty of opportunity and a place for alternative cloud providers," commented Barclay. "Inevitably, there are scenarios where a hybrid environment is best for the customer. A specialist cloud provider may have the flexibility to approach a customer's need with creativity, as opposed to offering a homogenised solution. The whole concept of cloud is about flexibility and adaptability. Creating market environments where that doesn't work is anti-competitive."

It almost goes without saying that standardisation around cloud switching gives customers freedom to choose their cloud provider, while promoting competition among suppliers. And Vapour CEO Tim Mercer also welcomes efforts to develop choice in the market, but he says it would be naive to think there will be a quick and easy remedy. "I can't help but worry that this is a paper exercise to try and show willing, without an outcome expected," he said. "The boundaries should have been set much earlier. Now, a colossal degree of change would be required to shake up the market. However,

cloud market

the conversation is getting louder, and it's up to people like us to keep it going."

Mercer agrees that competition in the cloud space is not working, especially with smaller players unable to compete on price. "Smaller cloud providers win and retain work based on service levels and the quality of support offered, providing a high level of technical expertise that clients can tap into, without the shackles of dealing with a much larger organisation," he stated. "However, in a market dominated by price it's hard for them to stick their head above the parapet and get noticed. The voice of the hyperscalers – particularly AWS and Microsoft – dominates the media so the go-to route to market is almost pre-determined. People in the cloud space are communicating hard to open up the playing field, but it isn't easy."

Mercer also pointed out that the state of competition in the cloud market is nothing new and he believes that Ofcom should have conducted an investigation long before now. However, the channel has much to gain by responding quickly to the news. "We have to leverage this opportunity to empower the buyer with knowledge, especially around the hidden costs of cloud, including egress charges and the inability to move simply," he added.

That said, Mercer is a supporter of the public cloud, but he also strongly believes that an organisation's cloud requirements should be fully explored and understood before the right solution is proposed. "In many cases,
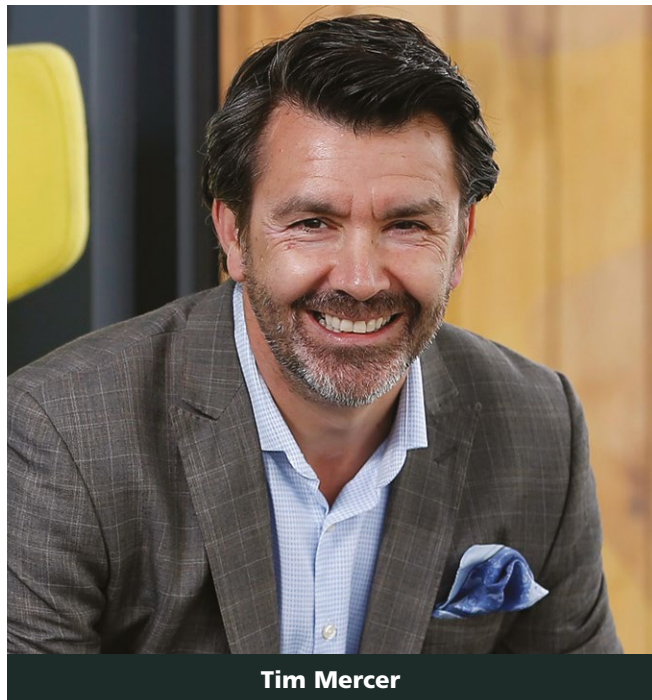
Tim Mercer

We have to leverage this opportunity to empower the buyer with knowledge, especially around the hidden costs of cloud, including egress charges and the inability to move simply

alternative cloud providers and private or hybrid solutions will represent a better fit," he stated.

Timeline barriers
Mercer also highlighted that the average CMA investigation takes 18 months, so nothing will change for some time. "Whatever the outcome, it feels like very little will happen for at least three years, and by then, the hyperscalers' share will probably have moved from 70-80 per cent to 80-90 per cent," he said.

Mercer also pointed to a potential conflict of

interests at the core of the investigation process. "The Government predominantly uses AWS and Microsoft for its own cloud services," he explained. "As part of this process, the CMA – a Government department – is now investigating the Government's own decisions to allow these two massive companies to dominate. This means that Ofcom, a Government advisory body, is investigating Government-supported companies. That will be a tricky narrative to manage."

Lee Thatcher, Head of Cloud and Innovation,

Best Practice CFO Strategies

The UC channel has been transitioning from transactional models to build monthly recurring revenue for a number of years. This is cash-hungry exercise that puts huge pressure onto the CFOs cash-flow but as the business reaches tipping point financial stability ensues. But in a post-pandemic economy can CFOs remain relaxed?

The number of registered company insolvencies in May 2023 was 40% higher than in the same month in the previous year and has doubled since the start of the first lockdown[1] . These insolvencies cause a domino effect of bad debt through the small business community.

Coupling this with 26% of businesses reporting a drop in turnover and 35% reporting increases in the prices of goods or services[2] we can start to see the requirement for stringent financial and cash-flow management.

Confidence among CFOs edged lower in the second quarter with higher than expected inflation and a sharp rise in interest rate expectations. In fact CFOs now see tight monetary policy as posing the greatest threat to their business.

CFOs rate credit as being more expensive than at any time since the end of 2008 coupled with availability of credit being harder to access than at any time since 2010.

This leads to an overwhelmingly defensive strategy stance, 55% of CFOs rate reducing costs as strong priority in the next 12 months with 46% looking

to increase cash-flow[3].

This reinforces the policy that cash-flow is an overall priority for a business. Working capital and the capital structure must be optimized. CFOs are vital in managing the capital structure and enhancing cash-flow. Getting the optimal mix of debt and equity financing alongside exploring financing alternatives is a must.

But in a period where availability of credit is the hardest it has been since the financial crisis and with rising interest rates what alternatives are available to the CFO?

Traditionally cash has been raised by selling parts of the customer base MRR, leading to a drop in turnover and operating profit as well as eroding long term shareholder value.

Invoice discounting and factoring facilities typically exclude MRR invoices, and even if an option are usually high cost with onerous security requirements.

This is where our CFO customers are using Liquid Subscriptions to accelerate cash from customer MRR; using the current assets of the business to optimise cash-flow without having to enter into expensive credit agreements or selling hard won customers.

The biggest objection we face is that the channel does not want to be seen to be in financial difficulty, our retort is that the customer CFO will take confidence in your strategic decision to ensure their services are never disrupted and always improved via their financially strong service provider.

1   Source: Insolvency Service Monthly Insolvency Statistics May 2023
2   Source: ONS Business Insights and Impact on the UK Economy
3   Source: Deloitte CFO Survey Q2 2023

Lee Thatcher

In most cases the issue is that MSPs don't want to, or don't know how to, provision their services correctly to maximise spend

Continued from page 31

Cloud CoCo, also believes that Ofcom's investigation could prove to be a 'massive opportunity' for the channel's CSPs. "Ofcom is not going to stop the growth of the big two, but this could open doors for the other players," he said. "This could shake up the channel significantly."

Thatcher also believes that the onus is on MSPs rather than the big CSPs. As such he says Ofcom does not have a strong case because MSPs can log into any of the hyperscalers and find the reserved instances price or egress tariffs, for example. "I don't think the blame lies with the hyperscalers, it's incumbent on MSPs to have the information for their customers at the front end," stated Thatcher. "In most cases the issue is that MSPs don't want to, or don't know how to, provision their services correctly to maximise spend. This aspect of the Ofcom study and the CMA investigation is aimed more at MSPs than hyperscalers, who often don't want to use the discounted rates or add in how much the egress charges are, as it affects their margins or potential to win deals. Another issue is that most MSPs only offer services around one cloud."

Bandwidth charges

Nevertheless, Chris Jackson, Chief Product and Technology Officer, Six Degrees, wasted no time in welcoming oversight from Ofcom, especially relating to bandwidth charges which he says can be a commercial disincentive to companies looking to contract with multiple cloud service providers. "Challenging the artificially high prices associated to data transfer would be another great move for the channel," noted Jackson.

But Ofcom oversight regarding technical lock-in and commercial discounting is less likely to gain traction, he believes, because as cloud maturity increases, the cloud control plane, APIs and management systems become more embedded in an organisation, which makes companies less incentivised to change providers. "As the adoption of cloud reaches saturation it is natural for the hyperscalers to make it easier to win business from each other," he said. "The ultimate goal for these providers is to provide the control plane of automation to the customer. This is where the true value and stickiness in the cloud business lies. Therefore, Ofcom and the CMA will struggle to drive any meaningful change in this space, but action on bandwidth would be welcome."

Mark Boost, CEO of cloud service provider Civo, applauds the 'bold action' taken by Ofcom. He believes that the referral to the CMA is an 'unprecedented opportunity' to make the cloud market a truly competitive space. "This means empowering any company to develop and grow cutting edge cloud services, and ensuring customers can readily move around to find the best solution to match their needs," he stated.

Chris Jackson

Ofcom and the CMA will struggle to drive any meaningful change in this space, but action on bandwidth would be welcome

Mark Boost

The price point charged on egress by hyperscalers is out of control and creates huge practical and financial obstacles for customers

"The CMA's enforcement power opens the door to wide-ranging remedies, but action will need to be a balancing act. It will be particularly important to tackle egress fees, either through significant price controls or the most ambitious choice which is to abolish them entirely. The price point charged on egress by hyperscalers is out of control and creates huge practical and financial obstacles for customers to move to another cloud provider."

According to Boost, urgent changes are also needed around how hyperscalers structure their services, if customers are to reap the benefits of simultaneously accessing multiple providers. He also advocates a review of the fairness of incentives for loyal customers. "It will be 18 months before we know the decision made by the CMA," added Boost. "But in the meantime this investigation can also act as a spur for immediate action from the industry. Emerging cloud providers are rapidly stepping up to offer an alternative way forward to the hyperscalers. This vision is founded on putting the needs of the user back at the heart of cloud computing – with transparent and predictable pricing, a streamlined experience and super-fast, reliable services across the board." ∎

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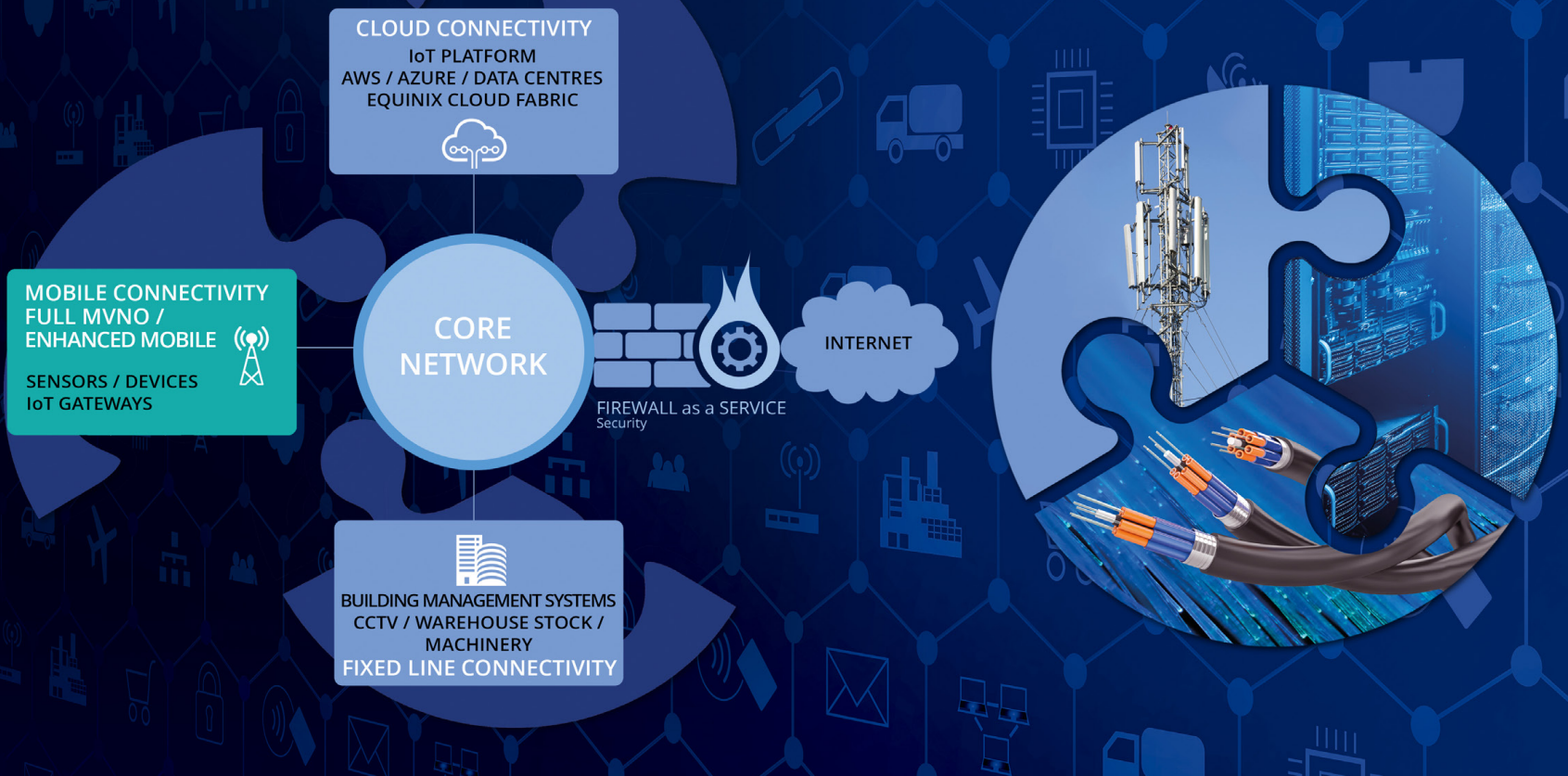
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Assessing cyber attack trer

This month we gain a deeper understanding of the security breaches hitting customer bases and their nature, and what channel players are doing to combat and contain cyber crime while establishing security strategies that provide long-term resilience.

DAVE NELSON
PRODUCT LEAD
CONNECTIVTY &
SECURITY
MAINTEL

There has been an uptick in cyber attacks over the last few years driven by the increasing sophistication of cybercriminals as organisations increase their attack surface. Phishing attacks are proving popular, and these are very convincing when targeting specific employees. Supply chain attacks aimed at compromising a supplier's system also remain a threat. Although the maturity of our customers varies widely, we are seeing more organisations recognise the importance of cyber security. It is important to establish seamless process and workflow alignment to identify and resolve issues fast. As we take care of customer connectivity, network security and cyber security, collaboration is essential. We value supporting customer to build a security strategy for long-term resilience. Being proactive in tailoring security is important.

MARK ALLEN
HEAD OF CYBER
CLOUDCOCO

We predominantly observe email-based cyber attacks, often targeting users through ongoing social engineering efforts. Our customers are showing increasing maturity as they deploy advanced security features to counter these threats effectively. At our level, we see cyber attacks continuing to rise and notice that the attacks appear in waves. Attacks often appear highly opportunistic, akin to testing every car door handle on an entire street. We're resolving issues through a proactive approach, which involves reviewing the security posture and establishing a baseline to build upon. Each organisation has a different view on risk and the damage a breach can cause, balanced with the investment in services and strategies in place to protect them. Initially, building a security strategy is highly proactive. Once the baseline is established, it shifts to a proactive, business-as-usual stance.

ROY SHELTON
CEO
CONNECTUS GROUP

Phishing attacks are the most common attacks we are seeing, preying on companies where staff are poorly trained to identify and prevent threats. Currently one in 323 emails sent globally is malicious. Also growing are physical threats to staff and employees over messaging apps and social media. We are seeing more unsuccessful attempts due to training, awareness and cyber security countermeasures. Resolving issues is expensive so prevention is better than cure. When an attack happens, more SMEs are paying the ransom as well as paying a vendor/ partner for upgrades to prevent recurrence. The right partner should implement a proactive set out countermeasures which are non-intrusive but constantly scan the threat environment to identify stolen information, including specific data breaches that company have been involved in.

NIALL TUOHY
SECURITY PRODUCT
MANAGER
VIATEL TECHNOLOGY
GROUP

In our customer base, which has a varying level of maturity, we've observed a rise in diverse cyber attacks. There has also been a rise in customer awareness of cyber attacks within their environment as they try to become more cyber ready, with a shift towards more sophisticated and targeted threats. A growing trend is Phishing and the exploitation of remote work. We tackle these problems through advanced tools for spotting threats, educating employees, and having plans for responding to incidents. Our focus is on enabling customers to become cyber resilient and prepared. We increasingly focus on proactive strategies, such as threat hunting, vulnerability assessments, and security awareness training. These are tailored to customer's unique needs. Continuous education and investment remain paramount. Adaptability and agility are also key.

PAUL CONATY
CLIENT SOLUTIONS
DIRECTOR
CWSI

Cyber attacks continue to rise among our customer base, with more variation in type. These include ransomware and sophisticated identity-based attacks, aiming to bypass MFA by stealing tokens or spamming users with notifications. There has also been a rise in data breaches which matches the current trend across the UK and EU. CWSI aims to build security strategies for long-term resilience by assessing gaps in customers' existing security architecture and providing strategic roadmaps to remediate. Many customers are looking to move their security maturity from basic identity and endpoint security to integrated visibility and management. Meanwhile, we are seeing many SMEs struggling to obtain cyber insurance. It's a double-edged sword as a lot of common attacks can be mitigated with basic security tools in place, but cyber insurance providers increasingly require that these measures are in place before providing cover.

nds through a channel lens

**HARRIET ROBBINS
PRODUCT MANAGER
GIACOM**

AI is making Phishing attacks harder to detect. Ransomware and malware defence is crucial, with recovery chances greatly improved by regular data backups and synchronisation. Zero-day exploits are rising due to evolving software and new, untested vendors. Daily threat identification by Microsoft exceeds 65 trillion and will likely grow. SMBs must fortify their cybersecurity defences, from firewalls to human risk management, and everything in-between. Hackers armed with AI create sophisticated threats, requiring comprehensive protection. MSPs should promote wrap-around services like third-party MDR for real-time threat monitoring and ensure all entry points are secure. Automation is the key to profitability while delivering third-party services. AI is a powerful cybersecurity tool, but it can become a threat in AI versus AI scenarios. Managing human risk is vital, educating colleagues and customers about emerging threats, and emphasising AI-human collaboration for optimal defence.

**RICHARD MCPHEE
SOLUTIONS
DIRECTOR
GAMMA**

Phishing attacks remain the most common type of attack for our customers and more sophisticated methods are emerging. Aside from dubious emails we're seeing smarter methods like leveraging QR codes to steal credentials. In parallel, organisations are transitioning to the cloud which enhances application accessibility and productivity, but also widens organisational security challenges. Building a Cyber Culture and awareness is crucial to help mitigate risk but that alone isn't enough. Understanding the current cyber-investment landscape is the first step any organisation should take. The next shiny tool won't help if it's not utilised correctly, or part of a rounded proactive-reactive strategy. Gamma help our customers understand what they've already bought, how to use it correctly and supplement their security teams with services like our Managed SOC to strengthen their security posture.

**ANDY SWIFT
CYBER SECURITY
ASSURANCE
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
SIX DEGREES**

As attacks tend to follow the most used technologies, we are seeing a focus on exploits against VPN endpoints. Attackers are seeking both the reward of access and a reusable route into a target. An increased threat is also coming from the Play ransomware group, who are targeting organisations using a much more manual attack pattern. These groups are taking the time to understand an environment and its valuable data. We aren't seeing volume rise so much as sophistication, for example, the growth in hybrid working has introduced a lot of attack vectors. When responding to incidents we are seeing two common failures, forwarding VPN authentication requests to a single sign in source and attack surface expansion. Questions must be asked on whether services are required to be Internet-facing, or if they are exposing more services to attack.

**STEPHEN CROW
HEAD OF DEFENCE
SECURITIES AND
COMPLIANCE
ANS**

We are seeing a rise in AiTM (Advisory in the Middle) attacks, where users, credentials, and login tokens are stolen, resulting in MFA/2FA being bypassed. This is successful due to users being susceptible to phishing attacks and can go unnoticed without the right security controls in place. We help users protect against this through implementing conditional access to ensure only trusted devices, or trusted locations, can login to emails or applications. This is underpinned by continuous security awareness training, which helps our customers prevent compromises. Outside of responding to security incidents, we proactively improve customers' resiliency by conducting a gap analysis using the National Cyber Security Centre Cyber Assessment Framework, allowing us to produce a strategy to strengthen their posture overtime through continual improvement against the indicators of good practice.

**SOHIN RAITHATHA
CEO
REDSQUID**

We have observed a relentless surge in cyber attacks marked by their increasing frequency and their growing sophistication. As for discerning trends, we have noted a shift in target industries, with the education sector and government institutions bearing the brunt of attacks, placing massive volumes of sensitive data at risk. We emphasize the importance of proactive cybersecurity strategies. While reactive measures are sometimes necessary, they stress the critical need for organizations to be prepared in advance and always be ready for the worst. In today's world, security risks can no longer be taken lightly. Cybersecurity is at the forefront of every meeting and roadmap we create, ensuring long-term resiliency for our clients.

**ADRIAN BARNARD
CRO
STAYPRIVATE**

Increasingly attacks have more in common with fraud rather than taking advantage of technical failings in the target. With cyber criminals starting to use AI tools, our customers have reported an increase in both the volume and quality of email phishing attacks. As customers move into the cloud, their cyber resiliency has improved. It's still a problem, but attacks that take advantage of out-of-date or unpatched software are reducing. We focus on keeping external emails private, reducing the company's attack surface by making it harder for cyber criminals to gain access to information that would enable a dangerous phishing attack. We believe that this trend towards criminals accessing and exploiting ever-improving AI tools will continue. It will become harder for all of us to differentiate between a fraudulent email and the genuine article.

Westcon hires CPO

Erna de Ruijter-Quist

WESTCON-Comstor's first Chief People Officer (CPO) position is to be filled by former Sage, HSBC and Sony executive Erna de Ruijter-Quist. She reports directly to CEO David Grant and moves from Sage where she led organisational redesign programmes and established strategic workforce planning capabilities. Her prior roles also include stints at Virgin Media, Liberty Global and GE Capital.

"My priorities at Westcon-Comstor include using my organisational development, organisation design and change management experience to accelerate the company's transformation as it shifts further to a software and subscription-based recurring revenue model.

"I will continue to embed a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion and drive employee engagement, implementing programmes around innovation, internal mobility and learning and development. I can't wait to make a positive impact, empowering our 3,500-plus people around the world to innovate, learn and grow."

Grant added: "Erna's passion for building great leadership teams and helping individuals, teams and organisations be their best shines through and is one of the main reasons we chose to appoint her to this important role."

Also on the move...

TD SYNNEX'S Simon Bennett is to step into the Advanced Solutions Managing Director role in December when incumbent Matt Child becomes SVP, Digital, Europe, taking over from Andy Gass who is retiring in January 2024 after a 30 year career at the company. Bennett is currently Senior Director, Enterprise Software and Cloud, UK&I. He joined TD Synnex following its 2009 acquisition of SDG where he was Internal Sales and Operations Manager. He then rose through the ranks and became Senior Director in 2019.

Simon Bennett

THE newly created Head of New Business role established by north east firm Razorblue is to be filled by George Galloway, an experienced commercial director with over 37 years working in the industry. His achievements include helping to grow a business from a £3 million to £20 million turnover with £15 million recurring revenue. In his most recent role he notched up 60 per cent revenue growth in a 12 month period. "I have an in-depth knowledge of public and private sector tender frameworks at all levels which is something I am looking forward to focusing on at Razorblue," stated Galloway. CEO Dan Kitchen added: "George brings a raft of experience to the senior leadership team as well as innovative ideas to support our sales and marketing function." Razorblue's headcount currently sits at over 180 with plans to exceed 200 over the coming year.

George Galloway

AGILITAS Chief Revenue Officer John Hayes-Warren has taken the CEO reins, bringing 30-plus years tech channel experience. He held the CRO position for the last 12 months, and his prior experiences include stints at Logicalis, Claranet and Vodafone.

RICHARD Howson aims to make a big splash in the channel following his appointment as Partner Account Manager at Evolve IP. "My role is to make a bigger impact on our partners to ensure they have everything they need to grow," he stated. "I also get the opportunity to have input into decision making."

KEVIN Dangerfield has stepped in as Nasstar's Chief Financial Officer. His prior roles include leading financial strategy for Tusker and The AA as CFO, along with stints at Virgin, Morgan Advanced Materials and Laird Technologies. Dangerfield has operated as a CFO for nearly 20 years and has been involved in three sales to, or for, private equity.

COMMS VISION CONVENTION 2023

THE NETWORK SUMMIT FOR ICT CHANNEL LEADERS

EVENT SUPPLEMENT

Comms Vision 2023: Crea

in transformational times

This year's gold standard Comms Vision conference (8th-10th November, Gleneagles) takes a multi-faceted research-led approach to unearthing why many organisations may only be scratching the surface of their competitive potential, providing critical insights into what is required to forge a long-term edge over rivals based on four key categories – Leadership, Culture, Technology and Markets, and Industry Collaboration – all of which contribute towards building an ultra-competitive business as well as a force for good.

To help chart a course forward Comms Vision will delve into the many business dynamics impacting leaders in the ICT sector today, with four Insight Sessions taking a deep dive into the findings of unique Comms Dealer research undertaken this summer around the key categories of Leadership, Culture, Technology and Markets, and Industry Collaboration – and spotlight how these vital elements combine to form a matrix for competitive development and lasting success.

Leadership: Are the right issues shaping your decision making?
Striking the right balance between leadership priorities and gaining a competitive advantage is key, and our research into Leadership sheds light on the key issues and challenges facing business execs in the channel with a particular focus on ESG (environmental, social and corporate governance), D&I (diversity and inclusion) and how they relate to the rising importance of business agility, trust, accountability and making the right decisions, as identified by our research. For the purposes of this report and our Comms Vision Leadership Insight Session we have termed these areas of focus the Fundamental Six.

In addition to underscoring the significance and interconnected nature of these six priorities, our analysis identified a number of strategic mismatches within the Fundamental Six sphere – and highlights why these anomalies are becoming increasingly critical for business leaders to address. Our Leadership survey also shows a clear sense among business leaders that agility and trust in their organisation is vital to success, and that gaining trust is becoming more complex. The report's findings

suggest that the channel's most successful leaders will be defined by their ability to simultaneously harness the Fundamental Six through taking the right decisions and actions to secure a competitive advantage – while navigating the new trust landscape. Perhaps most importantly, our data analysis raises this cardinal question: Are the right issues shaping your decision making?

Culture: Why thinking more strategically about culture will give you a competitive advantage
Today's business leaders in the channel face multiple priorities, including the wellbeing of their people, changing working practices, business growth, customers, digital transformation and the demands of a changing market. Navigating this broad span of interrelated imperatives means connecting with employees on all issues – and critically, organisational culture can be leveraged to support these priorities in a way that creates a competitive advantage. For business leaders to navigate the competitive challenges ahead, their prospects will be far brighter if the supportive pillars of purpose, strategy, operations and culture are firmly in place. All of these aspects are connected and should be considered as an organic whole – but it is organisational culture that functions as the DNA of an organisation.

For culture to become a source of competitive advantage it needs to be developed with consistency and authenticity. Therefore it is important for business leaders to understand how their approach to culture can both support or hinder their growth prospects. It is equally important to authenticate cultural declarations with effective actions. But our survey findings suggest

Our analysis identified a number of strategic mismatches within the Fundamental Six sphere of leadership priorities

...ting a competitive edge

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

that strong beliefs in the power of culture as a driver for positive change may not in many cases be maximised or acted upon. In this report, we lay out evidence that shows how competitive advantage may be weakened by cultural shortfalls, and highlight opportunities to resolve culture-related mismatches.

The research shows that the advantages of emphasising cultural traits as a source of competitive advantage may not be fully realised – and the study uncovered disconnects between what business leaders think about culture as being key to competitiveness, and what they actually experience. Therefore our Comms Vision Culture Insight Session will seek to unravel these cultural dilemmas and help bridge the gaps. This is vital not just to boost company morale, but also to bring about improved and measurable business outcomes.

Technology and Markets: Does technology and market planning need a serious reality check?
There is a strong correlation between a channel company's capacity to develop a powerful technology capability and its overall competitive performance. But we know from our research that many channel businesses may fall behind and be less able to react to what's coming next unless challenges are addressed, wider opportunities are embraced and the channel ecosystem becomes more tightly interconnected.

Furthermore, being competitive means having the agility to respond effectively to the evolving market, and for resellers and MSPs this in large part hinges on their technology propositions and capabilities. Therefore seizing technology disruption as a strategic

driver of growth is a major consideration 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.

But the results of our survey bring into question whether the channel ecosystem could be more effective at converting market opportunities into sustainable, differentiation-led growth. Therefore our Comms Vision Technology and Markets Insight session aims to shed light on areas where channel businesses may need to rethink their strategic outlooks to create not only a more competitive organisation, but also build greater value in significant markets not currently maximised or addressed. Is your business fully prepared to leverage fast-emerging and disruptive technologies?

Collaboration: Unravelling collaboration trends and solidifying competitive advantage through alliances
Unleashing the full power of strategic alliances with like-minded and complementary businesses and maximising the value of partnerships is another critical route to securing a competitive advantage, and is fast becoming a mainstream goal for a growing number of channel companies. To get a window on this important trend our research assessed the rate at which strategic alliances are being formed, and raised the question of whether channel companies going it alone may need to bring collaboration into their playbook – and whether those already on a collaboration journey would benefit from a reassessment of their approaches to building value and competitive advantage through alliances.

Another key purpose of the Collaboration survey was to assess the perceived drivers and criteria of successful strategic alliances, and shine a light on areas that could enable channel firms to make the most of their potential to enhance value through a broader collaboration strategy. The report also shows how the rise of strategic alliances could ultimately reshape how the channel generates business. Moreover, the data puts a spotlight on why business leaders may need to explore combinations of collaboration moving forward to achieve, for example, Net Zero goals and assure strategic alignment with key partners and customers on a broader scope of requirements.

On top of that, the report provided a solid foundation for our final Comms Vision Insight Session which will explore the most important challenges and opportunities that can be solved through game changing collaborations, 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.
In the following pages Comms Vision Convention 2023 sponsors share their market views and strategies.

> **For culture to become a source of competitive advantage it needs to be developed with consistency and authenticity**

The race is on: Comms Vision and the future of connectivity

The communication landscape in the UK continues to transform at record pace with the catalyst of the PSTN switch-off – or 'digital switch-on' – providing the mandate for change. To meet ever-increasing demands for speed and capacity, the roll-out of full-fibre and 5G is well underway. With this, comes heaps of opportunity for the channel.

Comms Vision has always been an inspirational and visionary event. It gives us the chance to reflect on the resilience of this industry and celebrate its innovation. For channel partners, it's about how to capitalise on all the opportunity out there. As always, its brilliant to be participating in multiple sessions.

Gavin Murphy, Propositions Principal, is leading a creative F1-themed boardroom session on 'driving success in all-IP'. Many businesses have already recognised the urgency to transition to IP networks, but there is still more work to be done, especially when it comes to helping smaller channel players and educating end-users.

Paul Beacham, Senior Manager, Data Networking, will be exploring 'the need for speed' in his boardroom session. We live in a data-hungry world, increasingly driven by digital transformation and the emergence of technologies like the cloud, Internet of Things and AI – and we need the networks to support that.

We're also excited to be participating in a number of panels, exploring the issues that are facing the industry as we head, again, into unpredictable times. The theme of the event is 'creating an advantage', which is exactly what we want to inspire our partners to do.

Alex Tempest, Managing Director, BT Wholesale

The Formula(1) for all-IP success

The PSTN switch-off is crucial to future-proofing the UK's connectivity. Mandated by the Government, it will bring us in line with countries like the Netherlands, Estonia and Germany who have already made the move to all-IP and are reaping the benefits of faster and more advanced technology infrastructure. Future-ready networks will lay the foundations for how the country communicates, delivers public services and collaborates to do business.

For years now, the all-IP conversation has been bubbling away within the channel. Now we're reaching boiling point. Yes – it's really happening. In fact, Openreach recently implemented a Stop Sell of all WLR products and a Stop Serve in Salisbury and Mildenhall earlier this year. These milestones give partners a great excuse to kick-start the all-IP conversation.

But just like winning an F1 championship, the transition to all-IP isn't always a straight road to success. Join the boardroom session with Gavin Murphy to find out how the right team, the right time and the right data can guarantee a smooth switch to all-IP – and a winning team in pole position.

Speeding towards networks of the future

Businesses that want to stay competitive are continuing to put digitalisation at the core of their business decisions, meaning they are more data-hungry than ever. From moving to the cloud, increasing data centre capabilities and adopting AI and IoT technologies, digital transformation is a need to have, not a nice to have. In turn, network traffic is at an all-time high. This requires access to solutions that deliver more capacity and speed. Access choice is key, and high bandwidth can enable this much-needed flexibility while reducing costs and the complexity of deployment.

As we change gear and accelerate away from legacy PSTN we have also seen significant progress when it comes to 5G. EE – named the UK's best network for 10 years in a row – has already reached more than 68% of the population with 5G, with availability in nearly every UK town and city and expanding into more rural populations. The move to 5G is a massive opportunity for partners and customers, whatever the business. In fact, our recent survey of end-users found that 70% will invest in mobile. By speeding up networks at a scale never seen before, we will minimise downtime and maximise the potential for collaboration.

BT Wholesale is investing in network expansion that future-proofs products, propositions, and solutions. To delve further into high bandwidth, Ethernet, DIA and 5G market trends and growth, join the boardroom session with Paul Beacham.

Culture, collaboration and capitalising on technology

As well as our boardroom sessions, we'll be participating in three panels where we reflect on progress of the industry and share tangible advice for channel partners:

- **Culture** with Alex Tempest, Managing Director at BT Wholesale: As well as the many business benefits of adopting a robust company culture, prioritising culture within organisations can also transform the industry for the better, making it more inclusive, sustainable and encouraging us to think differently. Learn why it's crucial to embed Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) and sustainability policies in culture and how you can stay accountable.

- **Collaboration** with Gavin Jones, Channel Director at BT Wholesale: The channel is no stranger to collaboration, in fact, it's an industry that often feels more like a community of like-minded people. We can't take this for granted and must continue to invest in long-lasting, evolving partnerships built on working towards a common goal. You can have all the legal frameworks in place, but if partners aren't in sync the relationship will fail. Management, honesty and feedback are crucial elements of collaboration.

- **Technology** with Gavin Murphy, Propositions Principal at BT Wholesale: Without technology, the channel wouldn't exist. Find out how small channel players in particular can overcome the specialist challenge and plug the skills gap by working with partners, as well as where the biggest technology trends are.

We're so looking forward to seeing the many familiar faces at Comms Vision and we're dedicated to using the event to inspire and help our partners.

For more information visit, btwholesale.com

BT WHOLESALE

Leading the way towards positive change

This year, Comms Vision is centred on achieving competitive advantage through leadership, technology, partnership and culture. For CityFibre these elements are fundamental to the achievement and continuation of success, writes Andy Wilson, Sales Director - Wholesale Channel.

Andrew Wilson

As the 2025 switch-off deadline gets closer, the need to take advantage is intensifying. This is a perfect illustration of a change to which we must all adapt if we want to maximise our potential.

To do that we need visionary leadership to inspire us to think bigger; technologies and solutions that meet customers' current and future needs; collaborative relationships with partners and suppliers; and a culture that embraces change, actively practices diversity and inclusion and drives sustainability.

Rapid evolution
Over the past year we have continued to challenge for better while expanding our network to serve a further one million premises. With over three million premises now passed in total, the work we're doing is critical to the economy.

Unlike other wholesale networks that continue to rely solely on GPON, the gold standard 10Gbps XGS-PON technology we are rolling out already provides low-cost

symmetrical services ranging from 160Mbps to 2.5Gbps. Our new platform is pre-designed for easy upgrade to 50Gbps, making it virtually unconstrained for the future.

Challenger culture in action
In terms of partnership and collaboration, CityFibre has continued to innovate and deliver the service and support partners need to meet and exceed customer expectations.

Our Permission to Work process has reduced the constraints of wayleaves on Ethernet orders, halving the order-to-cash time for partners and simplifying the process of setting-up a connection for customers.

Another important aspect of our approach is agility. Making the right decisions is key, but it's also important to remain flexible. We are always looking for ways to deliver a better service, and to make swift, decisive choices when time is of the essence.

UK businesses can't afford to hang around. They need faster, better value connectivity, and they need

it now. By being ready to take every opportunity, British businesses will help make that upturn happen and CityFibre and its partners are giving them the power to make that change come sooner.

Total commitment
Our wholesale-only model has been fundamental to nurturing highly collaborative relationships with mutual trust and benefit at their core.

Our channel-centric approach goes hand in hand with how we develop and bring our products to market. We continue to expand both our Business FTTP and Ethernet footprints, presenting quality services that meet businesses' needs, at prices that drive profitability for partners.

CityFibre is doing its bit to ensure everyone can benefit from fibre-only connectivity. At the time of writing, we have won four regional contracts under the government's £5 billion Project Gigabit programme.

These contracts represent a combined government subsidy of £387m to connect

around 262,000 premises. To this, CityFibre is adding a further £223m of private funding. The build work itself is also expected to add 453,000 additional premises to our commercial build.

UK government is subsidising fibre infrastructure build into these hard-to-reach areas because no network builder could commit to do so alone. In essence, CityFibre and its partners will become the only provider of gigabit-capable infrastructure and services for many of today's poorest connected premises.

Better for people and planet
When it comes to being a challenger and setting new standards, it's not just what we achieve but how we achieve it and the legacy we leave.

More than a quarter of our executive team is female. CityFibre is recognised in the Times Top 50 Employers for Women, endorsed by Work 180 for its commitment to diversity and one of just 1,700 UK employers that has signed the Menopause Workplace Pledge.

We have pledged to achieve net zero carbon emissions within our own operations by 2028 and across our value chain by 2030. We've committed to the Science Based Targets Initiative for our near-term goal and 100% renewable mains electricity now powers our network. CityFibre is the only wholesale provider operating a fibre-only network, so our partners do not have to wait for an energy inefficient legacy copper network to be retired before full fibre related carbon savings through their supply chain are realised.

Our leadership approach is one of partnership and collaboration with our channel, of working together to innovate and being a positive force for change. While we face into the same economic challenges as everyone else, we continue to break down the barriers that stand in our way and find unique, creative and innovative ways to keep moving forward and achieving better outcomes for all. ■

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CALLING ALL CAKE HAVERS AND EATERS

See us at Comms Vision to find out how we're busy expanding your Ethernet opportunities, bringing multi-gig products to life, and reducing your order-to-cash wait.

It's your cake and it's waiting to be eaten!

CityFibre

Now, next and new: from surviving to thriving

The business landscape is shifting from a purely competitive environment to one where, while still ultra-competitive, collaboration has become a must, writes Daryl Pile, MD – Channel, Gamma.

Daryl Pile

Looking at Gamma, 20 years ago we were the challenger brand: six or seven businesses were competing head-to-head with us in six different product markets within the channel. Only BT were a common supplier, it remained that way for years.

Now, Gamma has significant "supply or buy" relationships with every one of its chief competitors. Collaboration and the death of the "apex predator" view has been a real thing; nobody is everything to everyone anymore. Our culture helped with capitalising on this, being humble, reasonable, and doing the right thing, meant we're easy to do business with and trust. We saw even our most significant competitors become customers or partners.

Today it's the way people behave with partners and suppliers driving growth and profit. There's still much talk around culture and collaboration, suggesting businesses haven't settled on their value. For most businesses, having the right culture, and adopting a collaborative approach, is essential.

Culture: Blending with Strategy
Many organisations understand the importance of having a clear purpose yet neglect their corporate culture. So, can culture and strategy be separated? Yes, but one supports the other. Founders embodying behaviours crucial to execution cannot get their arms around everyone, so a clear strategy where people know their purpose is critical. Empowering people to act and think for themselves and for the business is key, particularly as it grows, and culture will drive successful execution of strategy. Embedding values and culture into behaviours creates better executing teams.

A strong business model and compelling vision are fundamental, but leaders must ensure their organisation's culture aligns with these and make it easier for people to relate, to see them in action. These should guide the hiring process too: forgetting the culture-fit during recruitment causes problems down the line. I bet every manager reading this can think of someone who had a concerning trait which was overlooked– that then came back to bite them!

Technology: Perception and Reality
Our industry is drenched with the "latest thing", but you're unlikely to have this to yourself for long. We're all able to bring opportunities to market quickly: just look at some of the success stories in IoT, Jola, Pangea etc. But adopting the latest tech solutions doesn't guarantee market readiness. We must compete through marketing, sales, and service. Businesses are unlikely to have technological exclusivity for long, its more about how its presented, sold, deployed, and serviced that sets it apart and that comes back to people.

In running our businesses, AI can improve customer experience and add actual, real-life value: completing tasks quicker, helping carry out work more cheaply and to a higher standard. Even now, the cost of "super professional" slick presentation has plummeted. Data analytics, too, improves internal efficiencies and helps us tailor solutions to meet market demands.

Embracing new technologies isn't an end in itself; it's about how we deliver and how we use the latest tech to enhance the execution of our business's strategy and day-to-day activities that keeps us ahead.

Collaboration: The New Competitive Edge
There's unexploited potential for collaborative efforts everywhere. They increase the chance of success, share the risk and the ability to manoeuvre when markets change suddenly.

Vendors are more readily open to partnership models that encourage co-innovation and shared effort. We've been doing this very well at Gamma for over 20 years - but in a narrow corridor of partners and supply relationships, building out new partnerships is something we should accelerate – it'll drive business growth in this industry for years to come.

The Balance: Leading by Example
Successful business leadership is a blend of a robust business model, a compelling vision, and the right people. Leaders must ensure financial sustainability and customer relevance while balancing short-term gains with long-term aims. Of course, things will change, organisations will grow, so it's important that core values and culture should be consistently pushed and refreshed across the workforce, pulling everyone in the same direction.

Your culture, technology, and collaboration are tools to help your businesses execute its strategy. Strong leaders should make sure everyone wields them well. Businesses managing to blend these aspects with a clear vision and strategy, where everyone knows the part they play, are more likely to achieve their goals: not just surviving but thriving. ■

Gamma

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We are **Good Together**

Enabling the Rise of the MSP

In an era where digital transformation is continuously reshaping the modern workplace, the channel is presented with an immense opportunity, writes Terry O'Brien, CEO, Giacom.

Terry O'Brien

S MBs are the lifeblood of the UK economy, contributing a massive 52 per cent to the nation's GDP and employing over 60 per cent of the workforce. Despite this, they often grapple with productivity challenges, exacerbated by their inability to harness existing technology assets to their full potential.

Today's SMB relies on technology and is not afraid to invest. According to Canalys, more than 43 per cent of all business technology spend will be made by SMBs in 2023. Yet SMBs frequently struggle to extract the maximum value from these investments. This struggle often stems from the practice of acquiring products from an array of carriers, consumer brands, resellers and vendors, resulting in compatibility, integration and security challenges.

However, this landscape is changing. According to recent research by Analysys Mason, more than 22 per cent of SMBs switched technology provider in the past six months (up from just five per cent in the same period in 2019), citing their incumbent supplier's lack of vision and strategy, and lack of breadth of product and service options as their top reasons for change. The clear conclusion is that in an ever more complex and strategically important sourcing area, SMBs are increasingly seeking a strategic supplier for their technology needs.

Enter the MSP model, where channel providers are emerging as the ideal solution for these small businesses, evolving into one-stop shops that offer comprehensive IT, cloud and communications solutions on a low-risk subscription basis. These customised subscriptions cater to the unique requirements of each customer, starting with the essentials such as software, communications, or infrastructure, and expanding to include services like security and managed services. The result is a centralised hub for all their technology needs with a simplified per-user monthly subscription model, invaluable expert guidance, and end-user training to ensure technology is leveraged to maximum effect. Ultimately, this provides SMBs with everything they need to enhance productivity.

Our mission is for every small business to source their ICT from a local expert technology provider. To realise this vision, we're making it simple for our partners to create brilliant technology solutions for UK businesses. Our approach revolves around providing partners with the choice, scalability, enablement resources, and opportunities they need to reach more small business customers and deliver even higher-quality services.

The launch of our Cloud Market portal was a significant step on this journey, and it is already providing a wide range of benefits to our partner network of over 5,000 local expert technology providers. Cloud Market is a channel-first, offering a unified platform experience where partners can access and manage a wide array of comms, cloud, hardware, and billing products and services from the world's leading vendors and service providers.

Cloud Market consolidates the capabilities of our four existing platforms for cloud services, wholesale telecoms, distribution, and hardware into one convenient source for quoting, provisioning, servicing, billing, training, and enablement. Prior to the introduction of Cloud Market, we took great care to standardise the four underlying portals, ensuring that all partners would enjoy a consistent and intuitive user experience when ordering across our complete range of services.

With the launch of Cloud Market, we are making it increasingly easy for our partners to offer a diverse range of products and services to their customers. Over the next three years, we have planned significant additional investment to introduce new features and software tools, providing enhanced support to our partners as technology continues to advance.

We're really looking forward to attending this year's Comms Vision, where we plan to delve deeper into the MSP opportunity during our boardroom sessions and 121 meetings. During this event, we will elaborate on how our partner strategy enables MSPs to thrive in their target markets. Key members of our executive team will offer their insights into how we can enable our partners to broaden and deepen their service offerings, empowering them to capitalise on new opportunities and secure more business within the SMB space.

On the second day we'll be wrapping up our boardroom sessions with an exclusive champagne tasting event and hope you can join us for what promises to be a fantastic and informal networking opportunity. We look forward to connecting with you at the event and to raising a glass together as we collectively celebrate the bright future of the channel. ▪

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Bringing better to the Channel

At Sky, we are always innovating, it's in our DNA. We have a relentless drive to reinvent what we do, writes Damian Saunders – MD Sky Business Hospitality, Mid-Market & Wholesale

Damian Saunders

This has inspired our transformation from a TV company to a telco, to an award-winning content creator, to what we are today - a company that puts customers at the heart of everything. To make sure we're delivering the products you and your customers want – bringing you better business.

Backed by our parent company, Comcast provides Sky with investment, leading business technology and expertise. These elements support our ambition to drive the evolution of the channel and create a Wholesale business that is an extension of our partners' organisations, in a way that only a business of our scale can.

Back in May our Managing Director Steve Hackley outlined in Comms Dealer how Sky Business aspire to offer a broad choice model, where every route to market has a role to play.

Six months on, we're really pleased with the progress we have made. Today provides a great opportunity to reflect on some of the steps we have taken since then to realise that vision.

Firstly, we have launched and given prominence to our Sky Business Wholesale sub-brand. As we continue to invest in the channel, we recognise the importance of having a brand that is dedicated to it, providing further reassurance of our intentions to drive change and capitalise on the opportunities it presents.

We want to partner with excellence. The team has worked tirelessly to progressively deepen relationships with current and new partners through collaboration and drive for a better end customer experience. By building a great culture through our partnerships we are beginning to stretch our market share to the point where competitors have no

choice but to take note. To that end, we have also cemented plans to deliver a best-in-class operating model – only possible due to the fact that we don't have legacy processes or systems to contend with, transforming the user experience with connectivity that future proofs our own businesses and will provide the slickest possible experience for our partners. We've worked with partners in the scoping stages of this project, which once deployed will position us with a clear point of difference as we continue to accelerate growth.

With the technological backing of Comcast, we are now excited to be entering the development stages for a wider suite of connectivity and overlay services, tailored for the channel that will continue into 2024 with no planned end date – a pivotal moment for Sky Business Wholesale.

At Sky Business, part of our

ethos for growth comes the commitment to grow responsibly and to support other businesses. The most recent commitment we have made is in signing up to support The Big Goal Initiative. This is a nationwide five-a-side football tournament for ICT resellers which will be delivered and facilitated by the Street Soccer Foundation Charity and sponsored by Giacom – using football as a vehicle to raise money to create opportunities for homeless young people. We are fully behind the ambition for this initiative set out by Tez O'Brien and Keith Mabbutt from the Street Soccer Foundation, and we were very pleased to support the launch event at St George's Park on 4 October. Aside from the great impact this initiative will have (and it will!), it also offers an excellent window into our view of the future: Working in collaboration with the best ideas from the channel to do things better, using all the resources at our disposal.

2024 promises to be a year of exciting announcements. Our drive to invest in the future ensures we lay the foundations for the next stage of growth. We truly believe that Sky Business Wholesale will become a leader in the channel and have a transformative impact. Leveraging our experience, scale, innovation, and growth mindset, we will bring change that will make a positive difference. Delivering better products and better service through innovation and transformation – with the ultimate aim of creating a better experience for UK Businesses.

We are really excited to be sponsoring Comms Vision this year and have a couple of surprises in store. We look forward to meeting new and existing partners and aligning our latest plans with those that want to come on the journey with us. To find out more about our vision, please join one of our boardroom sessions, or reach out to set up a meeting. ∎

sky business

WHOLESALE

We're here to change the game

Join us at Comms Vision to discover how we can
help to unlock growth within the Channel

Discover Sky Business Wholesale

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All products and services are tailored to each client and are subject to availability and location.

Catalysing innovation and collaboration

The Channel is famous for its high standards of innovation, collaboration and support throughout the supply chain, delivering innovative services, collaboration tools and seamless support to end customers while embodying all three facets internally in day-to-day operations.

Neil Wilson

These three areas have also been our key focuses as we forge a new direction, post-Virtual1 acquisition. As we approach Comms Vision, these projects – which have been pivotal in enabling a range of updates – will be shared and expanded upon with the Channel at Gleneagles, writes **Neil Wilson, Chief Product and Marketing Officer at TalkTalk Wholesale Services**.

Broadening partner portfolios with innovative services
We want our partners to be perceived by their customers as trusted technology partners; expert advisers that foster long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. To accomplish this, they must differentiate their brands and offer more value than the 'average reseller'.

For partners to realise growth ambitions and truly separate themselves from their competitors, they must offer more than the typical voice and connectivity services that have been heavily commoditised in recent years, given the race to offer services at the lowest possible price. To that end, we're expanding our portfolio with a range of margin-rich Managed Services that make partners invaluable to their customers. One of the first business challenges we're helping our resellers solve for their customers is basic cyber security.

These services include a Service Edge Firewall proposition and a Home Office solution for remote workers and micro-businesses, with more additions to strengthen partners' cyber security portfolios to come.

While cyber security is an ever-evolving challenge, there are simple, scalable solutions that we've sourced from best-in-class partners that can enable resellers to add more value to their foundational services. Plus, we've worked hard to ensure partners can 'hit the ground running' via engaging sales and marketing assets and training.

Enabling rich collaboration with partners
Our partners are core to our ongoing success and no matter how valuable they are, new products and services won't count for much if our partners aren't comfortable, confident and motivated in selling them!

To that end, we'll be announcing some major changes to how we interact with our partners at Gleneagles, empowering partners to achieve significant revenue growth with a clear reward structure and benefits at each stage of their relationship with us.

We've invested heavily in new e-learning training experiences that will help our partners embrace our expanding portfolio of services, and those who invest their team resources in completing those training initiatives will reap further rewards.

Finally, we're providing the assets our partners will need to promote our expanding portfolio, with a range of new-and-improved sales and marketing assets that can be quickly customised and published with minimal resources required.

Our partners make us tick. Without them, we wouldn't be here, and we look forward to sharing more information on the bespoke support system we've created and how it will align itself with partners' growth ambitions and establish a clear process to meet and exceed those goals.

Supporting accelerated sales journeys via 1Portal
Our award-winning 1Portal has long been the portal-of-choice for hundreds of resellers around the UK, but that doesn't mean it can't be improved. To help shorten the time before our partners can bill their customers, we've been working hard to expand 1Portal's capabilities, open it up to our international carrier and wholesale customers, and ensure the process is as hands-off as possible for all our partners.

1Portal's suite of APIs is continually being updated with new integrations, compatibility improvements and features to enable high-volume orders to be adjusted, all ensuring partners can leverage its award-winning functionality at scale.

New interactive elements such as sliders and automated pricing enable partners to adjust solutions with cost changes updated in real-time, eliminating common causes for delays in the sales process.

All our solutions will soon be consumable via 1Portal, making it a truly all-encompassing portal for our Channel partners' needs.

These improvements will help our partners work at scale, experience fewer issues in surfacing what connectivity is available at premises, enjoy faster ordering with less chance of human error causing delays, and realise bigger margins with a range of easy-to-add Managed Services. Ultimately, resulting in quicker book-to-bill journeys for our partners.

While we've hinted at some significant announcements for Comms Vision this year, the biggest are still being kept under wraps! ◼

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Discover what it's like working with us.

Our path to excellence and collaboration

My ambition is to uphold the robust strategy we set earlier in the year in terms of the markets and products we're pursuing, writes New Director of Wholesale, Fixed at Virgin Media O2 Business, John Chester.

John Chester

That's when our sales strategy pivoted in response to growing demand from our partners for our dark fibre, high capacity services, and backhaul provisioning. They're seeing higher end customer demand for increased network capacity, and so they've been increasing investment in their own networks to support these requirements.

Delivering Excellence

Success of that strategy centres on delivering excellence for our partners so that the experience of dealing with our business seamless.

This spans the entire customer journey and starts with an emphasis on pre-sales engagement, solution development, and pricing propositions. Our partners look to us to solve complex implementation challenges with guidance on how to best navigate intricate migrations, so this excellence must extend into delivery, life cycle management, and beyond for us to create mutual value.

Our recent investment into our Smart Planning Tool, which automates the planning process when quoting for our services, is a demonstration of how we can streamline our processes to address and alleviate our partners' friction points – by ultimately reducing the time required for product and service definition.

Facilitating the Transition to FTTP

We are continuing investment into our network and the products and services we are offering partners. A priority will be developing our high capacity services and expanding our network footprint out into areas where partners are currently seeking demand. These investments are critical to meeting the unique and diverse requirements of our partner base.

The transition to FTTP represents a monumental shift in the telecoms ecosystem, as the industry replaces an old technology with a new one that will last for the next century and beyond. It'll present tremendous opportunities for businesses and communities across the UK. We play an important role in facilitating this migration, providing the backbone infrastructure for ISPs and other network builders to scale more quickly and accelerate this transition. Our friends in Virgin Media O2 consumer are in the process of upgrading all our serviceable homes with FTTP by 2027. So, in time, we'll be able to offer our partners wholesale services using this infrastructure as well.
Market Challenges

The current inflationary and interest rate economic headwinds have placed pressure on customers. There's now an increased focus on the cost base of services. The value lens through which customers are looking at products and services has become more centred around whole life cost in addition to reliability and resiliency. In turn, this has fuelled competition.

We're incredibly proud of the way we work with partners to overcome cost pressures. We share an appetite to work together and create mutual value, using a suite of commercial tools to unlock preferential rates. We've recently formalised this approach through our Unity Rewards programme, which has been a real driving force behind our partnerships this year.

Collaboration as a competitive edge

Our partners value teams foster real, transparent, and honest relationships. A strong cadence of communication is critical. Involving partners in early planning and design stages is as an essential prerequisite for effectively co-creating solutions.

We're keen for that early touchpoint with our partners to be as least stressful and intensive as possible, which is why we are focusing our resources on areas that will deliver the best joint value. And while people are at the heart of this organisation, automation will be key for us to expedite processes and free-up our human resources for closer customer-support.

Automation and AI is rapidly gaining pace across the sector. We're seeing the impact that AI is having on data transfer and network usage. It's up to us to work with our partners to establish a shared view on use cases and the resulting connectivity requirements so that we're ahead of customer demand.

By aligning with customers on network roadmaps, service stacks, and future build programs, we can stay ahead of the curve as bandwidth and connectivity requirements continue to grow. Moving beyond the traditional and transactional 'Buy-Sell' relationship into a more collaborative partnership means we can meet these end use cases with greater flexibility.

We kicked off the year with the aim to go all in on our partners' growth, and focus more of our time, energy, and investment into their ambitions. That hasn't changed, and our commitment to excellent serviceability and collaboration ensures we will remain competitive and responsive to the market's shifting needs. ∎

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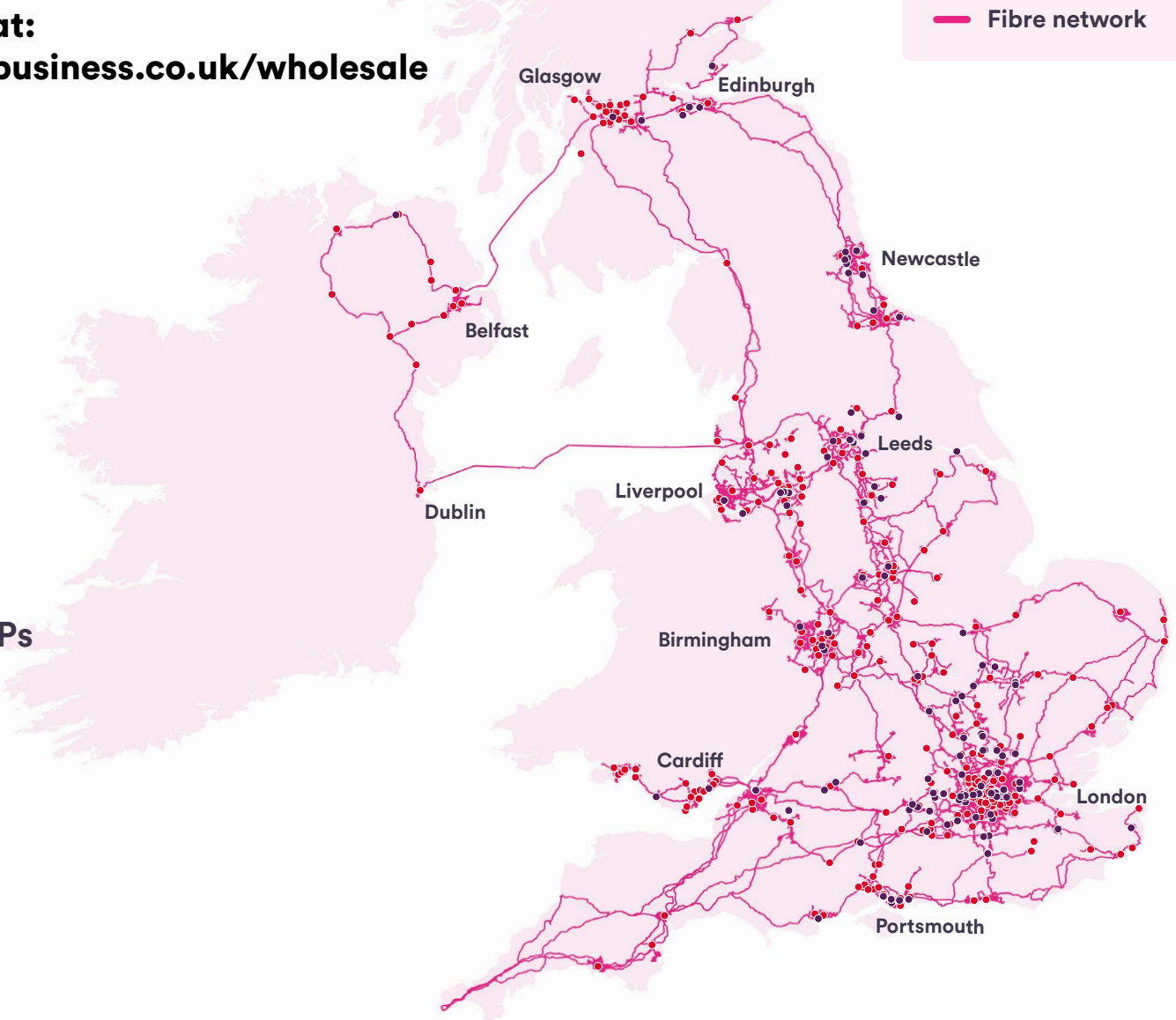
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The future for connectivity - why the channel is vital

In 2023, the global technology market is expected to grow by 3.5 percent according to Canalys. This total addressable market is worth £3.8 trillion worldwide, with IT services and telecoms expected to make up the majority of that spending at 62.8 percent.

Kathryn Platt

For channel companies, around 70 percent of that global market is available to them, writes **Kathryn Platt, Head of Indirect, Vodafone Business.**

Why is the channel so essential to serving that huge slice of the market? Because customers need the trusted advice and skills that they can provide, and the solutions that they can bring together, to meet those needs.

In the UK, Vodafone has a long history of working with channel partners to deliver what customers want, whilst also supporting their growth. This approach is based on communication and planning around the right products, solutions and initiatives to meet customer needs, backed up with the right engagement and enablement support to ensure that partners can deliver effectively. We've seen some partners grow their businesses more than 400 percent in the last three years by having the right support and enablement behind them.

Why the channel is more important than ever
To capitalise on this opportunity, channel partners and technology providers must capitalise on innovation and collaborate to create repeatable, scalable business opportunities. From the first mobile phone call in 1985, through to this year's support for 5G network slicing with ITN broadcasting to 500 million people globally at King Charles' coronation, we are at the forefront for innovation.

Underpinning this is our network – our service supports more than 550,000 companies in the UK including digital healthcare, connected living and independence, as well as agriculture, transport and logistics, powered by innovations in 5G. We're continuously investing in our network and we're proud to have the Best Network for Business, as awarded by Mobile News.

Alongside this innovation, fundamental changes are coming. The 3G network retirement in 2024 and PSTN and ISDN network switch off in 2025 will force customers to change their approach - some are investing to get ahead, but many are behind on their planning and strategy. Others are still not even aware of the changes.

Wherever they are in their journey, these companies will need support to realise their ambitions. With more digital service delivery and remote work taking place, getting communications strategies right will be critical. Filling knowledge gaps and providing the appropriate mix of services, technology, business and support will be essential for future success.

It's not just about the technology. We're also committed to the security and reliability of those services, enabling customers to feel they can rely on their partner and trust the services they deliver. It's also about being the right choice for long term commitment; being present through customer's pain points and into a brighter future. This aligns with our goals around protecting the planet, including making our UK operations net zero by 2027, and across our entire global carbon footprint by 2040. Circularity is our approach to network waste and we already reuse or recycle 100% of it here in the UK.

Getting the right mix for channel success
Educating customers around security, performance and connectivity challenges demands a joined-up approach between technology providers and channel partners. Trusted advisors in consulting, channel and managed services providers have an essential role to play with customers in sorting through priorities and laying out timescales for projects. While connectivity providers can offer products and enablement, channel partners will be responsible for driving those opportunities from potential to reality.

We have spent years developing successful relationships with our channel partners, delivering long-term and consistent growth. I'm always impressed at the new solutions and market strategies that we co-create based on our partners' insights and use of our innovations.

Collaborating around customer demand enables our partners to deliver more effectively and creates a competitive advantage for them to build on. For those that have not engaged with us before, we are encouraging new partners to discuss how they can take advantage of that same model and drive their businesses forward.

The technology and telecoms sectors are undoubtedly getting more complex. There are more options open for customers, yet less time to make decisions and commit to them. With so many changes taking place, customers need guidance. This creates opportunity in the market and channel partners must work with the right provider to empower them to capitalise on the opportunity and deliver effective, sustainable growth for everyone. ■
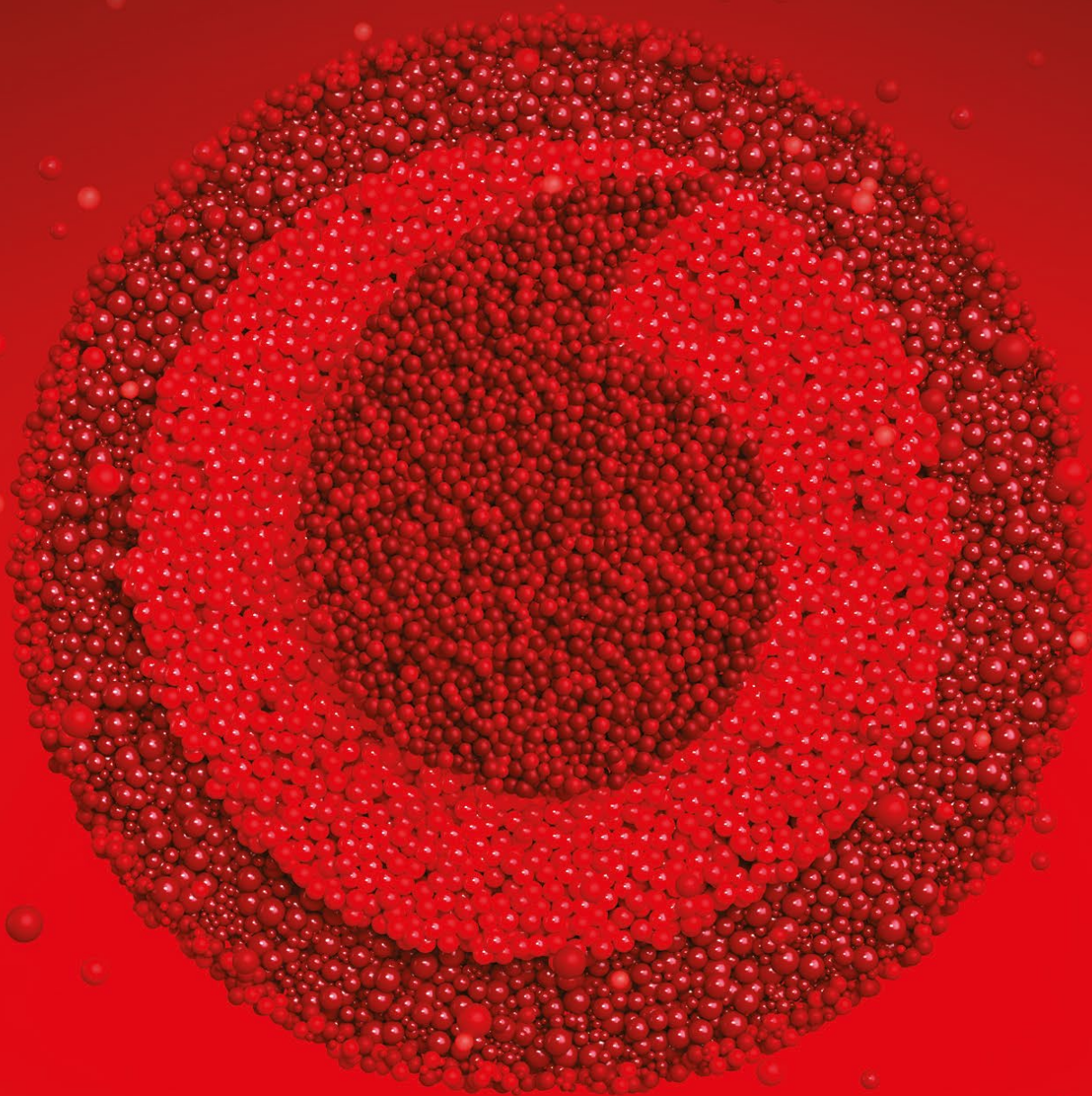
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What's driving the future full fibre landscape?

The connectivity market has come a long way over the last decade or so. As the country's telecommunications infrastructure upgrade continues to accelerate, more than half of the UK now has access to full fibre.

However, this still leaves 50 per cent to go, and some dominant market forces have emerged that mean our industry is being challenged, writes **ITS Chief Revenue Officer Simon Wort**.

At this year's Comms Vision, we will explore some of these challenges and look forward to discussing the motivating forces in some further detail.

Convergence as a key motivator
One of the key areas is convergence – that is the propositions and technologies that are driving change.

As we speak to our partners and understand the growing needs of UK businesses and public bodies, we know the market will demand these.

In the past, a customer may have had copper, point-to-point, or FTTC. Now, with the rollout of next-generation technologies such as XGSPON, connections can run over one single infrastructure and pipe.

This new era of connectivity is a catalyst for developing innovative services. B2B-focused operators like ITS have always lived in this 'wholesale world', building substantial expertise, and have developed significantly over the last five years, crucially with the space to innovate.

Our wholesale model allows our Faster Britain networks to exist at the heart of solutions for any industry segment, allowing our channel partners to deliver their vertically focused solutions over the top of our connectivity.

It also means we can respond with agility in a world where we're seeing the creation of micro markets, such as the emergence of local markets with geographical pricing.

The explosion of XGSPON and 5G
We believe that XGSPON will ultimately replace point-to-point networks. We're already seeing 2.5GB networks become 10GB, and there are now 25GB and 100GB XGSPON networks coming to market.

In the past, businesses would typically take a complex MPLS or IPVPN solution, connecting their remote locations. Now, with SD-WAN and SASE deployments, businesses need a new breed of internet connectivity to their locations and the ability to securely access their cloud applications.

It points clearly to this demand for greater symmetry and bandwidth.

We're also starting to see 5G standalone, unleashing some of the power of this technology (which has not been possible to date). The cost advantage of XGSPON will lead to better, stronger 5G networks.

Recently, ITS has become part of a consortium to deliver Open RAN 5G through high-capacity venues across the Liverpool City Region, such as stadiums and railway stations. £9m was awarded by the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) to deliver an Open RAN project to enhance digital connectivity in high-density areas across. Initially testing the technology in a simulated environment before trialling it at five test bed sites across the region, ITS will deliver the infrastructure that enables innovative 5G solutions to be provided at demanding high-density and volume locations.

Keeping pace
The market is moving quickly and there is a significant opportunity for companies like ours, which have designed and built their networks to support these requirements, delivering a national wholesale offering, and providing partners with a one-stop-shop.

If the economy is unstable and there's market pressure, investors respond, and the market consolidates. That means many resellers are looking at diversification and broadening of their product portfolios to include solutions such as unified comms, voice services, and SD-WAN.

The closer we get to reaching the government's targeted full fibre milestones, we can be sure that connections, convergence, and consolidation will dominate this sector and impact which businesses are successfully operating in the connectivity marketplace in the future. ■

Simon Wort

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The importance of mobile data

Your customers are working on mobile data projects right now and demand is predicted to increase dramatically over the next few years, writes Adrian Sunderland, CEO at Jola. If you get it right with M2M and IoT, you will quickly generate high-margin recurring revenue and, due to higher EBITDA multiples, increase the value of your company.

Adrian Sunderland

According to McKinsey, revenues from mobile data are set to increase dramatically over the next five years due to the availability, speed and reliability of 4G, 5G and IoT. Statista forecasts that there will be over 25.4 billion IoT devices worldwide in 2030. Fortune Business Insights predict this market will be worth £1085bn by 2027.

People think IoT is low revenue and you've got to win hundreds of thousands. You don't. You can often get a decent ARPU of £10 to £15 on thousands of devices and sometimes margins more than 40%, so it's an attractive line of business to pivot into.

Your mobile data partner will need to give you the tools to win deals, usually competing with the direct sales arms of the mobile networks. Your supplier will need to be an aggregator with access to all the networks and ideally, they will also be an independent MVNO. Most importantly everything must be automated, with real-time APIs offering zero-touch provisioning and management through a single self-service portal.

They will need to be innovative, with a constant stream of relevant mobile data and IoT products that the networks would take years to develop and launch. When you partner with the right channel supplier, mobile data is easy to sell, support and bill.

The opportunity for the channel is significant. ICT resellers already have strong relationships with business customers for IT infrastructure, asset tracking, digital signage, mobile WiFi, monitoring and utilities.

Mobile data is an easy product to sell and provision and needs very little support. Jola took on just over 200 new partners in 2022 and now has over 1400. We put 30,000 multinetwork SIMs into iPads for one public sector project, with a very quick book-to-bill timeframe and no issues. Our SIMs are in devices such as ANPR cameras, CCTV cameras, vending machines, digital signs and tracking devices around the world.

Our partners don't have to add any more people in billing or accounts to support these deals. SIMs provision immediately using our Mobile Manager® platform, so you don't have to wait to start generating recurring margins. As soon as customers put that SIM into their device, you're billing for it.

Getting started: speak to your existing customers, understand their requirements, and then partner with an aggregator that can provide innovative solutions, unavailable elsewhere. Find out about their current projects and challenges. Once you have established your customers' requirements, start building your solution. Jola has developed The Mobile-data Revenue Generator™. It is a 6-step process to do just this.

Jola

Jola is a mobile data aggregator and MVNO, part of the Wireless Logic Group, but channel-only and independent, which means that we offer services from all the major UK networks and hundreds of networks globally. We have been selling mobile data to the channel since 2014 and we understand the pain points of our partners and the needs of their end-users in each vertical market. Over time we have developed a unique portal, that gives you the control and visibility to manage global SIM estates. Control you can extend to your customers. We have also developed unique hardware solutions that save our partners time, helping them create a great customer experience, maximise their margin and minimise costs for their customers.

There is high demand for mobile data from your existing customers. It is an easy product to sell, provision, support and bill. We have partners who have doubled the value of their business, increased their ARPU and reduced churn by focusing on mobile data.

Our Network

The Jola network is built on technology from AWS, Cloudflare and Cisco and underpins our Fixed IP and Private APN services. We are the first MVNO in the world to partner with Cloudflare to ensure secure, fast delivery across our network. Cloudflare gives Jola partners protection against DDOS attacks and peace of mind that we are using world-class suppliers to protect against new threats as they emerge.

Three

Jola has teamed up with Three Business UK to develop and launch Unlimited SIMs specifically designed for resellers. Jola is offering a range of competitive Unlimited SIMs on the UK's fastest 5G network. ∎
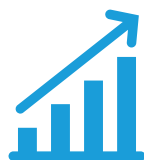
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Why must UCaaS licences be so complicated?

A question for telecom resellers: how many of your customers actually understand your quotes?

Let's say you quote 50 licences for your cloud voice platform. So far, so simple – until you start adding features, writes **Xelion CEO Micha Cohen and MD Dave Reynolds**.

Some users need call recording, and some don't. The same goes for call analytics. You might price UC features separately from voice, and mobile versions separately from desktop. The list goes on and on – and so does the proposal to the customer.

Now, itemised bills are a good thing. They're transparent. The question is how much you itemise. On a restaurant menu, you get a price for every dish – not for every ingredient that goes into it. The simple reason is that it would become unreadably complex. And our contention is that too many reseller quotes are exactly that: unreadably complex.

The reason quotes ended up this way
We're not just talking about separate licences for additional features, but a different number of users per feature. Let's call it modular licensing. At best, it's hard to read. At worst, it's impossible. Either way, it's not going to help the customer. So how did we get here?

The root of the problem is a lack of in-house development. If a UC platform isn't developed by the vendor, they're relying on outsourced support for every new feature, sometimes from different sources. That leaves you with a collection of third-party bolt-ons, and no choice but to license them separately.

The trouble with modular licensing
You might think this isn't a problem. After all, you're still providing the features the customer needs, right? But there are three big pitfalls:

1 Efficiency
Even if you have software that automates some parts of quoting, doing it this way is still slow. You also have to find out a lot about the customer before you can give them an idea of cost (in other words, before they're committed).

2 Customer experience
This is simple. Picking a new communications provider is a big decision for any business. In most cases, more than one person will have a say in the decision. If your proposal is difficult to read or understand, you're not helping them.

3 Under-provisioning
Say you've overcome problems one and two, and it's time to deploy. At this stage you get to know the customer better than when you first quoted, and it's not uncommon to find that more users needed more features after all.

An alternative approach
At Xelion, we don't put our partners in this position. The Xelion platform has one licence for all features. That covers the desktop client and mobile app, and includes voice, video, instant messaging, webchat, call recording and WhatsApp Business integration.

It's also management features like analytics, exception scheduling, IVR and hunt group management. It also covers new features and updates – which we develop ourselves, in-house, just like we've done for every component of the platform.

The reason we do this is simple: it benefits everyone. End users get quotes they can read and are never under-provisioned. Meanwhile, the reseller can spend less time on creating quotes. More importantly, they have a platform they can deploy quickly for an almost endless number of use cases.

Turning complex requirements into simple deployments
Combine all of this and you've got a highly flexible platform that's able to meet complex and specialised needs – but crucially, it can do this quickly. Forget about unreadable modular licensing. With Xelion, it's the licence multiplied by the number of users. That's it. It's a selling point for the user, and it allows the reseller to get quotes out quickly.

It also makes deployment faster. You simply configure who has access to which features, and away you go. Even technical needs like Teams or CRM integration are quick to deploy. Why? Xelion has an open API, and the integrations are pre-built for Microsoft and over 150 CRMs.
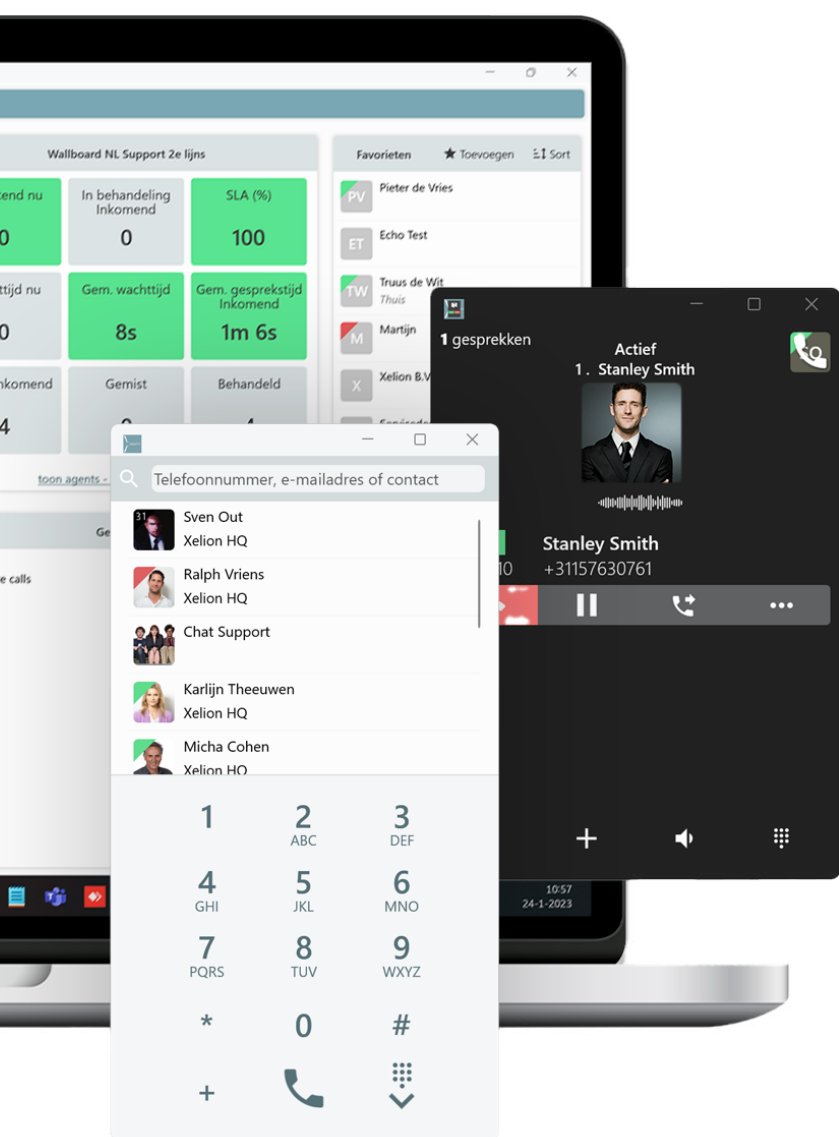
Resellers and users with their own development resource can really go to town with the open API. But even those without can benefit from it because the technical work has already been done.

This allows us to do complex things while making the user's life simple – which brings me back to quoting. Xelion offers all that functionality via a quote that's quick to produce and easy to read. The goal of any technology is to simplify the user's life. Why shouldn't that be the goal of quoting too? ■

Micha Cohen and Dave Reynolds from Xelion

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Re-imagining the journey for CX and collaboration

Meetings; who said we just do meetings? Zoom is so much more! Ian Massingham, Channel, Dion Smith, Channel Sales Leader, and David Fisher, Distribution Manager discuss Zoom's portfolio below.

David Fisher, Dion Smith and Ian Massingham

Zoom is renowned for its meetings and video capabilities but also boasts UCaaS and CCaaS stack, (Omnichannel CX, Virtual agent), AI enabled applications, Whiteboard, Chat, Calendar, mail and the list goes on. The best news is we are driving and delivering a Channel First approach, one of the many reasons we are Gold Sponsor at this year's CommsVision event.

Partnering with Zoom opens new revenue opportunities, enabling your customers to migrate to a simple to use, always on platform "that just works". The fact Zoom offers such a holistic suite of applications under one umbrella enriches a partner's stickiness with customers with just one Vendor. Zoom makes work less work. Partnering options are designed to suit any partner, of any size, in any location and ranges from referral, resell, hybrid, native call plans, BYOC, a mix of either or even utilise one of the growing numbers of Provider Exchange partners that span the globe.

Zoom offers a rich partner program designed with simplicity in mind. The partner portal enables access to a wealth of information, program activities, sales, technical and deployment training, deal registration, partner demand centre, Partner Use licences and more.

Focusing on a couple of key Zoom attributes: Zoom Phone was launched nearly five years ago and has seen exponential growth with over 5.5 million users worldwide. It boasts hundreds of features and includes call recording, call queues, monitor-whisper and barge as standard with options of calling plans and a licence mix 'n' match model.

Zoom Contact Centre (ZCC) was launched a year ago and since then we have seen hundreds of feature additions and integrations with some exciting enhancements coming very soon to ZCC and Zoom Virtual Agent (ZVA) including:

- Generative AI in ZVA, which empowers teams to build workflows and train bots faster and easier than ever before.
- AI Expert Assist, which serves up useful knowledge-based articles and helpful insights during live engagements. It also helps supervisors by generating summaries and automatically notifying them of the engagements that need attention.
- Outbound dialler, remote desktop control, PII redaction, and Customer Managed Key
- Integrations with WhatsApp and Messenger, so agents can better meet customers whenever and wherever they are.

Zoom Workforce Management (WEM) equips the Contact Centre with the right number of agents at the right times to help meet customer demands. WEM includes Zoom Quality Management, an AI-powered customer experience tool that analyses customer interactions via various communication channels to unlock key business insights and offer personalised coaching to agents.
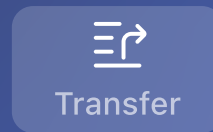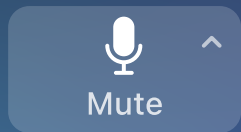
ZCC capabilities are part of Zoom's broader UCaaS platform: Zoom One, an all-in-one communication and collaboration offering that brings together ZCC, persistent chat, phone, meetings, whiteboard, and other applications, meaning the workforce have everything they need in one place and simplifies how people work. Additionally, the Zoom interface is very familiar for many users and has easy-to-use features designed to help employees waste less time. Companies that adopt other parts of the Zoom platform, such as ZCC, can have their employees up and running in no time.

Zoom at a glance:

- Enhanced Collaboration: Zoom supplies a platform for real-time collaboration.
- Broad User Base: Zoom has a vast user base, with millions of users worldwide.
- Integration Opportunities: Zoom offers a range of APIs and integrations that allow businesses to customise and extend the functionality of the platform.
- Industry Solutions: Zoom supplies industry-specific solutions for various sectors.
- Video Conferencing and Webinar Capabilities: Zoom's video conferencing and Webinar features are highly regarded and widely used for virtual meetings, webinars, and events.
- Security and Compliance: Zoom has made significant investments in improving security and meeting compliance requirements, crucial for industries with stringent data protection regulations.
- Scalability: Zoom offers scalable solutions that can accommodate businesses of all sizes.
- Global Reach: Zoom has a global network of data-centres, ensuring reliable and low-latency service for users worldwide.
- Brand Reputation: Zoom has built a strong brand reputation for its video conferencing and communication solutions. ■

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The art of the possible

Over the last 15 years, I have been at the forefront of the comms channel, supporting partners to optimise their market position and deliver a sound compelling customer proposition, writes Nikki Freeman, Business Development Director at Knight Corporate Finance.

Nikki Freeman

During that time, I've witnessed the impact of the market consolidation, which continues to have a major impact on the sector. I've also seen some successful exits, watched other channel players blossom as they execute their growth strategies and observed some acquisitive companies growing to a significant level.

Mergers and acquisitions have been the key driver behind the remarkable transformation of the telecoms and IT landscape. The comms channel has overseen this transformation and has been transformed as the boundaries of the reseller role expands. Many companies and business owners are making strategic decisions regarding M&A to gain synergies, competitive advantages or to reduce operational costs.

In my career, standing still was not an option. I'd spent the last seven years working for Gamma Plc, which proved to be a valuable experience.

However, I was ready for a new challenge, to push my own boundaries and make an impact on the strategic decisions taken by companies and business owners. Joining Knight has allowed me to leverage my industry expertise whilst developing new skills in a director role.

Knight was established 15 years ago, and during this time, we've successfully executed over 180 customised transactions. The initial focus was straightforward transactions. However, as the sector matured, both investor confidence and the level of funding available increased with has expanded options open to our clients.

Our primary objective is to understand and deliver on our client's aspirations and we won't start a process unless we believe we can deliver on these. A transaction is an intensive process that requires time and resources on both sides, our clients rely on us to deliver a deal, and we work on a success basis, so

our objectives are aligned. Our greatest frustration is when business owners are enticed by offers from acquirers seeking an off-market deal. These offers may be flattering but often fall short of delivering the full value business owners truly deserve. Many entrepreneurs are not aware of the full suite of options available beyond the conventional trade sale or private equity deal.

We recommend anyone considering a deal to use an advisor. Business owners may opt to proceed alone to attempt to reduce costs, but this generally turns out to be a loss-making exercise.

Common feedback we receive from our clients is that they had severely

underestimated the level of work required to complete a deal and the level of anxiety involved. The initial part of the agreement process is the tip of the iceberg, but the real bulk of the work starts afterwards. At Knight, we have a team of seasoned professionals with a wealth of experience in negotiating deals, managing due diligence, and executing transactions. Using an M&A advisor such as Knight, can streamline the process, enhance the likelihood of success, reduce the emotional drain on shareholders, and maximise the value obtained from the deal.

For most of our clients, their business represents the most valuable asset, and not all

business owners are looking to exit entirely. Instead, they aim to either realise or rebalance a portion of their wealth to ensure security for themselves and their family.

Private equity has become a very well-trodden path for equity release and has created a proven avenue for multiple businesses within the sector, facilitating growth in scale and value. While it's clear that no single approach suits every business owner, we are witnessing numerous innovative alternative options that bridge the gap between trade and private equity deals. This is particularly relevant for smaller companies, providing them with the advantages of both.

The ICT channel remains a robust and resilient sector and we look forward to more success stories as the channel continues to flourish and grow. As we expect to see consolidation continue, Knight remain committed to investing heavily in our team and continuing to support the channel.

In total, we have helped realise around £1Bn in value to our clients in the channel. Push the boundaries, don't stand still and know your aspirations as there are ample opportunities abound! If you are keen to understand your options, please do get in touch and we can help you understand **the art of the possible**. ∎

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Strength in partnership

As the move to cloud continues ahead of the ISDN switch-off we are seeing more companies exploring and implementing technologies like AI and ML, and while it's great to be a trailblazer, these customers know they cannot do it alone, writes **Ritchie Butters**, Director - Business Development EMEA, 8x8 UK.

Instead, they are looking to the channel for advice and support in an era of rising complexity. Whether it's Unified Comms or a Contact Centre solution, we can help our partners demonstrate that despite everything going on, they can simplify the number of platforms, companies, and supply chains their customers deal with and streamline work processes and improve customer engagement. With strong partnerships, this is all possible.

Ritchie Butters

Technology companies that team-up innovate, go-to-market and deliver solutions to their end customers quicker. The best channel success stories prove this, and at 8x8 we've taken that to heart as we continue to evolve our platform capabilities. This innovation gives our partners a competitive edge and opens new revenue streams.

Look at the 8x8 Intelligent Customer Assistant, a powerful, user-friendly conversational AI platform that allows your customers to deliver effective automated self-service experiences across a variety of different channels - you can build your own bot on our platform or bring your own. 8x8 also has a Technology Partnership Ecosystem Programme, designed to accelerate growth through a carefully curated network of innovators to solve specific CX use cases - including AI & ML, CRM, Employee Experience, IT Operations, Service Partners and Workforce Engagement and Management - all with native, hassle free, integrations.

It's not just about the technology. You need the right tools and campaigns, so you're reaching the right people at the right time. Our channel programme, Elevate, helps you do that, but we don't stop there. We offer free sales and technical training to ensure you know when our product is the perfect fit and offer several business development programmes that extensively utilise insight and intent data tools including Account-Mapping-as-a-Service and Marketing-as-a-Service to help you attract new customers and upsell to your existing install base. Because if you don't your competitors will!

Reaping the benefits from this period of technology advancements isn't something that just one company can deliver due to the sprawling needs of most organisations – but that doesn't mean it needs to be complicated. ∎

Stand out from the crowd

In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving comms world, there's no doubt that 'integration aids differentiation'. **Jamie Hughes, UK Sales Director at Evolve IP**, reflects on what this really means for resellers.

Lots of service providers can deliver dial tones and make a phone ring, but what really provides organisations with a competitive advantage is the level of value-added services delivered alongside that core voice technology.

There are many different 'value adds' where we can integrate voice services within a customer's wider business environment. Much of that comes down to integration, so yes, it's great that we can provide fantastic voice services, call recording and analytics, but this is still very much a siloed solution. It's a voice solution.

When we take that next step, and we start to integrate that voice solution

Jamie Hughes

with the other applications that the customer uses, that's when we start to add real true value through CRM systems which have come a long way over the last few years.

In 2008, only 12% of businesses used a cloud-based CRM. That figure has now increased to 87%, so almost 9 out of 10 businesses now use a cloud-based CRM system.

We know from industry research and customer feedback that the

return of investment in a CRM software system, can exceed 245% when properly implemented.

It comes down to the CRM really being the engine room of a business's function, whether that's sales, support, a ticketing system or a booking system. Those core systems are vital to how a business operates.

Secret to success

So, if we can then integrate into those systems, it provides added value to that customer. But also, as a provider, it makes us all far stickier. Because we aren't now providing a siloed voice solution. We're providing a solution which really embeds our voice service and voice products deep within that business day-to-day operation. So why integrate? The key to success is adding further value to the customer's CRM investment by adding incremental efficiency gains at every opportunity.

We support our partners by giving them the opportunity to integrate with over 350 CRM'S and carry out bespoke CRM integrations every two week.

Now, much of what we're trying to do with integration is to save time. Let's be honest. It's to save time and create additional efficiency.

Equally, it's no secret. ICT leaders are under pressure – now more so than ever in an increasingly dynamic, fluent and competitive workplace. Cutting costs, consolidating tools, ensuring 100% availability, supporting hybrid deployments and maintaining compliance are some of the many challenges.

There's always a new product, service or system that claims to future-proof cloud infrastructure. So, choosing the right 'integration road' for their UC journey is critical for overall business success.

Launching digital Energy

Apartnership with Fidelity Energy can support you to offer an online business energy switching solution for your customers, writes **MD John Haw**.

At Fidelity Energy, our commitment to our core values, including channel focus, continuous improvement, trust and adaptability, has been unwavering since 2014. Online switching is an increasingly common way for businesses to compare and switch services, such as insurance or connectivity, but the energy sector has lagged behind. Fidelity Energy are helping to revolutionise the energy market by introducing a cutting-edge online energy switching solution for your customers, which can be white labelled to the partner's brand.

The current energy approach typically involves sharing your information with a broker. Rather than receiving

Sean Dixon and John Haw

online quotes the customer endures a stream of endless phone calls. Fidelity Energy is changing this landscape, ensuring a more streamlined and customer-friendly experience that will benefit both you and your customers.

Going digital is a game-changer. Customers are more informed about their business energy needs and have clear preferences. Empowering your customers to independently switch

their business energy online, without the hassle of relentless cold calls, sets you apart from your competitors.

From the initial comparison of energy suppliers to the signing of the selected energy contract, the entire process can be done via an integration on your website. The Fidelity Energy team has created a fully white labelled switching site, that partners can embed into their own sites to enable customers to switch.

Our white label switching platform leverages all the advantages of our custom-built energy portal. The process is streamlined for your customers who wish to compare and switch online independently. All the suppliers and contract terms available are displayed to the customer, mirroring the information found on the portal. Once a rate is chosen, contracts are still generated and

signed via DocuSign, guaranteeing a clear audit trail. Our team of experts then handle everything, only involving you when necessary.

The best part for our partners? It requires minimal effort on your part while you still earn a revenue share. Of course, we continue to support the larger and more complex customers via the in-house teams. This enables partners to leverage their trusted advisor status within their current customer base of medium to large customers and the public sector."

Find John alongside Sales Director Sean Dixon at Comms Vision, in the Craigellachie Suite (room 405) to explore how going digital will be advantageous for your business and support your customers even further. Email **partners@fidelity-energy. co.uk** if you have any questions or to schedule a meeting. ■

Go Digital
With Your Energy Offering

Search Online

Compare Online

Switch Online

Get in touch to find out how to further elevate your energy partnership at partners@fidelity-energy.co.uk

Fidelity Energy
Energising Our Partners

Forward Thinking from ICUK

This is the first year ICUK is sponsoring the Comms Vision Convention and it coincides with the launch of three very significant developments, writes Founding Director **Paul Barnett**. To kick things off, we have an industry first, delivering fully automated broadband fault handling for our partners. This enhancement ensures that the more mundane elements of faults are taken care of quickly and without human delay. Being available at all hours also means opening up a wider portfolio of care level targets. The features include appointment selection, visibility of engineer progress, and automated note delivery. Our support team continues to observe and track progress, ensuring expectations are set to be met, and are on-hand should a query be raised.

Next up is the launch of our mobile data platform which instils the

Paul Barnett

design logic of ICUK, coupled with seamless integration with

our broadband and leased line portfolios, and is backed up with innovative mapping and logic tools to aid decision making from the comfort of your desktop. Our initial version will focus on layer 2 multi-net solutions allowing sims to be managed in the same way we operate for broadband. We will also offer a portfolio of single-net sim solutions across all carriers. We have longer term ambitions to develop genuinely unique and unseen levels of detail for planning, through to in-life controls mirroring what we have delivered in other areas of our portfolio.

Lastly, in preparation for Ofcom enforced changes to residential broadband migrations from March 2024, ICUK is launching its own Managed Access Platform. The TOTSCO One Touch Switching process is gathering pace, and ICUK will be one of the first approved

access providers. The platform will be suitable for managing third party broadband estates, as well as resellers who use ICUK for connectivity already. Regardless of how your estate split across providers, our One Touch platform will aid the migrations in and out. Whilst the initial brief focuses on residential migrations, the intentions are to expand across business connections too. As an industry we need to build awareness of these changes in order to comply.

Launched late 2022 our in-house developed VoIP platform, which was delivered flawlessly to our reseller base, offers dependability coupled with sheer ease of use. We couldn't be happier with how take-up has gone, with a number of significant enhancements set for release in 2024. For potential partners wanting to see this firsthand, the platform will be in action at Comms Vision. ■

More Control. More Visibility.

icuk

Introducing Inform Analytics

Inform Billing has been a disruptor since its inception almost 14 years ago, writes MD, **Shaun Bodsworth**. Initially with low introductory pricing and flexible contracts for start-ups, and in 2017 as the first provider to launch a fully cloud-based billing platform with all features available online. Now we are set to do it again, recognising resellers aspirations are stretching further than the reporting produced within a traditional billing platform.

Complementing our existing billing services, we are launching Inform Analytics to empower Telecoms and IT resellers, utilising their billing data to identify trends, mitigate risks, amplify profitability and generally inform more intelligent business decisions.

Our strengths lie within securely managing and interpreting commercially sensitive data in great volumes, and as a true independent,

Shaun Bodsworth

providing confidence that insights will not feed a wider agenda. With unrivalled market experience and a track record of successfully delivering data projects, we have invested in dedicated resource and brought in specialist expertise to deliver accessible 'Analytics as a Service' to the channel.

Inform Analytics removes the barriers of setup and the need for a specialist in-house data science team. The service, available by monthly subscription, starts with a range of pre-configured dashboards

designed specifically for ICT resale businesses, with more bespoke options if required. Our cloud-based dashboards provide a centralised real-time view, enabling data-driven decisions for service offerings and pricing strategies, boosting both profitability and customer satisfaction.

Considering the PSTN switch off there is a dedicated dashboard included to give visibility, track performance and identify trends, supporting resellers to deliver their strategy for migrating legacy services. Insights are delivered in real-time, integrating via API from our Eclipse billing platform.

Whilst Inform Analytics is designed to be taken in conjunction with our billing offering, we can also design solutions for customers using alternative platforms and can combine multiple data sources.

When moving to Inform Billing from

other providers, the differences are around time savings and greater accuracy from our revenue assurance tools. Increasingly popular is our end-customer portal with mobile self-service options, usage monitoring and alerting, with API integration to Abzorb, Gamma Mobile, Giacom and Zest4.

Another enhancement is our 'Automated MSP Billing Module' which streamlines subscription management for MSPs by addressing the challenges of subscriptions, quantity changes and billing processes that occur throughout the month.

Billing remains at the forefront of what we do, as we continually improve our software and services. Analytics is a natural extension, utilising our core competencies and providing both a real point of differentiation to us and significant benefits to our customers. ∎

INFORM ANALYTICS

Powering informed decisions

Inform Analytics powers Telecoms and IT resellers to easily identify trends, reduce risks, increase profitability and drive informed decisions.

See what we can do for you

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www.informanalytics.co.uk

A vendor that works for you

Intermedia is pleased to be supporting Comms Vision this year. We are thrilled to join the conversation as collaboration and hybrid work continue to be critical components of the partner landscape, writes **Philippe du Fou, EMEA Sales Director at Intermedia Cloud Communications**.

Recently awarded "Best CCaaS vendor" at the Comms National Awards 2023, Intermedia services over 500k UCaaS seats globally through our own product developed and backed by our 99.999% uptime SLA. As one of our partners, you can resell our consolidated Unified Comms and Contact Centre solution under a private-label to separate yourself from the pack, while earning up to five times more than a traditional agent model. Besides we only sell via indirect channel, so we won't compete with you.

Philippe du Fou

As a channel-first organisation, our robust partner programme gives you access to our highly competitive pricing, free phones or rebates with every license, and a friendly partner portal to manage all your customers and services (quoting, provisioning, number porting, QoS monitoring).

How do you differentiate yourself to customers in a competitive Unified Communications marketplace?

Intermedia has been solving this problem for our partners with our innovative cloud communications and channel friendly programs for years. CRN awarded us the "Partner Program Winner 2023".

Besides being the largest hosted Exchange provider outside Microsoft, we offer Voice, Video, Instant Messaging, Contact Centre, File sharing & Backup all delivered through one highly reliable and secure platform thereby eliminating the need for multiple communications providers.

Due to the breadth of our application portfolio, we can offer comprehensive, integrated solutions to meet our end customers' and partners' communications and collaboration needs, which saves them from the complexity of sourcing, integrating and managing multiple disparate solutions from different vendors.

The market opportunity is for the taking with over 300 million on-premises seats that have yet to migrate to the cloud – with projections showing that cloud communications adoption is happening at, and will continue to happen at, record rates. The advantages of being an Intermedia partner include: Private label option (so you can re-brand it), month to month billing (no minimum contract), consolidated client for both UC and CC, whole solution provisioned via a single pane of glass quoting, provisioning, number porting, QoS monitoring, business email, etc...), and free phone/device (no upfront CapEx cost required).

With the Intermedia private-label offer, you can retain top-line revenue & customer ownership through our channel-only approach. At Intermedia, we work for you. ∎
For more information:
www.intermedia.com/uk

Your path to cloud success

Nasstar Channel is a standalone division of the Nasstar Group dedicated to one thing, partner success, writes **Dave Hawkins, Sales Director for Nasstar Channel**. At Comms Vision this year, we'll be operating a Cloud Clinic where attendees can unpack their transformation struggles.

As one of the UK's largest independent technology providers, we offer a comprehensive range of partner solutions. Our expertise, portfolio, and tools make us the go-to source for transformative technology. As your channel partner, we're here to support your customers on their cloud journey.

Partner Ecosystem
Nasstar Channel interconnects with the UK's top connectivity providers, providing nationwide reach directly from our Intelligent Connected Cloud (ICC).

Benefit from attractive underlay solutions, available in unmanaged

Dave Hawkins

and fully managed options. Our 24x7x365 fully managed service is driven by our technical experts in our Connectivity Centre of Excellence. From SoGEA-based FTTC/FTTP services to dedicated 10Gb fibre ethernet services, we've got you covered.

Friction-Free Experience
We believe in simplifying the pricing, procurement, delivery, and management of connectivity

services. Our ICC supports your growth without adding unnecessary complexity.

We've packaged underlay and software-defined overlay branch deployments into specific "site types" for streamlined procurement. One transaction, multiple use cases.

Converged Access
The demand for Voice, Unified Comms (UC), data, and exceptional user experiences is greater than ever.

Our ICC proposition handles underlay and software-defined overlay capabilities and provides access to our voice solutions and dedicated cloud connectivity through a single circuit. Experience unparalleled quality of service that traditional internet-based solutions can't match.

Industry-Leading Threat Protection
We've assembled a security partner ecosystem to tackle the ever-evolving threat landscape. Our ICC branch and perimeter security

solutions include intrusion detection, prevention, and the latest in zero-day threat intelligence. Our dedicated cyber security incident response teams are available around the clock to analyse and remediate security alerts and anomalies.

"Direct To Cloud" Connectivity
As part of our ICC Converged Access offering, Nasstar Channel ICC Cloud Connect enables direct connections to Azure or AWS from your branch or data centre.

There's no need for separate Azure ExpressRoute or AWS Direct Connect circuits. Centralise your cloud application consumption for an optimised user experience.

Your trusted cloud advisor
Nasstar Channel's ICC portfolio simplifies the procurement and management of connectivity and security services. It's your ticket to a true "cloud-first" next-generation connectivity fabric, unlocking value and insights.

400Gbps services nationwide

Today, low-latency, high-capacity connectivity services are viewed as essential as businesses become more reliant than ever on digital practices and high-speed internet access to operate, writes **Simon Willmott, Business Development Director for Wholesale at Neos Networks.**

Recent figures show how such services are becoming the norm, with 70% of companies found to have sped up their cloud migration over the previous year in a survey on global IT decision-makers. The UK's growing appetite for cloud is also reflected in revenues from that sector growing 25-30% annually in recent years.

The growing adoption of next-generation and cloud-based services is exponentially driving end-user traffic. This naturally increases the demands on network providers,

Simon Willmott

which want to deploy high-capacity and backhaul services as close to their customers as possible.

Recently, there's been a call for higher capacities for backhaul connectivity. Neos sought to address that need this August, launching our national 400Gbps Optical Wavelength service across an initial 26 data centres in the UK, with plans to add more of our 600-plus points of presence

in the coming months. Our new 400Gbps Optical product bridges the gap for partners who need more than 100Gbps backhaul, but either cannot or do not want to move to a self-managed dark-fibre solution.

Putting 400Gbps in place means that the larger capacity is there for the longer term, avoiding the need for repeated upgrades and changes in the future. It creates a simplified connection compared to having to manage multiple 100Gbps wavelengths, along with reduced cross-connect charges. 400Gbps services will also offer better value in pounds per gigabyte than their 100Gbps counterparts.

Expanding options
Coupled with initiatives to bring a growing amount of direct fibre connectivity to UK businesses, such moves are creating more choice and competition in the market.

In recent years, Neos has recently embarked on a campaign to unbundle hundreds of BT exchanges, providing us with a broad network reach that spans the UK. More recently, Neos has diversified by launching our first metro access networks, providing direct end-to-end connectivity in four metro cities: Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London.

The launch of our metro access networks was a great step for us as they allowed us to provide our wholesale partners with a clearer route to market alongside better visibility over their entire connection, due to only one supplier providing the end-to-end service."

We are looking to make further improvements too by extending the capacities of some other services, including increasing the speed of our Managed Dedicated Internet Access service to 10Gbps. ∎

New-look Node4 Channel

Since 2004, Node4 has maintained a commitment to delivering powerful technology and IT solutions to our clients with exceptional service, writes **Ashley Butcher**, Sales Director – Channel. Driven by a desire to stay at the forefront of the market with leading technical expertise and a focus on innovation, we have grown from three to over 1,000 employees, with a widely expanded and comprehensive portfolio of services, products and solutions. Node4 has recently re-launched its channel programme exclusively for partners – Node4 Channel. What is Node4 Channel?

Node4 Channel plays a vital role in Node4's go-to-market strategy, taking an existing portfolio that includes Cloud, Security, Data, Collaboration and Colocation services to our vast partner base of MPSs, VARs, ISVs, SIs and Carriers.

Ashley Butcher

The programme has always been a key component of the company's offering, but thanks to significant investment, it now boasts an array of products crafted specifically for the channel, and a refreshed team of experienced channel players which includes Iain Shearman as CCO and myself.

Its aims are simple; to provide its partners with new long-term and recurring revenue streams that accelerate their organisational goals, whilst simultaneously bringing cutting-edge products and solutions to their customers.

Taking expertise to partners
A key facet of the programme's strategy is to leverage new and existing products in ways that can provide long-term, tangible benefits. It taps into a wide, expansive range of solutions such as Security, Cloud and Virtual Data Centre, each tailored to suit the needs and requirements of the partner in mind.

Thought-leadership is another key component, with our technology and practice leads conducting regular webinars to discuss how new, existing and emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, can be best utilised to benefit partners and their customers.

That same expertise ensures the creation of market-leading solutions and services. The recently launched Virtual Data Centre (VDC), a new infrastructure-as-a-service platform is a fine example of this, combining the positives of modern data centres with flexibility, self-service scalability and cost-effective usage billing.

Partners who wish to digitally transform but have no capex or operational headroom are also supported, thanks to Consultancy and Professional Services that provide the structure and guidance required to reach strategic goals.

Looking to the future
It's an exciting time for Node4 Channel, with a reinvigorated team and a vast array of solutions that promises to deliver increased monthly recurring revenue to its partners. Now is certainly the time to re-engage with the Node4 Channel team. ∎

Connecting you to the world

Openreach runs the UK's largest digital infrastructure company. We're the people who connect homes, mobile phone masts, schools, shops, banks, hospitals, libraries, broadcasters, governments and businesses – large and small – to the world.

It's our mission to build the best possible network with the highest quality of service, and make sure that everyone in the UK can be connected writes **Matt Dexter, the firm's Head of Client Partnerships**.

We've planned to build Full Fibre broadband to 25 million homes and businesses nationwide by December 2026 and have already built to around 12 million of those homes and businesses across the UK.

Our Ethernet products are high-bandwidth, permanently

Matt Dexter

connected, national point-to-point connections for businesses and large organisations. They help you extend your own networks and offer your customers faster, higher capacity products.

We also offer Optical products on a national basis with managed wavelength bandwidths of 10Gbps and 100Gbps, offering a range of popular client interface speeds and interfaces. These products enable

you to offer a range of premium services, from cloud applications and next generation data centres to high-speed file transfer and business continuity solutions, such as information storage and retrieval.

We're committed to delivering great products, with innovation and brilliant service at the heart of what we do.

Openreach is pleased to sponsor Comms Vision this year. It's the gold standard event with regards debate and opportunity that creates a unique environment where channel leaders can understand the factors driving ICT sectors.

Matt will be at Gleneagles along with Ses Karunananthan, Openreach's MD for Customers, to discuss how they can help enable customer and partner growth, and success.

Doing IoT all wrong?

The telecoms market is fiercely competitive right now, and there are seismic changes underway, writes **Dan Cunliffe, MD, Pangea**. The PSTN switch-off poses huge challenges — over 200 IoT applications, traditionally connected by PSTN, will need alternative connectivity, and 2.4m companies still using PSTN will have to switch to new services. Throw in the 2G and 3G sunsets and things look choppy for customers.

But as 5G rolls out worldwide as a viable alternative to fixed lines, and wireless tech continues to expand, there's no development more lucrative, more sustainable, or more scalable for partners than IoT.

The old ways of selling, characterised by overexcited price wars that push product as quickly as possible, are an unsustainable strategy for most businesses. Faster innovation cycles,

Dan Cunliffe

changing customer expectations, globalisation — Channel partnerships need to get up to speed when it comes to helping deliver more value.

And it's the maturity of IoT that's most clearly amplified the chasm between partnerships based on

a quick deal and those built on making significant, long-term growth together. Why? Success in IoT demands more from partnerships: more players in your ecosystem, more specific expertise, more network agnostic connectivity, and more bulletproof security.

Should that put you off? Just look at the numbers. By 2025 the IoT market will be worth $300bn, and account for 7% of global IT spending. The UK IoT market is growing at 16% CAGR vs c4-5% for the traditional telecoms market, almost four times the growth.

The IoT is a transformative force offering huge opportunities for remote, mobile, and edge computing deployments, and for working in conjunction with AI. Innovations are moving fast, and markets even faster. Getting on top of your IoT portfolio is going to be a

necessity for success for Channel businesses wanting to survive.

Sound like a lot of work? Not with the right IoT partner. The right IoT partner doesn't just help you sell. They'll be looking for mutual investment, with no qualms about putting some skin in the game. They won't just offer you a product; they'll invest in your growth.

They'll commit to a long-term vision, tailoring support and giving you all the right tools to help you along the way. When the time's right they'll have made your business a whole lot easier for you to sell too.

If you're in it for long-term growth, supercharged multiples, and lucrative acquisition prospects, then look to your IoT partnerships first. Accept nothing less than one that's in it for your long-term growth over short-term sales. ∎

Say 'yes' to customers

At Pragma, we're changing the channel and creating more opportunities for our partners to say 'Yes', writes **Will Morey, CEO, Pragma**.

The iPECS Cloud platform, based on Ericsson-LG Enterprise's market-leading technology, has been outperforming expectations since it was launched in 2016. But as cloud services grow, demands for features have become more specialised.

We've created a host (no pun intended) of new cloud products – to help our partners meet tricky requirements and win more deals.

CONNECT for iPECS Cloud

An innovative, bespoke browser-based UC app that can integrate with any other cloud service that has an API. Google and Microsoft integration are built in allowing users to click to dial their contacts, show presence

Will Morey

and synchronise their calendars within a single view in CONNECT.

We're not just saying you can integrate with other products – we're saying we will. Recent integrations have included project management and time-tracking software, allowing users to view tasks and track time within the CONNECT interface making iPECS Cloud the centre of the workplace. In turn, it's making our partners indispensable to their customers.

CONTACT for iPECS Cloud

Not everyone wants to call and wait in line, so offering more ways to get in touch offers better customer service. Omni-channel is in demand, and we've acted on it.

With our partners, Daktela, we've created an outstanding omni-channel CCaaS solution. Voice, social media, SMS and Web Chat are all included, alongside productivity-boosters like analytics and wallboards.

PCI for iPECS Cloud

This service makes PCI DSS 4.0 compliance automatic – it allows your users to take card payments over the phone in total confidence.

ANYWHERE for iPECS Cloud

App-free mobile integration to iPECS Cloud. How? Through a smart SIM that uses the mobile's native dialler to make and take calls via iPECS Cloud. This is a new, innovative, user-friendly way of enabling business mobility.

SafeWeb by Candio

Through our software business, Candio, we're protecting users from dark web threats while boosting our partners' recurring revenue. SafeWeb scans the dark web for your users' credentials and alerts them if they're being traded on the dark web. It's a lightweight, unobtrusive cloud service that's highly effective.

Product is just one element of Pragma's focus to help partners win that sits alongside technical training, marketing capability, proactive sales support and much more.

As Ericsson-LG partners, we're part of a community that serves 15 million users worldwide.

Through our unique product offering and approach to partnerships, we're changing the channel and helping you to say 'Yes' to more customers. ■

To switch off and beyond

It's estimated that around 33%* of businesses are still using ISDN as their underlying communications infrastructure. Collectively, the Channel has a big job to do. With that in mind, it's never been more important to ensure you're working with a partner who can help you deliver exactly what you need, when you need it, writes **ProVu MD Darren Garland**.

Margins are tight, and for many end users so is the amount available to spend in preparing for the switch off. That's why we've worked to provide a wide range of options to Channel partners designed to cover every eventuality.

Our main objectives in the run up to the 2025 deadline is to achieve two things; one is to ensure a smooth transition with minimal disruption for the end user and two, to enable channel partners to

Darren Garland

maximise the opportunities available.

When we talk about the switch off, we often think about phones. But what about lift phones, visual and audio alerting, door entry and access control? These devices

could all become obsolete in light of the switch off. With our range of technical services and support, these items can become a simple cross-sell – we can even arrange the installation for you. Or why not let us train your team.

Whatever your customers' circumstances or budget, we've got your back. We'll help you upgrade, replace or repurpose your customer's equipment with our complete offering which includes:

- IP desk and cordless phones
- IP door entry and access control
- Visual and audio alerting
- Gateways, SBCs and ATAs
- UPS devices
- Cloud-based solutions
- Routers

Let us support you in preparation for the biggest and most important modernisation of the public phone network ever. We're ready, are you?

Visit us at Comms Vision to discuss your requirements in the lead up to 2025 and beyond.

*Source: Computer Weekly

Use finance to drive sales

For the first eight months of this year, new asset finance business was 15% higher compared to the same period in 2022, writes **Dan MacKrell, National Account Manager at Shire Leasing**. Despite economic uncertainty, demand from UK businesses for finance options remains and continues to grow. That demand exists in the comms channel too, with over £1.3bn invested in IT equipment finance in the 12 months to August 2023.

The thirst to evolve, advance and grow in such a competitive landscape is widespread. Whether that be to pursue expansion, make sustainability improvements or upgrade operations to the latest technologies, through finance, SMEs gain choices.

Almost anything business-related that would include an upfront cost can be financed, from a single mobile

Dan MacKrell

handset and soft costs, to millions of pounds worth of kit. Shire offers conventional finance methods, such as Finance Lease agreements, as well as two off-the-shelf managed service agreements tailored to the ICT channel, Technology Lease and Managed Rental Agreement. These refined products allow resellers to deliver a solution for a monthly cost when the order value

mainly consists of 'soft costs'.

For channel vendors offering their solutions on a capex model only, this could result in lost sales. Even if you have a finance package in place, could it be performing better? At Comms Vision 2023, we're excited to discuss our latest updates and value-added services that can accelerate B2B sales even further.

This includes our Shire Online portal, which 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 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 and enabling sales

teams to increase overall conversions.

In addition to supporting the cash flow of SMEs, we also consider the impact the sale has on vendors. Delivering an exceptional service at all levels is important to us, that's why invoices can be paid and cleared in full within one working day after completion of relevant documentation, ensuring minimal disruption to your own business's cash flow.

By working with a forward-thinking finance provider like Shire, you can gain a competitive advantage and improve your overall sales proposition. When equipped with award-winning tech to quote, propose and receive auto-decisions for customers within seconds, gaining access to your solutions suddenly becomes an attainable choice for customers, maximising sales conversions and enabling SMEs to evolve affordably. ∎

Unify data for growth

In the fast-moving ICT sector, operating with siloed, incomplete data impedes the quality and pace of decision-making and severely impacts growth, writes **Michelle Livingstone**, CEO of Layer Systems. Executives, marketing, sales, service, finance, and operations teams rely on disparate systems and spreadsheets, leading to lost productivity and profitability.

Without a unified view of customer interactions and data across multiple sources, teams struggle to work efficiently and seize opportunities. This leaves decision-makers piecing together disjointed reports, resulting in an incomplete understanding of business performance.

Generic CRM systems fall short of addressing the complexities of the channel, forcing business critical functions to be managed across multiple platforms, crippling productivity, data accuracy, and the

Michelle Livingstone

overall customer experience.

The solution lies in an industry-specific CRM, The Layer. Consolidating marketing, sales, service, stock management, provisioning, engineering, and finance data into a single, dedicated platform allows businesses to gain complete visibility. This centralisation of interactions and customised workflows empowers employees to collaborate effectively

using accurate, real-time information.

With analytics and reports at their fingertips, leaders can comprehensively assess the current state of their business. Granular visibility into key sales and service metrics, and key performance indicators, allow for continuous business improvement.

Integrated billing and supplier systems ensure customer data remains synchronised in real-time across all functions, eliminating wasted time reconciling errors and discrepancies. These integrations streamline processes and boost efficiency.

Moreover, an industry-specific CRM ensures regulatory compliance and standardises processes company-wide. This consistency in customer interactions improves satisfaction, whilst seamless hand-offs between sales, service, and renewals increase customer retention.

Forward-thinking providers are turning to The Layer to unlock transformative efficiencies. They recognise forcing disparate systems together is expensive, time-consuming, and ineffective. The right platform and onboarding process is essential for optimised productivity, data accuracy, and financial growth.

Success depends on complete visibility, operational efficiency, and differentiation. The Layer overcomes fragmented systems' limitations, amplifies strengths, and personalises customer experiences.

Don't let a patchwork of systems hinder your business any longer. Gain a 360-degree view of your operations with The Layer to work smarter, identify opportunities, delight your customers, and capitalise on strategic advantages. Engaging with The Layer can help you embark on a more efficient and profitable future. ∎

Comms is moving online

Since our first SIP Trunk sale in 2005, we have seen an enormous change within the communication and IT marketplace, writes Voiceflex CCO **Paul Taylor**. In 2005, the average data speed was 1116 Kbps; in 2023, it averaged 86500 kbps. In 2007, fixed line voice calls amounted to 149 billion minutes, and in 2020, this had decreased to 40 billion.

Major Telecommunications players have left the market, including Panasonic, Toshiba, Samsung, Siemens, and Nortel. Microsoft Teams, launched in 2017, now boasts 280 million active daily users. WhatsApp, launched in 2009, has grown to 2.7 billion users, and is projected to reach 3.14 billion users by 2025. The WebRTC market is predicted to be worth $66bn by 2027. Facts and Factors estimate that the Global UCaaS Market was valued at $26bn in 2022 and will increase to

Paul Taylor

$150.5bn by 2030, with a CAGR of 20.1%.

Based on market trends and predicted financial gains, if I were a betting man, the favourites would be UCaaS, MS Teams applications, WebRTC and WhatsApp.

In March 2022 we launched the award winning UCaaS Flow platform, powered by Telavox. From a standing start, we have over 7000 licenses installed. In November 2023 this will be fully integrated with MS Teams dial pad, requiring no business license and offering cost-effective and efficient solutions.

OmniChat, our WhatsApp API, has so many features that the written word will never do justice to the scope of the application. We have integrated OmniChat with Flow enabling callers to swap between the applications seamlessly. If there is one new

application you look at Comms Vision, make it OmniChat - it's a game changer.

We have a lineup of MS Teams applications, including Operator Connect, Voca front-end IVR and Contact Centre, PCI, and SBC as a service (SBCaaS), all set to be launched in 2024.

WebRTC voice calling has been enabled on our SIP trunks since 2016 and QR code functionality was added in 2022. In 2023, we were awarded UC Vendor of the Year, OTT Service of the Year, Account Management Team of the Year, Cloud Services of the Year, and Ben Redknap was named Salesperson of the Year.

The communications landscape is changing, and we believe we have to integrate between voice and online. Join Voiceflex on the journey to moving communications online. ∎

Voiceflex

SIP
UCaaS
SBC as a Service
WhatsApp for Business API
Operator Connect with VF SIP

Flow

Find out more
+44 (0) 20 3301 6000 | sales@voiceflex.com | voiceflex.com

Turning vision into reality

Voip Unlimited is turning its vision as the preferred wholesale partner within the industry into a reality, proudly standing as an independent Tier-1 ITSP with robust, dedicated infrastructure and support.

Our technical expertise enables resellers to take advantage of granular customisations of services across our broad portfolio, underscoring a commitment to delivering advanced network capabilities alongside absolute reliability and peak performance, writes **MD Mark Pillow**.

Delivering a complete portfolio
Voip Unlimited resellers gain access to a diverse range of solutions, including FTTP, SoGEA, Ethernet, UCaaS, SIP Trunking, Hosted Telephony, and low-cost, internet-based Landline replacements.

Mark Pillow

The PSTN switch off marks the most significant industry shift since ISDN, and an opportunity for resellers to establish new long-term customer relationships.

The key to success is finding the right combination of solutions and services, which will result in happier and better in-formed customers. Making this work requires a long-term and trusted wholesale partner, one that can offer solid solutions with a complete portfolio, striving for excellence along the way.

To enable resellers to make their growth ambitions a reality, partners also gain access to a purpose-built self-service reseller portal, centralising access to all solutions and services. This demonstrates and exemplifies how partnering with an innovative supplier becomes commercially transformative for resellers, making it incredibly convenient – and as hands-off as possible – for resellers to manage their offerings 24/7 efficiently.

Our in-house technical team helps partners differentiate their services and enable higher-margin sales. From data anonymisation to wireless, over-sea connectivity solutions, our 'never say never' attitude puts the quality of our solutions above all else, no matter how complex.

Keeping one eye on the future
The Voip Unlimited vision is clear, to bring transformative change to the industry. By equipping our Channel Partners with knowledge, capabilities, and ongoing support, we aim to create an ecosystem where success knows no bounds.

We understand that our channel partners simply seek solutions and support that are both efficient and reliable. Providing a self-service 24/7 management portal, coupled with the added benefit of a dedicated account manager just a phone call away, ensures that we deliver on this promise. ∎

AI boost for retail

Since we entered the UK in 2016, our market share has grown via a dedicated partner network, writes **Ian Rowan**, Country Manager for Wildix UK & Ireland. We are now expanding our UCaaS solution to include a new retail communications offering: x-hoppers.

Wildix has been recognised by Gartner as the only European vendor to meet the requirements to be included on the Gartner Magic Quadrant for UCaaS. Our strengths include numerous first-to-market innovations such as its WebRTC browser-based softphone, which includes audio, video, screen sharing and location services, a dedicated Apple Watch application and most recently, support for the fully immersive Apple Pro Vision VR headset. Other improvements to our core UCaaS offering include skills-based routing groups and a comprehensive cloud analytics engine.

Ian Rowan

But value often lies in verticalisation: x-hoppers by Wildix is a tried-and-tested retail solution that delivers new revenue opportunities for partners.

x-hoppers allows frontline sales assistants to communicate seamlessly with their colleagues via a push-to-talk headset connected by a secure DECT network. What sets it apart from other retail solutions is its functionality, notably the introduction of AI to aid staff in their day-to-day tasks.

The first AI used by x-hoppers is its theft detection add-on for cameras. It uses computer vision and machine learning to understand a store's layout, and then algorithms detect human gestures related to theft and send an audio alert to a device when it detects them. This messaging can even be played in store via a connected speaker system. Similarly, the AI can nudge staff to go to attend certain areas of the store to react to footfall, customer numbers near high-ticket items or even to another checkout. These add significant value, can boost sales and improve overall perceptions of the business.

For retailers who are struggling with staff training, x-hoppers is the solution: Through the use of AI, staff can request information about stock, ingredients or even delivery times – this ensures each person has the information they need to enhance the customer experience at their fingertips.

For compliance, all interaction between users and AI tools is transcribed into a dedicated client instantly and a daily generative AI summary produced to allow managers to monitor users and highlight trends and in-store issues. This delivers live data for further analysis and better anticipation of demand. Wildix continues to innovate across all its solutions, and it offers partners and their end-users incredible value — whether through x-hoppers, Collaboration and x-bees. ∎

Nurturing longstanding customer relationships

A tailored and defined portfolio of services and solutions allowing channel providers the ability to enhance their standard cloud-based UC offering. In simplistic terms, this is what COTU offers to their partners, writes Channel Director Rich James.

Rich James

With many UC and CX vendors delivering an increasingly similar set of products and features into the market, this commoditisation means far end customers can find it difficult to spot the difference. As a result, the market has pivoted back away from offering solutions to selling services, with a race to bottom, driven by price. This makes the transition from one hosted solution to another increasingly less invasive for the end user:

- How can a vendor make their customers 'sticky'?
- How can a vendor stand out to ensure the customer doesn't consider the option of leaving?

COTU have been delivering solutions into the UC&C channel market to help their partners ensure that the ancillary services and wrap-around relationship provided alongside their core solutions make customer thoughts of switching vendors a thing of the past.

At COTU we enhance the ties between our partners and their customers by ensuring the solutions and services that we offer really fill gaps in the market. Coming from a background in UC and CX our team takes the time to understand the needs of your customers so we can ensure our product portfolio, and our ongoing sales and product support services, mean you can rely on COTU to work with you. Our expanding portfolio is currently focused on several key products, all developed and priced to fit seamlessly alongside the costs of UC licensing, some examples include:

RAMP offers fully secure cloud call recording archive and retrieval. Agnostic of where the recording originated from, recording files and associated metadata can be added to RAMP allowing for the simple retrieval and playback for all customers from Enterprise to SME businesses. RAMP offers compliance for FCA requirements on retention duration, GDPR requirements for data removal, and MiFID

II requirements on ready and easy retrieval. Chargeable based on storage, customers control their own data and therefore pay for what they need to keep. Hosted within AWS we use the latest in archival, playback and call transcription technologies to ensure a simple to use, yet powerful tool for all business sectors.

MyWallboards is designed to provide customisable real-time and historic UC data presentation allowing businesses to keep an eye on their call volumes and productivity. Simple to use and extremely dynamic in development, MyWallboards works alongside the Wildix UC solution to add an additional layer of data presentation which an increasing volume of end customers now desire. Sold on a licence model; meaning the customer only pay for reporting data on those extensions or individuals who they need to see, MyWallboards becomes an

affordable but invaluable add-on for most Wildix customers, with more vendor integration being launched soon.

Voicespider provides a cloud based IVR and call management solution. Designed to sit ahead of your PBX offering, the functionality within Voicespider ensures resilience for incoming call traffic by providing the options to route calls to any telephony end point. Incorporating a full drag-and-drop IVR builder, intelligent call queuing, scheduling, real-time and historic wallboards, full CDR reporting and number management; Voicespider is designed to be a channel solution with granular levels of reseller and customer access. This allows partners to offer their own inbound services, while remaining agnostic of carriers.

COTU is a key distributor of the **ipSCAPE** Hosted Contact Centre software. Developed in Sydney since

2005, ipSCAPE has only ever been a cloud based solution and offers an omnichannel CX solution for any business who needs it. Delivering inbound voice, dialler, chat and email functionality under a single, all inclusive agent licence price, ipSCAPE is a complete offering; providing the same level of functionality to all customers, from blue chip multinationals to small tactical sales or CX teams.

Since the inception of COTU as a pure-channel business we have gone from strength to strength, increasing our global reach, supporting over a hundred partners around the world. Our team is constantly striving to find and develop solutions for the needs of the UC&C market all with the same goal of making our partner's engagements with their customers as fruitful and longstanding as possible.

For further details contact us on **03301249595**, or email **partners@cotu.uk**

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Supporting UK business

IP Netix is supporting the legacy systems that underpin UK businesses whilst deploying UcaaS and CCaaS hybrid solutions, writes **Co-Founder Kevin Boyer**

With 2023 being another year of intense change, one of the things that keeps coming up across the industry is the requirement to support legacy systems – particularly across the public sector, where not everybody is on the immediate AI-adoption list. Many IPNetix partners are transitioning their customers from legacy systems, and it's a progressive step that requires skilful technical handling.

As a safe pair of hands, UK IT systems integrators are increasingly relying on IPNetix to get the job done reliably, on time, and above expectations.

With a differentiation-led approach to business growth, a passion

Kevin Boyer

embodied by Comms Vision, it will be inspiring to see how Comms Vision 2023 moves the game even

further. Understanding critical pillars for success in the channel is something we're extremely passionate about at IPNetix, and nowhere is this more apparent than in our agnostic service provision.

Agnostic Technical Services Specialists
As an agnostic technical services specialist, IPNetix specialises in the design, deployment and provision of in-life services for the UK's call centre, UCaaS portfolio and CCaaS. We do not re-sell manufactured product, minutes or lines; instead, our success comes from an acute business focus, and the dedication of our highly skilled employees.

Sitting between the channel sales partner and the end customer and providing reliable service and delivery in either an IPNetix or white label form, has been instrumental to our success in a highly competitive and fragmented market.

We stand strong as one of the UK's biggest service delivery success stories, despite the challenges of the past few years. We deployed subscription-based solutions to help customers beat rising inflation, and built a diverse and highly engaged team to support the legacy systems that underpin UK businesses.

Record Growth
This approach has led to IPNetix provisioning two new service agreements that support high profile customers – and growing the IPNetix workforce by 50%. The versatility of our leadership and the diversity among our team members have contributed to the positive experience of this integration.

Despite a raft of challenges including the energy crisis, inflation, and the tailwinds of the pandemic, the IPNetix team never stops developing.

A new channel battleground

Consumer purchasing decisions are no longer driven purely based on quality or price, but on overall experience, writes **TelXL CEO Aaron Fox.**

But right now, the lack of decent customer experience can be seen everywhere, and this has never been more important for our small-to-medium businesses to understand and address.

The Challenge
As consumers we don't differentiate between sizes of business, we expect the same great experiences in all cases. The contact centre inside any size of business plays a critical role in shaping the experience their customers get. But for our SME's, they face the ongoing and relentless challenge of balancing the ever-changing needs of their customers against the optimisation of their own operational costs. This is where

Aaron Fox

having the right technology applied in the right way inside the contact centre can be such an important variable in balancing the equation.

The challenge is that SME's have struggled to get access to the right technology needed to meaningfully impact their customer experiences. The technology has been too

expensive, too complicated, or simply just not flexible enough to meet their current day-to-day needs. For those that do take the plunge, they are often left without guidance, proper understanding of how to apply the technology in a meaningful way, or worse yet, end up only actually utilising a fractional % of what they have bought.

Addressing the opportunity
The SME sector is the fastest growing in the UK and with over 5.5m SMEs in business, this is a challenge that our industry must take responsibility in addressing.

TelXL has built up over 20 years' industry knowledge in delivering stable, feature-rich communication and contact centre solutions designed to make interactions feel exceptional, and that are now specifically targeted at the SME small and medium contact centres that are now asking for help.

Armed with the right technology, at the right entry price, that flexes to the needs of SME's, there is massive opportunity for the channel to step in and address this market.

Be a part of the future
Overcoming the challenge is an educational issue as much as it is a technological one. We believe the best way to bring this platform to the market is to empower an engaged, customer-focused partner network.

This is why we operate 100% through the Channel, offering dedicated enablement and implementation support, as well as feedback capture so that our Partners can layer their customer and local knowledge into our future development, making sure it addresses the true needs of these SME businesses as they grow and flex. ▪
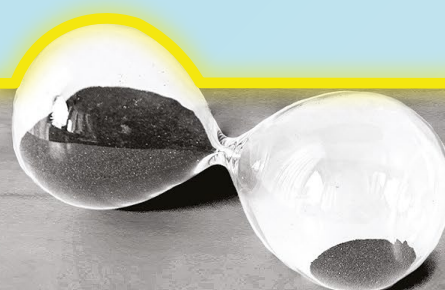
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