



Chris Russell sharpens Arrow to hit ambitious new targets p30



Former band leader finds his voice in communications p32

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to Spark market push

Platform and Business Edition 4000 cloud determined push into the SMB sector.

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“Teams require a new way of working,” he stated. “Most employees use unconnected tools for team messaging, virtual meetings and phone calls. Spark mixes messaging, meeting and calling in such a simple way that it is hard to tell where one ends and the next begins. All three are parts of a complete user experience.” See page 22

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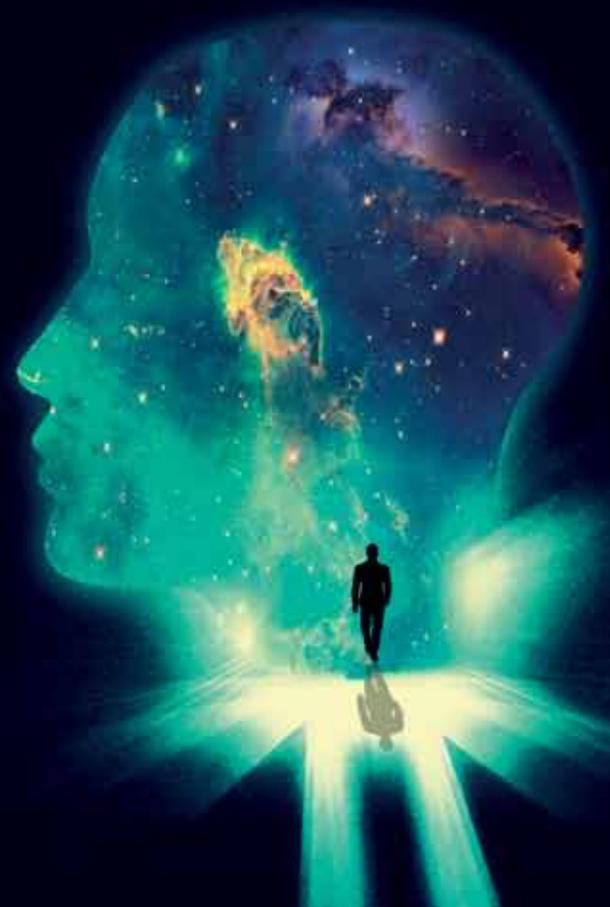


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This month's movers and shakers



Cisco set to Spark SMB market push

CISCO has manoeuvred its Spark platform and Business Edition 4000 cloud voice solution as springboards for a determined push into the SMB sector.

SPECIAL REPORT

The move broadens out Cisco's erstwhile focus on the enterprise space as it rallies SMB resellers around collaboration and team messaging tools designed for smaller firms.

Cisco Spark, a subscription-based collaboration platform offering fully integrated team messaging, meetings and calling, was launched two years ago following three years in development and a multi-million dollar investment.

Cisco lifted the lid on Business Edition 4000 in March 2017, a cloud managed voice solution for SMBs.

These developments signal a new era of channel engagement from Cisco based on innovation and simplicity, claimed Andy Brocklehurst (pictured), Head of Collaboration for EMEAR.

"Cisco Spark and BE4000 change the channel paradigm, offering resellers a collaborative solution that works seamlessly on all major devices and smartphones," he commented.

Brocklehurst cited a HBR Analytical Services global study that found current collaboration tools lack fizz when it comes to optimising teamwork.

"Teams require a new way of working," he stated. "Most employees use unconnected tools for team messaging, virtual meetings and phone calls. Spark mixes messaging, meeting and calling in such a simple way that it is hard to tell where one ends and the next begins. All three are parts of a complete user experience." See page 22

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

LIKE curtains closing on this year's bright summer the nights are now drawing in. And with kids back to school a new academic year gets under way. The closing of summertime and opening of school time are emblematic of the ongoing endings and new beginnings that permeate all aspects

of life. They bring change, opportunity, new challenges, uncertainty, time for personal development, as well as the certainty of a cold winter blast whistling over your head.

At this time, perhaps we look further ahead more than at any other period of the year, as we wish winter away in anticipation of a warming spring and the days growing longer. But winter is not a time to baton down the hatches, put our plans into hibernation and sit on our hands. It is also a season of growth. For some, the coming months will be the busiest of the year as a pre-Christmas rush spills over from the high street into the channel.

One sector especially represents a bright spot in the darkening days – health and care. As the cold winter adds more pressure to an already creaking infrastructure, the technology solutions designed to help the health sector to meet its budget and patient experience objectives will be in peak demand; and the new Health and Social Care Network (HSCN) has flung open the door of opportunity to smaller mid-market ICT suppliers now able to compete in this sector (see pages 48 and 50).

Also in this issue, we highlight the opportunities in WebRTC which experts say is edging closer towards mainstream adoption (page 38). Meanwhile, Nfon UK's MD Myles Leach turns his attention to the cloud telephony SMB market (page 26); Arrow Business Communications CEO Chris Russell sharpens up to hit new targets (30); and Armstrong Bell Director William Copley talks about achieving NME's 'single of the week' (page 32) – all inspirational stories guaranteed to brighten your day.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Maintel boosted by swoop on Intrinsic

MAINTEL has bolstered its Cisco expertise and strengthened its influence in the network security sector with the £5.25m acquisition of Intrinsic Technology, a Cisco Gold Partner with a particular focus on medium to large size enterprises and public sector organisations.

The deal boosts Maintel's revenues by £21m to £158m. Synergies are expected to generate positive EBITDA and be earnings enhancing in the financial year to December 2018.

Maintel CEO Eddie Buxton stated: "The acquisition makes strategic and financial sense for our shareholders. Intrinsic has a track record as one of the UK's leading Cisco partners and significantly enhances Maintel's capability in networking.

"As well as broadening our Avaya capabilities the acquisition also brings the opportunity to offer Maintel's existing portfolio to Intrinsic customers, in particular our ICON suite of cloud and managed services."

Maintel intends to report Interim results for the six months ending 30th June 2017 on 11th September 2017.

Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabyte, observed: "Maintel appears to be making a habit of



Eddie Buxton

picking up slightly challenged assets, with Intrinsic following last year's Azzurri acquisition, while in September 2013 Datapoint was acquired from the administrator.

"However, Maintel has clearly proven adept at integrating and leveraging such assets, in Azzurri's case securing £5m in run rate synergies from a £49m acquisition, in the process reducing the cost from 12x EBITDA to about 6.7x.

"Azzurri was also a much more substantial integration challenge than Intrinsic, at about double Maintel's then revenue base.

"Perhaps the main difference is that Azzurri's problems reflected an over-levered balance sheet, which limited its ability to invest but didn't prevent the company developing managed service capabilities; whereas Intrinsic seems to have struggled ever since the MBO, with the regular changes of CEO indicative of some fundamental issues.

"But it clearly has inherent capabilities given its public sector success and Cisco and Avaya partnerships. However the integration and financial challenge is more than reflected in a modest acquisition price."

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COMMENT: CASHLESS SOCIETY



Richard Carter

TECHNOLOGY continues to revolutionise many aspects of our daily lives and one of the biggest impacts is on the cash in our pockets. From online banking to contactless card payments and NFC, our reliance on cold hard cash continues to diminish.

Turn back the clock several decades and things were very different. Running out of available money was a

real problem in an era when it was common for people to get paid weekly and receive little brown envelopes with perforated holes in the bottom containing notes and coins. Times have changed thanks to a banking revolution based on electronic transactions which has resulted in many high street branches disappearing. Cashing cheques and paying bills over the counter has become as rare as fax machines and the audio cassette.

Convenience and cost cutting are two of the biggest driving forces as the need for cash continues to dwindle from our daily lives. Apparently the average £20 note changes hands 2,328 times which is quite a journey. However, its days could be numbered with a cashless society not that far away if experts are to be believed.

Mobile contactless transactions have topped £370 million in the first six months of 2017 – a 336 per cent year-on-year surge. Total UK contactless spend reached £9 billion across the same period, from bus tickets to restaurant bills and food shopping. Over 100 million contactless cards have been issued in the UK which is up 20 per cent in 12 months as people take real-time control over their finances – from balances to paying bills.

Four out of five UK adults now own a smartphone which is one of the main accelerants of change and it impacts on big business just as much as consumers. Technology continues to move on and cash is no longer king. A cashless society is on the cards.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

Rigby's on plan and nets record results

SCC's assessment of its latest financial year as 'exceptional' reflects record earnings of £25m (up 39%) across its EMEA businesses. The past 12 months also saw SCC complete its three year plan in the UK to grow a services business across cloud, data centre, managed services and managed print.

Services revenues now account for over 31% of revenues at £194m – an increase of 10% on the previous year.

Data centre services generated £56m in the year, up 29%, as SCC completed its current investment programme, bringing additional capacity to its UK-wide network.

Business was enhanced with all key major accounts including the Department for Work and Pensions, DXC, Northern Gas and Ladbrokes.

SCC also secured new contracts with Grafton Group, Interserve, Liverpool Victoria Insurance, Secure Trust Bank and Skipton Building Society.

Early in 2017, SCC opened a new Global Delivery Centre in Vietnam to complement its near-shore customer support operations in Romania.

The new hub offers data centre infrastructure support for



James Rigby

round-the-clock customer service and access to additional technical skills, as well as software development capabilities.

SCC's CEO James Rigby commented: "To close off our three year plan of building a

more agile and focused business is exceptional. Our future is to be an IT services business delivering solutions in data, cloud and cognitive computing supported by next generation Global Delivery Centres."

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Virtual1 staff Restless to do charity work



Keith Saunders and Tara Ridsdale (back row)

VIRTUAL1'S partnership with charity Restless Development continues to pay staff recruitment, retention and morale boosting dividends.

The company's link up with the global agency for youth-led change, forged in 2016, followed a period of selective consideration by Virtual1 of various good causes that ultimately identified Restless Development as the best cultural fit.

"Restless is a different type of charity," explained CEO Tom O'Hagan. "As well as the cultural fit I was struck by the innovation in the work it does."

"Young people aren't just seen as dependents. Restless supports them to become leaders in solving issues within their community and globally."

Kate Kohanzad, who is the Chief of Charity at Virtual1, explained why the partnership has been beneficial for both organisations. "Nearly all of our 90 London staff get involved," she commented.

"Not only have we raised over £50k, the partnership has also encouraged cross-team working with people building relationships via fund raising events like the Spartan Race.

"Restless has worked closely with us to understand who we

are and what works for our staff. It has genuinely created a real buzz around the office."

Each year two staff members are given an opportunity to visit a Restless project as part of the partnership plan. Keith Saunders and Tara Ridsdale recently returned from a trip to India with Dom Smith, Corporate Manager at Restless.

"We got to see first-hand where the money we raised was being spent," stated Saunders. "The young women in the Delhi slum left a real impression on us. Despite extreme poverty they are driven, and through Restless they get the life skills and training to succeed."

O'Hagan added: "The partnership with Restless has exceeded our expectations of what we thought we could achieve with a charity partner.

"Not only are we supporting Restless to unleash the power of young people to lead positive change, the charity has helped us to get a two-star rating in the 2017 Best Companies accreditation. That makes good business sense."

To learn how your business could benefit from a partnership with Restless Development, contact Dom Smith at dominics@restlessdevelopment.org

NEWS ROUNDUP

Node4's new status as Health and Social Care Network (HSCN) compliant enables the firm to further advance its ambitions in this sector.

Vicky Withey, Compliance Manager, said: "The HSCN allows the health sector to transform patient care and services through greater connectivity, making data and information fully accessible to clinicians, health and care professionals and citizens."

Paula Johnston, Head of Public Sector at Node4, added: "Now that Node4 is fully HSCN compliant we are able to grow our presence in the health and care sector."

See page 50

Vaioni Wholesale has made a significant long-term investment in Juniper to supply premium routers for customer leased line deployments. The new Juniper CPE range covers all Ethernet technologies and speeds up to 1Gbps.

"Our goal is to provide partners with the latest technology and features, coupled with automation around SDN and NFV as we roll out a bigger, smarter network," commented MD Sachin Vaish.

Interoute's roll out of a cloud-based storage service based on Cloudian's HyperStore object storage technology is being offered as part of the Interoute Virtual Data Centre Cloud Platform, providing customers with cloud-based storage for unstructured data, backups and archives.

"With GDPR looming large, as well as the rapid adoption of VDC and SaaS platforms, our customers are revisiting the legacy world of physical backup and archiving and demanding a simple, controlled, auditable cloud service," said Mark Lewis, EVP Products and Development.

"In response we've created an easily accessed and integrated, cost-effective object storage service to support their digital transformation."

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COMMENT: OUT ON THE ROAD



Adam Cathcart

MY RECENT partner tour across the UK confirmed to me there is no substitute for meeting people face-to-face. It really helped me to understand the types of channel businesses I am partnering with and relate to the challenges they are facing.

Most of our partners operate traditional telecommunication businesses and it was

clear many are looking for support with their transition to selling hosted services. There are obvious concerns about the impact on revenue streams and managing the transition from capex to opex based sales, not to mention changes to sales incentives and rewards.

Of equal concern were the regular issues partners encounter with their billing systems. I was pleased to stress to them on a one-to-one basis how much time and effort has been invested to minimise unexpected or inaccurate billing items. It was also nice to report that 9's managed billing service, combined with named direct debit collection, can free partners to focus on growing their business rather than managing a billing and reconciliation department.

Most seem to be thriving rather than just surviving, which is encouraging. Product fatigue in some areas has led to a race to the bottom on pricing as resellers attempt to grab market share. This means they look for service providers like 9 to provide insight and differentiation. Partners who have been working closely with us over the last two and a half years as we have perfected our 'eve' hosted communication and collaboration platform have appreciated being part of the development process.

Overall, I was struck by the openness and engagement that I encountered 'on tour' and the honesty was both refreshing and helpful. The lesson learned was that you can get the best out of partner leaders when you see their operation, shake their hand and look them in the eye.

Adam Cathcart, Director, 9 Partners

Portal offers user control

GAMMA'S partners and customers now have more control over their mobile service following the launch of its Manage My Mobiles portal.

The service provides channel partners and customers with a live connection into the Gamma Mobile core network, giving them greater control over their mobile services and access to a range of management features and reporting.

"For channel partners who want to add value by managing their customers' mobiles there is a managed service option, which gives the customer view-only access to settings while still being able to view usage data and set alerts," said James McFadyen, Mobile Product Manager at Gamma.

"In this scenario the partner retains control over the network settings of the mobile fleet. Providing this level of control over network settings and usage reporting also helps free up the customer's time to focus on their core business priorities."

McFadyen also noted that the launch of Manage My Mobiles is a response to feedback from partners wanting a white label customer portal that gives them overall control to manage all



James McFadyen

commercial aspects of the mobile service while offering visibility to their users.

One of these partners is Nathan Brome, Mobile Specialist at The Technology Group, who said: "The task of micro managing my customers' estates is time consuming for requests that can be handled by the end user.

"The Manage My Mobile portal takes away many of those tasks and puts the power in the customer's hands."

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3CX buys Germany tech firm

3CX has acquired Askozia, a Germany-based provider of the Asterisk-based IP telephone system AskoziaPBX.

Askozia was founded in 2013 and has more than 10,000 businesses using its solutions. The company evolved from a student project into an organisation known for developing Linux technology.

3CX saw the technical skills of the Askozia team as an opportunity to expand its market position in Germany and integrate new expertise and technology into its own product.

All Askozia customers will be offered a free 3CX license and Askozia partners will be onboarded as 3CX partners.

Nick Galea, CEO of 3CX, stated: "This acquisition sets another milestone for 3CX Germany. Askozia has a skilled team, and along with the Linux technology that will now be integrated into our own product we expect rapid growth within the German market."

Sebastian Kaiser, who is the CEO of Askozia, commented: "This acquisition enables us to contribute to the expansion of a big market player and developer of software-based communications technology."

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Richard Thompson

FIRSTLY, I am excited to be re-joining the partner team at TalkTalk Business in my new role as Director of Partners. It means a great deal to me as this is where I started my career 15 years ago. I am looking forward to generating further momentum in the partner channel, drawing upon my experience leading the

business product and trading strategy most recently as Commercial Director and building on the solid foundations Alex and her team have put in place.

I am especially excited about the new products we will bring to market in the coming months, especially Cloud Ready Connectivity, which was one of the key themes from our recent Partner Summit. There, we were lucky to be joined by Camille Mendler, practice leader at Ovum, who predicted a much greater take up of cloud-based services in the UK in the next 24 months.

According to Ovum, Rightscale and Cartesian, 95 per cent of businesses will use cloud applications and services by the end of 2017, up from 75 per cent in 2013. Cloud migration will put enormous pressure on network performance, and organisations need faster connectivity speeds to stay competitive. Cloud migration is only as good as the network that underpins it, which is why we're excited to be launching Cloud Ready Connectivity in September – connectivity products that are optimised for cloud requirements.

Cloud Ready Connectivity offers better performance and security for businesses, easier deployment and management by partners through our portals, and new up-sell opportunities for partners to make more margin.

The next six months hold exciting developments at TalkTalk Business including work to deliver Britain's Gigabit future. I am looking forward to working with the partner team in delivering these developments to our channel.

Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Nicol says Scotland faces copper crisis

SCOTLAND'S digital future faces stagnation and risks damaging the Scottish economy unless swift action is taken to bring the country's digital infrastructure up to speed with other European nations, claims a leading comms exec.

The primary issue has been identified as a lack of ultra-fast fibre to the premises (FTTP) connections, and Ricky Nicol, Chief Executive of Commsworld, has called for public and private sector cooperation to address the matter before it's too late.

"The majority of advertised fibre connections are solely to the cabinet, relying on antiquated and comparatively slow copper to deliver data to the building," he stated.

"This is an impending crisis that threatens the future health of our economy in an evermore digital world.

"Every new copper cable laid in Scotland builds in years of inconvenience as roads will need to be redug when the inevitable upgrades take place. In rural areas especially it is a sticking plaster.

"More cooperation is called for across the board and greater incentives and investment need-



Ricky Nicol

ed to ensure that businesses and consumers are receiving the speeds they deserve."

Nicol says that just 2% of buildings in the UK benefit from FTTP, mainly in London and the south east. This contrasts unfavourably with Spain which enjoys 80% provision, and the 70% found uniformly across Scandinavian countries.

"There is no company that does not depend to some extent on the country's digital infrastructure, not just to keep afloat but to deliver the quality that keeps pace with the best in the world," emphasised Nicol. "As computational power grows, file

sizes increase and with them the products and services offered across the globe.

"The advantages of FTTP over traditional networks are clear. Distance does not affect speed, it is much better at dealing with high demand, and it is future proofed, unlikely to be outdated in many decades.

"While we lag behind our mainland friends our current service will suffer, but more importantly it is the continued use of copper infrastructure that will do most harm."

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COMMENT: ANALYTICS MATTERS



David Rowlands

WITH many businesses still recovering from the great British exodus, also known as our summer holiday season, resellers are in a prime position to help their customers avoid the chaos of staff shortages happening again. Having an accurate picture of the volume of customer interactions and staff

capacity is vital for a smooth and positive customer experience, the key measurement of success these days.

Having encompassed digital transformation, this is where an agile cloud system gives businesses an analytical and competitive edge, being able to respond to demand quickly. In addition, businesses that use analytics can see where spikes of demand are likely to occur based on historic data, customer experience mapping and, just as importantly, when staff levels are likely to be lower.

Offering customers solutions that make a demonstrable difference to the efficiency of their business gives resellers an advantage over their competitors. Through analytics, businesses can not only boost customer satisfaction but also help improve their bottom line and keep customers loyal. While staff may be back from holiday now, businesses should be thinking ahead to how they will cope during other busy periods. The run up to Christmas will be crucial in tracking the peaks and troughs of demand and ensuring businesses have enough staff to support customers.

Traditionally, customer experience analytics was seen as an expensive add-on that put many smaller organisations off deploying it. However, thanks to the cloud this is no longer the case and it's now well within the grasp of most businesses. By working with a technology partner that is an expert in both the cloud and analytics, resellers can stand out from their competitors, win more business and boost their own revenue.

David Rowlands, Contact Centre Sales Director UK and EMEA, 8x8

eve's a new dawn in hosted claims 9

HOSTED telecoms brand 'eve' represents a new dawn for 9 partners, claims Director Adam Cathcart, who led the company's ninth accreditation session last month bringing the number of partners authorised to resell the bespoke Mitel-based hosted platform to 50-plus.

"eve is now making a name for herself in the UK having made a big and lasting impression in the Nordic region," stated Cathcart.

Sitting under the Telepo brand, which is owned by Mitel, eve (exceptional voice everywhere) is being introduced to the channel by 9 as the Canadian vendor's UK launch partner.

"We've taken the Telepo platform and transformed it to create the eve proposition and expanded feature set, all enabled by our own portal and secured by our infrastructure which we have developed and built from scratch," added Cathcart. "Our objective with eve is to position 9 higher up the food chain."

9 has sold more than 10,000 hosted seats over the past few years but the company recognised that to grow its market share it needed a more flexible offering, so 9 decided to invest in developing its own solution.



Adam Cathcart

"Our close relationship with Mitel enabled us to secure the UK launch partner role for its Telepo platform which we have since developed, expanded and refined to give birth to eve," added Cathcart. "In developing and expanding the platform and portal we've created a disruptive and individual brand and support proposition."

The project was supported by a near £2m investment in the platform and network infrastructure, along with a full-time team of five developers and network engineers who have been working on eve for well over two years, aided by product management, marketing and operational teams.

"The platform is located in a global standard data centre with dual resilience and mul-

tiple failover to ensure reliability, security and resilience," explained Cathcart.

"Our objective is to provide a robust alternative to the 'me too' hosted propositions which currently hold sway.

"eve is disruptive, abundantly featured and easy to work with, and we have ambitious growth plans to challenge the current dominant providers for the market share podium before the end of next year.

"Partner feedback on our platform and accreditation programme has been very positive, and the opportunity to deliver something different to their customers has also greatly appealed to partners."

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Renewable energy empowers Entanet

WHOLESALE voice and data provider Entanet has selected Fidelity Energy to provide 100% renewable energy for its own operations.

The solution uses wind, solar and tidal power as its sole energy source, meaning Entanet can reduce its carbon footprint by 866 tonnes of carbon.

Darren Farnden, Entanet's Head of Marketing, said: "The new contract saved money, but most important was the reduction in our carbon footprint.

"This is a great message for our business and shows a real commitment to our Corporate Social Responsibility. It also gives channel partners an edge when bidding for government and CSR focused businesses.



John Haw

"Fidelity is also managing all of our energy contracts and bill validation, and suggesting ideas about how we can lower our energy usage."

Fidelity Energy's MD John Haw stated: "Proactive contract management, bill validation and

the lowering of Entanet's carbon footprint were all key requirements of the deal. Fidelity Energy ran the tender process for Entanet, recommended the most appropriate supplier and helped it to balance carbon reduction, service and price."

Daines flows into FluidOne

FORMER Selection Services channel chief Grant Daines has joined FluidOne as Channel Acquisition Account Director.

His previous experience includes a spell at Acorn and managing large partner accounts including Dell, Telstra, Level3 and USAF.

Daines also established fixed line and GSM specialists FLCC in 2006 and grew the business from his spare bedroom into a 12-strong operation based in Liverpool Street offices before exiting in 2010.

His appointment signals FluidOne's ramping up of a new partner recruitment campaign.

"With a diverse product portfolio and exclusive suppliers, this is a prime time to drive revenue through expanding our channel," said Daines.



Grant Daines

Head of Indirect Simon Stokes added: "Grant is joining FluidOne at an exciting time, overseeing the launch and adoption of FluidOne's new self-service platform to our partner and dealer channel."

The appointment of Daines follows FluidOne's recent onboarding of Keith Wilkinson who joined as Wholesale Account Director (see p52).

ProVu launches router provisioning

DISTRIBUTOR ProVu has rolled out a new router provisioning service available via its online portal, ProSys.

The service enables resellers to have routers delivered next day to their customers' site ready to work out-of-the-box.

ProVu's Product Development Director Paul Hayes commented on the launch: "With



Paul Hayes

router provisioning resellers can now ship hardware direct to their customers with all of

their preferred settings already installed. They arrive at the customers' site ready to plug and play – saving resellers both time and money."

For a limited time, ProVu is offering free provisioning with the first order of any router.

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

WESTCON-Comstor has been appointed as a Microsoft Surface Hub distributor. The Surface Hub, which is available with a 55-inch or 84-inch screen, is designed for collaboration and enables multiple people to work on the device at the same time in a range of Windows 10 applications. Integration with Microsoft services such as Skype for Business means people can work together remotely and share what they create in different ways, including email, OneNote or OneDrive. Wayne Mason, EMEA UCC Practice Lead and General Manager for Westcon-Comstor, commented: "With our ability to wrap additional services around the Surface Hub and a portfolio of solutions for Skype for Business we are creating a strong offer for the VAR community."

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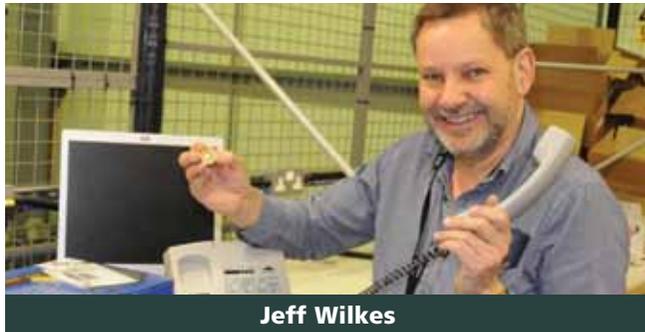
Payphone alert for spent pound coins

TIME is almost up for resellers to adapt thousands of payphones across the country to the new 'super secure' £1 coin before the old coin goes out of circulation and ceases to be legal tender on October 15th.

An estimated one in 30 old £1 coins were fake so the Royal Mint created a new 12 sided version said to be the most secure in the world.

"With the launch of the new secure £1 coin now over three months ago, the campaign to encourage people to return the 1.7 billion round pounds in circulation is entering the final stages," commented Solitaire's MD Jeff Wilkes.

All New Solitaire Payphones supplied since January 2016 will



Jeff Wilkes

accept the revised £1 coin but existing models already on-site will need updating, he pointed out. "Of the circa 500,000 Solitaire payphones sold in the UK around 50,000 are still in service," he said.

"Some older units will need to be replaced but many others need updating either on-site or returned to us.

"Resellers need to be advising their customers now about how to adapt their existing machines before it's too late. Calls and emails are coming in every day. The penny is starting to drop – or should that be the pound – but time is almost up."

Nimans is the exclusive distributor of Solitaire payphones in the UK.

Distributors in shift to cloud

A SHIFT towards managed services and cloud-based applications has seen Europe's leading distributors increase their share of the supply chain, growing revenues by an average of 5.4% while the overall ICT industry grew by just 0.3%, according to new figures from IT Europa and Gartner.

The UK experienced growth of 6%, higher than the European average of 5.4%.

IT Europa's latest database report, 'Distributors in Europe', describes an industry that is changing fast.

While consolidation and organic growth are making for economies of scale, and portfolios are expanding, the costs of doing business in the world of complex services and emerging technologies is increasing.

The larger distributors, those advancing into cloud, analytics, IoT and other areas, have invested in staff and training, with numbers employed in the top 500 in Europe rising to over 103,000 from just over 100,000 in the last study.

The 20-plus publicly quoted distributors in Europe managed to lift their sales in 2016 by just 2.58%, while smaller independents did over 10% better.

The total revenues for all companies in 2015 was \$142.84bn (€132.38bn) with a total staff figure of 103,034. Overall, total revenues of all companies increased 5.42% (based on 2016 revenues) compared to the previous year.

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Westcoast unveils CSP programme

WESTCOAST has thrown the doors open to new cloud revenues with a programme that enables all partners, no matter their size, to enter the cloud service provider marketplace.

"Partners will move through a series of development phases and have opportunities to unlock additional benefits and rewards," said Cloud Services



Mark Davies

Director Mark Davies. "The Cloud Development programme is suited for all of our partners.

It doesn't matter what size they are. Whether they are new to cloud, or if they're a more established CSP provider, there's an opportunity for everyone."

Westcoast was appointed a Microsoft Cloud Solutions Provider in 2015 and last year became the first distributor in the UK to surpass 100,000 Office 365 seats.



UNION Street has been approved for the Total Metering and Billing Scheme following an independent audit of its billing and service operations. All aspects of the firm, especially its Bureau Service where Union Street's team operates the aBILlity billing platform on behalf of reseller partners, underwent an audit by Enigma QPM. Union Street's COO José

Fernandez said: "Gaining approval for TMBS represents a significant effort on the part of the team, especially our Head of Bureau Billing Nicola Newstead." Pictured: Fernandez and Newstead.

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Telstra adds Cerberus commmits to storm cloud connectivity shake-up



Sean Taylor

TELSTRA has embedded a cloud comms platform into its network following a link up with Content Guru, the creator of the storm integrated comms and collaboration platform.

The deal enables Telstra to more effectively operate in the customer experience market, boosting its customer engagement capabilities in sectors including health, finance and logistics, with a particular focus on cloud contact centre services to global enterprises.

The global customer experience market is forecast to grow to more than \$10bn by 2020 as customer demands to interact with organisations at any time, from any place and across any device continue to increase.

Tom Homer, Country MD for the UK and Director Global Enterprise at Telstra, said: "The customer engagement and con-

tact centre markets are dynamic, and cloud-based technologies represent opportunities to transform the way organisations operate, communicate and transform the customer experience."

Sean Taylor, Global CEO at ContentGuru, added: "Customer engagement is going through massive change, driven by the increased consumer adoption of digital channels.

"Over the past couple of years there has been a significant adoption of cloud contact centres and these are now integrating with IoT applications in areas such as telehealth and connected home to produce exciting new customer engagement hubs. Add Artificial Intelligence to the mix and it makes for interesting times."

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CERBERUS Networks aims to shake up the connectivity market with the role out of ultrafast FTTP services (based on BT Openreach infrastructure) and an aggressive pricing plan designed to attract businesses looking to upgrade from copper-based broadband to super fast and ultrafast speeds.

All services come with unlimited monthly usage.

Cerberus is also taking part in Openreach's trial of the G.Fast variant of FTTC, offering up to 330Mbps but over a copper line.

Cerberus Networks' Director of Sales, Bob Hendy, said: "We are looking to break down the longstanding cost barriers that have held back the adoption of FTTP. By investing in our network and pricing services much more affordably, we expect to see more take up of these next generation technologies.

"Right now, FTTP roll out is fairly limited but where it is out there it is the only alternative to ADSL. We want customers to be able to take full advantage of the technology."

As part of the G.Fast trial Cerberus is also making these services available to existing and new clients in trial areas.



Bob Hendy

Operations Director Erik Carlson said: "While FTTP is a great technology, rolling out fibre to individual premises is a costly business so we don't

expect to see Openreach focusing on that outside of new build housing and office projects.

"G.Fast will give customers a big hike in speeds over existing wiring. It's just a matter of BT rolling out the upgraded service to the existing cabs and equipment around the country, so we expect much wider availability much sooner than FTTP.

"These new ultrafast broadband services offer resellers a great way to differentiate and add value."

Atomwide bagged by Adept Telecom

ADEPT Telecom's ambitions and expanding presence in the public sector have been underscored by its acquisition of Atomwide for £12m.

Atomwide provides ICT solutions to more than 4,000 UK schools, local authorities and Regional Broadband Consortia with over two million users.

The deal is Adept Telecom's fifth acquisition in two years.

To meet the funding requirements Adept secured £7.3m

from Business Growth Fund (BGF) plus funding through its existing banks.

Adept Telecom CEO Ian Fishwick commented: "Over the last two years we have transformed Adept from its origins as a telecommunications company providing calls and lines to a managed services business offering complex solutions involving IT and telecoms."

Law firm Cripps advised on the acquisition.

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Fibre comes to Wakefield



Nikki Guest and Jason Petrou-Brown

CITYFIBRE'S Wakefield asset (acquired in January 2016) is to be leveraged following a partnership deal with local provider NGC Networks.

The partnership signifies a period of investment into Wakefield's digital infrastructure and the provision of ultrafast full fibre connectivity to businesses in the region.

Alongside CityFibre NGC Networks will also deliver gigabit Internet speeds to businesses in Bradford and Huddersfield.

CityFibre has already launched full fibre networks in several other Yorkshire cities including Sheffield, Leeds, York and Hull.

Nikki Guest, who is the Network Services Director at NGC Networks, said: "Working with CityFibre to bring ultrafast full-fibre Internet connectivity to Yorkshire towns and cities is a

rewarding project. Our role will be to connect businesses to the Gigabit City networks which will enable them to take advantage of new technologies, vastly improving their digital capabilities and revolutionising the way they do business."

Jason Petrou-Brown, Senior Business Development Manager for the North at CityFibre, said: "Yorkshire's Gigabit City networks are already playing an important role in the growth of the region by boosting businesses' efficiencies, encouraging digital skill development and driving investment.

"Our new partnership with NGC Networks will enable more organisations in the region to realise the benefits of full fibre connectivity."

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Veterans start a new project

TWO industry longtimers have joined forces to offer business consulting services to vendors, distributors and resellers in the IT and comms industry, with a particular specialism in helping non-UK vendors launch products and services into Europe.

David Pitts and Graham Bunting have launched Trust Business Partners, a company that specialises in the channel, sales development and strategy.

Pitts and Bunting can trace their careers back to the deregulation of the UK telecoms market in the mid-1980s.

Their careers have run along parallel tracks coming together

on at least four occasions in the past 30 years. "We have experience at all levels in the sales value chain," said Pitts. "As well as recruiting, developing and managing channels inside and outside the UK, we have run our own businesses and know what it takes to help achieve a company's vision."

Bunting added: "Sales development requires focus and resources, which invariably are not immediately available in most organisations. Trust can provide on-demand resources along with up-skilling existing teams through training, coaching and mentoring."



HATS off to Telecoms World Directors Neil Barrall and Sam Diamond for completing the London to Surrey 46 mile Prudential Ride London cycle race. The duo smashed their target of completing the run

in under four hours and raised £1,155 for Cyclists Fighting Cancer after receiving generous donations from family, friends, colleagues and partner businesses. "I would like to say a huge thank you for our charity sponsors, Orpington Connected, Cyclists Fighting Cancer and to the spectators across the streets of London and Surrey for their spirit and encouragement," said Barrall.

MTR deal sewn up by distie

EXERTIS has added refurbishment and reverse logistics to its services offering with the acquisition of MTR Group, a service and solutions provider specialising in the second generation lifecycle extension of mobile, wearable and tablet devices.

MTR employs 60 staff at its facility in Harlow. It generated sales of £10.8m for the year ended 30th November 2016 and has seen year on year growth since its incorporation in 2011 by founders and co-owners Steve Healy and Andy Payne.

MTR's strong relationship with Samsung is expected to strengthen Exertis' partnership with the vendor.

The deal enables the distributor to leverage MTR's refurbishment and reverse logistics capabilities and jointly expand these services to a wider range of potential partners.

Gerry O'Keeffe, Exertis UK & Ireland MD, said: "MTR has enjoyed considerable success in providing refurbishment capabilities in the mobile and tablet device market."

Steve Healy, MTR, MD, commented: "In leveraging the strengths of both companies we can only add to the relationships currently held."





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Total moves into comms



Peter Woods

KETTERING-based IT reseller Total Computers – crowned CRN VAR of the Year for 2016 – has marched into the mobile comms market following a link-up with 9.

Total Computers has grown year-on-year for 14 years and aims to generate additional revenues via the resale of 9's mobile portfolio which according to Head of Marketing Peter Woods is a 'perfect marriage', citing 9's commercial packages, pre-sales support and training as key attractions in the decision to partner with the Gloucestershire-based comms provider.

"Total Computers provides IT products, solutions and services to around 2,000 UK private and public sector organisations," explained Woods.

"We have specific technical expertise in end user computing

(EUC) and mobility, core infrastructure and networking, cloud solutions and managed services. Adding mobile to the mix was an obvious choice."

The deal reflects 9's move to target IT services companies with its 'Think Outside The Box' proposition which supports partners from adjacent channels looking to add communications solutions to their portfolio.

Head of New Partners at 9, Gemma Horsell, said: "Business customers are increasingly looking for a single provider to meet their IT and comms needs.

"This demand creates a clear opportunity for IT resellers such as Total Computers to leverage our telecommunication solutions and expertise."

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

Gamma links up with AWS

CLOUD infrastructure services are available to Gamma partners following a link-up between the comms provider and Amazon Web Services.

According to Gamma the new Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) offering is straightforward and reflects a market shift to the public cloud from where organisations can run their normal business applications.

"This shift is a lucrative opportunity for the channel," commented Product Manager Steve Ashley-Brian.

"With Cloud Compute they can leave the infrastructure to Gamma while they focus on what they do best – delivering a stand-out customer experience.

"Cloud Compute provides a direct alternative to the traditional on-premise or data centre hosted servers and are accompanied by appropriate storage, security and networking facilities," added Ashley-Brian.

"This means there is no need for the customer to own, manage or maintain any of the underlying hardware. They can simply manage their applications without needing the skills or resources to support them.

"We've developed our portal to make Amazon Web Services easier to quote, order and provision. Our free training and accreditation has already seen a number of partners gain access to the service."



Steve Ashley-Brian

Distie to build out capacity



Julian Niman

A MULTI-million pound warehouse expansion at Nimans' Manchester HQ is on track to be completed later this year.

Construction work to increase floor space by over a third is progressing well with partial occupation of the expanded logistics operation due by mid-September ahead of full completion by the end of November.

Chairman Julian Niman says the project illustrates how Nimans is gearing up for the future. "In the early days I was working in just a few square foot of work space," he said. "But now the warehouse is increasing from 36,000 sq ft to almost 50,000.

"This gives us more order processing space particularly as pallet volumes and order tonnage are up 50% year-on-year. This expansion sends out a strong message that the business is growing and we are continuing to invest in the future."



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WebRTC is on the rise!

Since its release as an open source project by Google in 2011, WebRTC has sparked a technology revolution that could be the next big thing in communications, but can resellers turn it into real business? Software PBX leader 3CX believes the answer is a definite yes.

By simplifying and enhancing internal and external communication and collaboration, using a simple JavaScript-based API, WebRTC allows most renowned open standard browsers to communicate with each other and exchange audio, video and even data files.

Today, the technology is supported by Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, Mozilla Firefox and Opera and more are sure to follow. Expedited by growing internet speeds that enable reliable audio and video quality for web conferencing, organisations of all shapes and sizes are using WebRTC today as an immediate and effective way to communicate with customers, business partners and remote team members.

WebRTC Trends

A lot has been said already about the great impact of WebRTC on the efficiency of customer service, support, internal project work and training. This is thanks to the broad range of features that accompany WebRTC namely: Document Sharing; Screen Sharing; Remote Control; Classroom Features and Polls to name just a few.

When considering WebRTC as an alternative to traditional communication tools, cost savings derived from less travelling and more targeted communication and collaboration contribute to the positive overall balance. But its greatest potential is the opportunity to highly personalise an organisation's communication and adapt to the individual communication preferences of clientele, business partners and team members.

Since face-to-face communication, with its non-verbal aspects, is still considered the most effective and, in many cases, preferred way of interpersonal exchange, 3CX sees high potential in video conferences as a driver for prompt service and higher customer satisfaction. Thanks to the browser based Click-to-Call feature, WebRTC-based video conferencing also solves the issue of



interoperability and compatibility between different hardware and software. This allows participants to initiate a video call, scheduled or ad hoc, with just the click of a button. Whether organisations provide access to this on their website, or share the link directly with participants, all physical distances become irrelevant and even the most remote contact will be only a few clicks away.

WebRTC Development Focus

Until now, WebRTC has mainly been used as an isolated solution. But being a forerunner in the adoption of WebRTC, 3CX has outpaced its competitors with a full integration of WebRTC into its Unified Communications package. 3CX WebMeeting is one of the first multi-participant web conferencing solutions of its kind. Using WebRTC, 3CX is paving the way for easily reaching out to customer service centres or seamlessly joining meetings while taking advantage of unparalleled mobility at lower costs.

It's no longer just the generation of digital natives and high-budget organisations making use of WebRTC. Every internet user

can now enter the world of web conferencing. Fundamentally, Web browsers have become communications platforms without requiring any pre-installation of hardware, applications, clients or plugins. The ability to reach out immediately and in real-time to customer service, support or sales teams greatly accelerates the service process. For businesses, this results in prompt feedback, quick troubleshooting and consequently higher revenues and happier customers.

WebRTC offers end-to-end encryption and a set of security protocols such as DTLS and SRTP which ensures safe, private and secure real-time communication. 3CX also allows full tracking of conversations by generating automatic reports that include details such as participants, comments and the entire recording. SLA monitoring, quality checks and performance control for individual employees have never been easier!

3CX will continue to develop innovative features that anticipate future demands and give new directions in innovation for web based communication, collaboration and sales platforms. At the same time,

organisations can release their IT departments from tedious and time-consuming tasks such as installing, updating and maintaining complex conferencing solutions.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of the WebRTC surge are companies with extensive customer service and contact centres. Here, you can expect 3CX to soon deliver additional innovative features for our UC solution. But WebRTC is also on the rise in many other areas ranging from Education and Banking to Healthcare, where distant consultations have already been put into practice. One main future challenge will be to analyse all communications processes and requirements of those industries in order to provide them with the necessary tools to enhance their internal and external communication.

The One-Stop-Shop Opportunity

Resellers who embrace WebRTC technology will be able to generate new revenue streams from selling hardware, such as webcams and headphones for use with the web conferencing system. And with 3CX's integrated video conferencing, resellers can offer their customers a cutting-edge solution without extensive installation time or maintenance and with no separate licensing. Consequently, they have the opportunity to become a one-stop-shop for all of an end user's communications needs including WebRTC-enabled video conferencing, call centre features and a feature-rich IP PBX.

And this is just the beginning. We can expect WebRTC to become even more adaptable to individual business requirements and needs. Further developments will result in even broader functionalities and better compatibility between components, appliances and applications of different manufacturers and partners. In turn, this will lead to a reduction in the amount of platforms and devices needed and a real simplification of Unified Communications.

Cisco Spark adds flare

Cisco is best known for driving innovation in the enterprise sector. Now, it is running counter to convention and also championing SMBs, making strident manoeuvres in the channel with a full complement of sparkling collaboration and communication tools, according to Andy Brocklehurst, Head of Collaboration EMEAR.

There is now an overwhelming consensus, not just among Cisco's thinkers and tech innovators, but among channel opinion, in favour of joined up collaboration becoming the *de facto* mode of operation for SMBs. In reflecting this requirement, Brocklehurst says the launch of two value propositions signalled Cisco's big trump card moments in its SMB sector play – Cisco Spark and Business Edition 4000. Spark, a subscription-based collaboration platform brought out two years ago brings fully integrated team messaging, meetings and calling. BE4000 (unveiled in March this year) is a cost-effective cloud managed voice solution designed for SMEs. It's already putting confidence into resellers who have reevaluated their perception of the erstwhile corporate focused networking giant.

"Cisco Spark and BE4000 change the channel paradigm, offering resellers a collaborative solution that works seamlessly on all major

devices and smartphones," said Brocklehurst. "Clients, they can be fully operational in less than two minutes. BE4000 can be installed in under one day and offers a subscription model. All hardware (phones, gateway) can be retained, enabling customers to migrate to the cloud at their preferred pace."

Brocklehurst cited a recent study of more than 300 mid-size to large enterprises in which many execs said current collaboration tools fall short on supporting the depth, pace and style of teamwork now required to meet business imperatives. But Cisco Spark goes beyond conventional collaboration. Built from the ground up and over three years in development its ability to strengthen the bonds of engagement between all people in an organisation has injected a buzz into those who use it, according to Brocklehurst.

"The Spark development strategy was supported and defined by three



Andy Brocklehurst

structural and conceptual pillars – Experience Centric, Cloud Connected and Value Extended," he explained.

Taking each category in turn, the Experience Centric component focused, in the main, on making the user experience as simple as possible. Cisco Spark works seamlessly with the vendor's video endpoints and the Cisco Spark Board (an all-in-one device for wireless projecting, video conferencing and white boarding).

On the button

"When you walk into a room the video unit knows you are there and even says 'hello'." said Brocklehurst. "To start a meeting or call you simply press the big green button – no codes, no remote controls, no need to call IT for help. It's the same experience whether you are in an iOS, Microsoft or Android environment, regardless of device. It really could not be any easier."

The Cloud Connected pillar caters for all deployment models – on-premise, cloud

or hybrid. "The new Cisco Spark Flex Plan agreements take the pain out of buying as all offers become subscription-based and the customer moves to the cloud at their pace," added Brocklehurst. "Cisco Spark itself resides in the cloud and the deployment takes just a couple of minutes, even for full HD video conferencing."

The third pillar, Value Extended, signifies how Spark extends the value for partners in two key areas – lifecycle and adoption services. Embedding into the customers' business process and workflow is another area where partners can generate additional value and revenue, as the complexity moves to the application layer and the value for the customer becomes about resolving their business issues and improving workflows.

"A completely open API platform makes it possible for partners to deliver the integration that customers need," said Brocklehurst. "Multiple integrations and bots can extend the

benefits of Cisco Spark to infinite applications."

Working with Cisco has in the past been viewed as complex. The company was pigeon holed as enterprise orientated with perceived cost barriers in becoming a partner, while predicting margins and making money was not thought to be straightforward. All myths. Surely Cisco's \$6.3 billion annual R&D investment in doing the opposite proves these notions to be utterly false.

"The idea that Cisco is too enterprise orientated does not hold water when you consider that our collaboration portfolio spans from two users to many thousands," stated Brocklehurst. "There are no barriers to becoming a partner as Cisco offers absolutely free online accreditation, while the BE4000 is a GUI-based install product, removing the complexity of command line installs previously associated with Cisco. And the move to the subscription and recurring model coupled with a Cisco Spark Flex Plan has made it far easier to quote and predict margins."

The roll out of Spark and BE4000 is Cisco's biggest SMB project and a rush could be on the cards, so the company has made it easy for partners to gain a winning hand, simply by downloading the Cisco Spark application from the App Store or its dedicated Spark website. "Use it for free, set up spaces and teams and start to share it with your customers," urged Brocklehurst. "Resellers can also approach distribution partners Comstor, Ingram Micro or Tech Data Azlan." ■



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Navy man's plain sailing

With every year, Cheltenham-based PSU Technology Group just gets stronger, according to Managing Director Michael Lounton.

For as long as Lounton can remember he always wanted to be in the Royal Navy. So he studied electronic and electrical engineering at South Shields Marine Technical College before joining up in 1986. Lounton's time as a Weapons and Communications Engineer was to have a telling influence on his future career path. He supported various types of equipment including weapons, sensor, sonar and radar, yet had a particular interest in the support and maintenance of a ship's telephone systems. Lounton's predilection for all things telecoms prompted him to join a London-based comms company in 1995 after leaving the Navy, installing and maintaining the Inter-Tel Axxess and TIE EDX range of phone systems. In 1999 he was headhunted by PSU (then known as PSU Computers) where he set up and led its new telecommunications division.

PSU (Precision Second User) started out as a small IT support company operating from a workshop in Gloucester in 1986. It was founded as a repair company that served businesses looking to fully or partially outsource their hardware support requirements. "We added telecoms and mobile skills via acquisitions and staff development," explained Lounton. "Today, we're a Mitel house with

IT managed services and a growing portfolio of mobile and connectivity solutions."

In 2003 a management buyout led by Lounton and Technical Director Nigel Davies proved to be pivotal. The availability of affordable broadband was also a significant development, enabling the company to support clients in new markets including VoIP telephony, collaborative remote working and cloud computing. "Our recent purchase of ICT company Hub Business Solutions is another spur of acceleration for the business, expanding our focus on our portfolio of telecoms products and services," stated Lounton.

The acquisition of local rival Hub also saw the appointment of Hub Director Stuart Baikie as PSU's Director of Telecoms Sales. Baikie co-founded Total (now Bamboo Technology Group) which he led as Managing Director before leaving in 2014 having built a £12 million business. "Joining the PSU team was a no-brainer," stated Baikie. "We share the same ideas. PSU was the right place for us to continue to create customer centric end to end solutions."

Following the acquisition Hub's Lorne Fry and Glyn Evans also took up lead roles as heads of departments for telco and mobile, reporting to Baikie. Lounton



Michael Lounton

commented: "Hub has built up a reputation for its mobile solutions, rapid site deployment, wireless networking and IoT, making it the perfect fit to deliver a wave of new technology to our customers."

Award wins

In another scoop, PSU won the Comms National Awards for Best Enterprise Hosted Solution and Best Customer Service in 2012-2013. Last year the company celebrated its 30th anniversary. It now employs circa 60 staff, has a UK-wide customer base mainly made up of medium to larger sized multi-site enterprises taking multiple lines of recurring service. "To meet customer demand for an ever more personalised, accessible, agile

and accountable service, and to grow our solutions sales at a higher rate, we've made significant changes to our service, operations and sales structures," explained Lounton. "By simplifying and improving the structure, processes and communication between our teams we're providing the cross functional support our customers need to meet their growing service quality demands.

"Similarly, with considerable restructuring of our sales team, including the acquisition of Hub which strengthens our telco and mobile offerings, we've deepened our expertise. With more specialists across the business we've enhanced our ability to deliver exactly the right solutions for customers

and grow sales at a higher rate. A strong example of this is the increase in the number of IT and telco managed services we're implementing for customers. Over the past year our customer growth and take up of multiple product lines has continued to flourish."

PSU has forged a number of key technology partnerships including Microsoft, Mitel, O2, Vodafone, Solarwinds, Gamma, Daisy, Virtual1 and Claranet. And its acquisition of Hub has prompted a sharper focus on relationships with telco and mobile partners. "As a long-standing partner with Mitel we're already helping more businesses improve customer experiences with reliable phone system support,"

in the channel

said Lounton. "And while we offer access to all of the major UK networks our strongest relationship is with O2. With the concentration of our efforts in these areas we aim to double our turnover in the next three years."

PSU has offered mobile services for several years but not yet realised the full potential of penetrating its customer base. "With Stuart and his team on board their skills will bring a new focus to one of the relatively untapped areas of our portfolio – mobile," noted Lounton. "Our ability to offer access to all major UK networks and provide mobile device management solutions will help us to considerably expand our activity in this area."

Strong engagement

Baikie noted that he will conduct a review of existing products and services and if necessary strengthen the portfolio by engaging with new partners and suppliers. "It's all about demonstrating to new and existing customers that we have the skills necessary to truly offer ICT solutions, and crucially, to support them," he stated. "Although the ongoing integration of technology continues to influence and shape everything we do, our deep understanding of IT and telecoms enabled us to deal with this convergence from day one. We're continuing to increase our expertise to give us the widest breadth of skills across the business technology mix, so we can meet new development trends including the Internet of Things and the explosive growth of data."

Lounton also highlighted ongoing growth in the use

of collaboration tools as businesses engage more with remote working and seek to drive greater efficiencies and productivity. "This, combined with the emergence of IoT, is prompting us to shift our focus and adapt our processes to strengthen customers' underlying fixed and mobile networks," he added.

It goes without saying that all providers will need to have multi-skilled service and engineering support staff to deal with customer demands of the future. But according to Lounton a holistic approach to support is a must. "We all need cross product line thinking to manage customer issues," he added. "As the pace of business technology integration continues, more firms will be turning to providers such as ourselves. Comprehensive technology knowledge is critical to a holistic approach towards supporting the modern needs of businesses."

One of Lounton's current priorities is to upgrade to the latest ISO 9001: 2015 standard. "The strong foundations needed to accelerate growth and achieve higher standards are already in place," emphasised Lounton. "It's just a case of adding to our skill sets and strengthening our knowledge around products and service throughout the company, enabling us to grow the value of each customer through the sale of more integrated product lines. We need to ensure we're doing everything possible to maximise the sales of telecoms products into our existing customer base. These are all ambitious but achievable aims." ■

Just a minute with Michael Lounton...

Role model? Oliver Reed. Anyone who knows me well enough will understand why

What talent do you wish you had? The staying power of Oliver Reed

What do you fear the most? Retirement

How would you like to be remembered? Having not screwed up a 30-plus year old company (fingers crossed)

Name three ideal dinner guests: Rob Sims of Nexus, Russell Horton of Elite Telecom, and Fraser Ferguson of KubeNet. We always have a good time together at Comms Vision (the highlight in the telco calendar)

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? I wanted to be an Air Traffic Controller, which I changed roles into half-way during my time in the Navy. If I hadn't joined PSU I probably would be doing that now in a civilian airport

One example of something you've overcome: A fear of heights by climbing the main mast of the frigate HMS Beaver

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? My biggest strength is that I don't get flustered; but I can be tempestuous, according to my business partner. I call it passion

How do you relax when not working? Killing the enemy on Battlefield 1

Your biggest opportunity? To shout more about what PSU does really well

Lessons learnt: It doesn't always pay to be an early adopter. It's better to wait for some markets to reach a level of maturity

Pure winner is on track with energy

COMMS DEALER reseller of the year Pure Telecom is making a big name for itself in the supply of mobile, fixed and cloud based telephony solutions to the business market and now the Shropshire based business has added energy supply to its portfolio.

Working alongside Fidelity Energy, Pure were keen to offer customers more added value services and energy was the obvious choice, as David Hayward Sales and Operations Director explained.

"We heard about Fidelity Energy through a fellow O2 direct network partner and the attraction was three-fold. Firstly, it was gaining an understanding of the energy market better that convinced us that this was a market where there was opportunity. Secondly, it added to our product portfolio and provided us with an opportunity to offer our existing and opportunities a new service. Finally, the potential commission that was available from selling energy was obviously compelling."

Adding a completely new customer offering can be daunting process, but as Hayward stressed Fidelity Energy leads the field in helping ICT resellers address the energy opportunity and they had Pure up and running in no time.

"It's always a challenge introducing a new product or service. To sell effectively to

customers you must commit time and focus, but Fidelity have made the start-up process very easy and the introduction of the pricing portal has enabled us to turn proposals around in minutes. We're now addressing current and new business with energy supply under the Pure banner.

Hayward says some customers are receptive to the concept of changing their energy supplier whilst others are more cautious, but Pure's success rate to date has been encouraging and he sees energy supply as a great way to replace lost margins.

"We are finding that people are more receptive to providing us with copies of their energy bills than their telecoms bills which has enabled us to address key sectors like manufacturing, farming and construction but in all honesty, were getting success across all sectors. We can make a difference and offer better energy value for one in three clients.

"With margins on certain products reducing, it is vital for any business to have a strategy to replace lost margin. Every business has a range of core products that they focus on, however, adding energy to your portfolio can help generate a new income stream for any business. It's an excellent opportunity for a business diversification strategy and for us it's value add for our clients from a partner they trust."



“ Adding energy to your portfolio can help generate a new income stream for any business. ”

DAVID HAYWARD SALES AND OPERATIONS DIRECTOR



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Leach set to gain greater

Three months into the top job at NFON UK Managing Director Myles Leach reveals how a period of consolidation following impressive growth will provide the springboard for an ambitious push into the cloud telephony SMB market.

Leach took over the reins as NFON UK head honcho following the departure of former Managing Director Rami Houbby in May. The pair had worked closely together after Leach's appointment as UK Business Development Director three years ago and more latterly as Strategic Channel Development Director following promotion. Now Managing Director, Leach's first job is to consolidate following a three year period of fast growth and then continue to engage with key partners while taking NFON UK's channel programme to the next level. Leach commented: "We have established a great foothold in the market, now it's imperative that we have the right programme to move us forward while developing technologies around the core NFON solution."

Leach has been working in the telecoms industry since the early nineties. He spent ten years as the Managing Director of a traditional telecoms reseller and joined NFON UK in April 2014, the big attractions being its European reach and technology ownership. The UK office was in start-up mode, so he could assist with building and growing the operation from the ground up.

In the past year NFON UK ramped up a growth rate in excess of 300 per cent, 14 times faster than the overall



Myles Leach

market growth of circa 26 per cent, a figure estimated by Cavell Group. The 150-plus seat segment accounts for the largest portion of this expansion. More good news: During the same period staff headcount has grown 25 per cent while accredited channel partners have risen 46 per cent. Leach says these growth statistics reflect the aptness of NFON UK's offering to the market, an alignment that was first underscored when the company won a contract with the London Borough of Hackney. "It was

a huge win for more than 5,500 users," said Leach. "It reinforced the belief that our product and the peripheral technologies were right for the UK market."

The company now boasts over 100 channel partners and its technology relationships include Westcoast, a key Microsoft CSP. The IT distributor added NFON's cloud telephony product portfolio to its range of cloud services in February this year, enabling its IT partners to make a shift to

selling voice. Other routes to market include partners Chess and ScanSource which both broaden NFON UK's footprint and reach into the corporate space via a two-tier model.

Partner collaboration

"During this time of growth we have been working hand in glove with our partners to ensure that they are reaping the full rewards of adding cloud telephony products to their portfolio," added Leach. "Currently, only a small percentage of the UK

business telecoms market is cloud-based and this is only going to increase, driven by customer demand. The fact is that customers want one supplier to deliver their ICT requirements."

To give the market what it wants NFON is currently developing an entry level contact centre product and also working on improvements to its call analytics which are planned to launch by Q1 2018, as well as pressing ahead with developments to its UC

r market share

offerings. Leach says these developments reflect a change in market dynamics with customers demanding more cloud services, moving their data to the cloud and wanting to do the same with voice. "This has accelerated the cloud telephony market," added Leach. "There is a significant opportunity for our partners to sell an array of value added services as mobile working and UC go from being buzzwords to business realities."

Leach is especially abuzz with excitement about the potential of NFON UK's new link-up with Westcoast. Why? Because it gives partners an opportunity to deliver Skype for Business as a Service through a single solution.

The entry barrier for IT VARs into the voice market was high, but cloud telephony is fundamentally different

"For a long time we've had server level cloud integration with Skype for Business, removing the costs, risks and delays associated with application level integration," said Leach. "It also changes the economics for full-blown UC, unlocking its capabilities for the SMB market and making unified solutions available for fast rollout without any on site hardware or software, on a monthly subscription model with a 30-day rolling contract."

Leach noted that the SMB market is now a key growth area for NFON UK as it looks to consolidate a long period of market expansion in the mid to large enterprise space. "The Skype for Business proposition is a great opportunity," he enthused. "Once we start working with our more traditional reseller partners they are quick to embrace and maximise the potential. With cloud telephony being plug-and-play the revenue opportunities are huge."

The main challenge faced by traditional telco resellers is overcoming their heritage of selling on-premise solutions and moving to cloud telephony, a shift that requires a new business model based on recurring revenues rather than capex deals. And according to Leach, this is not a time for traditional comms resellers to sit on their hands. "Delaying the inevitable increases the threat of losing business to IT resellers," he stated. "Previously, the entry barrier for IT VARs into the voice market was high, but cloud telephony is fundamentally different. Getting started couldn't be simpler as it's an out-of-the-box solution."

That said, the boot could easily be worn on the other foot, noted Leach. "Voice resellers can flip the threat from their IT reseller rivals on its head and take a slice of their pie," he said. "We have a number of traditional voice resellers that started with cloud telephony and have now moved to also selling other ICT services such as Microsoft Office365. The cloud has blurred the lines between voice and data. The key is to get in on the action sooner rather than later." ■

Just a minute with Myles Leach...

Role model? My father. He relocated us from East London to the west country in the fifties and became a successful business man. His self belief, strength and success has been a huge inspiration for me

What talent do you wish you had? A more detailed knowledge of IT

What do you fear the most? Retiring. Pottering around the local garden centre and daytime TV don't hold much appeal for me

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I am a grandad! Hard to believe when I look so young...

How would you like to be remembered? As a good husband and father

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Life is a series of calculated risks. The key is being decisive and trusting your gut

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? As a child I always fancied myself as a criminal lawyer

Industry bugbear: The sector needs to be more diverse with more women in technology jobs. It's hugely important to address this imbalance

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? My biggest strength is developing people by giving them the opportunity to take on new challenges and grow. But I could be better at making more time for myself

How do you relax when not working? There is nothing better than sitting down for a home cooked meal and a few glasses of wine



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FINALISTS ANNOUNCED

Following another record entry we are delighted to announce the shortlist for the 2017 Comms National Awards.

"The number of entries our judges have received this year has been astonishing – it's another record entry. The judges have also been particularly impressed with the quality and depth of the submissions, which proves what an amazing industry this is," said Awards Co-ordinator Nigel Sergent, Editorial Director at Comms Dealer.

Finalists can now look forward to the spectacular finals night on October 12th at The Hilton on Park Lane, London.

"We have lined up a brilliant host and with over 160 entries from 100 plus organisations represented, the atmosphere, entertainment and excitement will be second to none. I am sure we'll have a full house to celebrate UK channel success," added Sergent.

To book your table at finals night contact Simon Turton on 01895 454603 or visit www.cnawards.com

CN AWARDS SHORTLIST

VENDOR AWARDS NETWORK CATEGORY
Best Mobile Provider/MVNO
Daisy Wholesale
Simetric Telecom
Trellisworks

Best Fixed Line Network Provider
CityFibre
Gamma
Vaioni
Virtual1

SERVICE PROVIDER CATEGORY
Best Wholesale Service Provider (up to £10m t/o)
Channel Telecom
Jola
Magrathea Telecommunications
Vaioni
The Voice Factory
Voiceflex
Zest4

Best Wholesale Service Provider (above £10m t/o)
Daisy Wholesale
Entanet
Gamma
Interoute
Invosys
Node4
plan.com
Virtual1
Zen Internet

Best ISP
Entanet
Gamma
Gradwell
Luminet
Spitfire
Zen Internet

TELEPHONY CATEGORY
Best SME Telephony System
3CX
Blueface
Ericsson-LG
Sangoma
Splice.com

Best Enterprise Telephony System
Content Guru
NFO
Ericsson-LG

Best End-Point or Device
Jabra
Ericsson-LG
Sangoma
Snom
Yealink

Best Hosted Platform
8x8
Blueface
Channel Telecom
Gamma
Gradwell
IP.Cortex
NTA
Ericsson-LG
TelcoSwitch

Teleware
Xelion

SOFTWARE APPLICATION CATEGORY
Best Call Management Solution
Cirrus
Content Guru
Invosys
KCOM
TeleWare
Tollring

Best Billing Platform
Aurora
Cirrus
Fidelity Group
Inform Billing
Union Street

Best Partner Portal
8x8
Fidelity Group
Fidelity Energy
Jola
Invosys
ICUK
plan.com
Splice.com

DISTRIBUTION CATEGORY
Best Convergence Distributor
Nimans
Pragma
ProVu
Scansource
Siphon

Best Mobile Distributor
Daisy Distribution
plan.com

PARTNER SERVICES CATEGORY
Best Channel Business Service
Agilitas
Fidelity Group
plan.com
Porrima
Train to Win.tv
Voiceflex

Best Installer/Maintainer
Agilitas
IPNetix
Train to Win.tv

RESELLER AWARDS CONTACT CENTRE CATEGORY
Best SME Contact Centre Solution
Ethos/Cirrus
ICA
NSN
STL Communications

Best Enterprise Contact Centre Solution
Aerial Business Communications
Cirrus
Connect Managed Services with Northumbrian Water

VERTICAL MARKET CATEGORY
Best SME Vertical Market Solution
B4BC
Cirrus
Cisilion
Cloudsource Technologies
GHM Communications
Loop Voice & Data
MPS Networks
netConsult
XMA

Best Enterprise Vertical Market Solution
BDR
Cirrus
Cisilion
Ethos
Incom-CNS
KCOM
SAS Global

IOT/WIRELESS CATEGORY
Best SME M2M/Wireless Solution
Pangea
Omnia
Channel Solutions Resource

Best Enterprise M2M/Wireless Solution
BDR
Comms365
Mason Infotech
Pangea

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Best SME Cloud Solution
B4BC
Cirrus
Cloudsource Technologies
Dupre
Gradwell
Loop Voice & Data
NSN
Sprint Convergence

Best Enterprise Cloud Solution
Connect Managed Services with Northumbrian Water
Datasharp
DF Communications
Ethos
Incom-CNS
TIG

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Citytalk Communications
Focus Group
Lily Comms
Midland Networks
MPS Networks
Solar
Telephone Systems.cloud

Best Enterprise UC solution
Aerial Business Communications
BDR
Cisilion
DF Communications
Ethos
Excell
Incom-CNS
Ocean

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Lily Comms
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Midland Networks
Rydal Communications
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Adam Zoldan

Partner

Knight Corporate Finance



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Enterprise Reseller of the Year

Charles Aylwin

Director of Channel

8x8



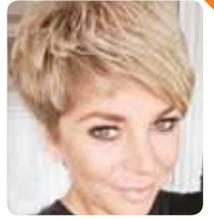
"At 8x8, we're delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards again this year. The evening is always a great celebration of the best our industry has to offer. It's also a fantastic recognition of true excellence in communications, whether rewarding vendor solutions, resellers, innovative technology or outstanding customer service. The channel is essential to the continued growth of our industry and at 8x8 we will continue our rapid expansion with the unrivalled expertise of our channel partners. We want to wish the best of luck to everyone that has entered and we're looking forward to celebrating on the night!"

Service Provider Category

Sara Brown

Head of Marketing

BT Wholesale



"BT Wholesale is once again delighted to be a sponsor of the 2017 Comms National Awards – Service Provider Category. The awards bring together the best of the industry – celebrating success, innovation and amazing capabilities demonstrated by our peers and colleagues. As a pure Channel business, we encourage all to enter as the benefits are huge! With a wide and diverse range of award categories, you can showcase your business and celebrate success. Excellence in the industry needs to be recognised and rewarded and the CN Awards does just that. So remember to submit your entry now. Good luck to all."

Best Contact Centre Category

Martin Taylor

CMO

Content Guru



"Content Guru is delighted to renew its sponsorship of the Comms National Awards for another year. Contact centres remain at the heart of the Customer Engagement Hub, a key component in any innovative customer service solution. We will be recognising those resellers who excel in this sector, and who are helping to evolve the traditional contact centre to meet the ever-expanding demands of today's consumer. The Comms National Awards continue to play an important role in the channel, and we would like to wish all the nominees the best of luck!"

Unified Comms Solutions Category

Peter Crooks

Chief Operating Officer

Invosys



"Invosys is delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards for the first time this year. Designed by the channel, for the channel, these prestigious awards truly showcase the crème de la crème of the telecoms industry and truly recognise outstanding achievement, innovation and excellence across the board. We would encourage all the channel to embrace the CNAs, which provide opportunities for all companies to enter, regardless of size. Not only is it a great opportunity for your organisation, it's a chance for your whole team to shine as you shape their future – as well as a great night out!"

Telephony Category

Kevin Boyer

Managing Director

IP Netix



"IP Netix is delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards Telephony Category which recognises vendor excellence and innovation. As one of the UK's leading installation and support organisations to the channel, we see how technology benefits end users every day, so it's wonderful for this to be recognised on an industry-wide stage!"

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Russell sharpens Arrow a

Mega-reseller Arrow Business Communications can chart its long history back to the launch of a small mobile service provider in 1995 and one man has been at the sharp end of its many twists and turns from day one – CEO Chris Russell.



Chris Russell

It all started when Russell qualified as a management accountant at Sony. "The Finance Director there asked me to join a team of three people tasked with launching a mobile service provider business," recalled Russell. "I was responsible for the Finance and Operations function, but that quickly morphed into a sales and marketing role. We grew that business to 120 people and £40 million turnover in

four years before we sold the consumer customer base to Vodafone in 2000.

"From there I was lucky enough to be sent to Los Angeles to take part in Sony's MBA programme at UCLA before returning to Europe to work in its new business division. By chance, I was asked to look after the remnants of the business that we had sold a few years earlier which we then bought via a management buyout in

2003. That business became Intelicoms, our second venture in this market."

Within four years Russell and his management colleagues had turned the loss making business into a vibrant reseller which was making £1.5 million per year and, as they were all about to start families, they decided to sell the business to Arrow. "I honestly thought that would be the conclusion of my time in this

industry, but Arrow asked me to stay on as a Non-Executive Director and, after it ran into some cash flow problems, I led the injection of new equity funding into the Arrow Group which resulted in me becoming the majority shareholder once again," explained Russell.

Acquisition strategy

"This became our third venture in this market and we followed a more acquisitive strategy to

complement our organic growth. Between 2010 and 2016 we completed seven acquisitions which broadened Arrow's expertise to include traditional telephone systems, unified communications, data services and IT while augmenting our national footprint."

After trebling the size of the company, Russell and his team faced the same crossroads once again and decided to search for private



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and aims at new targets

equity funding to accelerate growth. "Just over a year ago we completed this strategic investment process and started on our fourth venture selecting Growth Capital Partners (GCP) as our partner for an ambitious growth strategy," he said. "This is a true partnership deal with both parties holding a 50 per cent shareholding. All of the management team stayed with the business and remain committed to deliver this stage of our evolution."

Strong foundations

Today, Arrow remains a value added reseller of business services to the UK SME and corporate markets, with seven offices and 160 staff supporting over 4,000 customers ranging from entrepreneurs and SMEs to multi-national organisations. The company has a buy-and-build strategy supplemented by organic growth, and to make this work it has developed an operational platform and an effective cross sales strategy. "We will focus on our acquisitions first and more on the value plan once these foundation acquisitions have been completed," said Russell.

"Meanwhile, we aim to nurture close customer relationships through personal contact while offering dynamic solutions that suit all types of customer. We've added gas, electricity and water services to the business portfolio this year so we are now one of very few companies in the UK able to provide a full energy, telecoms and IT consultancy proposition."

The company has trebled in size since 2010 hitting £30 million in revenues and EBIDTA of £5 million,

but aims to double profits between 2016 and 2019, adopting what Russell calls a 'hub and spoke' approach to integration and a 'Kaizen' culture (constant improvement) which was a watchword at Sony in his early days.

"We like to keep the local offices to preserve the customer relationships that have forged in those businesses over many years," he added. "We have particular expertise in the education, hospitality and legal sectors and many of our customers buy multiple services from us and have been clients for many years."

"Our one word for the business has always been 'relationship', we want a relationship that we can be proud of with all our stakeholders – be that the local community, our suppliers, shareholders, employees or customers. We are a direct business that provides a solution sale and we are looking to work with like-minded partners."

"The biggest change has been the culture in Arrow. Two to three years ago we realised that we had outgrown our skin and needed to change before we could grow again. That started 'Arrow Vision' and has led us to a new structure, culture and employee engagement programme that has helped to prepare us for the growth phase that we are now in."

"Our culture is all about three words: Empowerment, Collaboration and Ownership. I don't believe that silo based organisations will work in today's world and I'm amazed by the collective

power of 160 brains to solve problems. That is what I want to harness each day. The final piece of that jigsaw is ownership. I want everyone to act as the owner and that is why everyone is a shareholder at Arrow after one year's service."

"The best endorsement of this was our first employee engagement survey which we completed in November last year. We achieved an engagement score of 90 per cent, 13 per cent above the benchmark and in the top 10 per cent of all participating companies. For our first attempt this was an amazing result and a testament to the team spirit at Arrow."

Arrow has four main areas of business – telephony, data, IT and energy – and each breaks down into subsections. IT, connectivity and hosted telephony are growing massively and the company continues to invest heavily in these areas. For example, in energy supply Arrow has purchased its own energy management platform which has won top industry awards.

Mobile heritage

Latterly, the company has reduced its dependence on some of its more traditional areas such as mobile which now only accounts for 40 per cent of its revenues, down from 85 per cent. However, as one of only six dual licensed network service providers the company has created its own range of tariffs. "These have proved to be successful and are now taken by over 50 per cent of our mobile subscribers," said Russell.

"The mobile market is tough but it's part of our DNA. I wish that we didn't have to

directly compete with the mobile networks. When we started, the mobile market was 80 per cent indirect and now it's 80 per cent direct, and it's the only market where we compete directly with our suppliers virtually all of the time."

"Moving forward, it is really important to stay flexible in our approach. We will continue to develop the services that our UK business customers want and I am sure that this will include full fixed and mobile converged products including full employee collaboration and video communication. There are always gaps to fill, some of which we haven't even realised yet. It is fascinating that we are selling products now that I wouldn't have predicted three years ago, such as water, IoT and energy."

"We are also taking our customers on a journey into hosted telephony and beyond. The range of products that we must understand, market and sell does increase the complexity of our business. And we must achieve all of this alongside our acquisition strategy that will see us add and integrate two companies into the group each year in a competitive market while achieving our targets and building and keeping our team. I would say that's enough to keep us busy!"

Looking back on his career, Russell is eternally grateful that his team has been loyal to him for 20 years and has worked so hard to get Arrow where it is today, and he has only one regret. "I just wish I had learned that culture beats strategy much earlier!" he said. ■

Just a minute with Chris Russell...

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I used to be a really good darts player

What talent do you wish you had? Better handwriting

Role models: Both of my grandfathers. One taught me never to give up and the other to do everything with a smile

What do you fear the most? Snakes

One example of something you have overcome: My first boss told me at 18 that I had a fear of using the phone. Ironic considering what I do for a living now and how much I talk!

The biggest risk you have taken? Leaving Sony and a good job to start Intelicoms via an MBO, although I probably didn't see it that way at the time

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who put a smile on your face

What possession could you not live without? My lucky Elvis – always ask yourself 'What would Elvis do in this situation'. It's guaranteed to lighten the mood a little

How do you relax when not working? Anything sporty or competitive. Body boarding with my two girls, Izzy and Georgie, is the favourite this summer

Top tip: I have never seen an unhappy employee give good customer service. Employees are your biggest asset – treat them well

One thing you could not do without in your job: Blank A4 paper and a pen. I'm a list person




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Ex-band leader finds a v

In his own words, Armstrong Bell Director William Copley talks about achieving NME's 'single of the week', becoming a chart topper in the comms channel, and why resellers are critical to the success of innovative businesses.

At school I was in a band called Fretblanket. We were somewhere between britpop and grunge, and when I was 17 we flew to New York and signed a seven album deal with Polygram. We toured America and the UK, recorded three albums and released two of them. We were also awarded NME's 'single of the week'. The band displayed self-belief prior to having some success, and going from Stourbridge to LA and beyond seemed natural to us. That confidence seems amazing now. But there is a lot of down time when you're in a band. My friend's dad had a comms company so I used to help out with cabling to fill in time. I eventually did jobs like cabling the seasonal tills in Toys R Us and picked up some system install training. It became a full-time job.

My friend's dad tragically died and things were never the same, so my manager and I thought we could do cabling and systems on our own and focus more on technology. As an engineer you think the world revolves around you and the installation, and we are lucky now that our engineers feel the same way. While there's a lot to be said for that attitude, of course I now understand more about the challenges of running a business.

Armstrong Bell started as Ocean Data and Voice Services in 2001 with an

eye on new technology and innovation, so we are never satisfied and always looking for new ways to service our customers' needs. We were based in Southampton and I was living in London. After a period of time we picked up some great customers, many of which are still with us today. I bought out my partner in 2008, renamed the company to Armstrong Bell and consolidated in Bromsgrove.

We are an outsourced telephony department to our customers. They trust us to do the right thing and we are successful because we care about the end result. When I look at our portfolio I feel we are strong in data, mobile, wireless and all the conventional voice offerings. We have had NEC PBX in the portfolio since the very start and it's still a core product, but hosted voice features strongly now. That is where the growth in recurring revenue will be generated and we have two great hosted voice partners. I'm told there are 90 hosted voice providers currently in the UK and it will be interesting to see who eats who in the next 12 months.

We hit the usual plateaus at around eight and 12 employees. There was a big one at 15 where it was really getting difficult, so I had to change mindset. Everything in the business was going through my head and it was all reported to me. The



William Copley

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secret of course is to employ great people. Sometimes you have to be ready to take the next step and there isn't a shortcut, so I want to help every individual in the team achieve their potential and reach their goals. I can only do that by providing the right resources and structure and allowing them to develop.

We aim to quadruple the size of the business within six years, tantamount to a target growth of 26 per cent per annum which we are

We aim to quadruple the size of the business within six years

running close to. We also doubled our office space this summer. A few years ago it was hard to visualise such an expansion, but now we have a good framework to support our longer-term growth plans which also build on some key developments over the past three years. We have implemented Salesforce CRM, added three field sales executives and worked hard on lead generation and process development. We have not made the most of creating significant leads from digital marketing. But we're refocusing on this area of customer acquisition.

The profiles of our customers are a broad range of size and industry, but we seem to be doing well in the education, hospitality and healthcare sectors. Right now we have some large projects to complete so two or three good recruits before the end

of the year would be perfect. We unfortunately lost a key employee in late 2015 but that has helped us to diversify some roles and expand the skill sets of the team.

We need more capabilities because the market has moved on in the last 12 months. It's something we have tracked closely in the first quarter of this year, and observed that the big players are driving customer expectation towards a default of more or less unlimited included calls, which has made it easier to compete. Call charges are now often irrelevant in sales, so you can concentrate on service and differentiators. People are expecting a high level of integration and we have to be ready for that as it develops. Customers will always need capable and trusted advisors so that they can concentrate on what they do best, therefore resellers have a critical role to play in the success of innovative businesses in the UK.

While the global technology companies will disrupt the market I have no fear of existential threats, partly because we select vendor partners carefully and view them as our most important strategic decisions. We have always worked with the smaller, more engaged and responsive vendors where possible, and have helped a few of them to improve their businesses.

Our team members are great ambassadors for Armstrong Bell and I couldn't ask for them to be more engaged and positive. Our customers sense a genuine belief in the company, whether it is in the engineers, sales people or support desk." ■

Just a minute with William Copley...

What talent do you wish you had? The ability to mimic and tell jokes

What do you fear the most? Phone calls from family. They are the new telegram – rarely good news

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I'm good at tongue twisters. Unfortunately it doesn't pay the bills

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? I'm a good communicator and on a good day I can bring people with me on an idea. But I can procrastinate (disguised as thinking time)

How would you like to be remembered? Inaccurately

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Having children, easily the scariest thing I've done

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? My friends from college have interesting careers in the professions. I hope I would have gone on to do that. Maths and physics might have been involved

One example of something you've overcome: Cigarettes

Biggest achievement: Pre telecoms – NME single of the week. In telecoms – attracting great people to join us

Lesson learnt: Think twice about employing friends. Don't give anything away

Top tip: Seek out and buy in expertise. You don't have to learn everything the hard way

Name one thing in your job you could not do without: I still pick up a krone tool now and then for old times' sake



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Whitty remoulds Solar

Solar Comms CEO John Whitty discusses his great transformation challenge and opportunity, an exciting step change year, and a potential company 'game changer'.

Whitty fully expects a big shift to the cloud over the next five years and the growth markets in his sights include unified cloud and managed communications, mobility, security, storage and SD-WAN, all of which build on Solar's heritage in voice, contact centres and WANs. "As more and more businesses move to a cloud first strategy traditional WAN solutions have created significant cost, performance and security challenges," said Whitty.

He claims Solar has solved this problem with its Silver-Peak Edge Connect SD-WAN solution. Solar's in-house tech team has also developed a Skype for Business solution that offers the call quality of enterprise grade telephony services. Skype for Business has seen a significant uptake from within the business community but it can be limited in its enterprise grade telephony offering, according Whitty. "Skype for Business is a great tool but it comes up short with regards to its telephony features," he said. "This has become a cause of frustration for many businesses which is why we developed Solar Skype Connect (SSC)."

SSC will be available to resellers of the Microsoft Office365 package and

can be delivered as either cloud, hybrid or on-premise. "SSC addresses a number of customer pain points by creating a scalable, cost-effective, next generation answer to the question of how to achieve optimum and feature rich telephony via a flexible model," added Whitty. "We've brought to market a UC solution that we feel could be a game changer for Solar and our partners. It's something we're proud of."

2016 was also an exciting step change year for Solar with the acquisition of two companies that took its customer base to over 1,700 and its headcount to 98. The company also started an apprentice scheme. The year saw revenues of £14.8 million, up 10 per cent on the prior year, with strong growth in hosted and cloud communication revenue streams. Solar's revenues from recurring business is now 73 per cent of total margins. The majority of new sales are monthly recurring revenue products, and the overall forecast for 2017 is strong.

"Our buy and build strategy has changed the shape of Solar, not just with our solution offering, product portfolio and vendor partnerships, but also with the opportunity it provides our people to develop and learn new skills, and



John Whitty

provide our customers with innovative technology," stated Whitty. "The deal I make with everyone is that I will do my best to create a fun, relaxed environment where people learn, develop and are given an opportunity to progress personally and professionally. In return I expect them to deliver the best service to our customers. We welcome people at all levels – college leavers, apprentices, graduates and experienced professionals. We are proud to have been named by the Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For as One to Watch which is voted for by our employees. We work hard to make Solar the best place we can."

Strong pedigree

Prior to joining Solar, Whitty held various technical and leadership posts including CTO at Pipex and Managing Director at GCI. He joined the British Army at 16 to undertake a three year apprenticeship as a Radio Engineer. This gave him an excellent foundation in engineering theory and practical as well as good leadership training. "After 18 years, and holding the

equivalent position of CIO, I left the military to see if I could survive in industry having gained a BSc and MSc in data communications," explained Whitty.

Solar was founded in Bristol in 1988 as a reseller of Avaya, Panasonic and Toshiba systems. Twenty years later its current Chairman Mark Colquhoun purchased and merged Solar with his existing lines and calls business and relocated to Chippenham. At the time, Solar embraced ShoreTel (now acquired by Mitel) as a new proposition for the UK market and invested heavily in championing the vendor, quickly gaining status as ShoreTel's European Partner of the Year. Solar was the number one partner for ShoreTel outside the USA, holding its Circle of Excellence accreditation for seven years and Platinum UK status for three years.

Solar's acquisition of Armstrong Communications in 2013 introduced a northern base and Mitel expertise. Solar then adopted a two vendor product strategy while

adding complementary connectivity and data services to the portfolio. The firm became a Mitel Gold Partner Cloud Service Provider, and its recent acquisition of Response Data Communications led to the formation of a disruptive technologies division, delivering solutions that challenge and disrupt the legacy business technology landscape.

As part of its transformation Solar implemented a unified business management software solution, ConnectWise, that gives the team access to company information via a single end-to-end system. Solar has also recently attained 27001, 20000, 9001 and 14001 accreditations to ensure quality in its management, information security and environmental management practices.

In other moves, Solar relocated from a base in Salford to larger premises in Salford Quays, extending its geographic reach while improving staff facilities. The company plans to relocate its Chippenham office to new premises. Meanwhile, high level appointments include Andrew Marshall as Chief Finance Officer, Sean Lowry as CTO, Will Kennedy as Sales Director and Paul Ceasar as Operations Director.

"Solar represented a great transformation challenge and opportunity, changing a successful PBX reseller into a cloud communications provider capable of supporting the majority of ICT needs of mid-market organisations," added Whitty. "We have aggressive plans to help our customers undertake digital transformation." ■

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KATY REID
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DEBORAH ROBERTSON
8X8

“ Our own research revealed that only around a third of staff interacting with customers are very confident handling multiple service enquiries across different channels. Businesses should make sure the right technology and training is in place to ensure staff are supported and able to make the most of the omnichannel challenge. The key to getting customer service right on social media is the same as any other channel – it’s about understanding your customers. That means giving them the option to contact you through their preferred channel, whether that’s the phone, social media, email or even webchat. Yet if you increase the number of channels your customers can use, you need to make sure agents have the support to manage them effectively. ”



Since the introduction of social media, customer service has undergone a dramatic change, writes Justin Coombes, Head of Marketing at Gamma.

Now seen not only as a tool for companies to deliver outbound marketing messages, social media has provided a space for inbound customer queries that allow for building better relationships and promoting brand champions. In addition, customers prefer to use social channels for its convenience, low cost and public nature.

There has been a shift from private, anonymous, one-to-one channels toward public, visible channels that are mobile and available in real-time.

This has increased expectations and a lower resistance to change. Customers now control the conversation through social by expressing their anger, asking for assistance or praising their brand.

According to the Institute of Customer Service, one in four social media users in the UK



DAVE STEPHENS
AERIAL

“ As a provider of unified communication solutions, Aerial is keen to keep on top of changing customer expectations. The channels in which customers choose to keep in contact with the companies they do business with are expanding, and as such, our solutions develop to integrate them. Aerial’s multichannel contact centre solutions enable agents to instantly see all previous communications such as phone calls, social media, webchat, emails and text messages. Customers can choose how they get in touch regarding their queries. By giving contact agents a 360-degree view of information, our solutions streamline data management, reduce response times and ultimately create a consistently superior service. ”



GLEN BLOW
CIRRUS

“ Use of social channels can greatly enhance your customers’ experience, if it is done well – and that’s the important caveat. To do it well means adding social media channels that are relevant to your customer demographic (noting the difference in social preferences between Millennials and Gen Z); and making the experience seamless across all channels. Your consumers expect to switch between channels and not have to tell the same story repeatedly; so a single view of the customer is key as you add more channels. Be wary of implementing social channels solely for cost savings. Social customer service is best leveraged by sales through service: Show that you care and are committed to your customers’ experience in the public square. ”



NEIL WATSON
ENTANET

“ Using social media as a centralised channel for customer service is a fantastic addition to any contact centre environment because of the speed at which engagement takes place and queries resolved. However, it’s not relevant for every business. At Entanet, we don’t use social media as a primary channel for customer service and technical support engagement because, in the main, our partners prefer us to be one-step removed from their end-users. Any queries that we receive are managed via the traditional routes of telephone and email, which are robustly managed by teams who are targeted on several KPI’s to ensure we remain industry leading. ”



ANDY PARKER
FOCUS GROUP

“ Customer Care can be delivered to the mobile generation through social media channels by encouraging conversational feedback and interaction not previously possible through the traditional channels. Issues and concerns tend to be highlighted a lot quicker through these platforms, which often results in a better timeframe for any resolution whilst maintaining direct customer contact through the process. Social media can also create a more human approach to the Customer Experience and by encouraging and responding to feedback, we are able to tailor our products and services, and engage in real time with our customers’ needs. ”

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JO SHUTTLEWORTH
GAMMA

“ By utilising social media channels in a positive way, Gamma have been able to build better relationships with our customers by providing immediate responses to queries and instantly sharing important information about our products. It is clear the businesses can no longer ignore the demand for social customer service. Customer now control the conversation, by demanding companies to be available 24/7 and through any channel they desire. We have looked at ways we can embed some of the underlying principles satisfied by social media within our customer-facing portal. For example, our live chat feature and the Service Status noticeboard, as well as developing forums within Gamma Academy to help customers collaborate and provide great customer support. ”



NIKKI LAKER
INFINITY GROUP

“ Social and digital are the perfect channels to mirror the behaviour and lifestyle of your customers. Customers want answers and they want them fast. Fully adopting the ‘always on’ approach, your customer service strategy should include channels such as social, live web chat and digital. Infinity Group have seven active customer service channels which are efficiently managed by a team of staff. Since the implementation, we have seen an increase in customer satisfaction which in turn boosts retention. Having a choice of contact channels provides reassurance for our customers as they can get in touch in a way that’s most convenient to them. If you are considering Twitter in particular as a customer service channel, make sure it’s managed closely. ”

used platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Google+ to make a complaint over the past three months, with 12% of customers using social to escalate their complaint if traditional methods for voicing dissatisfaction aren’t effective.

Their report also shows that many organisations are still undecided on how to change their customer service programmes to accommodate social. They suggest organisations will need to focus on several key enablers to make sure a social media strategy is successful.



JAMES WAPLINGTON
LILY COMMS

“ The role of customer service through online and social platforms is growing in importance year-on-year. At Lily Comms questions from customers coming from social media, live chat and web forms now account for around 40% of requests. Five years ago this was virtually zero. We have plans in place to put further resource into our online customer service, particularly within social media, alongside the launch of our new website later this year. The good old fashioned phone call will never go away, but it is important to adapt to changes in how we communicate and offer customers a broad choice of contact options. ”



STEPHEN MCINTYRE
NIMANS

“ Social media is playing an increasingly effective role across customer service as well as general marketing - with many organisations saving significant sums of money by aligning their contact and customer service centres with digital and social channels. Customer engagement is key to any successful strategy and social media is a very dynamic way of enhancing awareness and building customer satisfaction and loyalty. Live chat is another effective form of communication and these trends are set to accelerate in the future as companies embrace new technologies across multiple marketing and customer service platforms to engage with customers in a fast and professional way. ”

From a people perspective, organisations must ensure employees are fully trained in how social media works and delivering a customer focused omni-channel experience.

At the core, customer service has always been about connecting businesses with customers, and social media assists these relationships in a simple, efficient and timely manner. It seems that Comms Dealer’s Kaleidoscope contributors this month widely agree.



ADAM CATHCART
9

“ At Nine we really embrace open lines of communication, both internally and externally. Internally it enables us to share knowledge and ideas honestly and quickly, whilst externally it provides our partners with access into our business through their preferred communication methods, whether by phone, email or various means of social media. We also feel that social media provides us with an additional way of communicating, where our partners can easily access snippets of live information throughout the day, which can later be digested in detail at a convenient time to them. This has meant that we are not just ‘adding another mail to the inbox’ but can more efficiently share information, such as product enhancements, offers and incentives. ”



KATIE SLOAN
FIDELITY GROUP

“ We have embraced digital engagement for many benefits, not least for improvement of customer service. Our social media platforms are linked to our proprietary billing system, Anvil, enabling our partners to see latest social media posts on the main dashboard when they log in – including immediate customer service updates during unexpected outages. The organic reach through social media platforms helps to highlight important information as quickly as possible, as well as marketing opportunities informing customers of new product information and promoting exciting service features. We use social media to build stronger relationships with our customers, as well providing faster accessibility for improved customer service through linked communication systems, including a live support chat option on our website. ”

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WebRTC channel-ready

WebRTC is tipped to revolutionise the way businesses communicate and according to industry experts the technology is already edging closer towards mainstream and widespread adoption.

The fast-rising WebRTC standard for voice and video is gaining traction most notably in the UC space. This open source protocol enables video, audio and file sharing through a standard web browser, eliminating the need for platform-specific software, plugins or vendor lock-in that can complicate and raise the cost of existing video conferencing solutions. "As an integrator and reseller the opportunity is intriguing," stated Calum Malcolm, CTO, Elitetele.com. "The opportunity is huge as WebRTC can be a great benefit in UC solutions."

Malcolm observed that WebRTC has effected a 'quiet revolution' with little direct publicity but has been steadily growing in adoption, especially in UC video and voice applications. It is becoming increasingly powerful in connecting businesses with their customers. The key benefits are ease of use, better customer interaction, improved internal collaboration, and a lower cost of entry than some commercially provided solutions. "WebRTC offers cloud and UC integrators the opportunity to create disruptive solutions," noted Malcolm. "For the majority of clients it

will be a journey from traditional communications to the new world. The real opportunity is to integrate existing services to the cloud using a combination of public and private cloud solutions, providing a cost-effective transformation of their services."

The debate around open source and vendor supplied solutions opens up the opportunity further, observed Malcolm. "The real value as an integrator is the ability to provide the best solution to meet a client's requirements," he added. "As backing for the protocol grows with Microsoft and Google supporting it, the opportunity for growth over the next 12 months is encouraging."

While WebRTC is a critical tool for today's digital landscape it's important to remember that it is a communications enabler, not a replacement for solutions such as UC or call centre applications, observed Patrick Joggerst, EVP of Global Sales and Marketing, Genband. "We made the decision to invest heavily in WebRTC and build our Kandy CPaaS, enabling companies to leverage the capabilities of WebRTC without the risk," he said. "With that foundation in place we've continued to



Paul Taylor

innovate with our Kandy Wrappers, revenue-ready, pre-packaged, fully functional software applications that can be delivered standalone or inserted into a website or application to endow it with embedded real-time communications capabilities in minutes. With access to capabilities like Live Support, Visual attendant, Truckroll and more, businesses can significantly accelerate their time to market and enhance the customer experience while reducing their implementation efforts and costs."

Seamless experience

While UC has helped to enhance enterprise communication and collaboration, it isn't yet delivering the truly seamless experience users crave, according to Joggerst. That's where container technologies come in, he explained. "With container technologies it's possible to have disparate applications and processes combined within a single desktop or mobile client

'shell', delivering a truly integrated experience with extensive capabilities," added Joggerst. "An example of truly unified communications would be mashing up a Microsoft Skype for Business experience for instant messaging, address book and presence with voice and video delivered through the service provider's HD quality service. This is the path forward and container technologies are the enabler for these new and integrated experiences."

But undergoing a period of tech change can be challenging for resellers, even with the promise of big rewards. "It usually takes a trigger point for enterprises to make the jump, so resellers need to be alert to changes such as a growth in the number of employees, a move to new facilities, a need for more advanced functionality, a search for cost savings etc, which can help drive change," commented Joggerst. "But while WebRTC offers

multiple benefits, deployment can be challenging. It's critical for the channel to offer a clear migration path and the tools to help guarantee the performance of services and apps."

WebRTC is high on Voiceflex's agenda and Sales Director Paul Taylor believes that a reseller's strategy must now include a WebRTC journey, which Voiceflex has already embarked on and monetised for the channel following a link-up with Genband. "Voice WebRTC is real-time – calls are made directly and instantly via a browser over the web with no calling costs," said Taylor. "We have several WebRTC-based products and our priority is to get them into our channel. Short-term we're pushing voice-based WebRTC applications such as Visual Automated Attendant, moving the automated attendant from laborious tone based routing to a visual attendant that's embedded in the customer's website. It's opening doors and closing deals."

Voiceflex SIP Trunks are now WebRTC enabled and Taylor is busy pushing the benefits of the application into the channel. "Longer-term we will see additional features on our voice enabled applications and the introduction of applications encompassing the full spectrum of interaction with customers over the web including, but not limited to, voice, web chat, Facebook and LinkedIn," he said. "Most resellers haven't looked at the opportunities WebRTC can offer. It's where SIP was 10 years ago and just entering mainstream. The opportunities will be plentiful, but education is key." ■

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Gamma CEO's all for red & customer experience

Comms Vision Platinum sponsor Gamma's quest to redefine and enhance the workplace and customer experience is proving ever more fruitful, according to CEO Bob Falconer.

The workplace and customer experience dynamic is shifting the channel's plates, concentrating minds on wider conversations about what customers really value. And according to Falconer, the channel is best placed to deliver the Experience Defined Workplace stakeholders crave. In this context, he noted, a key virtue of technology is that it encourages us to evolve our understanding of the customer experience and ensure that solutions remain significant and relevant. "The workplace and customer experience is all about making life easier for the customer to interact with a business in a way that suits them best," he stated. "In today's omni-channel environment the timing and method of communicating – telephone call, via website, video call, instant messaging, SMS, social, the list goes on – are all defined by the customer's preferences."

For businesses, the employee experience boils down to giving internal users the technology that empowers them to be more effective in their roles. "In this new way of working the channel partner is essential," added Falconer. "You cannot buy a solution that is tailored to a business from a website, and you certainly cannot get the support you want as an end customer from someone that does not know what is important to them. Generally, margin is stronger when you can help change the way an organisation works rather than simply reducing its costs. Of course, if you can do both and you've also got an edge in how you do it, then you're cooking on gas."

The future success of channel partners depends on their ability to not only embrace digital transformation, but also get under the skin of end user organisations, believes Falconer. "If you can create a sales and marketing model that allows time to listen to the customer and then position a solution that provides

service improvements, that will be a great base to keep your business moving forward," he stated.

When developing new solutions Gamma first looks at ways to help a business be more efficient and improve the way they communicate with their customers. "We start by solving the customer's problem and then work through the technology solutions that can deliver the improvement, ensuring the cost structure can be delivered at a price point that businesses can afford," explained Falconer. "In order for a channel partner to be successful in today's customer-centric way of running a business, the first thing to do is to pick the products that are in growth markets and can change the way that businesses work. Gamma's SIP and Horizon products are in that space and we're building on these to enrich the customer experience and make businesses more efficient."

Product developments

Examples of this can be seen in Gamma's latest product and service developments, all designed for the channel to take to market. These include the integration of the Horizon cloud PBX solution with a number of industry vertical CRM systems to ensure that users can access customer data and communicate with customers from their key business application. Gamma has also developed a new service called Connect that it is taking to market over the next few months, giving Gamma mobile and Horizon users a single platform to communicate with their customers whether from a mobile or fixed device.

"This provides a consolidated platform for customer interaction where business mobiles are no longer individual isolated users," stated Falconer. "Instead, mobile calls can be tracked and reported on in the same way as hosted fixed voice, and features such as call recording

Our focus is on finding ways to help the channel succeed in the new world. This will be our theme at Gleneagles Hotel

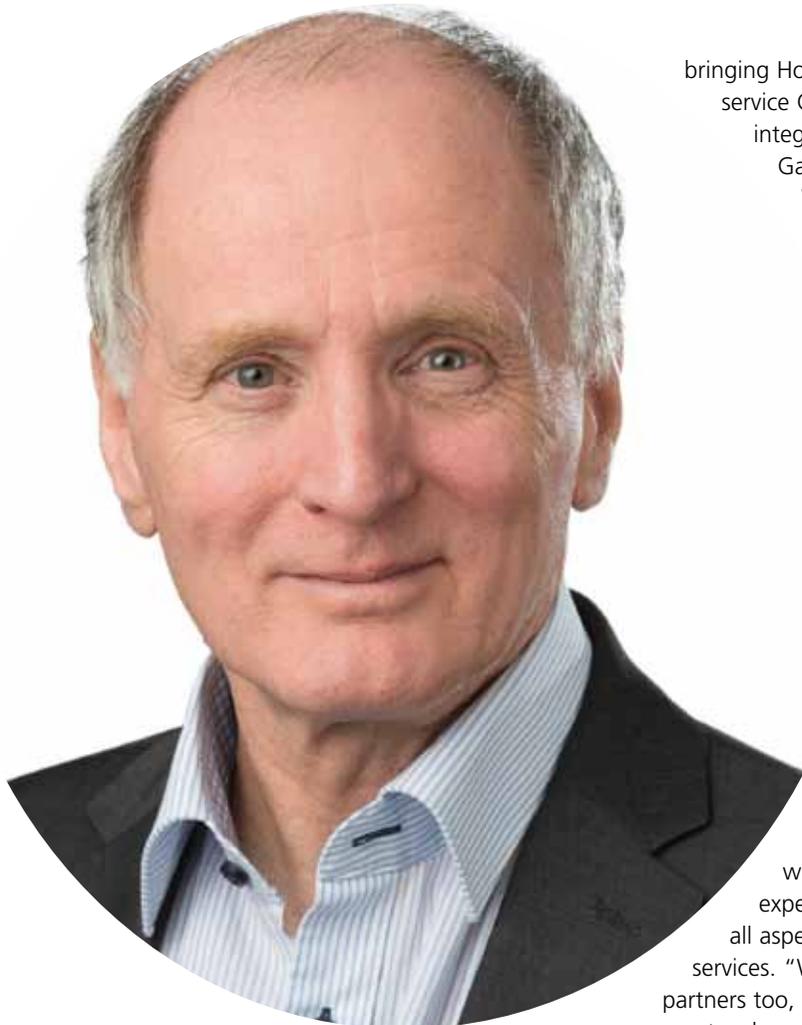
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Defining the workplace



bringing Horizon and mobile together with its new service Connect, to deliver true fixed-mobile integration. The other session will be on Gamma's new partnership with Amazon Web Services, a link-up that makes it easy for channel partners to take cloud compute and cloud backup solutions to their customers, alongside Gamma's connectivity services which help drive that uptake. "Our focus around these solutions will be on three key areas that give practical advice on driving incremental revenue and margins – winning new business, growing existing bases, and increasing partner margins by making it easy to do business with Gamma," said Falconer.

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Empowering partners

Over the last few years Gamma has developed its products and services to cover all market segments, enabling partners to address the evolving requirements of customers while improving best practice and the user experience. Gamma's portfolio encompasses all aspects of voice, data, fixed and mobile services. "We're now bringing cloud services to partners too, giving them the opportunity to take a greater share of the customer's IT budget," noted Falconer. "This is an exciting time for the ICT industry. Everyone in the channel has to be agile and listen to business messages coming from the client. Developing solutions and services that meet those true business needs is the way to success and future prosperity."

or hunt groups can be accessed from a centralised location, regardless of the device used to access them."

The key trends observed by Falconer are mobility and contextualising communications into the core of the customer's business processes. "Communications cannot be in isolation to be effective, it needs to be plugged into an organisation's wider ecosystem – CRM, finance systems and websites for example," commented Falconer. "Businesses don't care about telephony systems (cloud or otherwise), mobility or data networks. What they care about is selling more, making more margin and providing a better customer service, whether they are a B2B or B2C company. Our focus is on finding ways to help the channel succeed in this new world, and this will be our theme at Gleneagles. Our objective is to enable 'Gamma partners to do better'."

The themes of Gamma's boardroom sessions at Comms Vision are Voice and Mobile and how the company is

For Gamma, it's not just about delivering products in a standalone format. By providing multiple services that form a big part of, but not the whole solution, Gamma enables partners to solve real business issues rather than just offer a technology sell. "This led us to increase our focus on the service wrap we deliver around all of our products," said Falconer. "We've also invested in a broad set of staff across the piece, including areas like pre-sales support to help partners on the technical side, as well as project and product management to ensure that the delivery of various components come together at the same time. A better service wrap from us means an improved experience for customers. We're coming to Gleneagles this year with innovative tactics, tools and resources designed to help grow partner businesses." ■

A better service wrap from us means an improved experience



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Technology alone cannot sense of experience

The rise of what we call the Experience Defined Workplace as a measure of business success is both astonishing and inspiring. Here, Comms Vision Convention sponsors discuss how the 'experience' has become an industry benchmark.

The customer and workplace experience hinges on more than technology. It depends on culture and fully understanding the requirements of all stakeholders, and is driven especially by the benefits of flexibility, personalisation and familiarity, believes ProVu Managing Director Darren Garland, who says the factors that underpin the customer and workplace experience revolution include video, instant messaging and chatbots. "Bots will play a big part in the future of workplace transformation," he said. "As they become more advanced they learn the answers that customers require and can offer 24/7 access. In an age of convenience, consumers are becoming less 9-5 and expect to be serviced at a time that suits them and their lifestyle. Chatbots offer an excellent solution to this requirement."

The key is not to be too fixated on technology, what really matters is having an ability to understand customers. "Without any knowledge about what is required it's impossible to know what services to develop," added Garland. "To do this we review every customer touch point to ensure we are using the correct technology and that our information is being delivered in the right way. Even the simplest things such as streamlining the on-boarding process can have a great impact on re-defining the customer experience."

In elevating its ability to establish Experience Defined Workplaces the channel needs

DARREN GARLAND: Even the simplest things such as streamlining the on-boarding process can have a great impact on re-defining your customer experience.

to forge stronger relationships with customers to truly get to grips with their experience requirements, so much so that bespoke solutions become the de facto delivery model. "It's important for communications to be aligned across all departments and for customers to receive a personal and efficient service from the start," commented Stuart Birchall. "As the channel creates more and more opportunities around customer interactions, the more familiar resellers will become with the processes, making it easier for them to establish the Experience Defined Workplace and become highly trusted organisations."

Personal service

Optimising the customer experience must not come at the expense of delivering a truly personal service. While it is an industry priority to make customer and workplace interactions seamless and measurable, a balance must be maintained between the human touch and the benefits of automation. The potential of automation and AI is awe inspiring, but there are some pitfalls which



STUART BIRCHALL:

Finding the right context and developing a relationship that is more narrowly defined is important if you want success from AI as it exists today.



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t create the post-digital



ANDREW WILSON:
A confluence of trends and technologies, backed up by exceptional service, promises to reshape the way organisations do business.

need to be addressed prior to adopting them into the business processes. "For instance, if you've worked hard to forge strong personal relationships with customers and a chatbot does not match your approach, it could alienate customers and therefore have a detrimental effect on the customer experience," noted Garland. "So long as the benefits outweigh the pitfalls AI can open up great opportunities to businesses. The real danger, however, is that we become too reliant

on automated systems and the personal touch required to build customer loyalty ceases to exist."

Even the smartest AI is still 'pretty dumb' without the very human ability to generalise and infer meaning from context, believes Stuart Birchall, Zen's Head of Customer Solutions Architecture. "Finding the right context and developing a relationship that is more narrowly defined is important if you want success from AI as it exists today," he stated. "The ability of Amazon Retail to tailor its messaging based on knowledge of your browsing and buying habits is remarkably effective at reproducing the intimate relationship and local knowledge we used to enjoy with, for example, a local book seller. Amazon's

success in this area has led it to package the technology for sale in its Amazon



JUSTIN FIELDER:
Never lose sight of the fact that people buy from people. If the inter-personal touch point is removed you will need to supplement that omission with excellence elsewhere.

Web Services arm in the form of Amazon AI. However there is still no substitute for the personal touch."

New SaaS technologies are fashioned from the ground up with the user experience in mind. They are designed to purchase and use with the minimum amount of effort and expertise by people who really understand usability and user interface design. "The maintenance and management of these systems becomes less relevant and the data they produce is increasingly stored in a 'file-less' state inside cloud services, depriving intermediaries of the opportunity to stay relevant with business models based on managing servers, applications and files," said Birchall. "To stay relevant you need to become a broker, integrator and domain expert. This means helping customers choose the right service, support its integration with the business and other services while providing expertise on the detailed configuration and implementation of the service."

Enabling innovation

Organisations that stay relevant and harness innovation will be the most successful, but the challenge is in creating a customer-driven culture that also enables innovation among staff. "Providing you can bring the point of customer contact closer to the source of innovation this is possible," commented Birchall. "Putting the customer at the top of the list of priorities must also be a defining characteristic of your business culture. This is derived from the leadership team. The bigger and more hierarchical a business, the harder this gets, so alterations to the structure of an organisation are often a focal point for change."

At a strategic level, the customer experience is the critical benchmark for any progressive business. It is one that Node4 has identified as being at the heart of its Partner Markets 'channel without challenge' proposition. And in an age of public reviews and market saturation around products and services, successful businesses will need 'customer experience' as part of their overall growth strategy, believes Andrew Wilson, Director of Channel Sales at Node4.

"A confluence of trends and technologies, backed up by exceptional service, promises to reshape the way organisations do business, and that distils into the concept of customer experience," he said. "Likewise, from a workplace experience perspective, the same applies. The internal stakeholders within a business, the employees, need to experience the same levels of engagement and satisfaction > continued on page 44

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DARYL PILE:
The key trends are mobility and contextualising communications into the core of the customer's business processes.



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Continued from page 43 > aided by technology and the support and culture of their company.”

Businesses and their customers have a shared interest. At their intersection, they both engage with the cultural identity of a company through the service and experience that is delivered and received. For the channel this digital experience landscape has become a land of opportunity. But it has less to do with the oft-cited era of ‘digital transformation’, it is rooted in the post-digital rise of human experience, which is now the end game. Digital is a means to an end, not an end in itself, so balancing solutions such as AI with the real needs of customers could be a challenge.

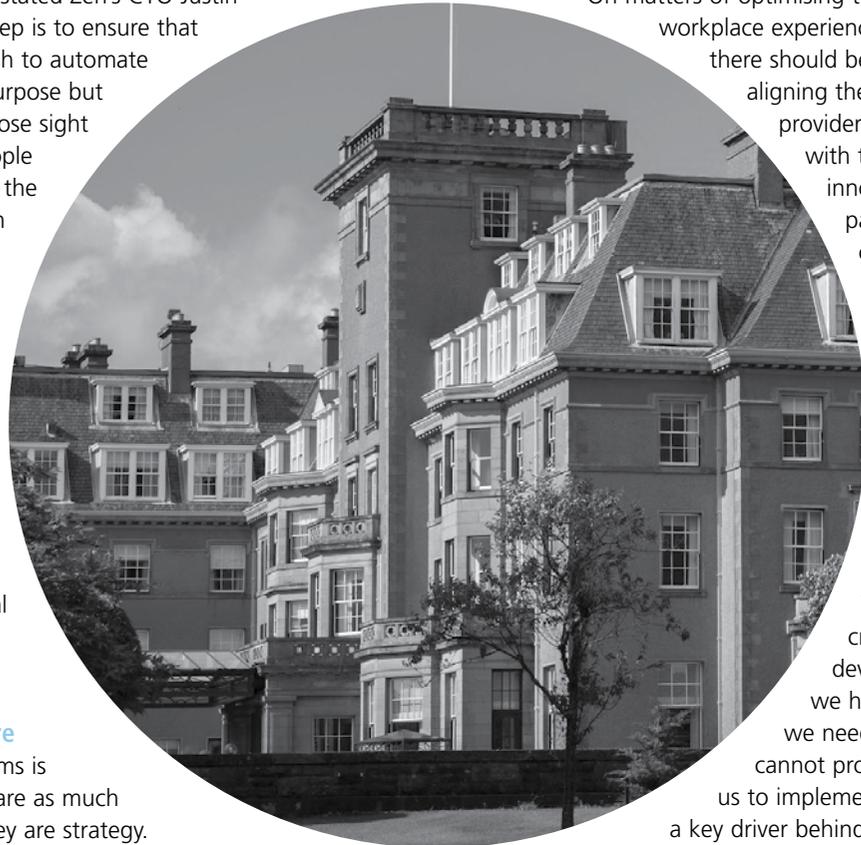
“As with all things in business, never try to automate a broken process,” stated Zen’s CTO Justin Fielder. “The first step is to ensure that the process you wish to automate is not only fit for purpose but world class. Never lose sight of the fact that people buy from people. If the inter-personal touch point is removed you will need to supplement that with excellence elsewhere. Many customers will be far more accepting of brutal automation in some processes if others are made to be more personal and interactive human-to-human.”

A matter of culture

What Fielder confirms is that these matters are as much about culture as they are strategy. Therein lies a bridgeable gap between technology and the desired experience and outcomes, and sales approaches should now be tailored to reflect the increased demand in burgeoning markets such as the mobile experience. “The key trends are mobility and contextualising communications into the core of the customer’s business processes,” explained Gamma’s Channel Managing Director Daryl Pile. “The customer and workplace experience is all about making life easier for the user to do business on their terms. As ever with any new technology or industry concept, the solution can only be successful if it

NEIL WILSON:
We can be held back by suppliers that are less advanced in the development of APIs and automation across their network.

can be effectively sold and supported for the customer. This is where the channel is key and the old school sales



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model still applies – listen to the customer, understand their business drivers and recommend a solution that offers a return over and above savings on costs.”

On matters of optimising the customer and workplace experience in the channel there should be a bias towards aligning the evolution of providers such as Virtual1 with the rates of innovation across partnerships. “We can be held back by suppliers that are less advanced in the development of APIs and automation across their network,” stated Neil Wilson, Product and Marketing Manager, Virtual1. “This creates a barrier for development where we have the ideas that we need but the supplier cannot provide a method for us to implement change. This was a key driver behind the expansion of our own network to deliver an infrastructure we could easily control. We need to be mindful of the capabilities of our partners. Having innovation is no use if customers cannot leverage the benefits.”

At this year’s Comms Vision Convention – to be staged at Gleneagles Hotel, 8th-10th November – we will explore how the communications industry is starting to reflect the underlying trends discussed in this article, and the longer-term implications of these developments and the Experience Defined Workplace on the channel and wider business community.

The customer experience is a critical benchmark for any progressive business



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Neil Whitelock

Avaya enables cloud partners

Avaya's cloud partner capabilities in the mid-market and enterprise are advancing at pace. Here, Neil Whitelock, Director, Cloud and SI Alliances, Northern Europe, outlines the vendor's channel strategy against a backdrop of market certainty and partner centricity.

Having spent over a dozen years as a sales leader in a global managed services IT organisation, and then driving sales transformation for Avaya as its Managing Director for the Nordics, it was apparent to Whitelock just how important the role of cloud services was becoming in the eyes of the customer. "When Avaya then asked me to lead its cloud business in Northern Europe I naturally relished the challenge, having already seen first-hand the rapid changes to the market driven by cloud services adoption in the Nordic countries," he said.

Avaya made a strategic decision four years ago to transition to a software and services company. Its global revenues now comprise 79 per cent software and services. The vendor continues to invest heavily in R&D and a great example of how it is adapting is its IP Office 'Powered By' cloud offering which is accelerating rapidly across all of Avaya's markets. "SME and mid-market customers can now acquire our solutions in a traditional manner through on-premise, as a true cloud service or a hybrid of both,"

added Whitelock. "The choice rests entirely with the customer to adopt cloud at a rate that suits their business best in a 'Cloud-Your-Way' fashion."

In addition to the IP Office 'Powered By' cloud service Avaya is delivering on a roadmap aligned to its business transformation strategy. Solution launches in the last 12 months include the acclaimed Oceana and Oceanalytics next generation customer engagement software based solution. Other recent launches include Avaya Breeze, an application development platform; and Avaya Equinox, a collaboration client that supports integrated user experiences. "Avaya continues to address its important enterprise and mid-market/SME segments with the channel, which remains an extremely important route to market," emphasised Whitelock.

"New solutions such as Avaya Breeze and Equinox open up opportunities for a new range of partners who specialise in providing software development and integration services supporting digital transformation projects. Our responsibility now is

to help our partners evolve their businesses as they also look to respond to the transforming marketplace. Most are making the transition to a cloud and software environment in response to market demand.

"One of the areas we're focusing on with the customer is their journey to the cloud. We're very conscious that companies don't go all-in with the cloud on day one. This is not a 'lift and shift' environment. This is why our IP Office 'Powered-By' hybrid capabilities are critical. Customers and partners can leverage existing investments made in on-premise systems and, for example, repurpose it as a high availability solution while they move their front office to the cloud."

Workplace experience

Digital Transformation (DX) is heavily influencing Avaya's discussions with customers. "It means different things to different customers and can be complex, therefore we focus our efforts to understand their priorities so that we can work together to achieve their desired business outcomes," explained Whitelock. "Ultimately, DX is about how they work with

their customers and how they optimise the workplace experience within their business. It is important we continue to develop solutions and services that address their business challenges, both in the shorter and longer term. Driving greater value add from investments in communications is a key driver for any company. Many CIOs are challenged to show greater integration of services with ever-reducing budgets. Our cloud evolution story is one way we can help them do just that."

Resellers and SIs have a great opportunity ahead of them, believes Whitelock, not only from customers looking to move from traditional on-premises to cloud deployments, but there is also an opportunity for partners to deepen their relationships with customers. "Especially as our joint solutions and services become ever increasingly embedded within customer business operations and transformation strategies," added Whitelock. "To realise this opportunity, the role of the channel must adapt quickly. Service led consultancy, focusing on collaboration, workflows, application development, omni-channel and business

efficiencies will lead to successful outcomes for both customers and partners."

However, partners are at different stages in their evolution to cloud and understanding their position and supporting their development is important. "I am also looking to understand the capabilities of our channel with regards to application development and integration, as the importance of this will increase in the DX landscape," added Whitelock. "New entrant partners also have a role to play here."

Avaya aims to become synonymous with collaborative digital transformation by delivering value through experience led cloud enabled technologies. "Our channel is already adapting to join us on this journey," said Whitelock. "The pace of change in the market is increasing and this will impose its own change on our partner landscape. We also see the make-up of our channel changing as new entrants emerge to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities in application development that our platforms, Breeze and Equinox, make possible." ■

To find out more about hybrid cloud and the
Powered By Avaya IP Office offering call **+44 800 011 9706**

AVAYA

ICT's in robust health

Technology is revolutionising the National Health Service, creating propitious conditions to achieve cost reductions, greater efficiency, and an improved and more personalised patient experience, explains Mark Elwood, Director of Marketing at TeleWare.

One tech innovation especially, Artificial Intelligence (AI), will go a long way in helping NHS Trusts to tackle the difficult and pressing issues that put them under intense pressure, believes Elwood. "AI is currently a hot focus area," he stated. "Healthcare companies are increasingly exploring ways to use AI to triage patients. This has obvious efficiency benefits, but it is important that patient safety is not compromised. AI symptom verifiers are leading the way as they have been shown to be both accurate and efficient. The tool can be a great way to point a patient in the correct direction in terms of how to treat their symptoms and seek further medical help."

Technologies such as AI hold the key to unlocking the NHS's potential to operate more efficiently. While technology is frequently used in treatment and care, there is a constant need to improve how it can be used in supporting services, particularly communications. "All technology must be able to deliver best practice in terms of clinical outcomes," added Elwood.

"But at the same time not increase the risk to either the patient or the clinician. The focus needs to be on increasing the speed between access and outcome."

Patient self-care and AI/automated system developments can speed up key processes and help the NHS to save significantly on the costly maintenance of ineffective and archaic systems that duplicate, replicate and require human involvement. "Computers could do a far more effective and quicker job," stated Elwood. "By providing the platform with high quality and reliable communications, the NHS and private sector can help improve patient experience and outcomes while also reducing costs through greater efficiencies."

Another key trend is the rise of online doctor consultations. The use of video calling services, such as Skype, are becoming ever more popular due to the increasing list of patients. "A new provider company is launching every three or four months in this space," added Elwood. "However, there are a lot of questions about the efficacy of these start-ups. The Care Quality



Mark Elwood

Commission and General Medical Council are keeping a close eye on this online prescribing explosion. The key challenge for companies here is balancing clinical risk with patient expectation. It is estimated that approximately just 50-60 per cent of patient healthcare issues can be resolved in this way. The rest require a face-to-face consultation."

Mobility

With more NHS workers becoming mobile, mobile voice, SMS, Skype for Business and recordings are playing a bigger role. Trusts are increasingly using communication recording for playback and auditing purposes. Analytics will also come into play in this area. "With more data being generated, the ability to analyse this data and turn it into meaningful insight could be game changing in both the NHS and private sectors," stated Elwood.

ICT buying is increasingly cloud-based as NHS technology buyers warm

to the open model with less upfront capital outlay. "They can trial solutions quickly and relatively inexpensively," said Elwood.

"For resellers, these new technologies bring fresh opportunities. But it also comes with a certain amount of risk. It is important that resellers are able to work with NHS trusts and the private sector on ways to guarantee clinical safety, while simultaneously providing efficiencies and improved patient outcomes. It is important to understand a reseller's challenges and work together on solutions. This can range from product innovation through to joint sales and marketing campaigns to generate pipeline opportunities. We purposefully work with a small number of selected resellers."

In a partnership with concierge medical service Akea Life, TeleWare has delivered a software solution that routes, records and analyses calls and patient

consultations which are available on demand, exceeding Care Quality Commission best practice guidelines. Akea Life launched a subscription wellness service in February 2016 and counts Premier League football clubs, north west based corporates and local families among its patients who are assigned their own personal doctor. "The crux of our offer is home visits within two hours of a call," said Akea Life MD Ben Paglia.

This premium operation meant that the team needed the ability to record patient calls and Skype sessions. Not for compliance purposes, but for the safety and security of both doctors and patients. "Most initial patient contact is by phone so we need to be able to capture the session," added Paglia. "We already had the phones and computers in place, but needed a partner with a simple, cost-efficient and scalable software solution to record and analyse calls, texts, emails, Skype sessions and IM."

Each doctor has a SIM in their phone that records calls and sends them to the cloud. In this case, Microsoft Azure. This way Akea can track performance and capture any evidence for potential complaints or queries (as well as for training and quality purposes). Elwood noted: "With a lot of our customers in regulated industries many of the solutions we put in place are for compliance purposes. It is great to see how call recording and analysis can be used as a basis for customer and patient service."

How a new framework for health tech was devised – p48



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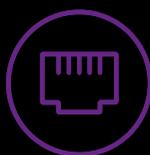
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The making of HSCN

Close collaboration between the comms industry and the Public Sector has delivered a new Health and Social Care Network (HSCN) designed to help SME providers flourish in a far more competitive marketplace. Here, Adept Telecom CEO Ian Fishwick provides insights into how the new framework was created.

In tandem with his Chief Executive role Fishwick doubles up as the Commercial Director of Innopsis, the Telecoms Trade Association that advised NHS Digital on the creation of the new HSCN. He also represents the telecoms industry on the Cabinet Office SME Panel, and brings key insights into the progress made towards the new competitive marketplace for integrated networks in the health sector.

In early 2016, NHS Digital (HSCIC as it was then known) approached Innopsis for help in the creation of the new HSCN. The key questions to address were: How to replace a single supplier network (N3) that has been around for well over a decade with a vibrant competitive marketplace for the supply of health and social care data networks? How to ensure that non-NHS organisations can connect to the NHS securely? And how suppliers can be seen to be approved and operating to the same standards?

According to Fishwick, the formation of HSCN and its introduction in April this

year is a shining example of how industry and the public sector can work together in answering questions such as these. And in addressing the issues at hand, Innopsis settled on three key focus areas – Commercial and Governance, Technical and Security, and Service Management. The first of these categories looked at how to create a marketplace where suppliers can compete on a level playing field. Innopsis explored ways for suppliers to become compliant and what that approval process would look like.

In terms of Technical and Security, the pressing concerns focused on how HSCN can become an interoperable 'network of networks' whereby the individual supplier networks work together seamlessly. It considered the security standards suppliers and users should follow to ensure the network is safe to use. Next, the Service Management category assessed how the 'network of networks' will be monitored and managed in-life to guarantee a high level of availability for end users.



Ian Fishwick

To address the big issues outlined above each working group had joint chairs – a subject matter expert from NHS Digital and a corresponding director from Innopsis who co-ordinated the view of industry. Fishwick was the industry joint chair of the HSCN Commercial and Governance working group.

Gaining compliance

"On passing stage 1 of the HSCN Compliance process a supplier is given the blue HSCN Compliant logo so that users can see that it is authorised to sell HSCN connectivity," stated Fishwick. "Once a supplier has achieved HSCN Stage 2 Compliance they are then authorised to start installing new HSCN circuits."

Early procurements were placed under RM1045

(Crown Commercial Service's Network Services Framework). Customers could either issue tenders or choose a supplier and place direct awards from a suppliers' online catalogue. Crown Commercial Service will then issue a HSCN-specific framework because some of the HSCN Compliant suppliers did not qualify for RM1045 when it was awarded two years ago. This means there will be more suppliers to choose from.

"In order to speed up the migration from N3 to HSCN, NHS Digital will co-ordinate aggregated procurements whereby several organisations can be grouped together under a single tender," explained Fishwick. "Before a customer can install HSCN circuits they need to get the funding approved from

NHS Digital. As N3 was previously funded centrally, each buyer now needs to apply for funding from NHS Digital before they commence procurement. The buyer also needs to sign a HSCN Code of Connection. This has been simplified to one code per organisation rather than one per site, making it much easier for multi-site organisations."

The migration to HSCN is planned to be completed by August 2020. It is expected to support around 35,000 digital connections across England and Wales (even more if it reaches its full potential), creating the largest public sector network infrastructure in the UK.

Adept Telecom has long been a SME provider of network services to the public sector and has a strong customer base in public and private health organisations. The company is a Crown Commercial Services supplier with the right to provide services under the CCS Network Services Framework RM1045. Adept gained approved supplier status in July 2015 for all four lots that it applied for and has since won a number of significant contracts across them.

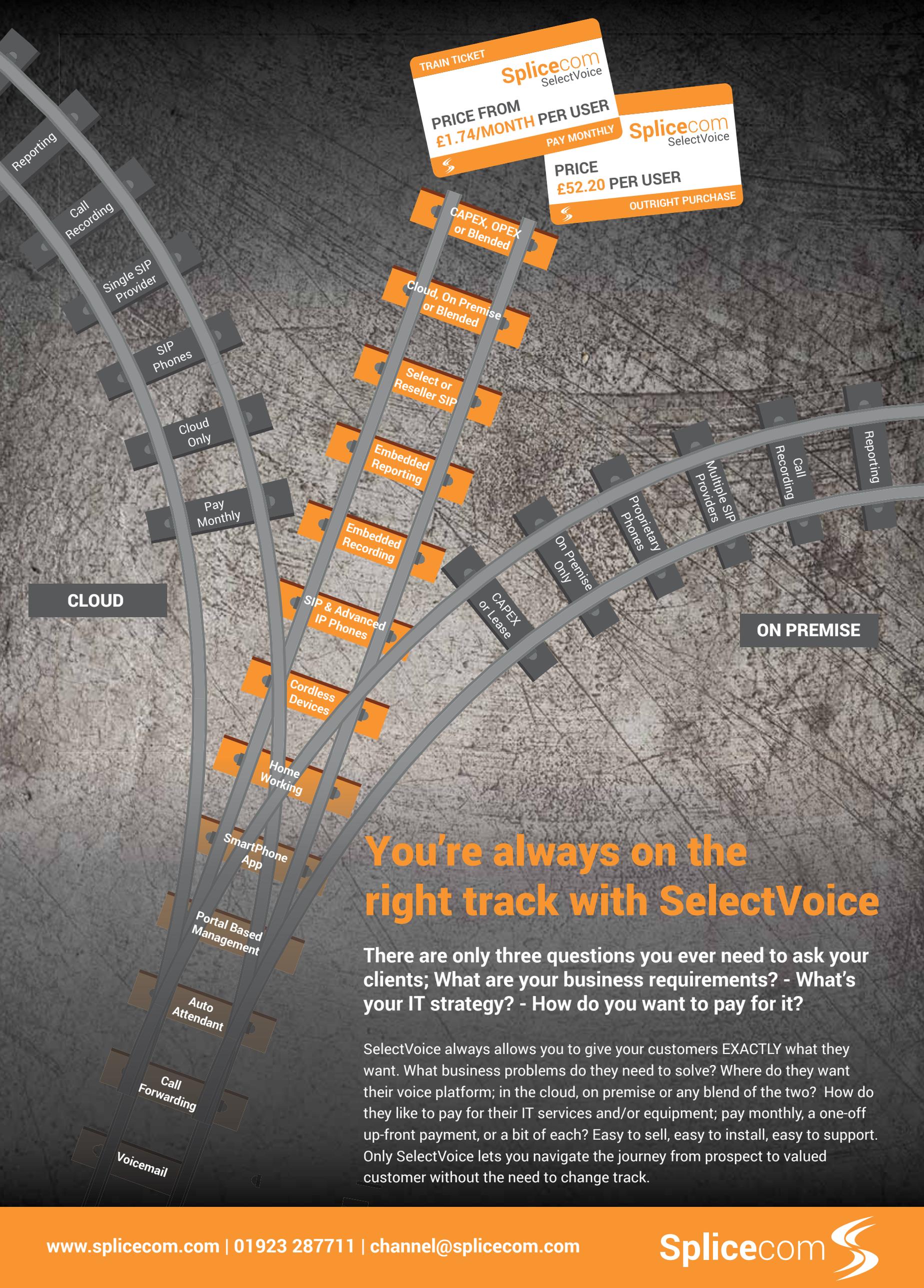
Adept Telecom is now able to offer HSCN compliant network services to health and social care organisations. "The ultimate goal is to support better integration across health and social care organisations," added Fishwick. "But it also represents an important opportunity for health organisations to achieve significant cost savings on network spend."

To find out more about what HSCN means to you see p50



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Getting to the heart of n

The new Health and Social Care Network (HSCN) represents the orchestration of greater competition and opportunity in the marketplace, which is music to the channel's ears. But to strike the right note resellers must make some key considerations and adopt a holistic approach to health sector tendering, says Node4 Director of Channel Sales Andy Wilson.



Andy Wilson

The health sector is set to buy tens of thousands of new circuits over the coming two years, believes Wilson, but the opportunity stretches way beyond this focused hotbed of demand, and those partners who take an all embracing approach to the underlying need will benefit most from HSCN. Underpinning the new framework – which was introduced in April this year as a replacement of N3 – is a vibrant and competitive marketplace.

NHS Digital wants to attract smaller, more niche mid-market players to provide IT services into the NHS, rather than simply handing the keys to the big companies. The NHS believes that there is a rich seam of talent and innovation to be mined from within mid-market integrators and channel players. Today, services like collaboration, security and cloud services are all open to innovation and are vital in addressing the health sector challenges, but are completely under utilised.

"It will be no surprise that the main emphasis will be placed on collaboration and cloud services as NHS Trusts look to make the best use of tightening budgets by deploying IT systems that are reliable, flexible and can drive additional efficiencies," commented Wilson. "There will also be a strong emphasis on security which will be an ongoing consideration with every contract. Before implementing a collaboration tool, vendors and buyers alike will have to consider how to secure voice calls."

As always, noted Wilson, it's about striking the right balance between flexibility and innovation alongside assured security. "Trusts needn't be concerned about the adoption of these trends if their partners have the ability to provide a holistic service," he added. "These technologies will only ever be as good as the networks they're running over. So, expect to see significant interest in infrastructure and network management with guaranteed SLAs."

The focus, as stated by NHS Digital, is to ensure that healthcare organisations can access and share their information in a reliable, efficient and flexible manner. However, it is also important that they can do this cost-effectively. Budgets are tightening but the trend is about spending wisely now to realise benefits in the medium-term. "As well as sharing and pooling their IT resources and expertise, Trusts are looking to overhaul their IT systems," added Wilson. "This is driving considerable demand for cloud and collaboration technologies.

"We've also seen an increase in solution sales and a move towards mid-market reseller organisations. This channel is exceptionally innovative and has the flexibility and agility to solve complex challenges, and to turn on a dime. This is the main reason HSCN has opened up to the mid-market in the way it has."

Many resellers in the mid-market have grown from

'doing one thing well'. This has built up a solid reputation in the health sector marketplace in more deregulated areas such as LAN, wireless and traditional voice services. Resellers now find themselves able to address a far wider requirement, often with health customers they already know well. "Resellers need to ensure they've positioned themselves as fit for this market by choosing the right upstream suppliers to enable them to meet demand," noted Wilson. "They can't neglect the integration of these services with their own operations though, as health sector IT teams will rightly expect to see a seamless partnership."

Rising sales

Wilson has witnessed a particularly significant lift in sales of collaboration, cloud services, managed security solutions, network implementation and management. "This is really driven by partnership," he explained. "Our partners who have looked at LAN solutions

are now pushing into inter-site WAN capabilities. Those who have traditionally implemented PBX solutions are now turning to hosted IPT and SIP. When an ecosystem such as health undergoes a significant shift as it is now, it drives two things – opportunity and innovation to meet it."

To realise the full potential of this opportunity resellers must face and overcome the challenges of addressing security issues and being able to implement the efficiencies that this sector needs. "The accreditation and buying framework also poses a complex challenge for resellers," stated Wilson. "The process of getting onto the frameworks that give visibility of the opportunity can create frustration. Furthermore, getting onto the framework does not guarantee that the reseller is equipped to meet the security, experience or accreditation requirements to transact business on it."

To handle these complexities, resellers need a partner that has deep experience of negotiating and servicing systems for healthcare providers. In addition, they need a partner that can offer a real breadth of services (not just point solutions). "We're increasingly seeing requirements that cover multiple types of technology and multiple points in the stack," commented Wilson. "Partners, therefore, need to be able to handle the entire technology stack, from data centre architectures through to security and networking."

Node4 works with a large number of big healthcare organisations and helps resellers through the process



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medical matters

via a broad portfolio of capabilities and knowledge, and its own HSCN accredited network and infrastructure. This means that resellers don't need to worry about developing a network and infrastructure to service their solutions; and also helps resellers to avoid some of the pitfalls they'll face in selling to the healthcare market.

"The kind of 'faceless' tendering the HSCN asks for is a new way of working for many resellers," stated Wilson. "If they don't have a pre-existing relationship or reputation with the healthcare organisation they're tendering to, the chances of winning the tender are slim. Companies such as Node4 can help the channel to be more consultative in their sell, which is critical. The customer, for example, might need a network, but the real issues are delivering on their objectives when using the network."

All this amounts to a clear shift in ICT buying in the health sector, moving from a supplier model to a partnership one. "It's going to become a lot more consultative as solution complexity grows," added Wilson. "I expect to see channel companies helping healthcare organisations to understand the benefits of their technologies earlier in the tender process and getting their buy-in, rather than simply having a system specified and then pricing to deliver it. We'll see wider opportunities in other local government branches and blue light organisations. I also think we'll see more co-operation between different trusts, aggregating expertise and spending power."

CASE STUDY: ON CALL FOR GPs



Mathew Evans

GP SURGERIES are under pressure to operate more efficiently while providing a better service despite being up against budget constraints. But according to **Mathew Evans, Business Consultant at Glamorgan Telecom**, mobility solutions that enable remote working can alleviate the strain and deliver on the evolving objectives and requirements of GP surgeries. Glamorgan Telecom aims to create a

more mobile environment within the health sector. Its main priority is to reduce the time it takes to process data and manage paperwork, ensuring a simple user experience. Streamlining communication infrastructures will also help to improve patient safety and general efficiency through the ability to keep track of patient progress and anticipate possible medical errors.

"Over the past 12 months we have noticed a significant increase in the buying of mobile devices within the health sector, increasing the mobility of clinical staff with their ability to access patient records and information remotely," said Evans. "However, there still needs to be a large investment in connectivity as the sector contends with issues relating to reliable Wi-Fi and 4G connections."

Evans has also noted a shift in the way that GP surgeries are operating, with multiple surgeries in an area working together as a federation and sharing a skill set across locations. "This helps to take the pressure off surgeries experiencing higher levels of patient traffic as they are able to direct their patients to a quieter practice within their group," added Evans. "In this instance it is vital to create a sound communication structure to ensure seamless integration that allows the surgeries to collaborate at ease. Using one supplier for all locations is vital and provides the opportunity for ICT resellers to target similar surgery set ups."

Evans also expects to see an increase in triage becoming outsourced, helping understaffed surgeries to save money on locums. "Hubs are being developed as a remote telephone consultation and triage support service," commented Evans. "Surgery receptionists redirect a proportion of their calls to the Hub during busier periods, aiming to improve primary healthcare within GP practices while allowing a more flexible working pattern for GPs. The Hub will connect available GPs to remote practices, offering a sensible and cost-effective option to help cope with the demands of the rising patient population."



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Timico in hiring spree

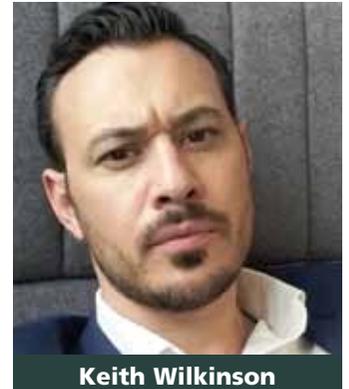


Back (l-r) Murphy, Riley, Johnson. Front, Smith & Riddle

A RECRUITMENT spree at Lyceum Capital backed Timico has brought four senior hires into its operations. Kirsty Johnson has been recruited as Client Operations Director responsible for all service desks, provisioning teams and client service teams. Her experience includes 12 years at Alternative Networks where she became Operations Director. Colin Riddle has been appointed as Head of Products & Services, joining from Rackspace where he was Manager of Product Enablement. The new Head of Application Development and Technical Strategy role has gone to Martin Riley who was previously Head of Infrastructure at managed cloud services provider Adapt. And Joanne Smith has been promoted within Timico to the newly created position of Head of Client Service Management. Chief Operating Officer Clodagh Murphy commented: "Our new colleagues will add strength and depth to our frontline operations teams."

FLUIDONE has appointed Keith Wilkinson as Wholesale Account Director. He joins after spells with Murphx and Juniper Bridge and was a founding team member of the latter from 2009 to 2013. Wilkinson brings 10 years experience in the IT and telecoms industry and plans to leverage his knowledge to grow the channel, particularly by focusing on L2TP partners. Phillip Oliver, Sales and Marketing Director, commented: "Keith's proactive and consultative approach, coupled with his entrepreneurial background, ensures he will add an extra layer of innovation to our maturing wholesale audience."

Wilkinson's at FluidOne



Keith Wilkinson

Phillip Oliver, Sales and Marketing Director, commented: "Keith's proactive and consultative approach, coupled with his entrepreneurial background, ensures he will add an extra layer of innovation to our maturing wholesale audience."

Wilkinson added: "The increased focus on our channel community will ensure that we continue to build product incentives that offer further growth opportunities for our partners."

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Simetric's new starter double



Chris Tucker (left) with Adam Banks

SIMETRIC Telecom has added two new team members to its sales division to help resellers make the most of the company's unified telecoms services. Adam Banks and Chris Tucker have joined the Leeds-based businesses as Channel Business Development Managers.

Their remit is to drive the uptake of Simetric's unified telecoms solutions including its Mobile-X converged service, call recording, MVNO, PBX and call centre solutions. Banks and Tucker have previously worked for the likes of Vodafone, Alcatel-Lucent and CloudSource Technologies.

Simetric Managing Director Gavin Sweet said: "We're excited for Adam and Chris to get out on the road and meet our clients and help convert more resellers in the channel."

Also on the move...



Rik Hubbard

EXERTIS has appointed Rik Hubbard as Commercial and Services Director for its mobile division. He joins from Samsung where he was Head of Commercial Finance and Financial Services for five years. He will be working to maximise

the performance of the division's vendors across the consumer and business to business areas. His remit includes the launch of device focused services from trade-in, repair and refurbishment to finance and service contracts, following Exertis's acquisition of MTR Group. "Providing services that add value are fundamental to being successful in technology distribution," stated Hubbard.

CATRIONA Connelly has joined SVL Business Solutions as Support Manager responsible for the service desk and support teams. She holds a BSc in



Catriona Connelly

Computer Science, has over 19 years experience in IT support and joins from Ageas where she was IT Support Team Leader. At Ageas she standardised support processes and merged three IT services desks. Connelly

also won the firm's IT Manager of the Year award a number of times. David Kindness, Professional Services Director, said: "Catriona's expertise will be crucial in enabling us to meet the enhanced SLAs that we are now offering to our customers."

Nolan signed by Blackbox



Stephen Nolan

KENT-based office technology and IT specialist Blackbox Solutions has expanded its team with the appointment of data security expert Stephen Nolan as Compliance Officer. Nolan is

responsible for reviewing company procedures to ensure operations for both print and IT are in line with the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which comes into force in May 2018.

Nolan's appointment will also enable Blackbox Solutions to offer GDPR guidance services to new and existing clients. He said: "Many organisations will need specialist support to guide them through GDPR and how it will impact their business. It's my job to help companies through this process and to make it as stress free as possible."

For the past three years Nolan has worked as an independent security consultant, advising the company on security, financial and insurance related matters.

IT DISTRIBUTION whizz Colin McGregor has chalked up a first as Nimans' inaugural Director of Major Accounts. He brings 20 years experience to the role in a career that includes a stint as MD of Tech Data (Azlan). For the past three years McGregor worked as a partner at channel consultancy Demuto.



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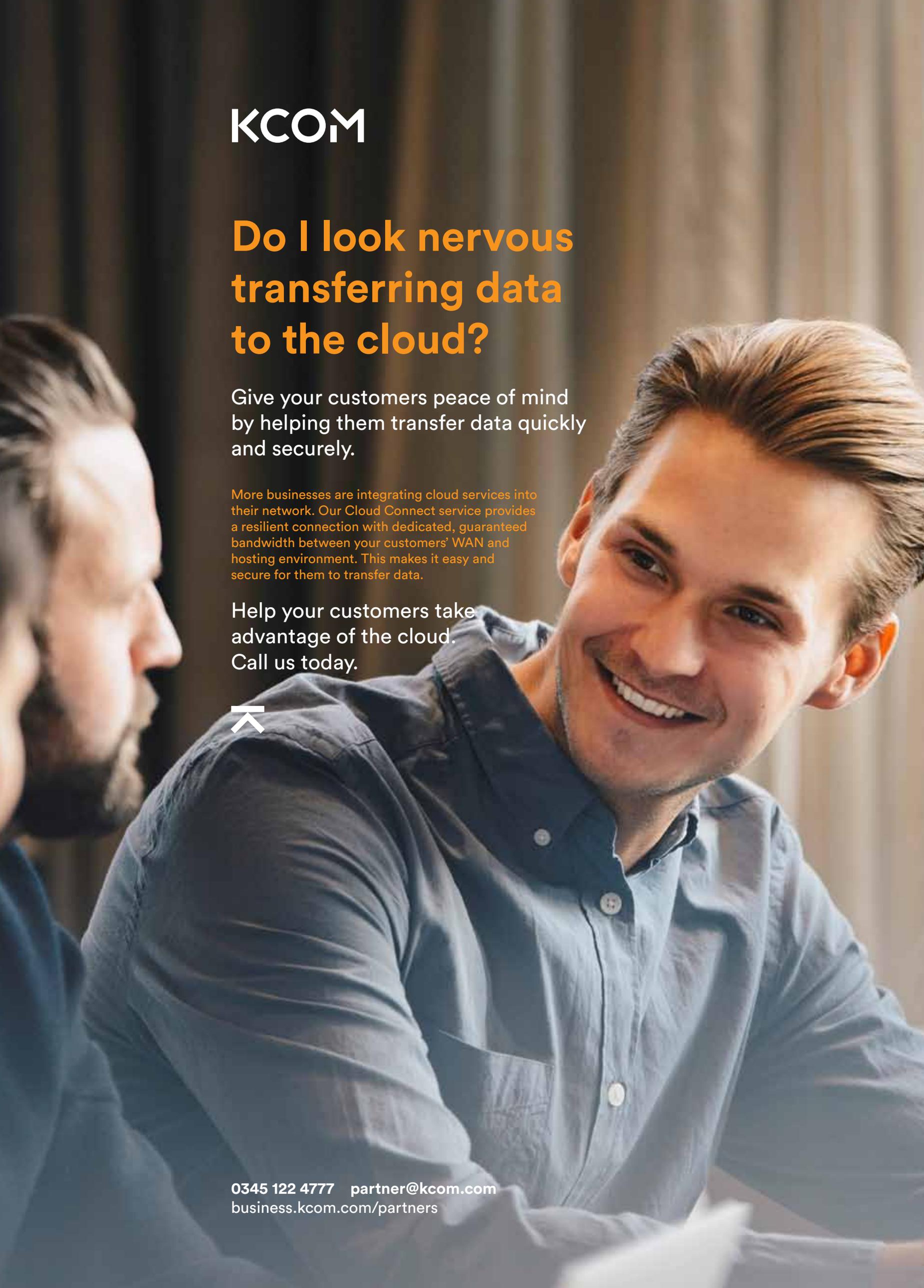
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