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June 2019

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TalkTalk ups the ante in full fibre

TALKTALK has ramped up its full fibre play as it seeks a major investment to drive FibreNation and forges ever closer links with collaborator Openreach.

SPECIAL REPORT

TalkTalk CEO Tristia Harrison (pictured) has signalled the firm's intention to be at the centre of the UK's full fibre debate based on a hybrid strategy she revealed at TalkTalk Business's industry summit last month.

This comes at a time when investment talks to beef up TalkTalk's own altnet, FibreNation (launched in 2018) are advancing well as are discussions with Openreach on a long-term demand-led partnership.

FibreNation has tested and trialled full fibre in York which is now hailed by TalkTalk as Britain's first true Gigabit city.

"We have a simple two-pronged strategy to ensure we are at the heart of the nation's full fibre project," said Harrison.

"We are accelerating our roll out and taking the York model to three more cities – Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon.

"But we need a solution for the whole of Britain, which is why TalkTalk's second strategic course is our relationship with Openreach and the scale we can bring with our wholesale B2B and retail customers.

"It's important that we continue to have an ongoing dialogue with Openreach to make sure we can commit our scale to its plans in FTTP.

"We want to give Openreach the volume guarantees it needs to de-risk its own build.

"On this, conversations are well underway. In return, we need a realistic commercial deal that works as well for CPs as it does Openreach." **See page 40**

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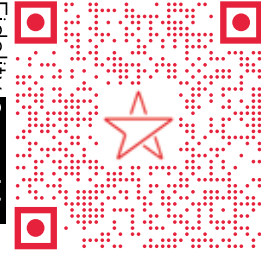
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EDITOR'S COMMENT

Stuart Gilroy

FOR those still stonewalling the realisation that the UK's comms infrastructure is undergoing an irreversible transition – with full fibre the accepted future of fixed line connectivity – the launch of EE's 5G network and accompanying business proposition last month should serve as a very loud wake up call. The roll out of EE's 5G across key cities (see page 14) shows the limitations of any reseller business's long-term strategy that does not take into account the digital transformation that is happening under our noses.

It is natural that centres of high demand, the low hanging fruit, will be hotbeds of early competition and implementation. It is equally inevitable that once those highest demand areas are served the focus will spread to all parts of the UK. That is a fact. What is not so certain are the timescales. But we can be sure that strong competition among operators will grease the wheels of 5G's rolling campaign convoy across the nation, and coverage may occur far quicker than we imagine possible.

On the question of the future look of 5G's role in business communications, there is a notion that 5G will function more as a back-up than primary network, which is the general consensus. Perhaps the bigger question is just how far that consensus is an assumption. The truth is that we don't yet know how 5G might impact fixed line revenues in Digital Britain. We do know, however, that the smartphone is king and talk of the 'death of the desk phone' has long been heard in industry chatter.

Full fibre and 5G are as much complementary technologies as they are potentially competitive. In being inter-dependent – as 5G cannot exist without full fibre connections in the ground – the common factors that link both next generation fixed and mobile connectivity may need to be reflected in the portfolios of ICT resellers to offer choice. It's a dynamic that may ultimately reshape how the channel is served by its connectivity providers.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Masergy set for big push

Steve Harrington

MASERGY'S channel expansion campaign continues at pace as it seeks to work with more than 150 partners by the end of the year, building on the near-80 existing partners, half of which were recruited during the past 12 months.

The provider of managed SD-WAN, cloud communications and managed security solutions has also gained traction in developing its alliance relationships in Europe, including its Global premier partnership with Cisco in the collaboration space.

EMEA MD Steve Harrington said: "We're amplifying partner revenue capabilities and driving new opportunities in the channel. In order to continue this success, the UK account management team has doubled, and we've bolstered our partner training programmes."

Masergy has focused on account mapping, business planning and joint marketing programmes with channel partners.

"Through a series of on-site and virtual training plus product and technology specific certification programmes, partners are equipped with specialist knowledge and the means to sell and promote solutions to enterprise customers globally," said Harrington.

In a key hire designed to manage channel growth, Emily Nerland (see p54) has joined to head up the UK channel account management team. She brings much experience of the UK channel having worked for a number of service providers.

Nerland stated: "The market opportunity for our partners is boundless and we are positioned to help them achieve their goals." **See page 22**

NEWS ROUNDUP

KELWAY founder Phil Doye has acquired York-based SBL and will lead the business as CEO. Kelway was acquired by US Fortune 250 technology giant CDW in 2015 for $431m. Doye said he will provide SBL with follow-on funding to drive organic and acquisitive expansion.

OVER 1,100 Swindon businesses now have access to gigabit-capable Internet services from CityFibre offered through its exclusive launch partner Excalibur. Elsa Chen, CEO of CityFibre's wholesale business Entanet, commented: "This future proof infrastructure is exactly what a modern digital city needs, unlocking world class connectivity speeds of up to 1Gbps that will enable local businesses to succeed productively and profitably."

CHARTERHOUSE Voice & Data's contract win from Creditsafe also bagged the London-based ICT provider record breaker status in 8x8's partner programme. Charterhouse signed up the global business credit report provider just six weeks into a partnership with the US headquartered cloud comms firm. "We had a gap in our portfolio for a pure cloud provider," said Charterhouse CEO Mark Brooks-Wadham.

COMMENT: THE RISE OF SERVICES

David Nelson

THE way progressive distributors are offering services is transforming, but in many ways the requirements of resellers are the same. They want to improve their margins, profitability and cash flow to drive business growth. They also want a differentiated customer proposition, the opportunity to sell more services and add-ons and thereby create a much deeper and longer relationship with their customers. The demand now is for a slick and simple process that gives the customer a subscription-based contract which is as easy to quote, sign up and deliver as a cash sale. Vendor partners have also cited that services are key to growth throughout the channel, and shortening the PC/mobile and tablet refresh cycles can offer opportunities for all.

Responding to the rising demand for services Tech Data has introduced a Tech-as-a-Service programme that allows resellers to combine their customers' hardware, software and services into a single solution, paid for monthly or quarterly. Offerings such as Tech-as-a-Service deliver bigger deals, higher margins and a more secure, predictable source of income for resellers. From building the quote, credit clearing the customer, sending documents via e-sign, and most importantly getting paid, the reseller is in complete control throughout the process. And it's all based on a platform that resellers already use every day.

The future of distribution lies in platforms such as the Tech-as-a-Service portal, which is fully integrated with our eCommerce platform InTouch, so resellers can build a mixed basket of all vendor hardware, software, accessories, extended warranties and their own services into one subscription. Tech Data's SVP UK&I & Digital Europe, Andy Gass, underlines the point: "As reseller partners continue to grow we see a need to support investment plans with focused programmes, make more credit available and invest in platforms that enable digital transformation."

David Nelson, Services Director, Tech Data

VMware specialist pocketed by Node4

VMWARE'S 2019 Cloud Partner of the Year Secura has been snapped up by Node4 for an undisclosed sum.

The deal is Node4's fifth and largest acquisition and boosts its managed cloud hosting proposition while strengthening its presence in the ISV market and SaaS vertical. Node4 will also leverage Secura's growing Azure public cloud services.

The acquisition adds 35 employees and over 110 customers and extends Node4's reach into northern territories.

Secura has witnessed organic growth rates of over 40% year-on-year and is forecast to hit close to £5m revenues for the year ending June 2019.

The deal pushes Node4's annualised run rate revenues to almost £55m with £20m coming from cloud services.

Secura recently increased its presence in the Manchester region with the opening of a new office, a key geographic territory where Node4 has been looking to expand its footprint.

Node4 confirmed that the Secura management team will remain with the business.

Andrew Gilbert

Node4 CEO Andrew Gilbert commented on the acquisition: "We've worked hard to find a business that is aligned with us strategically and culturally. Secura ticks all of the right boxes as we look to continue to grow Node4."

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Voice still primary in communications

TRENDS picked out from Tollring's latest growth statistics confirm the continuing primacy of voice and call recording.

During March 2019 the company captured nearly 11 million minutes of cloud call recordings at an average 192,000 call recordings per day within its cloud services.

"Voice is still the primary form of communication for customer interactions and call recording remains a hugely important business tool," stated CEO Tony Martino.

"We have seen growth across all deployment methods and our compliance centre coupled with our international localisation capability has delivered rapid expansion across the globe."

Total endpoints and licenses across all solutions has now exceeded three million, representing 337% growth in the past year. And the number of business customers has increased 146% across cloud products and 19% across on-premises deployments from 2018 to 2019, deployed in over 20 countries through a channel network of over 80 CSPs selling through 800-plus resellers.

Tollring's cloud-based iCall Suite has seen growth in call reporting analytics endpoints of 76% in the past year, while cloud call recording endpoints have grown 1,203% as more service providers have opted to add call recording as a bundled user option.

"Resellers can add value to their propositions by helping customers to extract actionable insights from their communications data, promoting improved interaction with their own customers which helps to improve the customer experience," commented Martino.

The Tollring fraud and credit management solution is particular popular with over 2.5 million end points monitored, capturing over 12,000 fraud attacks in the past year.

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Tony Martino

PTG pins revenue uplift hopes on new Virtual Reality service

THE launch of a Virtual Reality proposition by Pure Technology Group (PTG) is expected to help drive a 30% increase in turnover this financial year.

The new VR service embraces a number of augmented, assisted, mixed and VR technologies based on Toshiba dynaEdge (an Assistive Reality wearable device), hyperVSN (holographic emitter technology) and the firm's own pureVR HR Induction development.

"dynaEdge acts as an intuitive remote assistance tool," said PTG's Technology Solutions Manager Simeon Banks.

"The Google-Glass-style solution is linked to a Windows 10 wearable computer, integrating with Skype for Business and Microsoft Teams, and aids collaboration between in-house and remote workers.

"Wearers have full control over the visibility, recording and schematics functions, allowing them to send real-time updates to staff based at the office, and call for remote support via the glass as required."

PTG has already installed the solution for a national engineering and services organisation. The implementation is designed to blend on-the-job training with classroom learning.

PTG Group COO Cliff Fox commented: "VR is far bigger than just a gaming concept and has huge potential to enhance all organisations.

"This disruptive tech has the power to remould and improve the world of work as we know it, offering a revolutionary advantage for the education, training, maintenance, field service and retail sectors particularly."

Last year PTG generated circa £28m revenue, acquired Keytech Managed Solutions and employed its 100th person.

COMMENT: PEOPLE MATTERS

Nick Powell

FIGURES from the Office for National Statistics show that unfilled positions in the tech sector last quarter rose by 24.3 per cent compared to a year ago. So, what can you do to attract the right talent and boost technology skills? Answer: Find out what people want – rather than act on what you think they want.

Today's workforce is looking for rewards and benefits over and above financial remuneration. It's worth considering the working environment, office space and access to wellness facilities. Flexibility in the way teams work, especially for parents, is also high on the agenda. Our industry is always keen to promote the benefits of flexible working using UC – how about we get our own workforce more mobile.

When I'm talking to potential recruits and my team, increasingly I find they want the opportunity to positively contribute to society. Our teams can now volunteer through our Sky Cares programme which gives them access to a range of charities across four main areas – homelessness, our environment, loneliness and young people.

Now you've acquired your top talent, how do you keep them and support them with personal development and well-being? Investing in the development of talent leads to happy employees who will champion your brand and be more productive. Our teams have access to a development hub which includes LinkedIn learning, TED Talks and development sessions. We also give employees the option to feedback via a people survey.

High performers can come with high expectations so it's important to make sure your organisation can offer them new learning and development experiences to build on their skills. This will also create a sense of loyalty when other opportunities come knocking, and support further growth and innovation within your team.

Nick Powell, Sales Director, Sky Business Communications

Pescado set for scale up

Fraser Watson

NORTH Wales comms provider Pescado has reported its best year yet following a string of key client wins.

In 2018 the Ewloe-based firm spiked turnover to nearly £11.5m, up £1.5m on the previous year, and witnessed growth across all product categories – business mobiles, connectivity, phone systems and IT services.

Pescado also added 10 more full-time staff taking its headcount to 65 as it seeks to reach £13m turnover in 2019.

According to MD Fraser Watson the firm's £1m move to larger offices two years ago was a key factor in its growth. Pescado also has a Northern Ireland office in Belfast.

"We took the decision to move to new, larger offices to enable us to meet the needs of our existing customers and have the infrastructure to be able to take on board many more clients," commented Watson.

"We now have over 60,000 connected users across all platforms, compared to just over 42,000 a year ago."

The company holds Microsoft Gold Data Centre and Microsoft Gold Small and Midmarket Cloud solution status, and is a Vodafone Total Communications Partner, EE Direct Business Partner, Microsoft Gold Partner, Vodafone Fixed Line Service Partner as well as having supplier agreements with Tier 1 carriers TalkTalk Business and Gamma.

Pescado in profile – page 30

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NEWS ROUNDUP

ENGHOUSE Systems has bagged US-based video software player Vidyo in a circa $40m transaction, adding approximately $60m revenues. Vidyo's infrastructure software platform incorporates patented video routing, management and interoperability technologies delivered either in the cloud, on-premise or as a hybrid solution. "Vidyo's real-time video collaboration solutions extend our enterprise product offering into media and content," commented Steve Sadler, Chairman and CEO of Enghouse.

A CHARITY fund set up by Stonehouse-based 9 Group and supported financially by unclaimed cash compensation following a service glitch has raised over £2,500 for The Prince's Trust, for which 9 Group is a Silver Patron. "We invited partners to claim compensation, and subsequently established a charity fund for any money that was left unclaimed," explained 9 Group MD Adam Cathcart. "Following the cut-off date to make a claim a total of £2,687.82 was available to donate to The Prince's Trust. Collectively we have helped to make a big difference to this exceptional charity."

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COMMENT: THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Richard Thompson

WHAT is the value of thought leadership? The telco industry is one of the most dynamic in the world, with constant challenges and disruption to the connectivity landscape. By drawing on the expertise and best practice from a variety of perspectives from the market, we can learn from one another, grow stronger together and deliver excellent value for our customers. As a business, we share thought leadership in a variety of ways. From digital communications in the form of blogs, social media posts and emails, to relevant industry events.

Last month TalkTalk Business held the Connectivity Matters Summit, an event that championed thought leadership and innovation. We like to do things differently, so instead of a standard conference room we chose a venue that reflected our disruptive nature – the Ministry of Sound. As our delegates entered the venue to the sound of high energy music, they knew they were in for something different.

Although the day was packed full of insightful content from the TalkTalk team, the emphasis was on sharing ideas and best practice from experts from a variety of organisations. Our business is continually learning, and I firmly believe that listening to guidance and advice from our peers is crucial for our growth.

In addition to TalkTalk speakers, we invited some of our strategic partners to share how they're using technology to drive innovation, such as Juniper's self-driving network, ISG's robotics initiative and Google's digital market insights.

We also hold the opinions of other connectivity providers very highly, so one of the highlights of the day was a lively panel debate chaired by our Director of Fibre for Everyone Guy Miller, with Openreach, FibreNation, Gigaclear and G.Network. (See page 40)

Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Equity bags prime target

Marcos Reid

MAIDENHEAD-based Equity Networks has acquired Eurotech Services UK in a £1m-plus all cash deal.

The acquisition, which is Equity Networks' third purchase and followed a near six month period of due diligence and negotiations, brings total group revenues to over £4m, adds a Hemel Hempstead office and prompted the formation of a new holding company, Equity Managed Services Group.

The acquisition of Eurotech, which was established 35 years ago, is the next step in Equity Networks' three year plan to reach the £10m recurring revenue milestone, a target set by the firm in 2018 and includes a focus on organic growth.

"This is another stepping stone towards building the 'go-to' managed services provider for UK SMBs," stated Director Marcos Reid. "Equity has enjoyed double digit year-on-year growth since we started up as a CSP in 2011.

"This has allowed us to make targeted acquisitions as they become available, and enables us to transition customers from old world technology to next generation cloud services.

"Equity Networks has another acquisition target lined up, and will be looking for one or two more to ensure we hit our growth objectives."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

BUILDING on its collaboration with Polycom, Nuvias Unified Communications has achieved Distributor status for the Poly headset range across the UK, France and the Benelux, following the Plantronics acquisition of Polycom.

CERBERUS Networks has launched 1Gbps and 500Mbps FTTP services across the UK using the Openreach network. "At the same time as offering increases in downstream bandwidth, customers can take advantage of a big increase in upstream capacity," said Director Bob Hendy.

ANT Telecom has joined forces with Motorola Solutions as part of its PartnerEmpower Programme. The move bolsters ANT Telecom's Digital Mobile Radio (DMR) and related communication application portfolio.

NOUVEAU Solutions will offer the Greenbone Security Manager appliances as part of its cybersecurity portfolio following a link up with the vulnerability management system provider. "Organisations are turning to vulnerability management solutions to pinpoint and close weak spots in their infrastructures," said Business Unit Director Andy Stevens.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

CLOUD telephony provider Xelion has signed NDG Technology as a channel partner. NDG Technology will offer the Xelion hosted telephony service to its direct customers and 50-plus reseller partners. NDG Technology MD Alex Bentley stated: "For our customers, Xelion means no more in-house telephone systems with long-term maintenance contracts. They only pay for extensions that they actually use."

VANILLAIP has added Akixi products and services to its partner solutions portfolio. "Alongside our partners' ability to create feature appropriate user packs we have now delivered an enhancement to critical inbound and outbound call management services," said VanillaIP Sales & Marketing Director Iain Sinnott.

INTEC Business Solutions has acquired Vision Corporate Services. The deal forms part of inTec's model to build a network of telecoms partners, then expand their product and service portfolios and later acquire a controlling interest, but the partners' identity and management remain the same. inTec has secured £4m in growth capital to fund its development of technology solutions partnerships.

Bamboo's on buying spree

Lorrin White and Tech OP MD Sam Wilson

CHELTENHAM-based Bamboo Technology Group has acquired local business Tech OP Solutions, the first purchase in a buy and build strategy designed to develop the business as a high profile independent MSP.

Tech OP was established in 1983 and provides IT managed services to SMBs across the south west region where it has built a reputation as a cyber security specialist.

The firm also develops web and mobile logistics applications to support customers in delivering outsourced Government contracts (in the UK and Australia). It also develops and delivers software solutions for the niche Justice sector around prisoner escorting and offender tagging services.

"We have been partnering with Tech OP for a number of years, working together on providing its customers with connectivity, while they supported ours with managed IT services and cyber security consultancy," commented Bamboo Technology MD Lorrin White.

"We have ambitious plans for the next few years. The past 24 months have seen us focus on and invest in our internal processes, quality standards, new talent, further digital transformation and automation to enhance our service provision.

"With these elements complete and key new members of the team in place, we are now moving to the next stage of our growth plan and ramping up our activity with an aggressive acquisition strategy."

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

Daisy eyes more buy and build

ACQUIRING businesses and partner customer bases is again high on Daisy Communications' agenda. The company has completed a refinancing project and secured a £100m bank facility that will see it continue with a buy and build strategy that kicked off in 2001 when the business was founded.

Janine Murray, Head of Acquisitions at Daisy, commented: "There is a perception in the industry that Daisy is only interested in large acquisitions – this isn't the case. We're looking to acquire all types of businesses, in particular UK-based telecoms providers that supply a range of traditional telephony services to SMBs."

Daisy has completed more than 60 deals over the past ten years including last year's purchase of long-standing partner DV02 and direct EE partner Voice Mobile.

Janine Murray

Kaseya's boosted by funds

LAST month's announcement of a $500m acquisition war chest raised by Dublin-based Kaseya was accompanied by news that the business had acquired ID Agent, a US threat intelligence and identity monitoring provider for an undisclosed sum.

Kaseya's investors include TPG, a global alternative asset company, and Insight Partners, an existing investor in the firm.

The company grew circa 30% in 2018 having boosted its customer base to 40,000 worldwide, as well as completing and integrating four acquisitions including Unitrends, Spanning Cloud Apps, RapidFire Tools and IT Glue.

"Technology is becoming more critical for small to mid-size businesses, and whether they receive it from a managed service provider or their own internal IT department, they want more efficient solutions that yield greater results," said Fred Voccola, CEO of Kaseya.

The managed services market is expected to grow from $180bn currently to $282bn by 2023, a compound annualised growth rate of 9.3%, according to market research firm MarketsandMarkets.

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Jola claims a channel trailblazer

JOLA is claiming a channel first with the launch of self-service Private APNs. The portfolio offers four variants – Private APN, Private APN with Internet Breakout, Private APN with VPN Interconnect and Private APN with Public IP Addressing.

Each product is available to order, provision and modify within Jola's Mobile Manager SIM management portal, from where resellers can set alerts, run reports and monitor usage.

"The products offer a secure, remote access platform that lets resellers extend their IT security controls to their end users' mobile workforce, wherever they are," said CTO Adrian Sunderland. "Until now only the MNOs could provide Private APNs and there was no white label portal to manage orders.

"Resellers want the ability to create and manage their own secure private APNs and Mobile Manager allows them to do just that."

Adrian Sunderland

Italian buys IG Group UK

Enrico Donati and Matthew Ellis

CX FOCUSED Assist Digital has acquired IG Group UK for an undisclosed sum.

The move bolsters Italy-based Assist Digital's play in the global digital transformation market where it is seeking to widen its skills base and build its presence in the UK and other European territories.

IG Group's expertise spans a broad range of capabilities including a data analytics department, business transformation experience and a customer experience practice.

Enrico Donati, co-founder and Executive Chairman of Assist Digital, said: "The complexity of today's digital and multichannel reality requires ever greater design capabilities to offer customers simple, effective and intuitive solutions.

"The IG Group's global customer base, knowledge and strength in analytics gels with our existing skill sets."

IG Group UK MD Matthew Ellis commented: "This is a defining moment for our company and one we've been building towards for the past decade, which has seen us focus on enabling clients to make strategic sense of their data.

"This acquisition provides the springboard we need to move to the next level."

This latest transaction follows Assist Digital's purchase of Attoma just weeks ago. Attoma is a French agency specialised in user research, service and UX design.

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

Oncore IT alights on Fuse Tech

UC PROVIDER Fuse Technologies has been snapped up by Oncore IT, which itself was acquired three years ago by US headquartered $24m managed service and cloud solution provider Ergos.

The deal gives Ergos's UK operation the Unified Comms capabilities that already exist in the US business.

The acquisition also adds 10,000 users primarily in financial services, construction and professional services.

Ergos intends to grow the UK business through further acquisitions to match the size and growth of the US operation.

Oncore IT CEO Michael Croft commented: "The UC expertise of Fuse Technologies strengthens our UK portfolio."

David Redmond, CEO at Fuse Technologies, added: "By becoming part of Oncore IT and Ergos our clients have an opportunity to benefit from enhanced services and global opportunities for business growth."

Ergos is based in Houston and has other offices in Texas, New Jersey and Dubai. The firm has technology partnerships with Dell, Citrix, VMware, SonicWall and Microsoft, for which it is a Gold Partner.

Orange's European build up

ORANGE has strengthened its already strong play in the European security space with the punchy acquisition of SecureLink, just months after the French comms giant bagged SecureData in January 2019.

The SecureLink deal, which valued the Netherlands-based cyber security firm at over £444.3m, extends Orange's European footprint and increases its capabilities.

With almost £214m revenues in 2018 SecureLink is one of the largest independent cyber security providers in Europe.

"Cybersecurity is a priority for companies of all sizes, and we believe the two most important success factors are scale and proximity," said Hugues Foulon, Executive Director of Cybersecurity at Orange.

"Scale because today's threats are global, complex and require matching protection capabilities. Proximity because in the global IT world you want a trusted local partner to secure your most strategic assets.

"With the acquisition of SecureData and SecureLink, Orange has the scale to anticipate and fend off attacks, as well as local defence teams in all the main European markets."

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Mercer's big growth plan

Tim Mercer

VAPOUR Cloud is on the hunt for 10 more partners in a bid to realise 50% growth over the coming 12 months.

Early last year CEO Tim Mercer set out plans to collaborate with non-competing companies in the tech channel, targeting 10 partners.

The seven partnerships secured so far have delivered shares in deals worth £2.5m, and 85% of Vapour's own revenue is now partner based.

"These relationships alone look set to generate £6m of total contract value revenue over the next three years, as some of the newer agreements start to gather momentum," stated Mercer. "But the expansion plan does not end there. The search is now on for an additional 10 partners.

"In three years time I expect the uplifted partner portfolio to be generating £8m of revenue per annum."

Vapour grew by 51% in 2018 and expansion of at least a further 50% is anticipated over the next 12 months.

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Key cities get EE 5G service

5G SERVICES for businesses became a reality on May 30th when EE launched the technology across the UK's four capital cities plus Birmingham and Manchester.

Another ten cities – Glasgow, Newcastle, Liverpool, Leeds, Hull, Sheffield, Nottingham, Leicester, Coventry and Bristol – will be switched on to 5G later this year.

EE also introduced new 5G plans and a range of six 5G smartphones and devices.

"We're already working with our customers to help them maximise the potential of 5G," said Gerry McQuade, CEO of BT's Enterprise Unit.

"It will accelerate the growth of the UK economy by driving a fundamental change in how technology supports people, enables workplaces and simplifies business operations."

The first phase of EE's 5G rollout is a 'non-standalone' deployment built on top of the EE 4G network. Customers will connect to both 4G and 5G at the same time.

Ten more towns and cities are planned to get 5G in 2020.

EE is also expanding 4G coverage into rural areas, adding more capacity to 4G sites

Gerry McQuade

by turning a 3G signal into 4G to enable more spectrum.

Phase 2 kicks off in 2021 with the introduction of a full next generation 5G core network, enhanced device chipset capabilities and increased availability of 5G-ready spectrum.

In 2023 the third phase will get underway with the roll out of Ultra-Reliable Low Latency Communications, Network Slicing and multi-gigabit-per-second speeds.

"This phase of 5G will enable applications like real-time traffic management of fleets of autonomous vehicles, massive sensor networks with millions of devices measuring air quality across the entire country, and the 'tactile Internet' where a sense of touch can be added to remote real-time interactions," stated McQuade.

Quest for partners kicks off

CONNECTUS CEO Roy Shelton and CTO Duncan Shaw have embarked on a joint mission to recruit more partners to the firm's new programme.

The Doncaster-based connectivity provider has opened the door to its portfolio giving partners access to a range of connectivity options, cloud-based UCentrix voice and IP CCTV services and its cyber portfolio including network security, penetration testing, plus wrap around training, information governance and compliance services.

"Technology continues to evolve and end users are continuing to uncover new business challenges, as a result partners must work to modernise," stated Shelton. "This new programme will better enable partners to service their customers."

Connectus is providing self-service and bespoke solutions, training and enablement tools. A new portal is planned to launch this summer. **See p34**

Roy Shelton

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Study points to UC adoption bonanza

UC INVESTMENT rates across the planet will increase significantly according to a survey by Ribbon Communications.

It found that many organisations yet to invest in UC technology plan to do so over the coming two years, with 68% of large (more than 1,000 employees) companies and 46% of small (1-20 employees) companies set to adopt UC during the period.

Among mid-sized organisations, 67% of respondents with 21 to 100 employees and 71% of respondents with 101 to 1,000 employees plan to adopt some form of UC in the next two years. "Clearly, the UC value proposition resonates cross-market and cross-industry no matter the size of the company," commented Patrick Joggerst, CMO & EVP of Business Development, Ribbon.

"Our findings highlight the significant market opportunity to serve these organisations."

The research also found that UC adoption is more advanced (41%) in large companies than

Patrick Joggerst

small ones (10%), inverting the notion that smaller firms are the first to leverage new technologies. "The research also highlights security's key role in a comprehensive UC solution," said Joggerst. "Over 55% of respondents have been victimised by attacks running

the gamut from DDoS to robocalls, and 83% want their UC providers to be responsible for providing protection."

The survey questioned 4,800 decision makers in 23 countries.

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Small firms urged to adopt AI now or risk losing out to rivals

SMALLER businesses too slow to adopt AI risk damaging their future competitiveness, claims Mark McHale, VP UK&I for the enterprise computing solutions business at Arrow Electronics.

"It's never too early for SMEs to begin thinking about new technologies," he said. "Adopting AI strategies now, however embryonic, lays the foundations for future growth and makes adoption a more seamless process."

McHale's call to action follows research by Arrow Electronics which showed that just 17% of small firms employ-

Mark McHale

ing 11-50 staff plan to incorporate AI into operations.

In contrast, over two thirds of large businesses (with over

1,000 staff) intend to adopt AI; as do 38% of businesses with 51-200 employees and 37% of companies with between 200-1,000 workers.

"While some sectors have implemented AI solutions to take away the responsibility of repetitive tasks – particularly in the health, retail and financial services sectors – we've only just scratched the surface of AI, deep learning and machine learning," added McHale.

"Smaller businesses are in danger of losing out. Now is the ideal time to embrace AI and get ahead of the competition."

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Cloudbox unveils combined service package for SMEs

An 'all-in-one' IT and comms solution for SMEs launched by IT MSP Cloudbox UK plugs a gap in the channel market and will transform how smaller firms purchase and consume ICT services and support, claims CEO Nick Goodenough, who was formerly Partner Service Director at Spitfire.

The channel-ready cloud-based IT-in-a-box proposition includes IT solutions, security and support and simplifies the adoption of technology by standardising services across organisations using a per user monthly subscription model. Cloudbox's channel proposition is designed for a range of partners including those without the wherewithal to provide a fully managed IT service; smaller IT companies that prefer to outsource ICT solutions and be more hands-on with on-site customer service and projects; and comms resellers wanting to add IT managed services to their traditional telco portfolio.

"Cloudbox incorporates email, 10 year email archiving, file sharing, compliance, full backup, antivirus, full endpoint security, collaboration tools and Office 365 into one package, taking the complexity out of IT," stated Goodenough. "With no unexpected costs budgets can be projected more accurately, and with only one set of licences to manage customers have

Nick Goodenough

the flexibility to scale up or down as they require."

Goodenough noted that the proposition also offers unlimited IT support for all devices including desktop, laptop, tablets and mobiles, including change requests and new device configurations. "Small businesses especially struggle with budgeting for IT services and our unlimited support contract protects them from unexpected costs, delays and disappointment," he added. "Charging separately for IT support leads to problems and is a legacy of the old break-fix model of IT. Properly specified and managed IT should not go wrong."

Investment
Goodenough said Cloudbox has invested heavily in automated scheduled maintenance and security management (including patching and constant monitoring) to guard against IT downtime. "Through offering all-inclusive IT and support at a fixed rate per

month, Cloudbox gives SME owners the freedom to focus on their business instead of worrying about IT issues or costs," added Goodenough.

Standing alongside Goodenough are Cloudbox UK Directors Justin Trent, Oliver Potgieter and Nick Watkins – all previously known to each other having worked together in their relative and prior capacities as customers, suppliers and partners. "Everything we have learnt is distilled into one easily understood and simple-to-use solution that covers what most small and medium businesses need from their IT," stated Goodenough.

Cloudbox began its commercial life in 2011 and has offices in the UK and South Africa. The company serves over 200 businesses. As well as its core product Cloudbox provides supplementary services including on-site infrastructure, Microsoft Azure hosting and IP telephony. ■

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Vaish sets course for dig

For Manchester-based Vaioni Wholesale, digital transformation leadership in the channel is beckoning – so let's see how Managing Director Sachin Vaish built a strong and rapidly growing contender, from scratch, in the fast moving and critical connectivity space.

Fresh from a two year stint working in the banking and manufacturing sectors and seeking to re-experience the excitement of a childhood immersed in the first wave of computer games, a budding Vaish plunged into the tech sector, setting up a small IT business that was founded more on enthusiasm than industry knowledge. "It was the start of the Internet boom, so exciting times," stated Vaish. "This is still an amazing industry."

Vaish sold the business in 2006 and with the same sense of timing that aligned his first enterprise with the Internet boom he established Vaioni Wholesale in late 2008 just as Ethernet was taking off from the launchpad. "But the industry was slow to move, cumbersome and a hassle, with only four major players in the market – BT, Telewest, NTL and C&W," stated Vaish. "Getting anything out of these guys that remotely resembled a quote within a timely period was a struggle. So I built a connectivity company that enables businesses to procure Ethernet faster, easier, and supported by customer service."

A big challenge for any start-up is reaching the £1 million turnover milestone while also being profitable, which Vaish achieved with aplomb. Another turning point was a fundraise in 2013. "This process was a journey of learning and discovery about

Sachin Vaish

There is a fine line between success and failure when you make big changes, particularly with people

how good the business really was," he added. "When we signed the deal I recalled how it all started in a small rented bedroom. The company is burgeoning now, we have a recurring revenue base, key staff in every department and a network carrying traffic that is visible."

Vaioni Wholesale aggregates operators, technologies and connectivity products and currently serves over 200 UK partners; and Vaish counts himself as one of the first providers to offer an automated quote portal, which was launched in 2011, and an online ordering function. "Our Ethernet footprint (VEN) extends across 200,000 postcodes, so we really get our industry," he explained. "We have

our transaction customers, who just need us to be competitive and engaging no matter how small the requirement or challenge. And bigger partners who need us to be agile, available, strategic, deliver on time and help outsmart the competition. When you are dealing with multi-million pound contracts and the partner is fully reliant on you

and your capabilities, the relationship is truly tested."

Vaish identified his primary growth market as larger bandwidth businesses where there is a need for automation to facilitate what he calls 'hyper-technology' – where customers can apply real-time changes to in-life service. "It's about providing an agile set of technologies

...gital leadership

and tools to give customers the best infrastructure possible," commented Vaish. "So we are putting a huge focus on developing our network, core and LLU, automation and product development to hopefully one day lead the digital transformation market."

Fast growth

He expects Vaioni Wholesale to grow by 20 per cent this year and forecasts a 300 per cent hike in profit. Not for nothing has the company been recognised by the Northern Tech Awards as one of the fastest growing technology firms. "We are aiming to employ 65 people during the coming 12 to 18 months," added Vaish. "These numbers reflect the recent requirement for me to bring in a leadership and middle management team. Relinquishing responsibility while ensuring high productivity brings its own challenges. Good managers benefit the business. Bad ones damages us. There is a fine line between success and failure when you make big changes, particularly with people."

With a strong leadership team in place Vaish is now focused on refining the business through automation and innovation. "To spark innovation there is nothing better than a brain storming session," he explained. "Markets and vendors also play a significant role in what happens next. Consider SD-WAN – new technology and a lot of hype! But it gets people thinking about technology in different ways. Then we have partner engagement. We spend time with our key contacts to understand their challenges and customer demands and

assess how we can address them. The combination of these approaches helps us to think better, build better and innovate with precision."

Vaish believes that innovation in the industry is at an all time high and he is especially interested in the potential applications of Artificial Intelligence. "Amazon is looking at predicative ordering – predicting what you will need to buy next, ordering it for you and delivering the same day," he commented. "In our industry, we can think about how AI can drive more efficiency across our networks, automating certain tasks, automatically changing the flow of traffic away from potential at-risk links or possible congestion where it exists. We can extend this out to the customer through more intelligent management and efficiencies when building and maintaining networks."

That Vaish should ever mull over the impact of AI on his business was unthinkable when he formed the company 11 years ago. Then again, there was no time for such contemplation. "From the outset I did a lot of the selling, marketing, invoicing, service delivery and tech support myself," he said. "When you run a business it can be stressful and emotionally draining, especially in the early years. It can make you unwell if you are not careful. The key to managing pressure is to work hard, play hard, take time out, think about the bigger picture and accept that you cannot do everything yourself – while having fun! This way we will become a key player in the market. The wheels are already in motion." ∎

Harrington ramps up Ma

Masergy: A channel business transformed by PE-led acquisition, investment and a leadership restructure that includes the instatement of entrepreneur cum channel builder Steve Harrington as Managing Director EMEA, perhaps the company's most significant channel-focused appointment to date as he seeks to double revenues post haste mainly through partnerships.

The appointment of Harrington in January this year was an astute move by Masergy, and a key step in a restructure which began in 2016 when the Texas-based company was acquired by US private equity firm Berkshire Partners for close to $1 billion. Harrington was previously Masergy's Director of Channel EMEA, having joined the business in March 2018. The subsequent appointment of CEO James Parker (who previously held leadership positions at Microsoft, CenturyLink and Tata Communications) six months later signalled the start of a channel programme expansion campaign across EMEA and new investments in product engineering, sales and marketing. "Although we were already a global organisation, Berkshire's investment helped to scale our business," stated Harrington. "We are hiring a significant amount of talent across all levels of the company."

New arrivals include a Chief Revenue Officer in February, a Chief Human Resources Officer and former TalkTalk Business International Carriers Account Manager Emily Nerland as Channel Director EMEA in May. The appointments are an important component of Masergy's plan to double enterprise revenue during the coming three to five

Steve Harrington

We are focused on elevating our brand awareness in the market. We have a fantastic story to tell and want the channel to hear it

years, mainly through joint sales with channel partners. As a kick-off play Masergy has embarked on a strategy to raise brand awareness among enterprise customers and channel partners around its three core solutions – managed SD-WAN, managed security and cloud communications.

Masergy is investing especially in resources and personnel through its global channel programme. "My job is to scale our growth in EMEA while sustaining the personalised experience for

our customers and partners," stated Harrington. "The biggest opportunity is in selling managed SD-WAN into the enterprise. We see a lot of turnover in multi-cloud enterprises when their unmanaged SD-WAN doesn't work as well as the pilot because it can't scale or becomes too costly. That's why we made our Managed SD-WAN a turnkey service."

Pioneering pedigree

Masergy was founded in October 2000 as a managed network services provider, but it soon began to show

itself as a pioneer in software defined networking and now delivers managed SD-WAN, cloud communications and managed security solutions to global enterprises. Following a number of acquisitions, the first in 2012, Masergy added into the mix cloud-based unified communications as a service (UCaaS) and managed security with detection and response solutions.

"Masergy built a managed global network that was software defined before the term was common parlance in the industry," stated

Harrington. "We developed our global software defined network to be a platform to deliver other managed enterprise services such as UCaaS and our cloud contact centre solutions powered by Cisco. In the past few months we integrated key security features directly into our managed SD-WAN solutions."

Harrington cited a Gartner survey in which two thirds of organisations indicated a clear preference for managed SD-WAN solutions versus buying unmanaged edge devices for their corporate network. "We've seen interest in SD-WAN across the board from both partners and end customers," added Harrington. "It makes sense as more business apps and IT functions migrate to the cloud and more enterprises operate in multi-cloud environments. As always, security is top of mind for all buyers. Thanks to the GDPR, data security and privacy is an area of major concern for every organisation."

Masergy's managed SD-WAN solution includes integrated next generation firewalls with Unified Threat Management; and enterprises can readily bundle in advanced security with Managed Detection and Response (MDR) services with 24/7 security monitoring. "We have plans to add more AI features and true zero-trust security for our

asergy channel

managed SD-WAN solutions to simplify management of customer security," added Harrington. "The momentum is there for Masergy and our partners to deliver a secure managed SD-WAN solution that facilitates the CIO's IT initiatives while keeping the CISO happy."

SD-WAN opportunity

IDG stats show that almost 70 per cent of enterprises are either actively researching and piloting SD-WAN or already have some form of SD-WAN on their corporate networks. But the opportunity does not end there. Harrington noted that there is a wide scope for partners to upsell a managed SD-WAN solution to UC and managed security. "In these cases we engage with our partners to build customised bundles," he added. "It's easy for partners to not only sell the value of Masergy Managed SD-WAN to their customers but also gain a steady revenue stream for a long time off those customers."

Masergy's global partner programme is designed to work with different business models, including VARs, master and sub-agents, system integrators, solution providers and consultants. In addition to managed SD-WAN the programme allows partners to leverage Masergy's skills in servicing global customers with solutions such as UCaaS, intelligent SIP trunking, cloud contact centre and managed security with detection and response solutions. "We provide our global partners with a monthly residual compensation structure along with certified product training, joint business plan mapping, market development funds, and pre and post-sales support," explained Harrington.

He is deploying channel strategies in a space well known to him since 1994 when he first entered the networking and communications sector. Previously in his career Harrington built companies from the ground up and completed three successful exits. "Understanding market trends, customer challenges and the channel ecosystem is a huge advantage," he added. "Starting my own companies and building businesses with others keeps you down to earth and helps you to grow personally from lessons learnt along the way. For example, I would have been less cautious and learnt to embrace market trends faster. That is what excites me about Masergy – we are always thinking about what's next and how we can innovate faster."

Harrington is as sensitive to the positive influence of his past experience as Masergy is at being attuned to the future direction of the market. "My understanding of the enterprise networking, comms and security markets coupled with my experience working with enterprise customers as well as channel partners gives me an advantage in scaling our business in the EMEA region as we execute on our channel-first strategy," he said. "My current priority is to complete the build out of our team while maintaining our culture and 99 per cent customer retention rate. We are also focused on elevating our brand awareness in the market. We have a fantastic story to tell and want the channel to hear it." ∎

Corporate activity picks

Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabuyte.com, reports on the trading performance of leading companies in the comms space during the last quarter.

Philip Carse

As in the broader Megabuyte universe, corporate activity continued apace in the Telecoms Services peer group in the last quarter. This included several proposed take privates of some under performing infrastructure-heavy companies (Inmarsat, Manx Telecom and KCOM, for 8.7-12.8x current year EBITDA), continued private equity interest (G3 and FluidOne), more fibre fundings, this time for start-ups (Toob and Jurassic), and strategic M&A (by Adept, Ask4, Aerial Direct and Commify among others). Telit eventually sold its car M2M division that was first announced last summer. These take privates follow that of tax software provider Tax Systems by Bowmark, for 12.3x EBITDA, and infrastructure-heavy peer CityFibre last year.

While there was a relatively limited number of results and updates this quarter, several companies achieved double-digit organic growth, no mean feat in a static UK telecoms market. Among connectivity players, Exponential-e and Ask4 maintained their consistent growth records, while Zen Internet started to see the benefits of growth investments and has set out some very ambitious plans. Equally, in the contact centre world, Sabio and 4net grew strongly, while comms and IT service providers also achieved double digit organic growth including Gamma and Charterhouse Voice and Data, while LoopUp did the same in conferencing. M2M players Telit and Wireless Innovation and comms and IT service provider Adept Technology progressed, but there was more mixed fare from the listed Maintel and Redcentric, and Equistone-backed mobile support services provider WHP.

Scorecard updates

Megabuyte has developed a company ranking methodology called the Scorecard, based on growth, margins and cashflow. The Telecoms Services peer group has a Scorecard rating of 48, versus 50 for the Megabuyte universe. Its medians are: 6.6% for one-year organic growth (second quartile), 11% for three-year revenue growth (highlighting considerable M&A; also second quartile), 12% for EBITDA margins (third quartile), 0.2pp for EBITDA margin expansion (third quartile), and 86% and 53% for OCF and FCF conversion of EBITDA (both second quartile).

There is a wide divergence by sub peer group, with connectivity focused M2M & Messaging and Networks & Connectivity on 60 and 57 respectively, with the two Reseller categories (Comms & IT and Satellite) and Specialist Telecoms just below the average at 44-47, and Communications Implementation performing poorly at 32.

Leaderboard

Reflecting this, the peer group top ten includes a strong showing by M2M & Messaging companies (Commify, Wireless Logic and CSL) and Networks & Connectivity (M247, WIG, Exponential-e and euNetworks), while last quarter's lone Comms & IT reseller Bistech has now been joined by Charterhouse (+8 points), with conferencing's LoopUp still in the top ten despite its score falling four points on its recent results. The main top ten casualty was WHP, whose score fell 14 points on recent results.

Telecoms Services has performed broadly in-line over the last three months, up 13% versus 15-16% for ICT services and the Megabuyte All-Share, and +8.5% for the FTSE All-Share. This was buoyed by 35-45% increases for KCOM, Manx Telecom and Inmarsat on take private approaches, aided by Telit (+37%) on improved financials, Gamma (+39%) on strong growth and Redcentric and Maintel (19-21%), with the latter two presumably relief following difficult 2018s. ∎

IS Research publishes www.megabuyte.com, a company analysis and intelligence service covering over 1,300 public and private UK ICT, software, media and business services companies. philip.carse@megabuyte.com

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Among the connectivity players, Exponential-e and Ask4 maintained their consistent growth records, while Zen Internet started to see the benefits of growth investments and has set out ambitious plans

up the pace

COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

Aerial Group sets out post MBO ambitions
Accounts to September 2018 from Fareham-based mobile reseller Aerial Direct show EBITDA up 16% to £6.8m on revenues up 7.2% at £21.6m. In early October 2018, a bank-debt funded MBO saw Aerial Direct merge with sister company Aerial Telephones to create a business with pro forma £26.9m revenues and £7.8m EBITDA for fiscal 2018, and this was followed by the March 2019 acquisition of IPCortex, adding £0.4m EBITDA on £1.25m revenues.

TalkTalk broadly in line, still to find fibre funder
TalkTalk has reported year to March 2019 results very slightly below consensus, with headline EBITDA up 17% (on restated 2018 EBITDA for IFRS) to £237m (but £3m light of consensus) on revenues down 1.3% at £1,632m, though with target on-net revenue up 3.9% at £1,236m. The company is comfortable with current the year consensus of 11% EBITDA growth to £263m.

MLL Telecom reaps HSCN benefits
Calendar year 2018 accounts from Arva-backed network integrator MLL Telecom reflect the guidance of strong profit growth from CEO Gary Marven last year, with EBITDA up 23% to £1.6m on revenues up 37% at £20.8m, accompanied by unusually strong operating cash flow. In an update Marven confirmed continued public sector success as the company leverages its technology-neutral integrator model, but slower than expected 5G work.

Arrow on track for £10m EBITDA
Latest results to December 2018 for Growth Capital Partners-backed Arrow Communications are in line with guidance from last June and highlight 34% revenue growth to £37.9m (estimated +6.8% organic), while stellar EBITDA growth (52% to £7.0m) improved margins by 2.2pp to 18.6%. CEO Chris Russel highlighted Arrow's progress in the integration of the four businesses acquired in 2018 and also further organic growth (particularly within hosted and mobile) working towards £10m EBITDA in fiscal 2019, nearly 3x that at which GCP invested in summer 2016.

8x8 back on track but issues 'more measured' guidance
8x8 reported a broadly in-line fourth quarter to March 2019, with an adjusted operating loss of $7.8m on revenues up 18% at $93.8m, with the usual driver of growth from enterprise, mid-market and channel, while the UK business 'executed extremely well' with record bookings. However, 'more measured' guidance of 19% for fiscal 2010 growth left the shares down 5.2% in after hours trading.

Vodafone cuts dividend by estimated 43%
Vodafone 'rebased' (ie cut) its 2019 dividend by 43% to nine eurocents which will save it an estimated circa 1.7bn euros versus current net debt of 27.0bn euros. The full year results were in line with EBITDA up 3.1% organically to 14.1bn euros on revenues of 43.7bn euros. Significant UK headline declines reflected handset financing impacts, with underlying revenues and EBITDA up 0.6% and 11% to 6.8bn euros and 1.53bn euros.

Avaya underperforms, hoists for sale sign
Avaya has reported a below expectations second quarter to March 2019, with EBITDA of $166m down 11% year-on-year on adjusted revenues of $714m, 6% down, while operating cashflow was particularly poor at $37m – consensus was for a flat quarter. While the company blamed a similar underperformance in the prior quarter on the US Government shutdown, this time it was blamed on execution issues and uncertainly created by press reports of an M&A transaction, and the company has now compounded the latter by appointing advisers to undertake a strategic review. Avaya also lowered full year revenue expectations by 5%. The shares fell 16%.

BT flags challenging market conditions
BT's full year to March 2019 results were broadly in line, with revenue and EBITDA down 1-2% at £23,459m and £7,392m respectively, capex up 13% at £3,963m and normalised FCF down 18% at £2,440m. However, reflecting challenging market conditions and the expanded fibre push, BT's guidance for fiscal 2020 of 2% revenue and about 3% EBITDA declines is slightly short of market expectancy, though the company decided to maintain the dividend rather than cut it as some press reports suggested. ∎

Foehn's Voxivo campaign '

Simplified phone, collaboration and contact centre solutions for SMEs are the order of the day, not ageing and more complex affairs, according to Foehn's CTO James Passingham and Sales Director Julian Barrow who are on a timely channel building campaign following the launch of demand-led solutions and a solid partner programme.

Richmond-based Foehn's just launched Business Partner Programme answers the channel's call for a straightforward single vendor solution that encompasses the three hosted categories of phone, collaboration and contact centre, according Passingham. The SME focused partner scheme is based on Foehn's Voxivo platform, which was built by the company's in-house development team (and won the 2018 ITSPA awards for Best VoIP Software). The platform incorporates Voxivo Cloud Phone and Collaboration, a full featured phone system plus an integrated set of voice, video and collaboration tools. Also available is the new VoxivoCX Contact Centre which gives agents and

supervisors control over the customer experience with real-time reporting and performance management.

It's fair to say that Foehn has taken longer than other vendors to move into the channel, but Passingham says the company has been busy developing a market advantage that already outstrips the lead taken by early movers in the distant past. "Our new channel proposition coincides with resellers telling us that margins are being squeezed, omnichannel is out of reach and many solutions in the market are now showing their age," he commented.

"Our entire platform of Voxivo products have been launched in the past 18 months – Voxivo Phone system in 2017, VoxivoCX Contact Centre in April and the Voxivo Collaboration suite upgrade last month. That means our customers have immediate access to next generation solutions and up-to-date feature sets on a roadmap that we believe is already ahead of many other developers."

By offering a complete cloud communications ecosystem Voxivo enables resellers to build expertise around a single platform and create sales opportunities for customers with both phone and contact centre requirements. Foehn's common approach to the

James Passingham

Our focus on getting voice right resonates with many businesses and fills a critical space for voice optimised CX in the market

design, administration and operation of Voxivo products means that partners also benefit from rapid onboarding, channel sales and marketing support and the option to use Foehn's billing service or to bill their customers directly. It is even possible to configure and deploy VoxivoCX within 24 hours. Deployment services include Foehn's own cloud hosting, number porting, SIP trunking and Internet access via leased line or business grade broadband.

Foehn's channel recruitment campaign is led by Barrow who believes that Voxivo will

be attractive to a broad range of service providers in both the IT and communications sectors. "Our phone and contact centre solutions appeal to the SME market and we're taking a broad view of potential partners across IT, networks and cloud services, as well as more traditional business communications providers," noted Barrow. "The typical partner profiles of the past are obsolete. Managed services, technical support and consultancy skills have changed significantly over recent years and service providers can tackle a much wider range of integrated

services these days. Ultimately, we offer solutions for improving customer experiences and business productivity and need partners who understand those requirements and work with decision makers in those areas."

Portfolio picks
The Voxivo cloud phone and collaboration product is designed for straightforward deployment, configuration and management with repeat monthly revenues, but VoxivoCX is more suitable for partners with some contact centre expertise. "Our experience tells us that

Foehn in Profile

FOEHN was founded in 2000 and has doubled its headcount and turnover since 2016. Achievements include an ITSPA award for Best VoIP Software in 2018; Genesys Purecloud Partner of the Year; accreditations with ISO/IEC 27001; and a listing on G-Cloud for the seventh year running. Last month Foehn collected Highly Commended trophies in two categories of the ITSPA awards – Best VoIP Software and Best Business ITSP.

perfectly timed'

the successful deployment of any contact centre depends on having the know-how to align the customer experience with business operations, and requires a clear understanding of the challenges faced by agents and contact centre supervisors," added Barrow. "For this reason we'll be seeking partners with credentials across a range of key criteria."

What makes a comms solution fit for a modern purpose? Answer: It's not a complex and inflexible user experience, says Barrow, who claims that Voxivo's integrated collaboration suite eliminates the 'overload' which arises from the disjointed mix of legacy stand-alone collaboration tools that he says have proliferated over recent years. "For many of our clients, their legacy systems have evolved over time into a complex integration of hardware and applications and they now

seek simplicity," he said. "The impact of business alignment and customisation on system performance cannot be overstated."

Nor can the role of agents in the performance of a contact centre system and the quality of the customer experience. "That's why agent requirements are central in the design of VoxivoCX," said Passingham. "Our clients tell us that the most critical requirements are rapid user adoption, ease of operation and strong engagement with the system over the longer term. By addressing these issues, the design of VoxivoCX can make significant reductions in the time, cost and resource incurred in contact centre operations."

Voice matters
Foehn also focused on the criticality of voice and improved agent productivity, both considered to be foundation stones of contact centre design. "In the

development of VoxivoCX we've prioritised voice," noted Passingham. "It's still the most frequently requested communication channel and it's used for the most important interactions. Customer expectations are shifting towards the quality of response that only voice can offer; and backed up by skills-based routing and intelligent IVR agents can use voice to deliver the simplest, fastest response to complex calls.

"These often involve high value transactions, complaints or emotionally charged issues. So our focus on getting voice right resonates with many businesses and fills a critical space for voice optimised CX in the market. Voice is a fast, economical and trusted channel of communication. The customer wants it, the agent likes it and the business needs it. Consequently, there's a renewed focus on voice which, in any case, has always been a customer's preferred channel."

Alongside prioritising voice Foehn is also looking at APIs and integrating with key business processes. "Our in-house integration skills will continue to play an important role," confirmed Passingham. "Furthermore, we work with an open source architecture that gives us the agility and flexibility to respond quickly. As a system evolves through its lifecycle so must the provider's services, so it is crucial to keep moving forward. We have a strong development roadmap for both Voxivo and VoxivoCX and will be releasing new features for both over the coming months and years. Standing still in this market means certain failure." ■

Julian Barrow

THE COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS 2019

10th October / Hilton Park Lane / cnawards.com

Get the recognition you deserve by entering the UK ICT industry's most prestigious awards process

Now in their 18th year, the Comms National Awards is the ICT channel's most respected and coveted prize and now's the time to power up your involvement.

Sponsored by 9 Group for the seventh successive year and independently judged by a panel of industry experts, The Comms National Awards recognises quality across the channel spectrum with awards in both reseller (customer solutions) and vendor (service to the channel) categories. Once again, we will also acknowledge the contribution made to the ICT channel by one special individual who will be presented with the illustrious Entrepreneur of the Year Award. New categories will recognise channel efforts to improve Diversity and CSR (see www.cnawards.com).

With past hosts including, Jimmy Nesbitt, Ronnie Corbett, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre, Vernon Kay and Stephen Mangan the entertainment as ever will be top drawer. This powerful combination means the Comms National Awards is the ultimate evening for the ICT channel to gather together, recognise excellence and innovation, network with industry friends and colleagues and, of course, have some much-deserved fun!

This year's Comms National Awards, to be held at The Park Lane Hilton on Thursday 10th October, will be sponsored for the seventh successive year by leading service provider, 9 Group.

According to 9's Group Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, the decision to renew their sponsorship was instantaneous: "This awards evening is the highlight of the year and we are delighted to be able to continue to offer our support to Comms Dealer. The atmosphere is always incredible, the guests represent the high achievers of our industry, the winning entries must be outstanding and the organisation of the event is first class every time, so we are proud to be associated with such an enjoyable evening.

"In previous years, our brand ambassadors, Josh Webster and Maddie Hinch, have held the audience spellbound with tales of Porsche Supercup success and Olympic glory, so we hope to be able to continue that tradition this year with another of our sporting superstars. Watch this space.

"We always relish the opportunity to reward and thank our closest partners and key staff members at this event. The winning mood is infectious, and celebrations inevitably continue into the earliest of hours, before joining some of the more rested revellers for a welcome breakfast."

Saunders recognises the Herculean challenge facing the judges: "They face a potentially thankless task, but one that is carried out with boundless integrity and attention to detail. If you win one of these awards, you can legitimately claim to be the very best at what you do and I look forward to seeing a healthy mixture of familiar and new faces on the podium this year.

"Finally, 9 will once again sponsor an award for customer service excellence and it is always a special honour to judge those entries and meet and greet the winners during the gala evening at The Park Lane Hilton.

"Please make sure you are there to enjoy the very best night out in our industry, by entering as many categories as you can and showcasing the incredible range of talent that this industry should so rightly boast about."

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSORS...

Reseller Vertical Market Category

Vincent Disneur
Head of Sales & Marketing
Union Street Technologies

"As the industry's leading provider of billing and provisioning solutions, Union Street is very proud to continue our sponsorship of the Comms National Awards. Much like ourselves, the CNAs champions excellence and outstanding achievement within the channel.

"Success in industry awards demonstrates to the market that you are an elite performer with an edge over competitors. Targeting a particular vertical market requires high levels of skill and expertise, truly demonstrating that the winning company is the master of its market. It's a great pleasure, therefore, to be the sponsor of the Vertical Markets category."

Reseller of the Year – SME

Lauren McManus
Head of Marketing & Communications
Digital Wholesale Solutions

"Digital Wholesale Solutions works within the SME sector every day, which is why we are proud to sponsor the category for SME Reseller of the Year. This is a sector that has huge potential so we want to encourage our partners to celebrate their achievements and strive for further growth.

"As a Channel-only business, we are proud to support the Comms National Awards because it brings the industry together to celebrate the successes of both small companies and large enterprises. It is a fantastic opportunity for networking while rewarding your teams for their hard work."

Telephony Category

Kevin Boyer
Managing director
IPNetix Ltd

"IPNetix Ltd have sponsored the CNA awards since 2014. This event is the highlight on the calendar because it brings together the channel to celebrate our mutual efforts and is also the predominant channel awards of the year. Winning here really is a special achievement and the CNA team always deliver an event to match the quality and breadth of the participants.

"IPNetix operate a channel-only sales strategy delivering expert professional services to our partners, this event is a pivotal point in the year where we celebrate our joint success."

CNA TV

Nick Powell
Sales Director
Sky Business Comms

"At Sky we are limitless by design in our approach and fully focused on celebrating and strengthening our key partnerships. We encourage our partners to celebrate their success and the CNAs is setting the bar for awards to win. Built for the future and un-encumbered by legacy processes and technologies, we're transforming the market by being innovative and flexible.

"We hope everyone attending has a great evening and wish all entrants the very best of luck!"

Business Innovation Category

Justin Blaine
Channel Sales Manager
NTA

"NTA are once again very proud to be involved with the Comms National Awards 2019 and this year we are delighted to be sponsoring the Business Innovation Category.

"Having been a winner in 2018 for The Best Hosted Platform, we are fully aware of what the awards mean and how they can elevate your business within a busy and crowded market place!

"We would like to wish all finalists in whatever category they are in, the very best of luck and we look forward to a glitzy evening amongst our like-minded industry peers!"

Hospitality Sponsor

Shaun Bodsworth
Managing Director
Inform Billing

"The Comms National Awards are the industry's most prestigious and hotly contested awards, recognising excellence across the ICT channel. After experienc-ing the tremendous impact these coveted awards have for the winners – much greater and further reaching than we could have imagined - we are proud to once again be supporting the event as a hospitality sponsor.

On behalf of Inform Billing, I would like to wish all entrants the very best of luck and we will see every-one on what will be an extremely fun and enjoyable night!"

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Tuned for fast growth

Few, if any, classically trained musicians compose a business growth story in the comms sector, but here's how Pescado Managing Director Fraser Watson orchestrated one of the fastest growing ICT providers in Wales.

Watson, who holds a university degree in classical music, also has an ear for fine tuning strategic growth plans. Last year Ewloe-based Pescado registered £11.5 million turnover, a £1.5 million increase on the previous year. To support this growth the company has added 10 more full-time staff taking its headcount to 65 as it targets £13 million turnover in 2019.

Pescado, which has circa 3,500 business clients, was founded by Watson and Jonathon Weeks in 2006. The pair first met during a stint working for Iceland in retail management. "The B2B market was overrun by hordes of dealers all doing the same thing," stated Watson. "So we established Pescado to offer account management, to which we added other products and services such as fixed and connectivity. Following our acquisition of Pure IT systems in 2015 we were able to provide end-to-end solutions. We'd like to acquire more right-fit fixed line and IT businesses."

Watson's first foray into the comms market was a spell working for airtime provider Singlepoint as a Sales Manager in 2001. The company was owned by John Caudwell who sold the business to Vodafone in 2003 for £405 million. "The Caudwell Group encouraged flexibility in your role and during my time there I got to see lots of different areas, which gets you thinking," stated Watson. "When Singlepoint sold to Vodafone I left and joined Mainline as Sales and Marketing Director before setting up Pescado."

Pescado now holds Microsoft Gold Data Centre and Microsoft Gold Small and Midmarket Cloud solution status, and is a Vodafone Total Communications Partner, EE Direct Business Partner, Microsoft Gold Partner, Vodafone Fixed Line Service Partner, as well as having supplier agreements with Dell, Vanilla IP, TalkTalk Business and Gamma.

"I'm seeing a huge conversion around connectivity," commented Watson. "It's a commoditised market and businesses see the importance of constantly being connected. Dedicated services are not just for big businesses, they are for everyone. So we focus

Fraser Watson

Dedicated services are not just for big businesses, they are for everyone

on connectivity and cloud services such as Pescado Ola VoIP and IT offerings."

Priorities
Watson's current priorities are to continue driving multiple product sets into new and existing customers. "We do this well and the opportunity is still enormous," he added. "With more and more customers happy to self-serve nowadays the opportunity must be grabbed. We are constantly looking to see what we can make slicker or easier for our customers and ourselves. The challenge is always gaining and retaining great people. We are lucky to have a core of key people

in the business but it takes a lot of time searching."

According to Watson, the IT reseller market is 'refreshing'. "You can ask for support and register deals so the back end vendor can see who got there first," he stated. "There is structure and order, which is a welcome change from the mobile world where throats are cut by the day in a pointless race to the bottom. If the operators allow us to bill customers ourselves as we do with data SIMs for example, the churn cycle will slow and customers will benefit from joined up solutions which means they'll be stickier for longer.

But mobile networks can be fickle. One day they want to play and the next day they've kicked the goal posts over and punctured the ball. So our focus is always stability and avoiding the need to make knee-jerk decisions."

That said, an exception to the rule proved transformational for Pescado. "A big turning point for us was a meeting with Vodafone's Rob Mukherjee in 2010," explained Watson. "We had been selling a few connections but needed help doing more, and agreed a structure that freed up our cash and allowed us to recruit more sales staff. In return we committed to placing business with Vodafone. We felt someone wanted to support us rather than the typical anti-relationship and transactional scenario which stifles creativity and ambition. I am eternally grateful for that opportunity. If you pick your partners wisely they should come through for you."

Picking a good role model is also key, and the father of a school friend provided Watson with a burst of inspiration and ambition that remains a spur even to this day. "My friend's dad began work by sweeping the floor in a paper mill," recalled Watson. "The business owner was so impressed by his work ethic he bequeathed his shares to him. Following the owner's death he grew the business from the bottom up, getting hands-on with all the jobs and he thrived in life. Before he died I often visited his house, avoided the vicious Airedale Terrier and talked to him about how he succeeded. I always wanted to be like him, and now own an Airedale Terrier myself." ■

Foresite eyes UK channe

Global managed cybersecurity service provider Foresite's UK partner recruitment campaign has entered acceleration mode following the roll out of a strengthened EMEA programme that could quintuple the size of the channel-only business within five years, according to EMEA Managing Director Jason Humphreys.

Expansion trends in its partner network indicate that Foresite will witness a sharp increase in partnership numbers with the addition of multiple types of VARs in more countries and regions worldwide. Foresite's Farnborough-based EMEA headquarters is the focal point of its ambitions in the region, complementing its US base in Kansas. The company was founded in 2013 by CEO Robin Mayo along with President Marc Brungardt and Chief Technical Architect Adam Shaw. Having previously worked together at former global security distributor Integralis (acquired by NTT Com and now called NTT Security) for a number of years Humphreys and Foresite's founders were well known to each other.

"During our time at Integralis – and though we were also selling direct to customers – we worked closely to successfully help a large US telco establish and build a multimillion dollar MSSP business, as we did with a number of other MSSP providers," said Humphreys. "This gave us first-hand experience and knowledge of the increasingly popular MSSP model.

"In 2013 we identified an emerging and potentially large market opportunity for setting up a global MSSP business of our own,

Jason Humphreys

My focus is on growing our EMEA revenues and building strong reseller partnerships. The two are inextricably linked

but one that focused on selling exclusively through the channel. The demand for managed services and managed security services in particular was already larger than just three or four years before.

"We believed it was ripe for development and the channel would be the ideal route to market since small and medium sized organisations were now

increasingly looking for help, and managed services was the way to do it. Now my focus is on growing EMEA revenues and building strong reseller partnerships. The two are inextricably linked."

Security platform
The privately held company currently employs circa 60 people overall, having doubled its headcount and turnover during the past three years. Its ProVision

software platform for security monitoring, management, threat detection, security testing and compliance is serviced through the company's two SOCs (Security Operations Centres) where analysts provide round-the-clock monitoring for customers. "Owning the IP and having full control over ProVision's development and marketing has enabled increased cost-effectiveness and much greater agility

for going to market far more aggressively," added Humphreys.

"We now have a full blown SOC-as-a-service offering rather than just the typical MSSP 'SIEM' managed service solution. Many MSSPs don't actually own their platform so are beholden to the development road maps, pricing structures and whims of their software providers. Our proprietary cybersecurity technology platform allows growing and established VAR partners to address the constant and increasing security concerns of their customers on a subscription basis."

Foresite took on its first institutional investor, Elsewhere Partners, last year; and a significant portion of the multimillion pound funding package is allocated towards scaling up its partner network while ensuring the supporting resources and infrastructure are in place. The funding will also allow Foresite to accelerate organisational growth, marketing development, geographic expansion and product development.

A key market for Foresite, reiterated Humphreys, is the SME sector. "This is a major and largely untapped growth area," he stated. "To address this opportunity in the EMEA region we are scaling up our UK partner

l expansion

network in partnership with MSPs, ICT resellers and security consultants looking to broaden their portfolios with a flexible multi-tenant service offering for end users of all sizes across all verticals, on a pay-as-you-go subscription basis."

Combined service

Responding to feedback from partners, Foresite has combined its Cyber Consulting Compliance Services division with its core MSSP cybersecurity monitoring, alerting, threat intelligence and incidence response platform – all now available through ProVision. The move streamlines how Foresite helps companies address regulatory issues, respond to business threats, pinpoint operational inefficiencies and focus on the core of their business.

"We maintain a close watching brief on many cybersecurity technology developments as well as infrastructure technology trends such as those affecting public, private and hybrid cloud delivery," added Humphreys. "We are currently working on enhancing our Microsoft Office 365 services offering."

To provide a boost to its EMEA channel expansion ambitions Foresite introduced a new partner programme this year and appointed Mark Collins as Partner Account Director tasked with helping MSPs, SIs and VARs integrate ProVision into their portfolios or gain access to white labelling, joint promotional opportunities, educational tools and resources. "We are seeing many more resellers looking for ways to add value to their businesses by shifting from selling tin to software

and managed services," said Humphreys. "With cybersecurity and managed services strongly in the ascendancy for many years to come, we aim to help them transform their businesses."

But simplifying the process of selling and provisioning IT services requires a shift to a services-led corporate culture versus the increasingly irrelevant product-led approach, believes Humphreys. "C-level and procurement officers need to move on from the conventional notion of two to three year sales cycles including a long trial period," he commented.

"The essence and beauty of managed as-a-service solutions such as the MSSP model is that they can be turned on without delay, and scaled up or down as needed. Why wait! Resellers should embrace and leverage the business value and market opportunity offered by selling real services, not point software products and definitely not tin."

Humphreys' ability to read the market and give customers what they want can in part be traced back to when his interest in IT was fired up during childhood while using a Sinclair ZX spectrum home computer on which he created software programmes and played games. "That steered me towards a career in IT, initially at mainframe computer manufacturer Honeywell Bull in the late '80s and early '90s, before moving to various other IT roles elsewhere and eventually Integralis," he stated.

"I have always had a passion for IT and am comfortable

in embracing the application of technology. This helps me today in my understanding of the many business challenges faced, and the IT solutions required, by our partners to deliver value and service to their customers." ∎

Holistic security is key

Trends in cyber crime show that, for resellers, security provision is becoming an inevitable requirement and to find a holistic security partner is to put their best foot forward, according to Connectus CEO Roy Shelton and Chief Information Security Officer Scott Taylor.

Roy Shelton

Scott Taylor

Cyber protection is growing in demand across the world as threat levels continue to rise and the pressure for governance becomes ever greater. These threats are no longer isolated to Government departments or large corporates. All companies, including SMEs, are potential targets as they hold sensitive and valuable client and internal data. "The primary cybersecurity threats faced by SMEs are naivety and the 'it won't happen to me' mentality," commented Shelton. "Investment in preventative action is far cheaper than resolving a critical incident when it occurs. But the channel typically lacks detailed knowledge of audit and resolution."

To help plug the channel's skills gap Connectus runs cyber masterclasses for partners and provides support in pre-sales and engagement via its managed services capabilities which, says Taylor, helps to break down false perceptions of security services. "Our sector must work hard to lose the IT stereotype image, and demonstrate that good cybersecurity does not have to seriously impact business costs or manpower," he stated. "Solutions must be more business-focused and integrated into the normal range of operations rather than seen as 'money for old rope' or technology sold purely because of fear. When both sides work together to develop a good understanding of the reality of the risks and the simple things that can be done to mitigate them, SMEs will perceive us not so much as an unnecessary cost, but as a business partner who has their back."

In getting to this position, according to Shelton, it is important for resellers not to reinvent the wheel. "Embrace the growing number of managed services providers that have invested heavily in infrastructure, people, training and operational procedures with a channel-friendly wrap," he urged. "Look for experience rather than just certifications. Good security service providers don't scare their partners or customers into purchasing. They partner with them to help them understand the reality of the risk and how a

Look for experience rather than just certifications

business needs to operate, in doing so balancing risk against benefit and impact, leading to the best possible outcome for the service user. Security is not about a technology or product. Our approach includes a blend of people, process and technology which provides a holistic and ongoing preventative solution."

Human factor

Taylor underscored the strength of the human factor in implementing security measures. "The most important element of cyber and data security is what's between the individual's ears and how they apply it," he added. "Problems are seldom solved by technology alone, which can be one of the biggest issues for resellers who have a vested interest in the sale. The needs of security are ever changing with new threats and risks appearing every day. The cyber criminal does not sleep, and targets the least point of resilience which may change during the working day, week or month. So look for a partner that is prepared to invest in the relationship and work with you and your team on an ongoing basis."

The influence of technology in combating cyber threats will surely rise as the use of Artificial Intelligence and advanced data analytics comes to the fore over time. These innovations will identify abnormalities in the standard behaviour of users and computer systems which could indicate nefarious activity. "Moving beyond data analytics, and taking into account the increasing prevalence of users wanting to use their own devices, individuals will increasingly look to take control of, and centralise, their online identity for convenience and peace of mind," added Taylor.

"This centralised identity can then be used as the basis of their access to an employer's systems and information and can take their context (such as time of day, geographic location etc), the type of information they require and track precisely who is doing what to particular information where and when, which provides greater security for the business in terms of its information, and greater auditability in terms of proving any potential infractions of the rules."

According to Shelton, this enables businesses to deploy straightforward data access management solutions which meet the requirements of customers, suppliers, regulatory compliance, the simplified detection of potential cyber attacks and the mitigation of their impact. "Tools such as these are currently in their infancy but by working with our partners up and down the supply chain they will evolve into highly secure and robust solutions which can deliver great capabilities and a more secure world at a much lower cost than previously possible," he said. "Making it easier for resellers to sell and provision security will require a far more modular or layered approach to service delivery and a move towards micro services being assembled or combined into customer solution suites." ∎

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Securing partnerships

The rise of cybersecurity and managed services alongside the emergence of SMEs as a security market hotbed plays into the channel's hands – but with the channel handcuffed by a cybersecurity skills gap, what can resellers do to meet security demands? Jez Turner, Cyber Security Sales Director at Chess, provides some answers.

Jez Turner

The best, fastest, least risky option is to partner with an experienced security provider

A challenge for resellers wanting to up their game in security is to gain a low cost of entry with low risk levels, while focusing on core business. "The fastest and least risky option is to partner with an experienced security provider," said Turner. "This way resellers avoid having to grow security revenues to hit the right vendor discounts, and they sidestep the battle to retain skilled staff who often get headhunted. Working with vendors directly could also see resellers lose out to bigger established players. It is also a much harder route. To sell security effectively you need 100 per cent dedication. It can't be done as part of another role. So partnership in some form is the best route."

The must-have elements of a security solution for SMEs can be categorised as 'basic security' and 'advanced security'. Basic elements include next gen' endpoint, gateway solutions and encryption, while the advanced category may encompass SIEM, visibility and MFA. "The tricky part for ICT resellers is the knowledge and skill set they need to implement the appropriate security options," stated Turner.

Covering the basics
Security providers need to get the basics covered before they start to look at the advanced options available to them, and the best way to baseline this is through an effective audit, pen test and accreditation. "Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus are the two accreditations to consider, and are a great badge for any organisation," explained Turner.

"Penetration tests are vital, but it is more important to make sure the test is appropriate to the customer. Chess has five qualified pen testers and we have learnt on our journey that all pen tests are not equal: You pay less for someone to plug in a standard tool and print out a report; and pay more for someone with the right knowledge, who is CREST qualified like Chess Cyber for example, to interpret that outcome and use human skills to think like a hacker. This is what the market wants and resellers should partner with the right people that have the correct accreditation."

The main threats faced by SMEs include ransomware, data loss, hacking and the subsequent loss of business and reputation. "Many SMEs simply don't realise their information is just as valuable as larger companies and often they are easier to breach," said Turner. "This tends to follow the 80-20 rule, with just 20 per cent of SMEs being highly secure. In SMEs there is likely to be limited resources and a lack of understanding of security risks at senior management level. So cybersecurity needs a consultancy approach."

As with every technology area there is always the next big thing and security is no exception. Currently, pointed out Turner, the hype is around AI. "There is already talk of aggressive AI to overcome the defensive options," he added. "No doubt we will see this escalate in the coming months and years. There is a need to constantly evolve against the motivated and highly resourced threat actors.

"Furthermore, many vendors are constantly expanding their portfolios and Chess Cyber tracks these advances and is fast to market by talking to customers regularly, running webinars, events, demos and proof of concepts. The next big area will be how different point solutions in security can work together to form a holistic single picture of threats. This requires software platforms that work well together, with managed services and security expertise to look at how to develop and deliver SOC (Security Operations Centre) type solutions.

"The future will see larger security vendors expanding into more security areas to create their own view of this bigger picture. The best ones are already some way down this path. It also means the market needs the right skills to deliver, implement and manage those solutions."

Against this backdrop of technological change and challenge, and with the industry shift away from tin towards software and managed services, resellers must address the security needs of their customers large and small. "You need to get it right otherwise customers will move away rapidly," warned Turner. "Security is visible even if you get it a tiny bit wrong. So make sure you know your base and talk to lots of established players about the challenges and how they can help with a partnership." ∎

The C*h*an*g*ing Cha*n*ne*l*

Prepare for new opportunities at MiVaD 19

With the impending switch-off of ISDN, the increasing demand for customers for collaborative 'joined up' solutions, plus the increasing popularity of cloud communications, the ICT channel is truly facing a period of massive change.

The big question is: how will the changes ahead affect you and your reseller business and how will you maximise on all the opportunities they will bring?

Each year since the turn of the millennium, Margin in Voice & Data– affectionately known as 'The Industry event of the Summer' – has helped resellers addressing SME markets identify and open new doors to profit and truly understand the changing ICT environment. This is a truly inspirational event that will help you really understand the market changes and meet suppliers keen to help you unlock these amazing opportunities.

Where will it take place?

On July 4th 2019, MiVaD 18 returns to the picturesque Forest of Arden Hotel complex in the heart of the West Midlands and once again this 24-hour event promises a day of inspiration and exploration plus a 'once a year' opportunity for resellers to network with like-minded peers and business generators.

Who will qualify to attend?

if you are a director of a reseller organisation turning over up to £3m, you will be able to attend MiVaD 19 completely free of charge, including all hospitality and an overnight stay at the Forest of Arden!

This offer is only extended to 120 reseller directors operating in the ICT channel so do not delay, register now to secure your place.

**FOREST OF ARDEN, MIDLANDS
4TH JULY 2019**

MIVAD SPEAKER LINE-UP

Our evening dinner speaker at this year's Margin in Voice & Data will be renowned sports coach Frank Dick OBE who, amongst many others, has coached tennis ace Boris Becker and Olympic Gold Medallists Daley Thompson and Denise Lewis and is currently advisor for the England Rugby Coaching Team. Frank will be sharing his insights on how business leaders and teams can manage change to produce positive outcomes and reflect on his view that "Change is not a destination, it's a never-ending journey".

Adam Zoldan, Partner, Knight CF

Adam will provide an update on market activity over the year, an overview of the M&A landscape and the latest trends driving value in the ICT market.

Adam Cathcart, Director – Partners, 9 Group

Adam will outline how resellers can profitably address next-gen mobility and will explain how device lifetime management can be effectively managed via a portal.

Axel Kloessner, COO, FONtevo

Axel will examine where we are on the migration to/from cloud telephony and will provide statistics to separate facts from anecdotal evidence for PBX vs cloud adoption.

Iain Sinnott, Sales Director, Vanilla IP

Iain will explore how resellers can focus on personalised products and services for their customers and how this will enable them to focus on the higher value products.

Paul Taylor, Sales & Marketing Director, Voiceflex

Paul will discuss how resellers should 'redefine the workplace' and offer customers a seamless move to communications services offered by Amazon Web Services and Google's Cloud Services Platform.

Matthew Worboys, Head of Channel - South East and Scotland, Gamma

Matthew will examine how resellers can avoid the commoditisation of comms and increase the order value with their customers and Paul Gibbs will explain how to avoid the 'race to the bottom' on price.

MEET THE SPONSORS

IAIN SINNOTT – SALES & MARKETING DIRECTOR, VANILLA IP

"We really enjoyed the first Margin in Mobile event which was delivered to the very high standard that we expect from Comms Dealer. It gave us a great opportunity to meet with a new section of this converging market and I know we will be seeing a very rapid return on our investment. We're really looking forward to Margin in Voice & Data now!"

MATTHEW WORBOYS, HEAD OF CHANNEL, SOUTH-EAST & SCOTLAND, GAMMA

"Gamma is once again pleased to sponsor this year's Margin in Voice and Data. The day provides an excellent opportunity for us to meet with existing and new partners. As the only major UK communications company that has a clear market focus on targeting customers through the channel, we offer a variety of ways of working with us to ensure our Channel Partners are successful in their markets."

ADAM CATHCART, MANAGING DIRECTOR, 9 GROUP

"With our comprehensive portfolio, 9 has been a leading provider of IT and telecommunication products for the channel for over 10 years. At MiVaD, we're looking forward to exploring how channel partners can work with their service providers, to gain advice and support to help them grow their businesses against a backdrop of change."

AXEL KLOESSNER, COO, FONTEVO

"We have over 16,000+ ICT resellers across Germany, Austria and Switzerland and we're now expanding into international markets with the UK being a key focus. FONtevo is sponsoring Margin in Voice & Data 2019, to inform the UK ICT dealer market that we are on track with our rollout to recruit specific UK resellers looking for a unique, trusted, quality driven and collaborative partner to help grow their SME PBX and SIP phones solutions. Make an appointment to see us at MiVaD to see how you could join the FONtevo channel."

MARK CURTIS-WOOD, GROUP SALES & MARKETING DIRECTOR, VAIONI WHOLESALE

"We are excited to be sponsoring one of the most important events in the industry. At Margin in Voice and Data 2019, we will be showcasing our extraordinary connectivity solutions including our own Ethernet Network, V.E.N., Pre-Ethernet and 10GB services to name but a few. These will provide the channel with a genuine alternative to the main large Ethernet carriers, giving our partners access to a multi-award-winning and trusted network operator, Come and speak to us about how Vaioni Wholesale can help you stand out from the crowd."

SEAN DIXON, SALES DIRECTOR, FIDELITY ENERGY

"Fidelity Energy now has over 350 telecoms partners who offer energy as a service to their customers. Partnering with Fidelity Energy enables you to leverage your current relationships along with our energy knowledge to help secure the best energy deals for your customers. The average commission per customer is around £4,000 and we have a 39% closure rate with our partners. This is due to their great relationships and our prices from suppliers, with over £130 million contracted to date. Arrange to meet us at Margin in Voice & Data to find out more."

DANIEL ALVAREZ, HEAD OF CHANNEL, GLIDE

"Historically, most connectivity options have come from a core of players. With the fibre revolution, channel partners now have access to multiple ISP's all with their own business models and goals, not to mention delivery models and SLA's. With the shift to move as many services to the cloud as possible, full fibre now holds the key. One of the main challenges for resellers is the number of portals and suppliers they need to reach as many prospects as possible and to support their existing customers to maximise profitability and save time. We're looking forward to discussing these opportunities with potential partners at Margin in Voice & Data 2019."

SHAUN BODSWORTH, MANAGING DIRECTOR, INFORM BILLING

"As an experienced billing specialist with significant flexibility within our software applications, Inform Billing can easily support SaaS and dynamic connectivity areas where accurate billing is vital. Our solutions keep the bill to the customer simple, whilst providing the critical detail for revenue assurance and supplier invoice validation. Within the Exhibitor Zone at Margin in Voice & Data, we will be available all day for delegates to drop by and talk to us about their general billing requirements or to gain advice on billing recurring subscription services and more inclusive package style propositions."

JUSTIN BLAINE, CHANNEL SALES MANAGER, NTA

"NTA are once again looking forward to this year's Margin in Voice & Data. This time we will be focussing on our brand-new feature set that has been developed for our award-winning Hosted Telephony platform. This is particularly geared towards margin retention for our partners and promoting their brand as handsets and the platform are completely white labelled! Our platform is agnostic so with the changes in connectivity technology and our PaaS and SaaS offering this really does deliver a real differentiator for our channel reseller community. We look forward to meeting with partners at this thought leading, relationship building conference."

VINCENT DISNEUR, HEAD OF SALES & MARKETING, UNION STREET

"MIVAD is, without question, one of the years most important conferences for the channel. It's a must attend event for any forward-thinking reseller that's looking for develop their business, providing a veritable goldmine of information for capitalising on emerging opportunities and for developing product portfolios profitably. We're looking forward to engaging with both new and existing clients, to finding out how we can add value to their businesses and to showcasing the latest enhancements available in aBILLity™ the UK's market leading billing system."

IAN ROWAN, UK CHANNEL MANAGER, WILDX

"The way end users purchase technology has changed. It's no longer acceptable to be a pure reseller selling someone else's product on a Capex sale. Partners must become the product they sell. By providing a fully managed service, along with a product that allows you to create value-add, this is a must for any business that wants to avoid becoming a victim of the disintermediation that has been created by the likes of Amazon in the internet market place. Adapting to a recurrent model is not a simple transition but a must for a business with a long-term future and we are looking forward to meeting partners who share this vision at Margin in Voice & Data 2019."

HENRY WEST, CHANNEL SALES DIRECTOR, FLUIDONE

"FluidOne is a major network aggregator with over 30 carriers and suppliers delivered into its Platform One software defined core network which puts the control and flexibility of its connectivity services into the hands of our partners. With the ability to deliver all services at Layer 2 and Layer 3 plus a Virtual Core Network proposition, we have solutions that suit all the needs of channel partners to deliver high quality On Net services for Ethernet, EOD, FTTC, FTTP, G.FAST, IoT, Mobile, Wi-Fi, Cloud and Hosting, all of which can be accessed, consumed and managed in life via a single in-house developed portal called DASH. Come and meet us at Margin in Voice & Data to found out more."

MARK RIDDELL, HEAD OF INDIRECT CHANNEL, ABZORB

"One portal, one bill and one service support for all your profitable voice and data needs. The one partner for all your voice solutions from flexible mobile tariffs across all three leading mobile providers, all-inclusive simple, feature rich hosted VoIP services with zero hidden charges and the whole suite of data connectivity services from our Data and DSL network, served from a single portal that sets the standards in service enablement."

CAROLINE GISSING & DAVID FARRELL, IP CORTEX

IPCortex are looking forward to our first year as a sponsor at MiVaD with the opportunity to show how we can help resellers drive their business forward, stand out in the marketplace and improve your profit margin. We have a unique proposition that not only makes our partners the central focus of our growth; but more importantly has a platform that can provide 'on premise', 'virtual', 'hosted' and 'service provider' level solutions. No matter what your business size or growth forecast is, our platform and partner model will fit. We look forward to meeting you at MiVaD.

DAVE REYNOLDS, MANAGING DIRECTOR UK, XELION

"MiVaD is a major opportunity for the channel to explore profitable new business opportunities. Working in partnership with Abzorb, we will be offering live demonstrations of the Xelion user experience including our flagship desktop application and mobile apps. Guests have the opportunity to see the benefits to the customer of having all features included as standard under one user licence."

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TalkTalk Business's inaugural industry summit showed a company determined to lead from the front.

The full fibre future is in view – and the gates are sliding shut on legacy copper infrastructure. With the traditional connectivity options also closing for ICT providers the channel must manoeuvre behind a cross-industry push to embrace the inevitable rise, proliferation and supremacy of full fibre. TalkTalk Business aimed to trigger such a movement at last month's Connectivity Matters Summit, for which there is much to be said. The pages that follow are the first of Comms Dealer's reports on the conference, which began with an inspirational keynote by TalkTalk Executive Chairman Sir Charles Dunstone (see opposite), and concluded with a strategy update from CEO Tristia Harrison (page 44) and panel debate which brought the audience up to speed on the current state of the compelling full fibre market (page 46).

And as more customers migrate to higher bandwidth products the demand on networks will only increase. Against this backdrop TalkTalk Business showed how it is using data-led insights to help partners understand their customer base and gain a competitive advantage, and how it is using data to improve service and align customers with right-fit products at the point of sale.

From Robotic Process Automation (RPA), Optical Character Recognition (OCR), Natural Language Processing (NLP) and chatbots, the use of AI and robotics technology is increasing in businesses around the world. With its first channel event of the kind, TalkTalk Business offered delegates – channel partners and international carriers – insight's into the role of robotics, AI, self-healing networks and big data in its strategy. The event also highlighted how TalkTalk is adopting new technologies and harnessing network telemetry data to improve quality of experience and product optimisation. How the network operator is leveraging Juniper's Northstar and Assia's Cloudcheck to improve the customer experience was also showcased.

The first of our Connectivity Matters Summit reports underscores the emphatic role of full fibre both now and in the future, why partners need to manoeuvre with great ambition and intent now, and why TalkTalk Business intends to be at the centre of this vital industry debate. ∎

Why we need m

Charles Dunstone

There is no way of coming close to a full fibre Britain except by recourse to 'alternative-ism' financed by investment. That being so, it is clear that TalkTalk Chairman Charles Dunstone's propensity towards being a 'rebel' will accelerate the company's ambitions to meet the nation's ever-growing full fibre requirements.

> **We like to be the alternative that shocks people, and we still uphold the ideology of Carphone Warehouse in giving people choice, value and transparency**

Dunstone aims to raise £1 billion from investors to finance FibreNation, TalkTalk's full fibre infrastructure business which is being brought into play across the country as a challenger force. Gone are the days when the UK's digital future was held to ransom by short sighted Government policy and monopolistic power. Today, market conditions play into the hands of the billionaire founder of Carphone Warehouse who has set his sights on becoming a prime enabler of Britain's digital future, disrupting the status quo wherever possible. "Running a network and a technology business comes with a requirement to build, which demands a lot of capex and investing in the future," said Dunstone.

There are times when Dunstone seems to especially relish an opportunity to disrupt – now is one of those moments. A previous triumph was curtailing the chief of BT Retail Ian Livingston's holiday 13 years ago, which Dunstone cherishes as a 'particularly pleasing' memory. Livingston rushed back to BT Towers following Dunstone's decision to hand over free broadband to certain customers in a giveaway that crashed the market by circa 40 per cent. The move is explicable only by Dunstone's raw personal ambition to upset the applecart and give customers what they really want. Now he is focused on the full fibre space. "We like to be the alternative, the rebel that shocks people, and we still uphold the ideology of Carphone Warehouse in giving people choice, value and transparency," said Dunstone.

The flight from copper infrastructure has become urgent as Britain, in reality, has failed its people on full fibre

Connectivity Matters Summit 2019
Presented by TalkTalk Business

nore big disrupters like

provision. Hordes of would-be fibre users have been ill-served and Dunstone plans to provide a remedial and urgent response by replicating the ideas and beliefs that underpinned his success in the mobile market, this time as an accelerator of ultra-fast pure fibre connectivity. "I'm something of a pretender with ambition and confidence," stated Dunstone. "Many people in the mobile industry blame me personally for the fact that the UK has one of the most competitive markets with the lowest average ARPU in Europe. We like to be the disruptive alternative."

Ambition drives growth

Thus Dunstone has earned legendary status in the comms industry and he was awarded a knighthood in 2012, but his only achievement at school was to win Dyslexic of the Year, which is emblematic of his natural pragmatism and ambition to succeed, sometimes against the odds, and explains why the writing on the wall was not so obvious to him once the mobile phone firm he set up in a flat took off. "I had no idea how big the business would become," he commented. "I was not bright at school, I was dyslexic and established Carphone Warehouse in 1989 just to make a living. But it took on a life of its own."

Fast forward to the early 2000s and Carphone Warehouse secured a CPS deal with Opal Telecom, which the company acquired in 2002. Opal became a core part of the business and a big player in the CPS market with approximately 3.5 million customers. It was in April 2006 that Dunstone launched free broadband for customers who took the full package and line rental, marking the birth of TalkTalk and prompting

an emergency return to battle stations by BT's Ian Livingston. "It was fun for six hours, then we realised we'd started a tsunami of demand," said Dunstone.

TalkTalk subsequently acquired ISP AOL in 2006 and Tiscali in 2009 and was demerged in 2010. "Two years ago I stepped back into the business full-time and promoted Tristia Harrison as CEO," explained Dunstone. "We began a process of simplifying and clarifying the business, how we operated, where we invested in the network and we doubled down on the parts of the company that we wanted to deliver. We're starting to see the dividends of those efforts and we continue to make progress. Our focus has made real differences to the service and products we deliver."

Dunstone's entrepreneurialism and predisposition to zag when others zig is reflected in TalkTalk's full fibre strategy with altnet FibreNation, and strengthening partnership with Openreach which complements TalkTalk's rebel status rather than contradicts it. "Because of our roots as a disrupter, because of our focus on simple connectivity and giving people the best possible value while attacking the lumbering corporates and monopolies, I'm still totally committed to the business," confirmed Dunstone. "Our network of independent partners are kindred spirits, all trying to give people value and better products while taking on the monopoly and other big providers. We will continue support you and keep investing in the network and Britain's full fibre future." ■

TalkTalk Business pushes the full fibre agenda – page 42
Full fibre debate shows the way to Digital Britain – page 44

> **Our network of independent business partners are kindred spirits, all trying to give people value and better products while taking on the monopoly and other big providers**

TalkTalk Business pushes

with two-pronged plan

The argument is no longer between copper and fibre. It is about a Government target and how the comms sector collaborates, defines and delivers a solution to the full fibre deployment challenges. According to TalkTalk CEO Tristia Harrison, the company's two-pronged strategy offers Britain, and the channel, the best and fastest option.

> **We have a simple two-pronged strategy to ensure we are at the heart of the nation's full fibre project. Full fibre roll out will only be realised if there's real competition**

At last there is good news on Digital Britain. In the past, political, regulatory and corporate factors combined to ensure Britain failed on full fibre. Now, push has come to shove and our fate is in the hands of network providers which must plough their own furrows and work across company lines to agree on partnerships and deals, rather than stumble for a way forward through a legacy of policies which would never resolve the contradiction of a digital economy without full fibre.

"Three years ago the market was not set up to deliver investment," stated Harrison. "We had an infrastructure monopoly and the country's full fibre aspirations were dependent on BT, which at that point had little incentive to invest in new technology. The Government was on the fence about whether Britain needed full fibre – ministers were openly discussing whether G.fast would be sufficient for the long-term. And there was the expectation that the financial burden for full fibre would sit with the telcos alone.

"Today, the market has changed and through collaboration those roadblocks have been removed. Ofcom and Government have made an explicit policy decision to move away from the single infrastructure model to one based on true competition and they exclusively back a full fibre future for Britain with regulatory intervention where it is needed. Furthermore, a range of new funds and investors have recognised the potential of full fibre."

The full fibre debate must move on now to give us any hope of getting near the Government's goal set out in its Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review published in July 2018, in which it targets full fibre coverage across the UK by 2033. That said, the target date seems unambitious set against countries like Macedonia, Angola and some eastern European territories which have long been and remain streets ahead of the UK. "Full fibre coverage in the UK stands at just five or six per cent – we are woefully behind," added Harrison. "Rival economies enjoy coverage of 80 per cent. We can't go on like this."

Distinct strategies

The Government has indeed taken a decision on full fibre but not indicated how it wants the UK to proceed. So all plausible options are open. For TalkTalk, to get its strategy under way does not involve the delays that will inevitably hold back late starters to network building. Nor should its plan be one dimensional, believes Harrison, who revealed that TalkTalk has embarked on two distinct approaches to market. The first is to operate as an altnet, the second is to work in close partnership with Openreach.

"We have a simple two pronged strategy to ensure we are at the heart of the nation's full fibre project," she explained. "Full fibre roll out will only be realised if there's real infrastructure competition. The altnets have jolted the entire market into action, including Openreach. It's no surprise that since the altnets pressed ahead with their plans we have seen change and momentum from Openreach."

TalkTalk is using its scale to bring its own altnet into the market – FibreNation – which has been four years in the making. Headed up CEO Neil McArthur (the founder of

Connectivity Matters
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s UK's full fibre agenda

Opal Telecom and former Managing Director of TalkTalk Technology) and Chairman Paul Reynolds (a former BT executive), FibreNation has tested and trialled full fibre in York which is now hailed by TalkTalk as Britain's first true Gigabit city. "We learnt how to best build a network, how to bring the cost to the premises down and how to market and sell the products," stated Harrison. "Critical to success are ducts and poles so FibreNation worked closely with Openreach to make the project work."

FibreNation is now taking the learning and skills it has accrued to three million homes and businesses across the country. "We are accelerating our roll out and taking the York model to three more cities – Harrogate, Knaresborough and Ripon," added Harrison. "But we need a solution for the whole of Britain, which is why TalkTalk's second strategic course is our relationship with Openreach and the scale we can bring with our wholesale B2B and retail customers."

In their market approaches TalkTalk and Openreach are from opposite ends of the connectivity sector spectrum, but they are constructively working together because they obey the key rule of today's challenging comms market environment – collaboration – which offers the only sensible way for Britain to advance through the legacy copper morass with a workable business case.

"FTTP networks are only viable with high take up," commented Harrison. "The business model is simple and all about cost per home, penetration and pace of adoption. Therefore it's important that we have an ongoing dialogue with Openreach to make sure we can commit our scale to its plans in FTTP. We want to give Openreach the volume guarantees it needs to de-risk its own build. On this, conversations are well underway. In return, we need a realistic commercial deal that works as well for CPs as it does Openreach. That is only possible if we continue to work together and build on the success of the proper collaboration between the organisations over the past two years."

First to market

Decisions must be made on what that collaboration deal should be in the future. But early insights already indicate joint work on assessing and testing the products Openreach is currently developing. This function is led by Guy Miller, Director of TalkTalk's Fibre for Everyone project, who is working with Openreach as a priority to be first to market with new products through FibreNation. "We will use our scale to unlock investment from multiple networks and be the first adopter of full fibre products as they become available, which means joining up with our best customers to test and learn and roll out as quickly as possible," stated Harrison.

She also noted that TalkTalk's full fibre arm will evolve as an aggregator that consumes from other altnets as well as Openreach. Although TalkTalk set up FibreNation (which currently has wholesale agreements with TalkTalk and Sky) it will not be the long-term infrastructure investor. Harrison confirmed that the company is in talks with a number of potential investors.

For the moment, the UK remains a non-participating member of the world's full fibre club. But the comms sector is now on parade and must be proactive and positive. "It's easy to be pessimistic for many reasons, and get bogged down with challenges and risks," noted Harrison. "But Britain is a world class digital economy, and new figures show that the UK tech sector has grown nearly 20 per cent despite the EU referendum, far outstripping the 5.5 per cent for the rest of the economy. This success is in spite of our digital infrastructure. Now, TalkTalk is at the centre of the debate, investing in FTTP and working pragmatically with Openreach. That's the best way to ensure that the roll out goes as far and quickly as possible. We are entering a transitional period and have a limited window to catch up with the rest of the world. Time is of the essence." ■

Full fibre debate shows the way to Digital Britain – page 44

> It's no surprise that since the altnets pressed ahead with their plans we have seen change and momentum from Openreach

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Panel debate: Industry le

build full fibre Britain

The best overhauls are born of necessity, and addressing the nation's full fibre deficit is already looking to be the most transformational reset seen in UK comms sector history. It's full steam ahead for full fibre, so what needs to happen now? TalkTalk Business's panel of industry leaders respond.

NEIL MCARTHUR

We've seen regulatory and technology changes and demand is everywhere. The Government and regulator want FTTP to happen. This is only going one way

The pre-full fibre status quo had gone unchallenged for too long, and the scale of the nation's loss under the burden of legacy technology is hard to measure. But at last Britain has found a way to grasp the nettle, and it's time for the channel to do the same. "This is a pivotal moment," said Neil McArthur, Chief Executive, FibreNation. "When we first looked at this project with TalkTalk in 2012 the construction expense was double today's investment. We have driven the costs down and we have a potential key supplier with Openreach, meaning that its infrastructure is available to us. We've seen regulatory and technological changes and demand is everywhere. The Government and regulator want FTTP to happen. This is only going one way."

Britain has finally taken on the grim reality of its legacy comms infrastructure, and in lending force to arguments in favour of full fibre Katie Milligan, Managing Director Customer, Commercial & Propositions at Openreach, spoke of an 'inflection point'. "Previous business cases didn't work," she commented. "I remember doing the first ever FTTC deployment and first FTTP. When we laid them side by side we couldn't make the case work so started the journey on FTTC. But there have been many changes since then, and innovation has helped. The key stakeholders have decided that the future is not about copper, and we are starting to see enablers that allow the industry to build out fibre."

A great challenge then presented itself: Full fibre is an industry in its infancy but speed of cross-country deployment is of the essence. "There's a lot of capital being sunk into the ground but the constraint is that it takes time," said Gareth Williams, Chief Executive, Gigaclear. "Speed is going

to be the hardship and working with Openreach on shared infrastructure is a good approach."

The principle of collective responsibility requires that industry stakeholders collaborate in the expectation that they can influence an outcome, which is the proposition on offer from Openreach. "We are about to start a consultation on what FTTP looks like," added Milligan. "It's clear that we need to understand the products and services that customers want. Do we know what the answer is yet? No. We need as many views as possible from those working with alternative network providers. We need their voices to be clear on the products they want to buy. In reality we don't want a product that is vastly different from someone else's. Equally, we do not want to be dragged down a route if it's not right for us. Once we build that product we need as much feedback as possible."

Milligan stated that the best approach to making progress is for demand clusters to be identified, and that stakeholders must wholeheartedly agree that demand

Gareth Williams, Chief Executive, Gigaclear:
Gaining help on wayleaves is an enormous issue if we are to move faster. For example, if we use a pole, BT's historic wayleave agreement does not apply to us. We have to go back to the land owner and re-energise that conversation.

David Sangster, Managing Director, G.Network:
It's not easy to dig trenches. Local authorities need help to understand how it's done, the risks, the timescales and challenges. We need to educate them, and take them on a journey through how we do this. If we don't, the industry won't see steep growth.

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eaders show the way to

leads supply. Openreach must then devise a plausible way to deliver what is decided. "Key points for us are where do you build and how far do you build to?," said Milligan. "Do you build to the edge, into the premises, build ahead of time or try and do something smarter and build to 15 or 30 days on-demand? This is a practical challenge for us at the moment. We want to know now where the clusters of demand are, what types of services we provide, and decide our approach to delivery and specification."

Collaboration is key

This would require marrying joint strategies to realise the practical possibilities. And a strategy heavy with checks and balances based on feedback will enable Openreach to respond to market requirements in a flexible and targeted way. "For resellers it's not just about services and margin," added Milligan. "Think about FTTP as a way to reduce costs through fewer repairs and fewer overheads, for example, and try to understand the business model. Then look at the ecosystem and see how the removal of legacy services is an opportunity to completely overhaul the business and offer additional services. But as an industry we need to work out the use case and how it is sold."

At this juncture it is propitious to consider the long journey from 21CN to the modern day goal of

Ethernet over full fibre, and understand that the same principles for success apply now as they did for the first next generation network project which failed to materialise. The real pertinent point is not that 21CN failed, but the reason why it reverted to square one. "There is a huge temptation to hold onto legacy services and milk them," said McArthur. "What killed the 21CN project? Trying to maintain legacy products such as ISDN, not the technology. The industry must be brave and get rid of legacy technology, simplify things, and get to a modern fibre-based digital network running totally IP-based services."

A rerun of the 21CN failure cannot happen and the obvious way to avoid a repeat scenario is to build a strong business proposition. "While the business case at the moment is driven by the residential market, the fact remains that there is fantastic potential with FTTP for B2B products," added McArthur. "This is a real inflection point in B2B that must not be ignored. Once you have the service levels you get from fibre, never mind the speed and latencies, then you aren't going backwards. We can expect the cost of high bandwidth services to businesses to go down and the richness of functionality to go up. FTTP is transformational for B2B and we ignore it at our peril." **Continued on page 46**

KATIE MILLIGAN

The key stakeholders have decided that the future is not about copper, and we are starting to see enablers that allow the industry to build out fibre

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HEAD-TO-HEAD ON KEY ISSUES

Gareth Williams, Chief Executive, Gigaclear:
Regulation should encourage Openreach to cover the regions that are commercially difficult to get to, and create more space around areas where competitors can build. That's an important piece.

Katie Milligan, Managing Director Customer, Commercial & Propositions, Openreach:
That is anti-competitive. Just because we were an incumbent in the past doesn't mean that will always be the position. We have a right to compete and will fight tooth and nail for an even and fair playing field.

DAVID SANGSTER

In the past there has been a lack of clarity as we migrated through different products into FTTP and the various standards, which most businesses do not understand

Continued from page 45

The following sets of words do not sit in harmony together: On the one hand, we hear it's time to act now on full fibre and not be left behind; on the other, there is a lack of clarity on what B2B products will look like. Unsurprisingly, the issue is high priority. "Most of my time at the moment is spent on the business case for FTTP," said Milligan. "A key consideration point is whether a business FTTP product should look exactly the same as residential. I'm not sure that should happen. From a FTTP perspective we'll probably start trials in the summer of XGS-PON and some of the more symmetrical products."

For all the industry pressure which is heaped on Openreach, on full fibre it has shown flexibility in its capacity for course setting and correction and meeting the channel's requirements on agreed terms. That said, so far in B2B services there's no collaboration on technical specifications, pointed out McArthur. "We might see altnets delivering subtly different service levels in the B2B layer," he said. "That's not happening in residential. Its a challenge for the industry to get to a point where we don't confuse the B2B audience."

In such mega-projects the channel has, more than ever, a vested interest in keeping things simple and customers up to speed. "In the past there has been a lack of clarity as we migrated through different products into FTTP and the different standards, which most businesses don't understand," added David Sangster, Managing Director,

G.Network. "Our responsibility is to educate. We need to provide clarity around the benefits these different products deliver. Most SMEs aren't willing to pay massive premiums, whether it's an upfront connection fee or even monthly for a leased line service. FTTP is absolutely perfect for the vast majority of these types of organisations. They get more reliable services and higher speeds, but they may not be in the market for traditional Ethernet."

According to McArthur, Ethernet is a 'fabulous tool' in the business community because of standardisation. "Once you start to run Ethernet over the top you know it's going to be full to capacity across the planet," he added. "While 2.5 and 10 GPON is an asymmetric service, and therefore poses challenges in B2B, the early adopters see it as a cheap high bandwidth service. They accept that it's not as symmetric as they need at all times because it's cost-effective. As we get more sophisticated and create better service wraps with Ethernet we will start to see the convergence of suppliers being driven by that technical plan."

It is clear that the comms sector requires a strong sense of guidance and leadership right now. It's a vital role that TalkTalk and FibreNation have embraced as they seek to become a potent force in the build out of Digital Britain. "You ignore FTTP at your peril," reiterated McArthur. "It will grow fast so get on the bandwagon. Track it, learn its capabilities, learn about the products you will be selling, and when FTTP grows, grow with it." ∎

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Roper takes direct line

Here we chart Anna Roper's journey from switchboard operator to 9 Group's Sales Director, and reveal the lessons we can all learn from her blend of directness, honesty, transparency and belief that there is always a solution no matter the challenge.
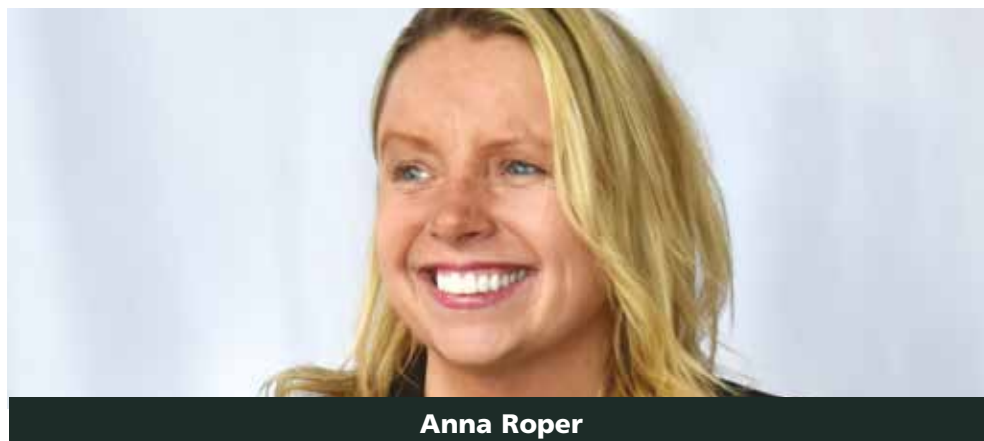
Anna Roper

You are a Sales or Channel Director faced with a partnership issue and wondering how to resolve it. What do you do? You would be wise to take a leaf out of Roper's book, whose approach to managing channel partnerships is all-encompassing, transparent – and shows why honesty is always the best policy. "If there are difficult conversations to be had I don't hide behind email," she stated. "Instead, I visit the partner in person wherever possible and actually talk to them. This is one of the reasons partners tell me that I'm approachable, personable, direct and trustworthy.

"I'm also naturally inquisitive, so when I don't understand something I am not shy to ask partners to explain their position in idiot terms that enable me to help them. This way, they can rely on me to be honest about any situation and never stop until there is a resolution."

No one doubts that honesty is always the best policy, but to entirely decant partner challenges and pinch points into a pool of potential solutions requires more than a 'conventional' transfer of pertinent information. "During many of my partner meetings we will spend much time talking about anything but telecoms, but the art is to still ensure that information is successfully exchanged," added Roper. "Ultimately, my approach means that the relationship will always be strengthened. There is no substitute for a face-to-face meeting to understand what is driving a partner, and identifying where 9 can add value and help them to achieve their own plans."

Taking ownership
Despite Roper's strong will for a solution there is not always a 'way' when factors beyond her control come into play. "A personal frustration is being unable to help as quickly or thoroughly as I would like because of poor delivery from the large operators and the impenetrable nature of their systems," she stated. "Nevertheless, 9 recognises the importance of ownership when problems arise and does not abdicate responsibility or transfer the blame to others. My customer service experience allows me to empathise with the problems that our partners face in these

There is no substitute for a face-to-face meeting to understand what is driving a partner

situations, and where possible find a way to fix them."

Roper found her way into telecoms as a receptionist for Swedish telco Telia in London after she moved from her native Wales in 1998. She went on to hold customer facing roles with Worldcom and Gamma before joining 9 Group in 2007. "My experience in front line operations roles has been pivotal in enabling me to make a successful transition to sales, and ultimately achieve my ambition of becoming a Sales Director," she explained.

Roper's direct 'get to the nub of the matter' approach must become an example and beacon to the wider industry if we are to bring greater transparency to how the UK's connectivity landscape will shape up, and the implications of a forthcoming transformation on the channel. "Partners' concerns over BT's plans for the legacy network are deepening," stated Roper. "The carriers are not transparent regarding their future product sets, and more importantly how they plan to deliver them. Partners are uncertain and still have many unanswered questions on the connectivity changes ahead."

Far more certain is that Roper has become a role model for aspiring women in the comms sector; and her example is reflective of an equalising adjustment to the gender balance in leadership across the industry. "Today there are many organisations with women in decision making positions," commented Roper. "We are moving more towards balancing the gender ratios of leadership roles in the ICT sector.

"Overall, the position and influence of women has strengthened over time and will continue to do so. Consider the patent that screen actress Heddy Lamarr filed for frequency-hopping technology in 1941, which became a precursor to the secure Wi-Fi, GPS and Bluetooth technology now used by billions of people around the world. Her idea was brushed aside at the time only for others to take the credit later. That wouldn't happen in today's world, so we are moving forwards." ■

Just a minute with Anna Roper...

Role models: People who focus on the positive no matter their situation

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Giving more support to charities that aid the mental health of ex-service personnel

Your main strength and what could you work on? I'm loyal and committed to our partners; but I need to work on delegating more to others

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I can do magic tricks

What possession could you not live without? My lucky piece of wood

How do you relax? Camping. The isolation and freedom provides a welcome contrast to the hullabaloo of leading a channel sales team

A true channel champ

The channel's capacity to grow across key expanding tech markets could be near limitless, according to Gamma's Managing Director for Channel Daryl Pile, who even mooted the possibility of Gamma one day becoming a billion pound revenue powerhouse, such is his strong belief in the high growth potential of partnerships.

Daryl Pile

Reaching sustainable profitability in 2006 and taking the necessary risk on VoIP services, which led to transformational growth between 2010 and 2012, put Gamma on course to becoming a billion pound company, according to Pile. Moreover, a structured and inclusive approach to strategy and culture, along with recent expansion into Europe and a focus on UCaaS provides another strong foundation to build on, he believes.

"Since Gamma's AIM floatation in 2014 we targeted and achieved double digit revenue growth, gross margin and EBITDA," he commented. "As we enter a new chapter with clear strategic goals in UCaaS, digital delivery, expansion into Europe and our core markets, the question is how far can the channel advance and grow? Industry analysis indicates that the channel provisions over half of all new SIP business in the UK. So why can't we do the same in data, mobile, UCaaS and security?"

Pile's current priorities are to continue driving growth in core markets with a focus on Horizon Collaborate, the company's UCaaS service, while also building momentum in mobile. "It is becoming congested at a vendor level," he observed. "Many new entrants, particularly in hosted PBX, mean the UK market is not large enough to provide sales based on every platform being 'leading edge', 'highly resilient', 'scalable' and 'highly automated'. How this market consolidates and finds equilibrium without a race to the floor on price is a challenge Gamma is ready to meet."

New technology areas of interest to Pile include digital platforms that have been designed to sell and self-serve. "They meet the demands of an increasing number of customers who prefer to interact and buy services digitally because it gives them a better experience," he said. "AI will also improve the customer experience, and the integration of different connectivity types, especially

Digitalisation is everywhere, speeding everything up, and our customers are being influenced by the immediacy of product delivery, consumption and service

wireless, is essential because customers expect services regardless of time and place. We need to be ready for that.

"Over the long-term many of the services we provide will be simplified, particularly as cost-effective broadband connectivity becomes more affordable yet capable of providing high definition video and voice for the office. APIs and digital interfaces will mean the customer is able to do more, instantly, but laid out very simply. This trend towards simplification means partners need to think carefully about where they are adding value. Digitalisation is everywhere and speeding things up, and our customers, both business clients and channel partners, are being

influenced by the immediacy of product delivery, consumption and service."

Digital destination

Digitalisation has defined the channel's destiny, and to a large extent the innovative nature of the tech sector helped to define Pile's career path. "My early interest in business and technology, the fast paced nature of the buoyant telecoms market, and working in the city of London with an opportunity to earn enough to provide well for a future family were all factors that attracted me to the sector," he said. "After completing a degree in Business Economics I saw that the telecoms and Internet market was evolving exponentially. I signed up with a recruitment firm that

specialised in that sector and my first job was at Telia's UK Office in 1998 where I was placed into the channel business unit. The channel was dominant in terms of revenue and margin, but under served in focus by Telia and across the wider industry.

"At that time I wondered what could be achieved if we focused more on the channel, then along came Gamma. It bought a high-quality network in Atlantic Telecom at a low price and needed to light and fill it. During the three years after Gamma purchased Telia's channel business in 2002 the subsequent organic growth confirmed that the channel route to market could be sustainable and profitable in the long-term which is exciting.

"Now I am wedded to the comms sector and Gamma, and did not hesitate to grasp the opportunity to work with a great management team and channel partner base as Gamma's Managing Director, empowered to make the changes required for channel expansion and growth." ∎

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FREE TO PERFORM

Channel heroes acknowledged at the industry's leading team awards event

Hosted by inspirational England World Cup winning rugby legend Matt Dawson, this year's Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards extravaganza once again recognised and celebrated the channel's revenue generating superheroes.

Staged at the London Marriott Hotel in Mayfair and sponsored by KCOM, the spectacular event underlined once more the quality, innovation and determination of sales and marketing teams operating in the UK ICT channel.

Stand-out winners were Daisy Wholesale and IntY who both scooped a hat-trick of awards while Pure Telecom and Sirus Telecom won for the second year in succession. Virtual1 and Windsor Telecom were also top winners, securing the coveted 'Best Company to Work' For awards.

In his keynote address, Head of Channel

Sales at KCOM Dave Hawkins told the 400 strong audience that although the event celebrated the heroes in all channel businesses, teams in reseller companies were often the 'unsung heroes'.

"Resellers do the hard work, build a relationship, understand a business, shop around, select the right products and create a bespoke package or solution," he said.

"We need to embrace, empower and encourage our reseller channel to continue building those strong relationships, solving the difficult problems and adding value to our products. We need to recognise our resellers for the heroes they are."

Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent added:" The CDSMA is always a highlight of the BPL spring calendar and the event was as motivating and enjoyable as ever. The event once again underlined what a dynamic and inspiring industry we work in and recognised in style the teams that have made a big difference to their companies over the last year."

ROLL OF HONOUR

DISTRIBUTOR CHANNEL SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR – INTY

DISTRIBUTOR CHANNEL MARKETING TEAM OF THE YEAR – INTY

DISTRIBUTOR CHANNEL MARKETING CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR – WESTCON

SERVICE PROVIDER CHANNEL SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR – DAISY WHOLESALE

SERVICE PROVIDER CHANNEL MARKETING TEAM OF THE YEAR – 9 GROUP

SERVICE PROVIDER CHANNEL MARKETING CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR – PANGEA

VENDOR CHANNEL SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR – UNION STREET

VENDOR CHANNEL MARKETING TEAM OF THE YEAR – INFORM BILLING

VENDOR CHANNEL MARKETING CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR – VIRTUAL1

RESELLER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR (UP TO £2.5m) – SIRUS TELECOM

RESELLER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR (£2.5m- £10m) – PURE TELECOM

RESELLER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR (above £10m) – BERRY TELECOM

RESELLER MARKETING TEAM OF THE YEAR (up to £10m) – MPS

RESELLER MARKETING TEAM OF THE YEAR (above £10m) – BERRY TELECOM

RESELLER MARKETING CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR – FOCUS GROUP

BEST SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN – PRAGMA

BEST PR CAMPAIGN – SWCOMMS

BEST APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME – BT WHOLESALE

BEST PARTNER/CUSTOMER EVENT – INTY

BEST SALES SUPPORT TEAM – DAISY WHOLESALE

CHARITY & FUNDRAISING AWARD – GAMMA

BEST COMPANY TO WORK FOR (UNDER £10m) – WINDSOR TELECOM

BEST COMPANY TO WORK FOR (OVER £10m) – VIRTUAL1

COMMS DEALER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR – DAISY WHOLESALE

Security: SME's fate sits in

The general consensus is that there is only one solution to the cybersecurity threat now faced by SMEs – to work in tandem with ICT partners that are closely allied to the channel's more holistic minded Managed Security Service Providers.

N o longer should SMEs assume they exist comfortably under the radar screens of cyber criminals. No more should they consider themselves small fry, unworthy of attack. Now, implementing a security strategy should be the default position for all SMEs. They must wake up to the threats they face on a daily basis and seek help from their ICT providers. "It's difficult enough to find staff with the right security skills, let alone the right attitude – it's even more difficult to retain them," stated Trevor Parks, Principal Solution Architect, Information Security at Masergy. "The answer is simple – leverage cybersecurity partners."

The biggest threat to SMEs, according to Parks, is complacency and a false sense of immunity from attack. "SMEs generally face the same cyber threats as larger enterprises," he said. "Everyone is a target, but SMEs are invariably more susceptible to a breach because of lower defences due to a lack of funding. It costs very little to put a good cyber security awareness programme in place for SME staff. It provides the best bang for the buck. This is the absolute minimum SMEs should aim for, and be in addition to using infrastructure and services that have been designed with information and IT security in mind."

Trevor Parks

Everyone is a target, but SMEs are invariably more susceptible to a breach because of lower defences due to a lack of funding.

In recent times security products have moved from a focus on the perpetual licence model to a subscription-based modus operandi. "The most significant value a security service can add to a reseller business is predictable and regular monthly revenue for the lifetime of the contract, plus a happy and sticky customer that will typically purchase more services as time goes by," added Parks. "Rising cloud adoption introduces more security challenges for businesses, but it ties in nicely with the security service subscription-based licensing model that most MSSPs and MDR providers offer."

A number of factors have combined to transform SMEs into an important and untapped security market. These include automation, security orchestration,

Automation and Response (SOAR) platforms, machine learning and behavioural analysis. "Cybersecurity service providers are making much better use of automation, driven by some or all of the above systems and processes," explained Parks. "Not just to speed up the Mean Time To Detect (MTTD) and Mean Time To Respond (MTTR) to cyber attacks and anomalous activity, but to streamline resources and ultimately make cybersecurity services more affordable for SMEs."

Masergy provides partners with training to help them identify the customers that would most benefit from security services. Its analysis is based on business sector, company size, revenue statistics and other metrics. "As time progresses and the threat landscape continues to morph, Masergy will

expand its security product partner relationships to broaden its portfolio and pass on efficiencies to customers," added Parks.

Tech advances
Technology-wise, advances in machine learning and the introduction of Artificial Intelligence have been on Masergy's agenda for some time. "For security services providers such as ourselves, innovation around SOAR system efficiency and leveraging ML and AI are key differentiating factors that will continue to enable us to keep up with cyber criminals and malicious threat actors, and to take full advantage of innovation in cloud-security product development," noted Parks.

"Furthermore, the reduction and eventual loss of signature-based systems is not far off, so tools that

provide visibility and control of network traffic and process paths will become more and more relevant. The growth of cloud services is forcing innovation in the cloud-security arena, which is where we see the most growth of sorely needed security products."

According to Jonathan Whitley, Director for Northern Europe, WatchGuard Technologies, a single appliance that delivers enterprise grade security and is simple to deploy and manage is the order of the day for SMEs. "As well as a good firewall, every network needs a full arsenal of scanning engines to provide visibility, threat intelligence and protection against spyware and viruses, malicious applications and data leakage – all the way through to ransomware, botnets, advanced persistent threats and zero-day malware," commented Whitley.

It's no secret that humans are the weakest link, and the recent Verizon Data Breaches Investigations Report indicated that circa 90 per cent of breaches start with a phishing or social engineering attack. "By making employees smarter about attacks they can become a human firewall and a good anti-phishing education programme can reduce click rates on malicious links from 40-50 per cent to below 10 per cent," added

the hands of ICT partners

Whitley. "But spotting a malicious email is not easy. Attackers are gathering more intelligence on their victims, friends and colleagues and interact with them. There is also an increase in so-called CEO fraud where the attacker impersonates senior management. Fundamentally, we need to change the culture in organisations around phishing. We need to move away from the blame culture so it is OK to make a mistake and learn from the error. It only takes one user to spot and report a phishing email to protect other users in the company and go from 'zero to hero'."

The other major user problem is stolen or weak passwords, noted Whitley. "We all struggle with remembering a multitude of long, complex and secure passwords so on the face of it the use of multi-factor authentication (MFA) is compelling," he stated. "MFA is simply a security system that requires more than one method of authentication to verify the user's identity for a login or other transaction.

"But traditional MFA solutions have been too expensive and complex, particularly for SMEs, and can be seen as a hassle for end users. Cloud-based MFA requires no on-premise equipment which cuts down on costly deployment and management activities, while a choice of modern authentication methods including push notifications, one-time-passwords or QR codes to a mobile device provides good security combined with an improved user experience. If we are to significantly reduce the number of breaches from poor password

Jonathan Whitley

It is up to traditional security vendors to help MSPs embrace and deliver cloud-ready packaged security services that are simple to deploy and manage.

practice, it's time for SMEs to adopt MFA."

Faced with the rising tide of cybersecurity threats, SMEs are increasingly looking to their IT managed service providers to add security and go from MSP to MSSP, as a way to make cost-effective security available. "It is up to traditional security vendors to help MSPs embrace and deliver cloud-ready packaged security services that are simple to deploy and manage," added Whitley. "For a MSSP programme to work, proper packaging and delivery of services is vital.

This means helping security resellers who are accustomed to selling hardware-only to move to a services model.

Key tools
"This includes providing technical tools to deploy, manage and provision an MSSP's security estate and give full visibility to demonstrate that the services solution works and is delivering protection and tangible value. The commercial arrangements also need to accommodate annual and monthly billing and flexible licensing, as well as the ability to scale up

Ian Kilpatrick

Coupling cyber hygiene solutions with support from value add partners for training, as well as carrying out penetration testing, are strong first steps for SMEs.

and down instantly to meet changing requirements."

As we have seen, SMBs are facing ever rising security threats and in many cases they are strategically unprepared, and therefore unable, to contain an assault. Attacks continue to threaten the external perimeter – but the threat is also internal, reiterated Ian Kilpatrick, Strategic Advisor Cyber Security at Nuvias Group. "The lack of strategic focus on cybersecurity has left many SMEs challenged," he stated. "They haven't planned security into their culture and therefore staff don't think about cybersecurity. So their response to security challenges is often reactive which doesn't strengthen their defences.

"A considered plan is the best place to start. This should be projected over a number of years as it is unlikely that SMEs will be able to deploy all the solutions that they need in 12 months. SMEs first need to work out what their most valuable assets are and how to protect them, rather than try to protect everything.

The next thing to do is to change the cyber habits of one of the weakest security links – company staff. In a world of hybrid access, users are the weakest link. If staff don't have good cyber hygiene awareness and training it's impossible to expect them to use good cyber behaviour in the office.

"There will be channel opportunities to provide Entity and User Behaviour Analytics (EUBA) systems as well as solutions that offer user training to deal with issues such as phishing and social engineering attacks. Coupling cyber hygiene solutions with support from value add partners for training, as well as carrying out penetration testing, are strong first steps for SMEs."

Two factor authentication is another inexpensive, clearly visible and effective means of slamming the door on a number of threat areas. Yet surprisingly, 2FA is still only deployed in a minority of companies, pointed out Kilpatrick. "Multi-factor authentication and identity management, including single sign-on, will grow rapidly in 2019," he added. "Insecurity has increased through the move towards hybrid access, which can include a mix of cloud, on-premises and managed access, using multiple devices and involving multiple applications. Not surprisingly, cloud security and security for multiple applications in the cloud will also continue to be an area of growth for the channel. This can involve a variety of solutions including encryption, risk analysis, access and identity management – including single sign-on – and managed security." ∎

G3 swaps Chairman

Mark Thompson

MARK Thompson has joined G3 Comms as Chairman, replacing co-founder Tony Parish who continues as Non-Executive Director and shareholder. The appointment follows April's acquisition of a majority shareholding in G3 Comms by Apiary Capital. Thompson brings over 25 years industry experience and has held senior roles at Reliance Communications, Energis and Intercity Mobile Communications. Following the exit of Easynet MDNX in 2015 Thompson pursued personal interests. Prior to his commercial career he spent 12 years as a Royal Navy Engineer specialising in electronics and communications.

Thompson said: "G3 Comms is well positioned but sustainable growth can be attained only by achieving scale in the marketplace and by augmenting core operations with the diverse range of products and services that support business communications today. With the support of the Apiary investment team we have the means to address these challenges with a buy and build approach directed at carefully targeted acquisitions."

Thompson's arrival follows last month's appointment of David Blackburn as CTO and board director. It also follows the hire of Gary Robinson, who joined from Vodafone, to manage the G3 Comms sales function. G3 Comms CEO James Arnold-Roberts added: "We plan to expand our activity into the global enterprise market, so Mark's experience of working in this sector will be invaluable."

Also on the move...

David Meads

CISCO'S Middle East and Africa business leader David Meads is poised for a career move at the beginning of the new fiscal year (29th July) when he becomes Vice President for Cisco's EMEAR Partner Organisation. He joined Cisco in 1996 and has held several leadership roles in the UK before moving to Johannesburg as GM for South Africa in 2010. Meads went on to lead Cisco's Africa business in 2012 before taking on the combined Middle East and Africa role two years ago. He also has an understanding of the partner landscape having worked in one of Cisco UK's largest Cisco Gold Partners for 10 years.

BIRMINGHAM-based Intercity Technology's executive board line up has been bolstered by the appointments of Neil Parker as Chief Sales and

Chris Sharp

Marketing Officer and Chris Sharp as Chief Financial Officer. Intercity's CEO Andrew Jackson commented: "Our team is our biggest asset, and we couldn't be more excited to have Neil and Chris on board to drive forward on our strategy." The appointments follow the company's investment into a technology hub in the midlands which includes the build of Intercity's flagship data centre and a redesign of its HQ.

Nerland gets Masergy role

Emily Nerland

FORMER TalkTalk Business International Carriers Account Manager Emily Nerland has joined Masergy as Channel Director EMEA. In leading the UK channel account management team Canadian born Nerland will focus mainly on supporting partners' portfolios in security, international networks and SD WAN. Prior roles include stints at tlPicall UK as Account Manager and Channel Sales and Marketing Manager at Zamir Telecom. "I'm excited to be joining the Masergy team and executing on its plans to drive continued growth in the channel," said Nerland. "The market opportunity for our partners is boundless."

ITS boosted by Lee hire

ALTERNATIVE full fibre and hybrid network operator ITS has strengthened its wholesale team with the appointment of Philip Lee as Partner

Philip Lee

Development Manager. Lee joins from Daisy Group where he helped to build the partner offer. Previous positions include a spell at Virgin Media Business.

ITS CEO Daren Baythorpe commented: "This is an important appointment in terms of taking our wholesale offering to the next level. As we continue to build and grow our full fibre and hybrid footprint we need likeminded partners to come on board. Philip's track record is impressive and he will bring a lot to the table."

ITS currently has 22 full fibre and hybrid networks and launched a partner recruitment campaign in late 2018 after the arrival of Dave Hudson, former Managing Director of Wholesale at Zen Internet, as Business Development Director. ITS has since added over 20 new partners.

Louth rocks up at Logicalis UK

LOGICALIS UK has pulled in Alex Louth as Managing Director. He moves from Data Intensity, a multi-cloud managed services provider, where he spent over two years managing the integration of his former business Red Stack Tech after its

Alex Louth

acquisition by the firm in 2016. Louth brings more than 20 years experience working in the IT channel.

"The marketplace is changing and there's a great opportunity to establish ourselves as a long-term value partner to our customers, helping them navigate ongoing business and technology change through engagements driven by much greater levels of intimacy, customer experience and service provision," stated Louth. "The business has been restructured and re-energised, and I'm excited to work with the management team to ensure we increase our value to customers."

Axe HS2 urges Daniell

The construction of HS2 has been pushed back again and with contractors struggling to keep to the £56 billion target build cost, a leading figure in the ICT industry has called upon the project to be scrapped in favour of expenditure on the UK's digital networks.

Piers Daniell

FluidOne Chairman Piers Daniell believes the UK should abandon HS2 – and other costly infrastructure projects – in favour of wholesale investment in fibre connectivity. "Instead of concentrating on a platform that would benefit us, our children and our children's children we have focused on several national projects that are dated and mired in controversy," he said. "We are going to sink billions into a century old technology that, according to the CBI will end up creating a 'two-speed England' let alone Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This investment along with Heathrow and London's Crossrail is a patchwork quilt approach and doesn't include the masses across the country who have shown through the Brexit vote that they are being left behind."

Daniell's views have been backed up by research carried out by top US pollster Frank Luntz who, in a briefing to the Conservative Party, said supporters would be more likely to support a leadership contender who pledged to axe HS2. Meanwhile, the Midlands Economic Forum (MEF), which has produced new analysis on the controversial high-speed rail link, has raised concerns that phase one of the scheme – which is set to link Birmingham and London – may not be complete until 2030. And, taking into account the further delay to the completion of Crossrail, that timeline has to be optimistic. Daniell is convinced HS2 will end up costing over £100 billion or more and will not benefit people across the whole of the British Isles.

"We should be lighting up the UK with true end-to-end fibre optic cable, enabling our country to lead the world in the digital economy," he added. "Every part of our country would benefit from an infrastructure that works at the speed of light, a platform onto which countless businesses and industries could be built, millions of physical journeys avoided, and cost savings delivered throughout the public sector."

Daniell's views chime with those of Per Odling, a telecoms professor at Lund University in Sweden who is pushing his country to take digitalisation to the countryside. Odling says

We should be lighting up the UK with true end-to-end fibre optic cable

digitising the countryside as well as cities will bring major benefits such as new online healthcare services to all people, rather than just those with access to a fast digital network. "I would be more inclined to live remotely should the investment in a digital infrastructure enable that," said Daniell.

"There is no argument for keeping HS2 alive and Government would be wise to can the project and throw all its might into a truly successful and forward-looking fibre optic network. It does not mean we cannot revisit the idea of super-fast travel between our cities, but let's review that on the basis of emerging technologies that enable people to 'virtually' communicate at the speed of light."

Daniell says the benefits and opportunity for connecting every part of our country to fibre optic is well understood and even BT proposed the idea to Margaret Thatcher in the eighties. "Imagine what a country we would live in today if we had that kind of infrastructure through the nineties and noughties," he speculated. "A lack lustre effort by previous governments to improve broadband speeds with a 'superfast broadband' roll out has managed to connect five million homes and businesses and generated an increase of £9 billion in revenue for companies as a result."

Dramatic returns

The Department or Digital, Culture, Media and Sport commissioned Ipsos Mori and Simetrica to ascertain the economic impact of the broadband subsidy programme during 2012 and 2016 and it was calculated that there had been a £690 million net increase in gross added value to the UK economy. "We saw dramatic returns, and that doesn't include the £500 million returned by BT as part of the funding scheme because take up was higher than expected," added Daniell.

Some argue that 5G will deliver the high speed connectivity applications required, but Daniell is not convinced. "5G has a future and a role to play, but it is limited by physics and I'm sure it will be superseded within a decade by 6G or the like," he added. "Fibre on the other hand gives us a platform on which lasers and optics can be upgraded for decades, achieving speeds we can't even imagine today. That is what we should be investing in, not old technology to satisfy our needs for the next few years."

According to Daniell, the Government should commit to bringing optical fibre to every part of the country within the next five years and achieve a level of investment that would see massive savings compared to HS2, and deliver a huge return for the UK economy and society as a whole. And with the Brexit debacle creating an increasingly divided country, he believes it would be a unifying force. He added: "I truly believe that investment in a digital infrastructure would help unite our country and provide us with a globally leading platform on which to base the future of our economy and society." ∎

Should HS2 be axed and ca

IT is predicted that the HS2 rail project could ultimately cost the taxpayer £100billion and it's dawning on Government ministers that delivering top–quality fibre-optic connectivity across the country could be a much smarter use of public money.

One is Chief Secretary to the Treasury Liz Truss, who wants to accelerate the high-speed internet revolution – funded by the billions currently earmarked for HS2 – and has launched a review into how to free up money to dramatically bring forward the roll-out of 'full fibre' broadband.

We feel sure the vast majority of the channel community would prefer to see more opportunities to hook up new comms services to high speed networks, than saving half an hour on the journey time from Birmingham to London.

And there is also a growing group of campaigners – including the Taxpayers Alliance and the New Economics Foundation - calling for HS2 to be axed due to the growing costs and damage to the environment. Estimates for the railway currently stand at £60 billion, but it could spiral to £100 billion and run way past estimates for completion, in common with London's Crossrail project which is already two years behind schedule.

ANDREW DICKINSON – MANAGING DIRECTOR, JOLA

FIBRE ROLL-OUT DOES NOT NEED GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

"With access to Openreach poles and ducts, plus micro-trenching and amazing new fibre splicing technology, fibre companies really have no need for Government support. There are at least 15 fibre-infrastructure companies in the UK. They mostly have 25-year investment plans and, with an average cost to install per site of only £500, their ROI looks stellar. Getting the Government involved in this would be like introducing the BBC into a thriving commercial radio industry.

"HS2 will cost a lot of money, will be very disruptive and it will definitely run over budget. However, if the trains are carbon neutral and we can get people out of cars, then I suppose that's a good thing. Also, big infrastructure projects are great for the economy if the investment stays mainly in the UK.

"Personally, I'd rather jump on Teams these days for a meeting than jump on a 45-minute train to Birmingham. Also, remember that most people don't live in the centre of London or Birmingham, so they must get there first which probably adds an hour to the journey."

MARK CURTIS WOOD – GROUP SALES & MARKETING DIRECTOR, VAONI

A BETTER-CONNECTED UK WOULD PROVIDE BETTER ROI LONG TERM

"Should the Government axe HS2 now and allocate the money to fibre connectivity across the UK? I believe the bigger question is what does £60 billion really gives us? In the quest to become a fully Digital Britain there is an argument that the money could be used more effectively to leverage a better-connected UK through an extended fibre roll-out and provide a far better return on investment in the long term.

"A better-connected Britain would allow people to travel less as we use technology to communicate better and therefore reduce our carbon footprint. With better connectivity it doesn't matter where you are as you can connect via video conference and give people more choice on how and when they travel.

"For me, the argument for Transport v Technology is one of giving people more choice over how they balance work and life."

ROB SIMS – GROUP CEO, ELITE GROUP

FIBRE ROLL-OUT IS A CRITICAL REQUIREMENT FOR NATION

"I think the roll-out of fibre across the UK is a critical requirement to meet the demands of rising bandwidth from both consumers and businesses and these requirements will only increase as we become a further connected nation (locally and globally). Although mobile services such as 5G will support this requirement, the UK fixed line access will be a continued critical requirement for many decades to come.

"The fibre roll-out should be a private and public investment in our infrastructure, but it should not be one or the other and we need to ensure it is prioritised, so we begin to move up the global ranking of next generation access services to attract businesses and ensure we can deliver our next generation services. If I had to choose between HS2 and the fibre roll-out I would choose the fibre roll-out, but my view is still the same - if we must pick between the fibre project or another we are missing the key point, the UK will need this regardless!"

GRAHAM WILKINSON – HEAD OF SALES, NETWORK SERVICES, NIMANS

## IF ONLY WE COULD TURN BACK THE CLOCK ON THE HS2 PROJECT

"Hindsight is a wonderful thing and I worry that the HS2 project may be too far down the line now to stop. Lots of money has already been spent and it seems already over budget. If the question had been asked at the beginning, I would say we don't need this project. From an ROI point of view in terms of economic benefits Manchester to London is just two hours anyway. The benefits would be much greater through a fibre roll-out especially in today's connected world where people work smarter not harder – and conferencing can take place instead of travelling.

"Clearly there will be benefits from HS2, but they tend to diminish the further north you travel. There are far better ways to spend the billions of pounds it will cost. But I fear it's too late now to divert that money elsewhere. Cross Pennine travel needs huge investment for example especially for the so-called northern powerhouse to reach its full potential. If only we could turn back the clock with HS2."

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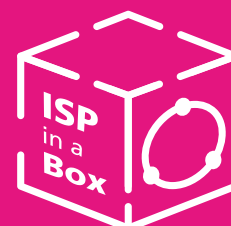
ash spent on fibre roll-out?

On the flip side, Governments of any colour do like big infrastructure projects - HS2 was originally conceived by Labour and rubber stamped by the Coalition administration - and the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, argues that the North needs HS2, as the main transport artery, to be connected to smaller rail connection projects across the area. Under the chairmanship of former Chancellor George Osbourne, The Partnership is urging the Government to give the green light to the £39bn plan for Northern Powerhouse Rail, the east-west rail connection, and guarantee that it opens in the North at the same time as HS2.

The debate is further fuelled by that fact that well-funded private enterprise is steaming ahead with the fibre roll-out so, is any Government money actually needed?

For this month's Kaleidoscope, we thought it would be interesting to garner the views of Northern channel focused businesses on the HS2 v Fibre question and posed two simple questions: should the Government axe HS2 now and allocate the money to fibre roll-out across the UK or should it continue with HS2, as it will strongly benefit the North and the UK economy as a whole? As ever there were polarised views, but the majority believe ubiquitous high-speed fibre could yield more benefits than a single high-speed railway.

LAUREN MCMANUS – MARKETING DIRECTOR, DIGITAL WHOLESALE SOLUTIONS

TIME CONSUMING HS2 PROJECT HAS SPIRALLED OUT OF CONTROL

"HS2 has the potential to shape how we travel with benefits to commuters and the rail industry but, unfortunately, it seems to have spiralled out of control and poor management has meant more money is being poured into the project that could have been better allocated to the fibre roll-out across the UK.

"HS2 is a time-consuming project that will likely have little bearing on current congestion issues on public transport, affecting people's commute, whereas, if the funds were spent on the fibre roll-out, this would help reduce the need for commuting in the first place. Employees could work from home, holding meetings over video conferencing with an ultrafast, stable fibre connection, improving efficiency and meeting the needs of the growing mobile workforce."

MARK COLLINS – DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, CITYFIBRE

WHY THE CHOICE? WHY CAN'T WE HAVE BOTH HS2 AND FULL FIBRE?

"It's increasingly recognised that access to next generation digital infrastructure is a critical driver of economic growth, innovation and job creation. It enhances the agility and efficiency of both public and private sectors. No one will deny that good transport infrastructure also has a crucial role. Yet in this carbon-conscious world, let's remember that good digital connectivity can reduce the need to travel altogether.

"And yet – why should the UK have to choose? Surely public investment is best focused where the market can't or won't provide? CityFibre and others are ploughing billions in private funds into fibre networks across the North and the UK as a whole. Northern Powerhouse leaders would agree - if Ofcom can establish a healthy, competitive digital infrastructure market, we could have both HS2 and full fibre."


ADRIAN BARNARD – ICT AND TECHNOLOGY COMMENTATOR

BENEFIT OF FIBRE TO REGIONS ACROSS THE UK IS IMMEASURABLE

"Of course the Government should axe HS2 now and allocate the money to fibre roll-out, but I'd give anyone long odds on it going ahead - at least between London and Birmingham. In a networked world never more focused on both the 'Local' and the 'Global', devolving access to the benefits of full fibre to the regions and fixed and mobile 'not spots' is almost immeasurable and clearly of significant benefit. Sadly, I and esteemed Comms Dealer readers are not the decision makers in this important national matter.

"That development follows investment is a well-known truism and economic fact. Whether or not the same amount of investment, if used locally to improve transport infrastructure in general, would yield better returns is the more useful investigation (and I bet it would). But since central Government is leading HS2, I doubt this will happen. I fear the phrase 'HS2' will become synonymous with a 'failed Government white elephant'."

DARREN GARLAND – MANAGING DIRECTOR, PROVU

HS2 SHOULD BE DOVETAILED INTO HS3 HIGH SPEED LINK FOR NORTH

"I believe the obvious and most important benefit to the North is building the High-Speed link between Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Hull (HS3), this would bring the largest economic benefit to the North for a relatively small investment as compared with HS2.

"If HS2 is to be built it needs to be dovetailed into HS3 in a seamless high-speed network, allowing connectivity of these major urban areas to allow the flow of people and goods in a fast, efficient modern railway network, that will deliver prosperity to a much wider population."
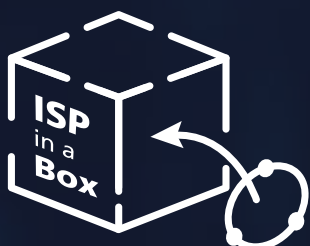
Strategic manoeuvre

Tim Sayer and Matt Brewster

DIRECTOR level promotions at Strategic Imperatives (SI) have significantly sharpened its focus on two key strategic areas. The appointment of former Head of Business Development Tim Sayer as Chief Operating Officer further brings to bear his capabilities in SaaS telecom billing and provisioning solutions.

Meanwhile, the instatement of Head of Service Delivery Matt Brewster as Chief Technology Officer brings to the fore his cloud and infrastructure knowledge to drive the development of the Elevate billing platform and CPConnect, an API that allows CPs to integrate with multiple network providers. CEO Wail Sabbagh stated: "We are in an enviable position with the rise of the subscription economy, the roll out of 5G connectivity and demand for intelligent billing solutions. Tim and Matt will be key to the company's next stage of growth."

Sayer added: "Elevate has a growing reputation among the communications, IT and software communities, and I am looking forward to working with the team to disrupt the billing landscape with fresh thinking solutions." Brewster commented: "These promotions allow us to focus on our growth strategy within a rapidly changing and challenging industry."

Also on the move...

Lee Underwood

LEE Underwood has joined Snom as Channel Manager for the UK&I territory. He brings almost 20 years experience in the telecommunications sector and has worked for a number of resellers. Most recently Underwood was a Channel Manager and cloud specialist at Unify. Snom's UK Distribution Director Alison Tetlow stated: "It's great to see Lee join Snom having known him for such a long time. His competence and expertise will contribute to the increase of Snom's presence in our region."

CHANNEL-only MSSP Foresite has pulled in Mark Collins as Partner Account Director. "In the past I've advised customers to layer security, to encrypt their data wherever it resides, to adopt technology to increase productivity and gain competitive

Mark Collins

edge," said Collins. "Now I'm back in the security market I see even bigger challenges than ever for organisations that our partners can address." Jason Humphreys, Foresite's Senior VP of Managed Services, added: "Mark's experience and know-how will strengthen existing relationships and enable new partners to enter the market to meet the security and compliancy needs of their customers, without the need to invest heavily in training or infrastructure."

Wireless whiz joins Pangea

Dr Arslan Usman

PANGEA'S 5G Project has received a boost following the appointment of Dr Arslan Usman as System Architect. He holds a Wireless Communications PhD and will unite the commercial and academic sides of the joint 5G Project launched by Pangea alongside Kingston University and Innovate UK. The project's intention is to develop enhanced video compression and data transfer capabilities over 5G connectivity.

Usman completed his PhD in IT Convergence Engineering in South Korea, and is credited with over 30 academic publications within the wireless communications field, with a heavy focus on 5G wireless networks.

Usman said: "My role is exciting: We have an ambitious agenda at hand, turning extensive research work from the world of 5G and beyond into user-centric, front-line devices and platforms."

COLT Technology Services has pulled in Melanie Halsey as EVP for Human Resources. She brings 20 years experience in HR and joins Colt from Eight Roads, the proprietary investment arm of Fidelity International, where she was Head of HR for six years.

Olive names Jane as CTO

HIGH Wycombe-based Olive Communications has appointed Andrew Jane as CTO. He moved from Mitel where he was responsible for delivering solutions for global cloud infrastructure,

Andrew Jane

environments and applications. Olive CEO Martin Flick commented: "This is an exciting time for Olive as the plans we laid down four years ago have proved successful, growing cloud revenues five-fold in that time, with some landmark customer wins and key milestones in partnership with Mitel and Vodafone."

Jane added: "Olive has proven success and credibility in the UC and Contact Centre cloud arena. It's exciting to be joining as the company continues to expand its global reach while transitioning and elevating its technological abilities to the next level."

Langley makes way for Craner

James Craner

A DIRECTORSHIP change at South West Communications sees James Craner join the firm as Financial Director replacing Harry Langley who is now the Group's Company Secretary. Craner qualified with Arthur Andersen and brings 24 years experience in senior management. Prior roles include stints at Curver UK, Catalent, Baldor Electric Company and Ultra Electronics. He most recently worked as a corporate finance consultant. South West Communications Managing Director Brian Lodge said: "James will build on Harry's exemplary work as we strive to grow our business into the managed services arena. His experience outside our industry and strong financial leadership will be key to our success."

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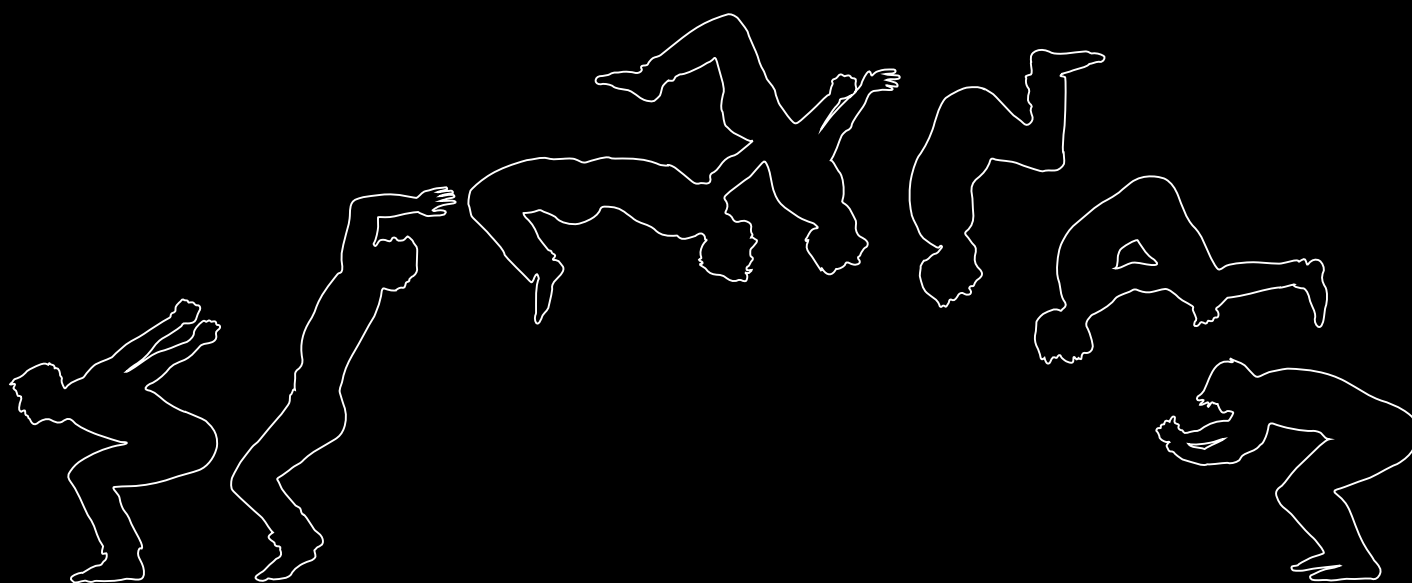
o Officially known as the Games of the XXXII Olympiad , commonly known as Tokyo 2020.
o Scheduled to take place from 24 July to 9 August 2020 in Tokyo, Japan.
o These Games will mark the return of the Summer Olympics to Tokyo for the first time since 1964, the first city in Asia to host the Olympics twice.

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