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January/
February 2024
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ISSN: 1742-8440 Copyright 2024

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The Editor

Welcome to PCR's first issue of 2024



As you might expect, we've had a look at what the industry is saying about this next year to come. Whether it's hardware, software, cloud, edge or any other area of tech, artificial intelligence seems to be the name of the game. Take a look at our overview of opinion in the 2024 predictions.

Sustainability is our other area of focus in this issue and Amber Hovious of Teamwork Commerce discusses how to balance online and brick-and-mortar retail, with sustainability playing a surprisingly important role. With a view towards a company's responsibility to sustainability, Richard Slade of Utelize Mobile talks about the multi-faceted approach the company has towards the environment. Meanwhile, Kevin Wragg of TD Synnex talks about how sustainability is growing in importance.

In our big interview, Yana Kuzmanova talks to us about why Logitech has recently overhauled its partner programme and what it means for partners, while in our Life in the Channel interview, Rob Young, of Infinity Group reveals the company's journey from its founding to its current growth and expansion plans.

Ecommerce is an inescapable part of everyday life for retailers these days. John Hayes-Warren of Agilitas looks at four key disciplines that can help align customer and employee channels, while Daniel Todaro of the Gekko Group looks at where brands should be focusing their attention if they wish to grow their e-commerce performance in 2024. Retail Express' Ed Betts explores the ways digital transformation can lead retailers to new horizons and help them get the edge in a crowded, competitive market.

When it comes to choosing between on-premises and cloud-based document management solutions, the decision can be challenging. David Malan of DocuWare delves into the key considerations. AI and security is a rapidly evolving issue, so Clyde Williamson and Nathan Vega of Protegrity explore what often seems to be a complex relationship between the two.

Finally, James Barrett of Michael Page Technology talks to PCR about the current trends within tech recruitment.

I hope you find this issue informative and interesting.

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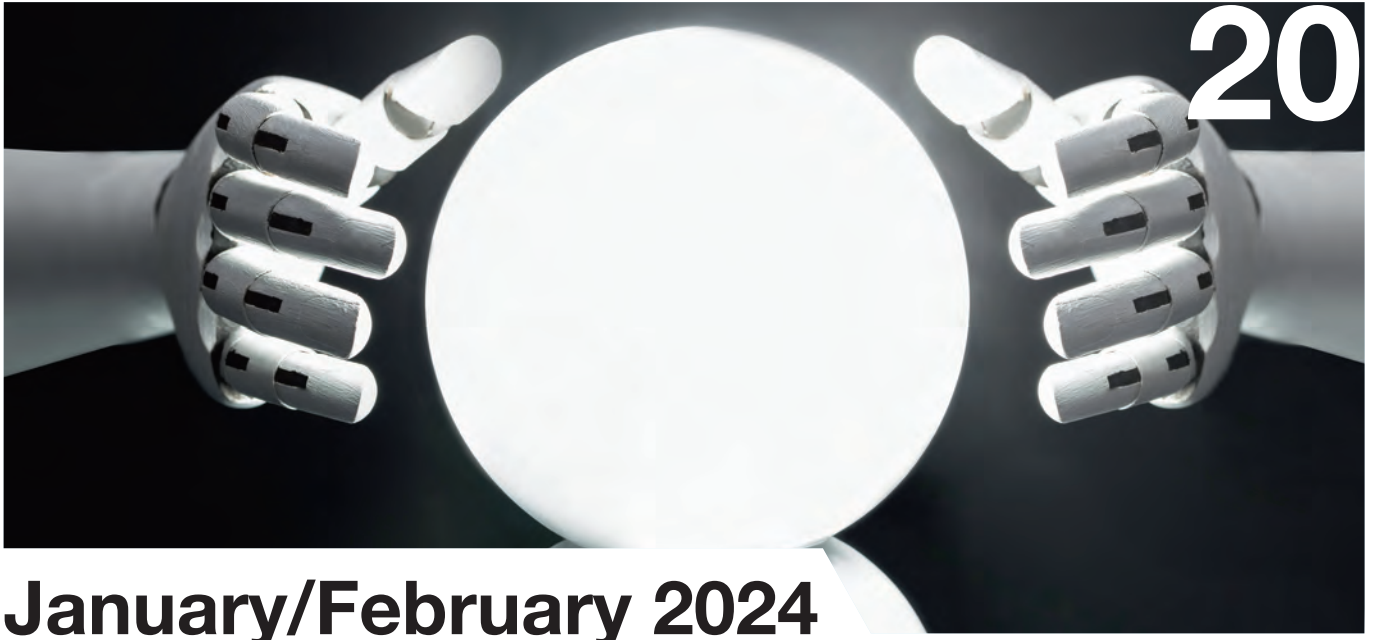
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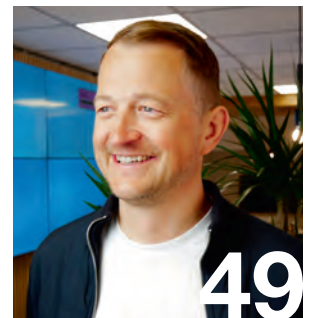
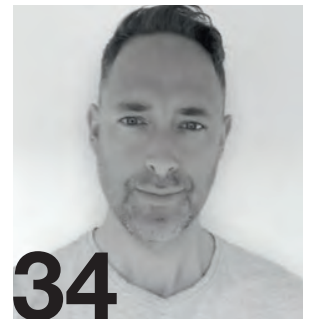
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SUSTAINABILITY DRIVES HIGH QUALITY SHOPPING

Amber Hovious, VP of marketing and partnerships at Teamwork Commerce discusses how to balance online and brick-and-mortar retail operations in 2024.




According to a survey by Bank of America, 42% of customers intend to spend more online over the next 12 months, with convenience being the key driver. The trend seems to be already in action, with 2023's Black Friday weekend generating \$38 billion in online sales, indicating an increase in online shopping. Meanwhile, there was also a significant consumer appetite for in-store shopping experiences. According to McKinsey, 85% of customers planned to purchase at least one item in-store in the 2023 holiday season.

The ability to try products physically remains significantly valuable. While one sales

channel may outpace the other in the short-term based on consumer preferences, both online and offline fulfilment are crucial for retailers to thrive in today's environment - where consumers demand convenient experiences that best suit their evolving needs. Retailers need to be able to effectively manage operations across both brick-and-mortar and e-commerce.

The balance between offline and online: Why is it important?

Today, customers have unique needs and diverse shopping preferences. Some favour the ease of purchasing online, while others place a



higher value on the tangible experience of shopping in-store. Simultaneously, there exists a segment of shoppers who embrace hybrid shopping models where they browse online and make purchases in-store. In fact, an anticipated 53% of UK consumers plan to conduct online research before making any major purchases in 2024.

Whether to deliver convenient and seamless shopping experiences or to maximise sales, having an appropriate presence over both offline and online platforms is necessary. Relying solely on one channel can make a retail business vulnerable to potential disruptions. Finding the right equilibrium between offline and online is critical. Ensuring a balance between channels can help retailers cater to their customers' diverse needs.

Amid ever-changing trends that influence both online and offline realms, the right balance between offline and online can help retailers swiftly adapt to market trends, allowing them to stay relevant and competitive in the face of changing consumer preferences. Using a blended approach, retailers can have access to multiple touchpoints that help them engage with customers, gaining increased opportunities to win consumer loyalty. It also allows them to diversify their risk. For instance, during Covid-19 retailers with a strong online presence continued to serve customers even when physical stores faced restrictions.

To strike the right balance between their offline and online channels, retailers must create a frictionless omnichannel environment for their customers, allowing them to browse online, make purchases, and even return or exchange items in-store. This integrated approach can significantly improve overall customer satisfaction. The key lies in integrating physical stores with online platforms to create a unified shopping environment.

Brick-and-mortar and online: The need to connect the two

There is no denying that omnichannel retail has taken the industry by storm. However, there is significantly more that needs to be done by retailers to capitalise on opportunities provided by the omnichannel boom. Retailers must connect their physical stores with online sales channels to boost visibility for their customers and themselves alike. If the customer has ordered an item using the Buy Online, Pickup Instore (BOPIS) service, they should be able to track their order in real-time. This helps shoppers confidently walk into the store knowing exactly whether their order is ready for pickup, eliminating any guesswork.

Weaving their physical stores with their online platforms in real-time, retailers can deliver a unified and consistent experience across all touchpoints, maintaining an omnichannel synergy. Shoppers can research products online, make purchases in-store, and use online services for post-purchase support, creating a cohesive and positive overall experience.

Retailers can deploy an all-encompassing retail solution that demonstrates a great user interface and is well-integrated

with wider retail solutions such as inventory management, customer relationship management (CRM), point-of-sale (POS), order management and clienteling.

By managing their entire retail ecosystem from a single software, retailers can have more real-time visibility of their business. They can gather more comprehensive data on customers' shopping behaviour, in-store inventory, warehouse stock, and online orders. Retailers can use this information to make informed and personalised decisions related to pricing and discounts. Retailers can also use real-time data to optimise their inventory, minimising overstocks and stockouts. This, in turn, enhances the overall efficiency of the supply chain and enables retailers to seamlessly adapt to the continually evolving preferences of consumers.

Consumer preferences in 2024

Despite continued economic pressures in 2023, consumers demonstrated strong levels of resilience. However, the industry saw customers becoming considerate about their purchasing decisions. As 2024 unfolds, shoppers are likely to remain cautious about their spending which can make the market more competitive.

When it comes to shopping, physically trying items in-store and experiencing human interaction is an evergreen consumer preference. However, due to an influx of options available in the market, it is not easy to attract, and more importantly, retain customers. To stand out, retailers need to deliver unparalleled, convenient and personalised shopping experiences in-store. From mobile POS to automated self-checkout, retailers can use a number of innovations to revamp their in-store shopping experience.

As retailers prepare to enhance the in-store shopping experience, they must not overlook the value of a seamless online shopping experience. According to forecasts, retail sales from mobile commerce in the UK are expected to surpass the £100 billion mark by 2024. As a result, retailers must streamline their mobile purchasing process to reduce shopping cart abandonment and ensure a frictionless customer experience.

Whether shopping in-store or online, sustainability is one of the key factors that will influence consumer preferences in 2024. According to Statista's Consumer Trends 2024 report, sustainability and ethics are at the forefront of shoppers' decision-making. In fact, ethical spenders will make purchases from eco-friendly brands even during challenging times. It is clear that sustainability isn't just a buzzword anymore, and retailers need to act now.

Ultimately, driving sustainability is likely to be on par with providing high-quality shopping experiences. With growing cautious spending and the rise of conscious consumerism, delivering high value to the customer, sustainably, should be a priority for retailers to drive revenue and earn consumer loyalty. Those who can deliver top-tier omnichannel experiences sustainably can well cater to evolving consumer preferences in 2024.

TD Synnex launches GAPP initiative

TD SYNnex has launched the Growth Accelerator Partner Programme (GAPP) to support reseller partners in maximising their opportunities in the B2B market with the Google Pixel range of smartphones, complementary products from the wider Google ecosystem, and value-added services.

The GAPP initiative will provide partners with access to sales support services and resources that aims to elevate their knowledge and capability to take Pixel devices and add-on products to the market effectively. Partners that accept the invitation to join the programme will be given log-in details for a specially-created GAPP portal, through which they will be able to streamline quotations, learn about Pixel products, and place and manage orders. Partners will also be eligible for special discounts and promotions on Pixel and related ecosystem products.

Ryan Thomas, business unit manager, mobile, UK, at TD Synnex said: "Google Pixel devices are ideal for business users and the potential for partners to take them into the B2B market is huge. The GAPP programme – along with the focused support and service that TD Synnex can provide – will give partners the tools, support and incentives they need to take the Pixel value proposition to their customers."



By making use of complementary products that can be sold with the Pixel range, partners can add more value for business customers. Thomas added: "We have an extensive portfolio of add-on products that can be used to really enhance the experience of Pixel users, and significantly boost partner sales and profitability. Pixel Buds headphones, for example, are perfect for mobile conferencing calls and with Zero-Touch Enrolment on Pixel phones, partners can make it really easy for customers to integrate Pixel devices securely into their IT infrastructure."

The Zero-Touch Enrolment tool is fully integrated into TD Synnex's InTouch e-commerce platform, through which Google partners also have access to value-added services, such as Trade-in and Tech as-a-Service (TaaS) offerings, both of which can be used to further enhance the appeal of Google Pixel products by making it easier for customers to invest in new technology.

With Trade-in, partners can offer their customers a residual value on legacy devices, providing them a second life or secure recycling. TaaS enables partners to provide products and services combined into a single regular subscription payment, instead of having to fund purchases of new equipment through capital expenditure budgets.

Synaxon shop provides quick and easy access to Synaxon hub

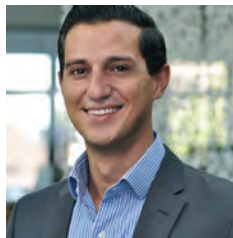
SYNAXON has launched of Synaxon Shop, a web portal that makes it easy for reseller partners to place orders on Synaxon Hub, providing them with access to a wide range of best-selling products from leading manufacturers via its distribution operation.

Synaxon Shop is easy-to-use with an intuitive search and ordering process which, combined with a 14-day returns policy and centralised RMA processes, makes Synaxon Hub a good resource for reseller partners.

Miguel Rodriguez, managing director, Synaxon Hub said: "Synaxon Hub is already a big success. More UK partners have been discovering the exceptional choice, availability and value that we are able to provide by leveraging our purchasing power with major distributors and vendors. Synaxon Shop is a large piece of this jigsaw. It provides partners with a simple way to place orders directly from Synaxon Hub, streamlining the process and driving further efficiencies and cost-savings for their business."

"That translates directly into improved customer service and higher profitability for them. It will also help us to continue growing and developing Synaxon Hub and allow us to make even more popular products available on the platform, which in turn will make it an even more valuable tool for our reseller partners."

Access to Synaxon Shop is available to all UK resellers on request. In addition, partners are still able to find products and place orders on Synaxon Hub through the EGIS web portal.



Spire Technology takes on Dahua

SPIRE TECHNOLOGY has been confirmed as official distributors for Dahua Technology Monitors in the UK.

Sales and purchasing director of Spire, Michael Botto is excited by the acquisition. He said: "Everybody knows Dahua is a huge name in video surveillance with products, solutions, and services available in over 180 countries globally. It has a track record of achieving what it sets its minds to and we share its ambition to grow their monitor business within Europe. To have such high-quality product coming in at such a competitive price is something the whole team here at Spire are really looking forward to."

Michael Lawrence, marketing director at Dahua Technology UK & Ireland added: "Dahua Display and Pro AV is progressing well, with exceptional products currently available and more in the pipeline. We are pleased to welcome Spire Technology on board to contribute to the growth of our monitor business. It's unwavering focus on the UK IT channel has positioned it as one of the leading distributors in the market."

piXL introduces retrospective 3-Year warranty across entire range

MONITORS AND ACCESSORIES

MANUFACTURER, piXL, has retrospectively extended its warranty period from two years to three years across all models, and applied the extension to all units it has ever sold.

The brand, available exclusively through UK distributor, Target Components, announced the extension applies to all historical purchases as well, rather than those purchased from the announcement date.

Launching in the UK in 2020, piXL has now sold on excess of 70 000 units through Target's reseller network. The brand has consistently focussed on providing high quality displays at affordable prices, while also delivering the technologies required by users, leading the brand's launch from an initial three-model range (22", 24" & 27" frameless units) to the manufacturer boasting nearly 20 different models, as well as a range of monitor arms, in under three years.

Target's purchasing and displays category manager, Kelly Coxon, explained: "We've monitored any issues, faults and returns across the piXL range since launch and we were delighted to see the rates were minimal. At under 1%, it's way lower than most brands expect. And those customers who bought right at the start are continuing to buy it now, citing reliability as a major part of their buying decision, as well as the colourful retail packaging, something most brands don't worry about.

"This confidence in quality and reliability is what piXL has based their decision on", she continued. "That they have backdated the warranty to include every single unit they've ever sold in the UK seems pretty unprecedented but customers



should be confident in their confidence – it's certainly something end users and business and public institutions are basing their purchasing on. Buying a monitor and knowing it's covered for a whole three years is a big bonus."

Discussing how the brand has performed versus expectations, Coxon responded: "piXL's impact on the UK display market has been swift. Admittedly, we were lucky to launch the brand just prior to the first lockdown so initial sales were fantastic, and we were nervous they might then take a nosedive once everyone was set up for working and living at home. We needn't have worried: piXL developed the range very quickly and, by the time we appeared out of lockdown, sales were even stronger thanks to extended options that included 4K, curved, large format and gaming screens. We've just launched the new 34-inch Ultrawide QHD monitor that's a fantastic all-rounder whether you're looking for amazing gaming visuals or an efficient workspace, and the feedback continues to be fantastic."

Westcoast and Ergonomic Solutions team up for an AV partnership

WESTCOAST has partnered with Ergonomic Solutions – a leading provider of advanced technology mounting solutions. As part of this exciting new partnership, Westcoast will distribute Ergonomic Solution's robust range of digital signage mounting technology, giving its partners an even greater choice of AV products and services.

The advanced hook and rail display systems manufactured by Ergonomic Solutions have been designed with quality and sustainability in mind. They are easy to install and maintain, support a variety of screen sizes, and can be configured to meet the requirements of digital menu boards and other ceiling and wall-mounted applications. The simple modular and configurable design offers limitless possibilities, enabling businesses to create their own unique installation.

Mark Crysell, chief sales officer at Ergonomic Solutions, commented: "We are excited to partner with Westcoast to bring a new level of synergy to our digital signage solutions. By combining our expertise in manufacturing

with Westcoast's distribution capabilities, we aim to provide businesses with a holistic approach to creating signage solutions that enhance channel partner offerings and increase media reach and footfall."

Westcoast's relationship with Ergonomic Solutions enables its partners to offer a comprehensive range of display products to their customers, helping them maximise the dynamic messaging and imagery of digital signage and make the most of customer engagement opportunities.

Richard Carr, AV director at Westcoast, said of the partnership: "We are excited to announce our newest AV vendor, Ergonomic Solutions, as we continue to grow our status as a major player throughout the industry across the UK. Their wide portfolio of products ranging from indoor and outdoor digital signage solutions to kiosk and tablet applications for retail and hospitality fit perfectly with the Samsung range of digital signage. This is an exciting period for both of us and we are looking forward to seeing how this partnership grows moving forward."

Maxhub announces partnership with Avitor AV & IT Distribution

MAXHUB has partnered with AV and IT distributor Avitor Distribution UK, which will supply the UK and Irish markets with its entire range of products.

Maxhub and Avitor have formed a partnership to further strengthen Maxhub's presence in the UK and Irish market. Avitor's parent company, Avitor Ireland, was founded in 2017, and is now one of the fastest growing AV and IT distributors in the country. Now the company aims to transfer this success to the UK and is expanding its product range by means of Maxhub's portfolio.

"We have been monitoring the rise of Maxhub in Europe for some time now and have analysed its portfolio in

depth. We are absolutely convinced by the quality of its products and its innovative strength. We also recognise many synergies from which both companies can benefit. We are, therefore, delighted to welcome Maxhub into our distribution network," said Jared Huet, director at Avitor Distribution.

"In Avitor, we have gained a young, up-and-coming distributor that perfectly matches our own standards through its strong service ethos and outstanding technical expertise. We are convinced that, together, we will leave a lasting impression on the UK and Irish markets," said Cathy Liu, country manager UK and Ireland at Maxhub.

EPOS and Aston Martin F1 team strengthen audio partnership

EPOS has extended and expanded its partnership with the Aston Martin Aramco Cognizant F1 Team as global audio partner. The renewal of the existing sponsorship agreement extends our collaboration, which began in 2021, continuing to support on audio and communications with the team's commercial operations.

Building on the existing collaboration, EPOS is expanding its technical partnership with the team. The team now uses EPOS's Command HME110 C3 headsets at the core of its race operations – in mission control at the new AMR Technology Campus in Silverstone, England. The utilization of the Command HME110 as a part of the technical infrastructure marks a significant next step in the partnership.

Whether it's determining how to react to incoming rain, a red flag, or increased tire degradation: Formula One is underscored by complex decisions that require simple, streamlined communications. Strategy plays a vital role both on and off the circuit, and EPOS recognises that races are won or lost through real-time communication.

Mission control is central to the team's strategy; it is where critical data is collected and analysed, and strategy recommendations are made and executed. As it operates as the communications hub for multiple channels and teams, working across different locations, time zones, and environments it's essential that noise in mission control is managed effectively so that important information is seamlessly relayed.

Built to empower reliable communication in critical situations, the Command HME110 C3 headset will empower Aston Martin's race engineers and strategists at Mission Control to act with unparalleled efficiency, clarity, and precision.

The Command series sits within EPOS's range of customized solutions created for Air Traffic Control (ATC) and C3 (command, control, and communication) operations:

empowering control and performance for when it matters most. The specially manufactured Command HME110 C3 headsets will ensure the team can maintain real-time, crystal-clear communication and support split-second decision-making.

"We moved the whole team into our new AMR Technology Campus in the spring, and it has been a significant positive change for the entire organization," said Mike Krack, team principal for the Aston Martin Aramco Cognizant Formula One Team. "As well as a new environment, we've been able to invest in new equipment across every department, ranging from large manufacturing capability to the smallest measurement tools. One particular area where we've made considerable improvements is our new Mission Control facility. The opportunity to install HME110 headsets for every team member has been a great improvement. The microphones on these units are noise-cancelling, which improves the clarity of sound across the working group, and it makes a significant difference to the way we all work. Clarity of sound and clarity of thought is essential in such a high-pressure environment – and using EPOS is providing us with first-class equipment."

EPOS president, Jeppe Dalberg-Larsen said: "With a unified ambition for unleashing human potential via technology, innovation, and state-of-the-art engineering – our partnership with Aston Martin Aramco Cognizant Formula One Team is a natural fit. We're thrilled to expand our partnership with the team and to continue the work we've been doing to support them on their journey to the top of the grid. Our products are designed for seamless communication even in high-stakes moments and in a sport where each fraction of a second counts, clarity and precision are essential. We're looking forward to seeing the continued success that our products and expanded partnership can deliver to the team."

FluidOne acquires CNC

FLUIDONE, a provider of Connected Cloud solutions, has acquired Brighton-based IT managed service provider, Computer and Network Consultants (CNC). Established 27 years ago by co-founders Graham Lind and Gary Jowett, CNC provides quality IT services to small and medium size local businesses across Sussex and Hampshire.

This acquisition follows that of Highlander Computing Solutions in January 2023 and projectfive in April 2023, building on FluidOne's strategy to invest in regional IT MSPs to create a branch network for expertly delivered localised services for its SME customers. The investment in CNC has expanded the Business IT Centre of Excellence (CoE) for FluidOne to £37m revenue, with 1,100 customers, 164 employees and with five branch offices led from Highlander's Sheffield headquarters.

CNC will operate as a separate branch with a dedicated management team, continuing to be led by co-founder Graham Lind as managing director of the Brighton Branch and supported by co-founder Gary Jowett as operations and marketing director. The branch will report into Steve Brown, as managing director of the FluidOne Business IT CoE, ensuring that customers benefit from local account management and engineering, with best practise and a wider services portfolio supported by centralised leadership. Russell Horton, the FluidOne group CEO will assume the role of chairman for CNC.

Commenting on the acquisition Russell Horton, FluidOne CEO, said: "I am pleased to announce the acquisition of CNC, that

builds on our strategy to create a branch network for expertly delivered IT managed services to Business customers. When reviewing the business, I was impressed with the excellent service they deliver and the strength of relationships that the team build with their clients. This was reinforced by great customer feedback in our survey and an excellent NPS of 60. They are a great fit to our strategy, and I look forward to working with Graham Lind, Gary Jowett and the team to grow the Brighton business."

Graham Lind CNC founder and managing director: "Gary and I are very proud of the CNC business and our great team of staff. We have experienced strong growth over the past 2 years and customer feedback of the services they require going forward from their IT support partner has given us the ambition to accelerate our growth and deliver quality services to even more local businesses. Having met with Russell, Steve and the wider FluidOne team we see a great opportunity to build CNC as the trusted local IT provider whilst benefiting from expert overlay in connectivity, mobile, Unified Communications and Cyber from the wider FluidOne group. We see a strong match in culture and putting the customer first, and the acquisition offers fantastic career opportunities to the CNC team."

Post-acquisition, FluidOne's CEO, Russell Horton, is to become chairman of CNC, with FluidOne directors Steve Brown, Simon Ward, Chris Rogers and Roy Hastings also becoming board directors.

Westcon-Comstor acquires AWS service partner Rebura

WESTCON-COMSTOR has acquired Rebura, an award-winning AWS (Amazon Web Services) advanced service partner and solution provider, to further strengthen its cloud capabilities and channel-focused services offering.

The deal will enable Westcon-Comstor partners to provide a comprehensive suite of AWS solutions to their customers, encompassing cloud consultancy, migration services, FinOps, AWS Marketplace excellence and security-aligned professional services.

Rebura's status as a certified AWS migration services competency partner, combined with Westcon-Comstor's expertise and specialisation in cybersecurity, creates a powerful cloud offering for channel partners.

Founded in 2017, London-based Rebura specialises in supporting AWS cloud migrations and modernisations as well as SaaS and DevOps capabilities across the UK, Nordics and central Europe. In 2023 Rebura and AWS signed a strategic collaboration agreement, highlighting Rebura's value to AWS. Rebura now holds seven competencies with AWS including migration, Microsoft Workloads and DevOps.



A qualified and fully accredited AWS advanced service partner and solution provider, Rebura supports companies of all sizes as they build and optimise their apps and workloads on AWS, increasing productivity, scalability, cost efficiency and security.

Following the acquisition, Westcon-Comstor – which recently became the first distributor to achieve AWS Security Competency

status in Asia Pacific (APAC) and is an approved distributor of AWS products and solutions in the region – will offer Rebura consulting services incrementally through its existing lines of business; Westcon and Comstor.

Rebura will be maintained as a separate standalone organisation and form the foundation of Westcon-Comstor's AWS line of business, leveraging Westcon-Comstor's extensive global network of technology resellers, systems integrators and service providers to help more end-user businesses and partners on their cloud migration journey.

Following a period of sustained organic growth, including double-digit revenue increases for the past two financial years, the deal represents a new pillar in Westcon-Comstor's growth strategy to focus on targeted, strategic acquisitions.

APPOINTMENTS

This month's movers and shakers in the tech industry...



Agilitas

Agilitas IT Solutions has appointed Sara Wilkes as chief operating officer. With over 15 years of experience in the technology channel, including

roles at Computacenter and most recently director of customer experience at SCC, Wilkes brings a wealth of expertise in driving innovation across the entire service. As Agilitas' operational leader, Wilkes will be responsible for strengthening the company's customer experience strategy and ensuring the voice of the customer remains embedded in its culture.

In addition to Wilkes' passion for enhancing the customer experience, she is committed to supporting teams across the business. As part of this, she created and chaired the Diversity and Inclusion Council at SCC.

As chief operating officer, Wilkes will be a driving force in Agilitas' technology-driven growth, strategic expansion and employee empowerment, working closely with department heads to execute the company's operations and support the wider team.



Cato Networks

Cato Networks has named Kanwar Loyal as vice president for the SASE leader's Northern Europe and Middle East & Africa (MEA) regions. Loyal joins Cato from CrowdStrike, where he has spent the past six years in various customer-facing leadership roles.

Reporting to Luca Simonelli, vice president of sales for EMEA at Cato Networks, Loyal will scale his team to help meet the growing customer demand for Cato's networking and security solutions throughout the Nordic, Baltic, Middle East, and African markets. He will lead Cato's team dedicated to delivering an outstanding client experience for enterprises transitioning to the Cato SASE Cloud platform.

Loyal brings over two decades of experience in the technology sector. In addition to CrowdStrike, he also held key positions at cyber companies Imperva, and Fortinet where he led high-performing sales teams.



Northamber

Northamber has appointed Jeremy Keefe as the new group managing director. Keefe, a seasoned industry executive with over 30 years of experience,

brings a wealth of knowledge in building and managing successful sales teams. His impressive career includes leadership roles at prominent companies such as Poly (Formerly Polycom), Westcon, Computacenter, Avaya, Citrix, and, most recently, Nuvias UC, where he served as chief revenue officer and CEO.

Keefe's appointment comes as the company continues to expand its presence in the technology distribution sector. With a proven track record of profitably driving growth and fostering strategic partnerships, he is well-equipped to lead Northamber into a new era of success.

Keefe will be succeeding and reporting to Alex Phillips, who will be transitioning to the role of executive chairman. As part of this leadership transition, Colin Thompson, the current non-executive chairman, will be refocusing on strategic projects for Northamber and remain as non-executive director.



Pax8

Pax8 has named Robert Belgrave as chief operating officer (COO) and Elizabeth (Libby) McIlhany as chief product officer

(CPO). Belgrave will continue reporting to John Street, chief executive officer (CEO), and McIlhany to Scott Chasin, chief technology officer (CTO).

Belgrave has transitioned from CEO of Wirehive to CEO of Pax8 EMEA, then extended his leadership globally into the role of chief people officer. The role of the COO is to oversee the day-to-day operational functions. Belgrave will work closely with other executives to optimize and align operations to realize Pax8's mission, vision, and strategy.

As senior vice president of product, McIlhany has led Pax8's product strategy and execution for two years. Her leadership has been instrumental in driving the company's evolution into a technology-led company. In her new role as CPO, McIlhany will spearhead the global product management function, shaping the strategy, crafting the technology roadmap, and overseeing execution. She will play a pivotal role in guiding Pax8's overall direction and ensuring seamless alignment between its technology and business strategies.



TD Synnex

Patrick Zammit has been named chief operating officer at TD Synnex, reporting to company CEO Rich Hume effective 01 January 2024. In this new

role, Zammit will coordinate the company's business strategy to drive profitable growth across all technologies, geographies and vendors, and to accelerate the adoption of new, high-growth technologies around the globe. Zammit has served at TD Synnex as president, Europe, since 2017, adding executive responsibility for Asia Pacific and Japan in 2021. A new leader for TD Synnex's business in Europe will be announced in the coming weeks.

With this organisational structure change, regional presidents in the Americas, Asia Pacific Japan (APJ) and Europe will now report into Zammit, along with the corporate functions responsible for global strategy and information technology. Additionally, Michael Urban, President, Americas, has decided to leave the company and has offered to support Patrick with this transition through 1 March.



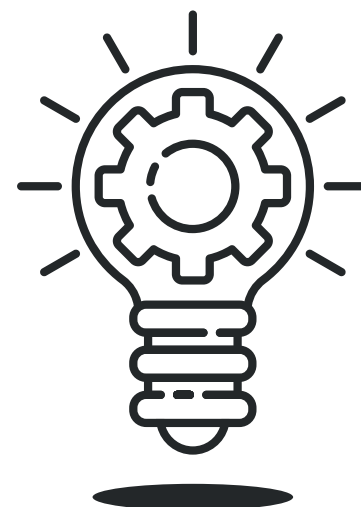
Vault365

Vault365 has appointed Mike Basile as channel manager for the UK and Ireland. In this new role, Basile is responsible for managing the relationships

with partners who deliver Vault365's data protection and backup services to customers in the UK and Ireland. He plans to drive growth of Vault365's solutions suite and expand the company's partner base, while also growing the number of customers across both markets. Basile will also focus on continuing to evolve the relationships with existing customers.

Prior to joining Vault365, Basile was product manager with Cadoo, a business messaging provider. Here, he oversaw the design and development of new products and features in Cadoo's portfolio across iOS and Android apps, as well as web messaging.

Cyber security demystified



Marion Stewart, Chief Executive Officer, Red Helix demystifies the language and the concepts used in cyber security.

Businesses across the UK have undergone significant digitalisation in recent years, fuelled by the rise in remote working and the efficiencies gained through advances in modern technology. According to Gartner, 91% of businesses are engaged in some form of digital initiative and 87% of senior business leaders say digitalisation is a priority.

Digital transformation is undoubtedly bringing advantages to enterprises and stakeholders, but it is not without risk. As the monetisation of cyber-crime continues to grow, cyber criminals are finding new and more sophisticated ways to exploit vulnerabilities and launch targeted attacks. As the digital landscape expands, so does the threat surface.

For many, cyber security can be a complex and technical field, often only fully understood by those individuals with a background in IT or security. Yet, understanding the basics of cyber security has become crucial for all employees working in a digital environment, since they are on the front line and the most likely to be exposed to common attacks that exploit lack of knowledge to extort information or cause harm to the company. Therefore, it is essential for organisations to ensure that their employees receive adequate training so that they recognise and respond appropriately to such threats.

How to ensure employees are equipped to spot threats

The first and most vital layer of defence in any organisation is its people. Often referred to as 'the human firewall', the effectiveness of this layer can vary, depending on the quality of training and the level of awareness among team members. Therefore, creating a company-wide culture focused on risk awareness is essential – with employees knowing not only the protocols in place but also the reasons behind them. By doing so, organisations can reinforce their cyber hygiene and reduce the risk of cyber-attacks affecting their business.

It is important for businesses to understand that strengthening the human firewall is an ongoing process that requires regular training and assessment, alongside a systematic program that identifies and fills any gaps within employees' knowledge. Additionally, this training should break the information down into real-world scenarios and plain English explanations that are easy to understand over and above technical jargon.

As a result, training will become more consumable for all and will have a greater impact, especially if the information is presented in



context with real-life examples. Most employees won't need to know the technology behind a cyber-attack, but they should understand how to identify them and what action should be taken if a breach does occur.

To further ensure that staff cyber hygiene is up to scratch, regular assessments should be conducted to identify if there are any knowledge gaps or particular areas of vulnerability such as the ability to recognise phishing attacks. Future sessions can then be tailored to focus on strengthening these areas of weakness in particular - ensuring employees are better equipped to spot such attacks in the future.

Translating cyber for board members

For most members of staff, awareness is key. For board members, however, there is an additional challenge as they are the ones with overall responsibility for the business; they need to understand the types of different cyber risks facing their business, the investment that needs to be made to mitigate and the impact security will have on protecting their organisation. They also need to know what 'good enough' is for their company with regards to the risks they face, covering the cyber hygiene related to the business risk verses [potential large investments to cover every eventuality is something that boards need to consider as they think about protecting the business.

While cyber security is becoming more of a priority for businesses, without understanding the varying levels of protection offered by different solutions it can risk becoming a simple tick-box exercise, rather than a crucial part of a business continuity plan. To avoid this, the focus when presenting cyber security to the c-suite should be on the security status posture, rather than the technical aspects of them – highlighting how they reduce risk, their alignment with business objectives and the return on investment they can provide.

Although the terminology jargon used to describe cyber security might be familiar for some board members, to resonate with the majority the focus should be on translating complex technical terms and jargon into understandable business language, helping to ensure that the whole board understand this, as well as why they need to. In doing this, executives will have the means to make more informed decisions on resource allocation and risk management, as well as gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the increasingly important role cyber security plays in business development. Also, importantly, it will help assist boards making investment decision to ensure this is targeted in the right areas for their business.

Switch on before the switch off

Jon Selway, VP of channel sales (EMEA) at Aryaka
explains why the UK channel is a hotbed for SD-WAN opportunities.



As the UK moves away from legacy connectivity technologies such as MPLS and copper broadband services, the opportunity for channel businesses to support their customers in realising their digital transformation goals has never been greater.

And, with more and more aspects of doing business now being performed in the digital world, businesses need to centrally manage and orchestrate their increasingly complex network topologies to enable greater levels of business agility and operational efficiency while strengthening the protections against the ever-evolving threat of cybersecurity attacks.

Thankfully, SD-WAN solutions can facilitate those aspects in improving network management and are already gaining in popularity among forward-thinking UK Enterprise and SME organisations. Here's why.

In the run-up to the 2025 switch off, multi-site businesses face a tough challenge, organising and facilitating the upgrade of multiple services, especially PSTN-based voice services and FTTC connectivity, with SD-WAN platforms making that transition simpler in several ways:

Application performance and latency

Various technologies and service aspects within best-of-breed SD-WAN platforms, such as data compression and directing traffic across a private L2 core network, ensure that current connections are truly optimised, providing real-time visibility into key metrics such as latency, packet loss and bandwidth usage.

This is vital, no matter whether the business in question is a global organisation or a nationally-focused Enterprise with multiple sites spread across the UK. In both scenarios, ensuring that all the various Last Mile services can be managed and optimised in a central location.

Seamless deployment

Integrating new connectivity services and deploying network policies across those new connections becomes super-simple via a central platform that accelerates the transition, for example, ensuring that managed firewalls and integrations into existing cloud services, are transferred seamlessly.


Optimising international enterprises

The UK has long been an international hub for business, attracting organisations with a global reach. Ensuring those international enterprises have the most efficient processes is key when competing on a global stage, and SD-WAN solutions can deliver the best possible user experience worldwide.

Superior QoS

Leveraging an SD-WAN provider's core network, such as Aryaka's, ensures global businesses experience the lowest latency, jitter and packet loss, helping to keep teams productive and collaborative, especially when accessing data stored around the world for example, with best-of-breed SD-WAN solutions enabling businesses to reduce latency to under 30ms worldwide.

Hands-off compliance

Especially in areas such as China or the Middle East, where geopolitical stresses may add to challenges around data transmission, cybersecurity and compliance, the best SD-WAN vendors will leverage their footprint and operational experience in those geographies to help ensure customer businesses can balance compliance and local regulations with application performance. 

"In the run-up to the 2025 switch off, multi-site businesses face a tough challenge, organising and facilitating the upgrade of multiple services, especially PSTN-based voice services and FTTC connectivity, with SD-WAN platforms making that transition simpler in several ways."

Pioneering sustainability in the fast lane of technology

In the relentless race towards technological advancement, the echo of sustainability is growing louder. In the heart of this dynamic landscape, RDUK has emerged as a trailblazer in computer refurbishment, carving a distinctive niche through its commitment to environmental responsibility and a keen eye for detail, especially in the specialty field of wrapping.

Established three decades ago as an IT distribution company, RDUK underwent a remarkable transformation a decade ago when it recognised the shifting market demands. Identifying a demand for sustainable IT options that could also provide cost savings, the company ventured into computer refurbishment. Led by Managing Director Nick Waite, whose engineering background instilled a deep appreciation for the beauty and aesthetics of reconditioning items, RDUK took a bold step towards a greener future.

RDUK primarily caters to resellers and the education sector, offering a sustainable alternative that aligns with the needs of end-users while providing substantial cost savings. Refurbished computers, a cost-effective solution without compromising on quality, have become increasingly appealing to SMEs and educational institutions, enhancing the profits for resellers.

Setting RDUK apart is its unwavering commitment to quality. As one of just six Microsoft Authorised Refurbishers in the UK, the company gains access to original manufacturers' software licenses, ensuring the use of genuine Microsoft products. MAR partners have

to meet very stringent quality requirements too which sets them apart from their competition.

The meticulous renewal process involves refinishing external surfaces with high-quality, durable cast vinyl, providing a flawless 'as new' appearance. Every laptop undergoes a four-stage keyboard refresh and the company adheres to a zero-mark policy for screens, leaving no room for imperfections.

Desktop computers, treated in a bespoke paint booth, also emerge looking as good as new. Rigorous component testing, facilitated by the Aiken Workbench software, guarantees that every refurbished machine meets stringent quality standards. Each product is accompanied by a comprehensive test sheet, detailing specifications and serial numbers.

RDUK's core operations centre around an unwavering emphasis on quality, ensuring that every product leaving its factory not only looks but also performs like new. In a world grappling with e-waste and environmental concerns, RDUK's commitment to refurbished technology stands as a commendable effort. By breathing new life into devices that would otherwise contribute to the mounting e-waste crisis, RDUK exemplifies how sustainability and cutting-edge technology can coexist harmoniously. As the world navigates the intersection of progress and responsibility, RDUK is leading the way towards a brighter, greener future in the realm of technology.



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Cyber-education is key



Ensuring that businesses have secure practises is a year-long endeavour. With over half of UK employees concerned about cybersecurity at work, more support is needed to ensure that security is upheld throughout organisations both large and small. **Mark Appleton, chief customer officer at ALSO Cloud UK** believes that MSPs and the cloud marketplace are in the best position to provide this support due to the breadth of their resources and clients available.

With workforces more conscious than ever about cybersecurity concerns, more reassurance and support are needed to keep secure practices for business continuity. MSPs and the cloud marketplace are in the best position to provide this support due to their extended access to cybersecurity clients.

Cybersecurity month has come to a close, but cybersecurity practices are a year-long endeavour. Yet even years into the new normal of hybrid and remote working, businesses and IT leaders are still failing to ensure security practices are upheld within their operational teams. With more than a quarter of UK executives reporting their cyber budgets are inadequate – according to iomart and Oxford Economics – intelligent allocation of budget and support when it comes to supporting cybersecurity is key more than ever.

Earlier this year, Aviva also reported over half of UK employees harbour concerns about cybersecurity at work. Gen Z workers were found to be more worried than their older generation counterparts. With this shift towards a next generation workforce more aware about the new dangers to business continuity that cybersecurity threats bring, more support is needed to combat these concerns and ensure that cybersecurity training and practices are upheld throughout organisations both large and small.

“Onboarding via MSPs should include cybersecurity practices as a default and necessity, especially given the shift to hybrid and remote working is here to stay. One vulnerability can compromise the whole system, and often this is tied to human error. Enterprise defence is a team sport – so every employee is a player in ensuring cybersecurity practices are upheld.”


“MSPs are in the perfect position to provide much needed support to their customers, to safeguard against ransomware threats.”

“MSPs are in the perfect position to provide much needed support to their customers, to safeguard against ransomware threats. This can be in the form of phishing simulations or quality service solutions, amongst other solutions. By giving their customer businesses the ability to check their security posture, operational teams gain a greater understanding of where potential education gaps are regarding company cybersecurity practices.”

Appleton also believes that human resources are often overlooked in lee of high-tech protection, but ultimately are just as important. “People forget common security practices that can be so critical to business continuity, just for the sake of ease and convenience.

Human resource, just like SaaS and cyber protection, needs the same level of ongoing patching and updating to ensure that it is working at top capacity. Human error is not something that can be entirely removed in operations; educating people, therefore, is the key here.”

“Having an ecosystem that works for you is essential, but it all depends on the size and data kept with your business. All these factors mean each has a different approach. SMEs especially must consider what is best within their budget, but MSPs onboarding and support is a critical way to provide them with needed resources and access to security posture checks.”

“Ultimately, your human operational teams and software all work in a complete business ecosystem – one cannot function to maximum capacity without the support of the other. MSPs are in the best position, due to the breadth of their resources and clients that they have available, to support SMEs and other businesses in their cyber-education efforts through the cloud marketplace and promote ongoing training with their onboarding practices.” 

Cultivating success

Angela Townsend, UK & I director at SMART Technologies discusses the mutual advantages of channel partnerships in education.



Although technology has become a fundamental tool within the education industry, supporting teachers by reducing their workload, increasing efficiency, and improving accessibility and inclusion, it's constantly changing. It's therefore vital for the channel and vendors to work together to ensure schools are getting the most out of it.

For global EdTech companies, having partners is essential for successfully connecting with customers, getting to know their preferences, and ensuring what they're offering is relevant to the region and environment they're in.

The education sectors in different countries have their similarities of course, but it's the nuances that the channel really help to support. Understanding not only how the education system is structured on a country level, but more granularly on a regional level, ensures that each school gets the right technology for them and is supported with the installation process, professional development to support adoption, and other support as needed.

A company that truly comes to the table as a partner rather than just a vendor brings several strategic advantages for both parties, fostering a more collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship.

While the vendor/reseller relationship can be productive, looking at it as an ongoing partnership allows for better strategic alignment, joint goals and objectives, and, consequently, a higher likelihood of long-term success for companies and customers.

What's more, having partners working towards the same goal allows for deeper collaboration through sharing insights, resources, and expertise.

Partnerships can also help to emphasise a customer-centric approach. By working together as partners, both vendor and reseller can better understand and meet the evolving needs of their customers, leading to improved customer satisfaction and loyalty. What's more, specifically within education, having a local partner who also puts the customer first, provides unique opportunities to personalise learning in schools, with the right tools being used in the right way making learning more accessible and tailored.

The trajectory of the channel's role in the education sector will depend on a myriad of factors; however, there are general trends that are likely to continue as we move into next year and beyond, and I know that the channel will remain a crucial part of the education ecosystem.


Firstly, it's very likely we'll continue to see increased integration of technology in learning spaces with a focus on making it user-friendly as well as supporting remote and blended learning. The channel will be vital in ensuring technology users understand the reasons behind the integration and have the tools to use that technology to their advantage. An example of this could even be moving from on-premises software to cloud-based, making it available from anywhere and at any time.

Secondly, there will continue to be a push to make education more inclusive and accessible for students with diverse learning needs. This will involve partners leading initiatives that support professional development opportunities for educators, as well as the likely use of adaptive learning technologies and data analytics to provide insights and help to deliver personalised education.

Thirdly, sustainability is a key issue in today's society and with the UK working towards its Net Zero goals, it's vital that all industries make an effort to reduce their carbon footprint - a focus that will continue into 2024. The channel plays an important role in holding vendors accountable for the sustainability of their products, working with them to ensure they're both helping their customers to realise any sustainability goals of their own.

Further, understanding how new technologies such as AI can support the education sector will be an ongoing project. Vendors and customers alike will be calling on the channel to help them to navigate the new technology on offer but also to communicate the value it can bring to the classroom.

And finally, conversations. Partnerships are all about relationships and the channel is going to continue to be a vital part of conversations with customers and vendors alike, be that as part of technology demonstrations, participating in industry events and conferences like the upcoming Bett or ISE, or ongoing client support.

Ultimately, being a true partner involves a commitment to shared success, ongoing communication, and the recognition that the success of one party contributes to the success of the other. The relationship must go past simply ordering and shipping. Companies that position themselves as partners rather than simply sticking to a transactional reseller/vendor relationship, will be able to create better value for customers, build trust and loyalty, differentiate from competitors, and sustainably grow their businesses together. In doing so, they'll have much more long-term success. 

the **big** interview

Out with Logi One and in with Partner Connect

Yana Kuzmanova, programme manager at Logitech talks to **PCR** about why the business has recently overhauled its partner programme and what it means for partners.

Why did Logitech decide to create the Partner Connect Programme?

The main driver was feedback from our partners. Like us they wanted a programme that recognised and rewarded their value add. As our offering evolved from plug-and-play products to true solutions that answer the challenges of hybrid working for companies and end users, that brought on a layer of complexity, and a need for services so companies could integrate Logitech products with other onsite equipment. Throughout the years, we've started to work with partners which offer expertise in solving various hybrid working challenges and offering solutions to customers, many in their own unique ways. That evolution in our portfolio has naturally led to engaging with different types of partners, and we felt the need to evolve the ways we engage with them too. Recognising this profound shift and the opportunity to Logitech and our partners led to us replacing Logi One with our new partner programme, Partner Connect.

How does the new programme address the evolving needs of partners and customers?

Focusing on evolution, we wanted to make our partner programme both simple and flexible. What we launched on day one is just the beginning for us. We will continue to iterate our offering and incentives to our partners, making it easier to do business with us. We will be introducing different specialisations, each with its own unique set of incentives, which partners can be part of to truly serve them and their customers.

A lot of partners have indicated that the speed of doing business was paramount to them, and so they want to be able to rely on our partner portal as a one-stop-shop for quotes, training their employees, and managing their business with Logitech. By giving partners these abilities, they have flexibility to engage or ask for support on different areas via their own self-service in a simple way. Through this, partners can be a part of the programme, but have complete autonomy over their engagement with Logitech.



What were the key partner feedback points that shaped the design of the programme?

One of the key starting points was the realisation of how varied our partner landscape had become so a 'one size fits all' was no longer appropriate. The new programme offers flexibility and simplicity for this reason. Our partners are varied in terms of the challenges they solve for customers, but also how they

solve them - through offerings, types of services, partnering with third-party vendors and even other partners, and so on.

Those have been some of the key areas we focus on - a variety of incentives and introduction of automation both internally and externally, to make it easier to do business with us. As we learn from further feedback and the programme evolves, new incentives will be introduced and tailored to the areas our partners are focused on, so they have a way of growing with us and being rewarded for it.

How does the Track system benefit SMB partners?

Improving ease of doing business is crucial, especially for registered SMB partners, who serve a range of customers with differing needs. A lot of them have multiple concurrent deals for which they want to offer their customers the best pricing vs focusing on less opportunities or going through the RFP process. They value moving fast and the ease of doing business. Recognising their distinct needs we've adjusted our programme, and the Deal Registration threshold for SMB partners is now 10,000 EUR across Europe, coupled with increased discounts for registered deals. We've also streamlined internal processes for faster quote responses, ensuring quick turnaround times without partners needing to engage with us prior. Lower thresholds and enhanced processes contribute to high win rates, benefiting both partners and us. At the same time, we're able to give them advice on the right solution mix, provide any additional help where needed, and increase customer satisfaction with their purchase, encouraging repeat business.

These changes in deal registration exemplify our dedication to supporting and valuing SMB business, and going forwards, we'll continue to invest in automation and incentives tailored to this segment.

Can you elaborate on the specific benefits of each Track?

We offer three tracks – Principal, Elite, and Premier – in Partner Connect, not solely based on revenue but also on engagement levels, such as business and marketing plans, quarterly business reviews, specific solutions certifications that we offer and more. All tracks can apply for MDF, submit deal registrations, and access back-end rebates. Elite and Principal partners receive website placement, higher back-end margins, a dedicated channel account manager, marketing support, and participation in the partner advisory board. These partners commit to joint business plans, certifications, marketing plans and quarterly revenue milestones. Premier partners opt for lower engagement, while Elite partners collaborate on campaigns and joint business without strict quarterly targets.

We are proud to be a channel-driven business and recognise that there's many pathways to joint success. We believe in the flexibility for partners to be able to choose a model that corresponds to their business model.

What are your expectations for partner adoption of the new programme?

We've had a great response from our partners so far. They recognise why the requirement for each track is in place, how it would benefit them, and appreciate they should take the time to learn, provide their feedback and adapt to our reporting requests. As our first quarter after the programme launch has just closed, we are working on our first partner advisory board to truly bring them in and give them the ability to shape the programme's evolution.

Can you provide examples of typical partners who might choose each Track?

Our partner landscape is varied, and we are proud that there is no typical partner in each track. Instead, tracks are assigned based on competencies. In almost every country in Europe, we have a Principal partner which only does business in a single country, and yet is very committed to Logitech, alongside some of the biggest multinational resellers, which do business across the globe. Conversely, we have seen integrators who are not focused on AV, and hybrid working solutions are only a part of the solution they offer their customers, so the Premier track is right for them.

We encourage partners to speak with their assigned CAM as they get onboarded on the programme, to ensure they understand the requirements and incentives for each partner track. We also offer a lot of training materials on our partner portal, which goes into detail on their specific needs and requirements.

Is there flexibility for partners to move between Tracks over time?

The partners will review their partners' track status each year, alongside their CAM, to assess whether they are on the right track to grow together with Logitech. Some might decide they wish to invest more into our partnership. Our first such review is in the coming months, where we will talk to partners about the past year and make plans for the year ahead, so everyone in our partner programme has the opportunity to go through this process with us.

How is performance measured within each Track, and how does it influence rewards and benefits?

Depending on the track a partner has chosen, they might have to hit quarterly or annual milestones and goals we set together. Those goals are not purely revenue-based, but also qualitative – we value partners promoting Logitech through joint campaigns and events, their investment of time and resources to train their team for example, to make sure they can really understand the breadth of our portfolio.

Can you explain the LEAP growth rebate and how it incentivises partner growth?

LEAP is what we call our back-end rebate incentive. It rewards partners for growth quarterly, across the entire Logitech portfolio, on targets we set together. The goal is to continue growing our business together, and we will be paying LEAP rebates based on POS data, so partner rebates are calculated very transparently, which is something partners all value.

Other incentives include lead allocation, supported pricing for own use and proof of concepts, dedicated account management (for certain tracks) and Partner portal access.

How do the PRM and CIM tools streamline partner interactions and management?

These are tools to help streamline interactions as they can be used not only for our partners to track their performance and benefit eligibility in real-time, but also to automate their MDF requests and claims. Partners will be able to apply for, procure and complete the end-to-end processes for MDF, rebates, and deal registration all through our platform.

The new tools we are introducing as part of Partner Connect mean that we can use partners' Point of Sale (POS) data to establish incentives and rebates we can offer them in a very transparent way. It also allows us to ensure we accurately manage our inventory and correctly forecast stock, so we can offer a quick turnaround time on their orders. This is just one small example of how the programme is transforming the way we do business together.

What are your long-term vision and goals for the Partner Connect Programme?

We will continue to assess partner satisfaction, as our goal is to have a programme that values and is shaped by their feedback. We believe that alongside the breadth and depth of our solution portfolio, the partner programme now offers a best in class, partner-first go-to-market motion that can serve partners and Logitech, setting us up for growth together. As we continue to evolve, we are proud to invite the partners to contribute to shaping the programme through the advisory board.

We are not simply going to look at revenue growth, instead we'll be looking at how much our joint business with a specific partner grows year-on-year. One of the other key areas we are looking at, for example, is how much our in-house share of the business our partners is growing. If we are growing both in revenue and also growing our in-house share, this means the partner is on the right track, they prefer the ease of doing business with us, and the benefits we offer are meaningful.



THE FUTURE IS ALL ABOUT AI

Artificial intelligence is taking over and this brings with it many challenges and opportunities for everyone. Here, we find out what the tech industry thinks the next twelve months will bring.

It's no secret that confidence has been low in the market, but general feeling is that 2024 will see activity increase.

Mike Barron, managing director UK, Synaxon says: "We feel genuinely positive and optimistic about 2024 and we're certainly expecting to build on the successes of the past 12 months. If the predictions about a resurgence in hardware sales prove to be correct, we'd expect to have an even better year in 2024. We also expect to see continued growth in software and services. It's not really just a question of if, but when the upturn comes."

However, this feeling is framed by a tough global landscape. "In 2023 we continued to witness global supply chain disruptions in the tech industry caused by a combination of tough post-Covid trading conditions, the war in Ukraine and then in the Middle East, and the ongoing reliance on manufacturing in regions affected by geopolitical issues," says Ann Keefe, regional director – UK and Ireland at Kingston Technology EMEA. "This is unlikely to change anytime soon. IT companies are still struggling to put in place robust systems for identifying and mitigating supply chain risks. However, they will need to address this issue and look for more resilient and transparent supply chain solutions that will enable them to thrive and set themselves apart from the competition."

"We foresee inflation and high interest rates being an ongoing concern for markets. Central bank policies and rising costs have the potential to impact consumer and business spending, which will

have a ripple effect in the channel and amongst vendors. For systems integrators this will be challenging to manage unless they have exemplary financial management or are well financed.

"Rapid technological advancements and the ongoing digital revolution will present both opportunities and challenges in 2024, and the key to maximising the former and minimising the latter is staying ahead in the technology stakes."

Faced with this landscape, businesses will be demanding more value from their IT spending as Linda Yao, chief operating officer and head of strategy, Lenovo Solutions & Services says: "They will demand more flexibility in their operations, in terms of having their investments scale with the value they return. They will want more predictability in their cash flows, whether that means using technology to stabilise revenue growth or to achieve expense savings, or implementing that technology in a way that allows for predictable cash flow payments."

"Businesses will also be focused on ensuring IT deployment directly supports or drives business outcomes. We will see more customers adopt IT based on business outcomes that they want to achieve whether it's top line, bottom line, or to hit specific customer experience, sustainability, throughput, customer acquisition, type of metrics. More businesses will tie their technology adoption to these metrics rather than deploy and maintain technology in a vacuum."

"As a result, IT spending on legacy infrastructure will shift to spending on next generation technology and grow rapidly in the next

five to ten years as customers modernise or revamp their IT stack end-to-end. This includes moving from legacy IT systems to hybrid cloud, adopting more virtualised and interconnected IT environments, and eschewing traditional software licenses for highly personalised tech on demand.”

Covid has seen businesses have to rethink their employee strategies. Phil Bell, chief revenue officer of Westcoast says: “2024 brings a new PC era, giving partners the opportunity to get back to black with sales. This will largely be driven by the start of a new refresh cycle four years on from the digital transformation seen during covid, and the emergence of AI-powered PCs into the market. Plus, the rise in return-to-work mandates will see businesses look to re-equip their workspaces.”

While some businesses are returning to office-based working, others have seen the benefits of home working. Keefe explains: “Hybrid work is now widely accepted as the norm, but the technology that facilitates it is still in transition. Inclusive and flexible solutions must allow for diverse workstyles and keep employees connected, engaged and productive, wherever and whenever they are working. As a result, we will see an evolution towards more seamless integration of virtual and physical spaces to enhance collaboration and deliver experiences that encourage creativity and teamwork.”

Such integration relies on good networks as Rachel Rothwell, senior regional director, UK and Ireland at Zyxel Networks says: “We expect 2024 to be a big year for wireless upgrades as businesses take advantage of the increased speed and consistent performance of WiFi 6/6E and WiFi 7. We also see more opportunities with multi-gig’ networking and security will continue to be a major theme. We see plenty of growth potential for MSP partners in providing monitoring and management of both customers’ networks and their edge protection.”



December 2025 will see the PSTN switch-off, which is meeting with resistance from some end-users. Gavin Jones, channel partners director, BT Wholesale says: “As the switch to all-IP draws closer and businesses embrace a digital future, it has never been more important to ensure a seamless transition.

“The biggest challenge for channel players will be educating customers on this. Whilst many within the channel know how, why and when the move to all-IP will occur, many end-users don’t. It’s likely that resellers will need to increasingly use vendor partner programmes to help combat misunderstandings around the switch to all-IP.

“As technology advances and customer demands evolve in 2024, the channel will need to be nimble. It’s important that we really listen to SMB’s needs, as they will be feeling the pinch during the current economic climate and skills shortage.”

2025 will also see Microsoft ending support for Windows 10 which should drive an accelerated move to Windows 11 as Bell explains: “Organisations will be seriously considering how they navigate their Windows 11 migration in 2024. It’s estimated that millions of devices will not be compatible with the latest OS. This presents an opportunity to take a layered sales approach to your customers’ IT estates through devices, SaaS offerings and ongoing services.

“Beyond the millions of device sales up for grabs from the Windows 11 upgrade, add-on services and support will be crucial for growing revenue as time-poor business look for guidance and consultancy.”

Demand for more memory and storage never stops as Keefe explains: “Huge amounts of processing memory and storage are needed both on local networks and in the cloud. Companies will find they are looking for ways to cost-effectively ramp up both memory capacity and storage systems to support the higher intensity



2024 Predictions

demands of AI optimised servers, and cloud servers which are processing for the multitude of cloud-based applications.

“Where once a complete replacement would have seemed straight-forward, companies will be under pressure to find more economical and sustainable routes to achieving a better outcome. This will lie in upgrading – from HDDs to SSDs, for example, to gain a performance boost and process data faster, and when it comes to memory, by improving multitasking and extending the life of systems. A memory upgrade will be a highly economical and easy option for gaining improved performance this year.”

Ralf Jordan, vice president channel EMEA at Lenovo adds: “In 2023, the work of a traditional corporate reseller, that buys, enhances and sells products, still exists but alongside new, evolving ways to work. Cloud service providers are increasingly taking over some of the capacity, as business requirements that historically were done in a data centre are moving to the cloud.

“This is changing the role of resellers who are now helping to create or manage cloud infrastructure, and delivering solutions that empower customers to enjoy the benefits of hybrid cloud. Resellers will increasingly play a critical role in managing digital transformation projects and offering customers the choice of multiple cloud vendors.

“Edge computing offers a new chance for channel partners to deliver specialist solutions to sectors that are hungry to bring the computing to the data, rather than vice versa. This technology is considered the backbone of modern digital transformation, and as a result will be an increasing presence in the channel in the coming years.

“Over the next couple of years, compute power will move significantly to the edge, eliminating the need to send data off-site. By processing and computing at source, edge enables real-time decision-making, with benefits felt across all aspects, from improved customer experience in retail to helping telecom providers to virtualise network functions.

“Given its increasing importance to a multitude of sectors, channel partners are already spending significant time and money to pick the right technology suppliers for edge projects. For channel partners, this is a golden opportunity to deliver specialist solutions that enable edge computing, and this is only going to grow as more sectors embrace it.”



Corey Nachreiner,
Watchguard

Securing tomorrow, today

The need for security is ever-evolving and it's tough to keep up, never mind elevate it as Keefe says: “The ability of companies to mitigate against the relentless and cunning hacking attempts being made on sensitive and private data is one of the key factors that will determine success this year. This means relying on advanced AI algorithms to proactively identify and neutralise threats and implementing Zero Trust architecture which works on the premise: trust no-one, not even insiders.



“When it comes to protecting devices that are on the move due to hybrid working, organisations will start opting for methods that ‘air gap’ data, such as USB drives and other storage devices designed for the transportation of data. However, unless these devices are encrypted, information can still be extracted by cyber criminals, and even those encrypted with a software solution will be unable to withstand a brute force attack (repeated attempts at breaking a password). It can take just moments to overcome a common password and even more complex passwords can be cracked in a few hours.

“We anticipate that 2024 will be a big year for storage, not just for enterprise-grade, but even military-grade drives, that are designed to resist the most dangerous and determined cyberattacks. The key to protection lies in their hardware-based encryption which uses a dedicated processor physically located on the drive containing a random number generator to create an encryption key. This can be opened with a user's password. Software-based encryption will also grow in popularity however, in this case, it shares computer resources to encrypt data with other programs on the computer and the user's password is the encryption key that scrambles data. This means that the encryption is only as safe as the computer.”

There are opportunities here as Corey Nachreiner of Watchguard says: “With approximately 3.4 million open cybersecurity jobs, and fierce competition for the talent that is available, more small- to mid-sized- companies will turn to trusted MSPs and MSSPs to protect them in 2024. To accommodate growing demand and scarce staffing resources, MSPs and MSSPs will double down on unified security platforms with heavy automation using AI and machine learning.

“Virtual and mixed reality (VR/MR) headsets are finally beginning to gain mass appeal. However, wherever new and useful technologies emerge, criminal and malicious hackers follow. In 2024,



Threat Lab researchers forecast that either a researcher or malicious hacker will find a technique to gather some of the sensor data from VR/MR headsets to recreate the environment users are playing in.

“While quick response (QR) codes – which provide a convenient way to follow a link with a device such as a mobile phone – have been around for decades, mainstream usage has exploded in recent years. Threat Lab analysts expect to see a major, headline-stealing hack in 2024 caused by an employee following a QR code to a malicious destination.”

Sridhar Ramaswamy, SVP of AI, Snowflake adds: “Deep fakes are also another hurdle, and we can expect increased attacks on what we humans collectively think of as our reality — resulting in a world where no one can, or should, trust a video of you because it may be AI-generated.”

“Cybercriminals and bad actors will benefit from the widespread deployment of advanced AI tools before their targets can set up AI in their own defence,” says Mario Duarte, VP of security, Snowflake. “A lot of businesses are cautious about adopting and using new technologies — there’s cost, regulatory requirements, reputational risk, and more at stake if it’s done poorly. However, bad actors won’t wait. For example, phishing is still a big deal, and most phishing emails are pretty clumsy and dumb. Generative AI will make this already effective attack vector even more successful. They’ll have the full firepower of large language models and generative AI, and defenders will be playing catch-up. Eventually the playing field will even out, but I expect a lot of pain in the meantime.”

With all of the real threats out there combined with scaremongering in the main stream, Etay Maor, senior director of security strategy at Cato Networks is quick to lay some of the myths to rest: “There won’t be a wave of AI based attacks – while AI has been getting a lot of attention ever since the introduction of ChatGPT, we are not even close to seeing a full-fledged AI based attack.

“There won’t be a cyber war between nations – while some international conflicts are increasing in intensity, ‘cyber-war’ is just not a thing. Cyber is yet another military branch and while it can be used as a destructive weapon, kinetic attacks such as bombing is simpler, faster, and for the purpose of destruction much more effective.

“But, businesses will continue to be targeted by nation state and semi-nation state actors, with SMBs, small municipalities, universities, and infrastructure suffering the most. Patching and updating, maintaining a zero-trust approach, and safeguarding from even simple attacks continues to challenge those organisations with limited budgets – and those are prime targets for attacks.

“The end-user is not stupid and it won’t be their fault – there is a tendency to blame the user and couple it with ‘humans are the weakest link’ but humans are not going anywhere so let’s focus on more productive approaches. Cyber security responsibility is moving upwards, to the CISO, CIO, and board, not downward towards the employees and practitioners.”

However, Stu Sjouwerma, CEO, KnowBe4 cautions: “Cyber-attacks like phishing are getting more difficult to detect. It is imperative that employees keep the threat of phishing attacks top of mind and not become complacent. This is only made possible by recurrent security awareness training and simulated phishing so that end users have the knowledge to identify phishing attacks, report them and better protect their organisations. It comes down to building a strong security culture and we will see organisations continue to focus and build on this in 2024.”

Neil Langridge, marketing and alliances director, e92plus adds: “The inbox remains the primary target for entry onto a network, as phishing emails contain to prove lucrative. That won’t change in 2024, but there will be a greater focus on education, awareness and the need for more integrated security around email security.”

Maor continues: “It is on us to create security tools and processes that will be easier to manage. We are going to see organisations move to products and services that while being more robust and advanced, offer simpler management with much less overhead of false positives, integration projects, and constant updates.”

“The challenge around cybersecurity predictions is not what is going to change but whether it’s an evolution or a revolution,” says Langridge. “For example, Artificial Intelligence, Machine or Learning or any variation of the above has been a core element of the solutions helping protect against advanced threats for years, and continues to improve, but 2023 saw a huge awakening in the public understanding of what AI could be, and could do – and the democratisation of access to AI, making it a tool more easily leveraged by malicious hackers and cyber criminals.”

“The inexorable rise of artificial intelligence will continue to evade and challenge security measures, but the market will become fragmented and specific to the different needs.



Art Hu, Lenovo



John Hayes-Warren, Agilitas

“For bad actors, automation through AI will allow the kill chain to be delivered quicker and more effectively, meaning defences will need the same benefit as human responses will simply be too slow. It also increases the concept of least privilege – and Zero Trust – to reduce the potential attack surface and the need to be play a speed game of Whack-a-Mole.

“Shadow AI will also present a challenge for IT teams – without the visibility of what’s being used,

there will be no control, and AI will represent a significant potential vulnerability for data loss.

“Misinformation, social engineering and deep fakes will blur the line, making it increasingly challenging to trust what’s in front of you. Leveraging tools like AI, social media and the widespread access to huge data sources, deep fakes and social engineering will become harder to evade, and increasing target our personal vulnerabilities where technology finds it harder to protect us and will have to focus on being a secondary line of defence if the user is compromised. This also plays into the challenges around phishing and BEC (business email compromise) and defending the inbox, as well as the rise of associated attacks like Vishing and Smishing.

“The rise of smart devices and inter-connectedness means that OT (operational technology) and IoT (Internet of Things) devices are the new edge, and brand-new networks in their own rights – and can no longer be considered outside of the traditional IT team obligations. Cybersecurity specific to their needs will be needed, and will form a fundamental part of business resilience, with sectors from utilities to government relying on OT to deliver essential services. That will need to include not just protection, verifying machine identity and securing the data communications.

“The potential for Quantum Computing has been discussed extensively, but has not been able to breakthrough – or find it’s potential with a mainstream audience. 2024 could change that, as the complex world of cryptography becomes a new learning path for cybersecurity teams. This will stretch across the supply chain, as device management, verification and trust rely on encryption, plus the potential damage caused by a data breach could be exponentially greater if stolen encrypted data could now be decrypted by the attackers.

“All the above represents new opportunities for VARs and MSPs, alongside the need to integrate new solutions into their existing technology stack and service offering. But most of all, supply chain attacks highlight that partners are now targets too – so internal protection is the first step.”

AI in the channel

There’s no doubt that AI is touching all aspects of the tech world. Liz Centoni, executive vice president chief strategy officer and GM, applications at Cisco says: “While there’s always a wave of excitement around the next big thing, I think the last year has been different. Advancements in AI, especially generative AI (GenAI), are leading to a once-in-a-generation shift.”

Bell adds: “It has the potential to accelerate workflows, removing mundane tasks so users can focus on adding value to their roles. By 2028, GenAI is expected to represent a \$158 billion opportunity. Businesses will be looking to partners for technology, guidance, and support, to help implement AI within their organisations.”

“We’re very excited about the AI at the edge, which brings your data to where you want to consume it with AI,” says Yao. “Take the AI PC – many of these AI processes are being compressed so businesses don’t even need a GPU rack to deploy AI applications. This will make the technology more personalised and accessible.”

“Technology vendors can give partners the confidence to unlock their imaginations in terms of what AI could bring to customers,” points out Jordan. “Partners need to figure out who to work with, which solutions to use, and what business models to adopt. IT vendors can therefore help channel partners understand the answers to these problems, and in turn help customers start their AI journey.”

Sunny Bedi, CIO and CDO, Snowflake adds: “One of the most exciting ideas for workplace productivity is the deployment of AI assistants that help employees become — and continue to be — efficient and effective. For example, onboarding new workers is a complex process of educating the worker about systems, processes, and culture, alongside ensuring that they quickly gain access to only the right systems and projects. Looking forward, we can expect AI assistants tuned to specific departments and roles to provide that orientation, tied to their individual persona and accompanying them throughout their tenure at the company.

“As an organisation’s processes and needs become more mature, they can then train the agent to do the same thing on their behalf next time. And when they hire a new person into their organisation, that person gets that full wealth of knowledge from the beginning. Taking it one step further, these AI assistants will start contributing to larger enterprise knowledge. By ingesting new documentation and thorough feedback from existing employees, scouring the internet for new ways to optimise processes, and more, these AI assistants will become every employee’s best work buddy. This will quickly become the workplace standard and table stakes for increased productivity.”

“If you look at the smartphone in your hand, it’s not the phone itself that makes it revolutionary — it’s all the various applications that you use every day for different functionalities,” explains Christian Kleinerman, SVP of product, Snowflake explains. “The generative AI revolution draws similar parallels, with the data and apps being where the value will be realized for this next phase of innovation. An explosion of apps and novel use cases was already underway, but it will be significantly accelerated by generative AI and large language models. We’ll see applications across categories and industry verticals leverage these technologies, and many more apps will have AI-based search, conversational, and assistive experiences built in. These apps will bring true disruption, mostly around end-user experiences and interactions.

“How will people access systems in the future? They’ll need to know less, lowering the bar to access and broadening the reach of technology. Today there’s expertise around how to manage a CRM or point-of-sale app. In the fullness of time, app management will converge toward simpler experiences with natural language as a core interface. It’s going to be a different experience that redefines roles and responsibilities across the board.”

“The crux is not the avoidance of technology due to its inherent risks but harnessing its potential while establishing robust regulatory frameworks,”

Centoni adds: “We must also ensure that consumers have access to and control over their data in the spirit of the recent EU Data Act. With the rising importance of AI systems, available public data will soon hit a ceiling and high-quality language data will likely be exhausted before 2026. Organisations need to shift to private and/or synthetic data which opens the possibility for unintended access and usage.

“In 2024, AI-enabled disinformation, scams, and fraud will continue to grow as a threat to businesses, people, and even candidates and elections. In response, we’ll see more investments in detection and risk mitigation. Inclusive new AI solutions will guard against cloned voices, deepfakes, social media bots, and influence campaigns. AI models will be trained on large datasets for better accuracy and effectiveness. New mechanisms for authentication and provenance will promote transparency and accountability.”

“The crux is not the avoidance of technology due to its inherent risks but harnessing its potential while establishing robust regulatory frameworks,” says Jeffrey. “With every innovation comes responsibility, and this holds true for AI.

“The AI revolution is not just about software or algorithms. It’s about embracing a new era marked by even closer collaboration between humans and machines. It is about understanding that while AI can augment our capabilities, it is up to us, the humans, to guide it, regulate it, and ensure it’s used to create sustainable value.”

Maor concludes: “AI is not going to replace AI, but people who know how to use AI will replace those who don’t.”

Adapting is key

What does all this really mean for channel partners? David Watts, senior vice president and regional managing director, UK and Ireland, TD Synnex explains: “In 2024, as they were in the past year, cloud and cybersecurity will be key areas of activity. We expect AI will be more of an influence and it could play a significant part in driving hardware upgrades. We also expect

interest in IoT and data analytics to grow.

“For partners, the most important thing will be having access to the enablement resources and support required to meet their end-customer needs – whether that’s for a simple refresh of laptops or a comprehensive digital transformation project. As solutions become increasingly complex, we expect to see increased enthusiasm and involvement in ecosystems and more collaboration between channel businesses with complementary capabilities.

“Sustainability and DEI will continue to be major themes and IT providers will need to both demonstrate their own efforts to drive down their carbon footprint and help customers do the same with the technologies they deploy and use.”

“Whilst last year brought its set of challenges, 2024 is going to be a turning point for many businesses,” adds John Hayes-Warren, CEO of Agilitas. “Many channel companies, Agilitas included, will proactively move forward with adopting a ‘Total Experience’ strategy, which is defined as an organisation’s ability to break silos and treat all experiences as interconnected.

“With increasing demands from both customers and employees, the total experience will require diverse groups and teams, who may have previously worked in siloes, to collaborate, share knowledge and operate in a coordinated manner. This approach bolsters employee and customer confidence, satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy over time. When implemented successfully, the strategy will also demonstrate and communicate a company’s core value proposition across all touchpoints.

“I expect that we will see the polarisation of organisations across the channel in 2024. Those who are adapting, creating a total experience strategy, tracking their carbon footprints and putting their people first, are the ones who will succeed now and in the future.”



Ralph Jordan, Lenovo

Making informed DMS choices

Document Management Systems (DMS) play a crucial role in this regard, helping businesses across all industries, process, archive, manage, and track documents efficiently.

However, when it comes to choosing between on-premises and cloud-based DMS solutions, the decision can be challenging. As a reseller, it's essential to guide your small and medium-sized business (SMB) customers in making an informed choice that aligns with their specific needs and priorities.

Here, **David Malan, sales director, UK & Ireland of DocuWare** delves into the key considerations, the differences between on-premises and cloud-based DMS, as well as the potential benefits of a hybrid approach.



A DMS is a digital solution that streamlines document-related tasks, including processing, capturing, storing/archiving, managing, and tracking documents. It also provides automation for workflows and often includes email integration and e-signature capabilities. Common document types handled by DMS include emails, forms, invoices, contracts, and sometimes personnel records.

So, what should a robust DMS actually do? In my opinion, it comes down to four key things:

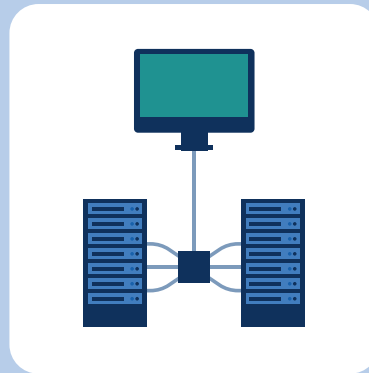
1. **Smart Document control:** It enables employees to manage business documents securely and find them quickly.
2. **Adhere to compliance regulations:** Strict operational standards surrounding document security, data privacy, retention policies and information disclosure mean that having the right DMS in place, compliance is maintained.
3. **Enhance security:** Protects sensitive information through access rights, encryption, and robust data management tools.
4. **Workflow management:** Digital workflows are used to automate business processes. A DMS with a good workflow management system performs continuous analysis of the workflows.

The on-premises vs cloud dilemma

When selecting a DMS, the first decision I believe revolves around the deployment model. As mentioned, there are two primary options those being on-premises and cloud-based solutions.

On-premises DMS:

- **Complete control:** Organisations maintain ownership of their data and have control over security and configuration.
- **Internet independence:** Data remains accessible even during internet outages, ensuring uninterrupted work.
- **Highly customisable compliance:** Suited for industries with strict data storage regulations, such as healthcare or finance.
- **Reliability:** Perceived as more dependable due to lower reliance on external systems.



ON-PREMISE



CLOUD

Cloud-Based DMS:

- **Fast deployment:** Quick implementation without significant infrastructure investments.
- **Scalable costs:** Pay only for the services and storage needed, eliminating surprise expenses.
- **Anywhere/Anytime access:** Facilitates remote collaboration and work, ideal for the age of hybrid work.
- **Disaster recovery:** Provides redundant backups to minimise downtime in case of unforeseen failures.
- **Continual technology advancement:** Regular hardware upgrades result in enhanced performance and security.
- **Scalability:** Resources can be adjusted to meet real-time needs, ensuring optimal performance.

While both deployment models of course have their benefits, it's essential to consider the unique advantages and drawbacks of each when advising your SMB customers.

The hybrid approach

For some SMBs, a one-size-fits-all approach may not be the ideal solution. Enter the hybrid approach, which combines the strengths of both on-premises and cloud-based deployments. In this model, current documents and data are processed and archived on-premises, while less frequently used or backup data is stored in the cloud. Some organisations even adopt a hybrid strategy, housing critical customer data or intellectual property on-premises, while leveraging the cloud for routine tasks.

The hybrid approach offers flexibility and scalability, enabling businesses to adapt to changing needs and market conditions. However, it's essential to be aware that this option may come with higher costs, as it requires on-site data storage hardware. If you're going to advise an SMB customer to consider this approach you should carefully assess their specific needs and budget.

Advising your customers on the right solution

As mentioned, the choice between on-premises and cloud-based DMS hinges on a business's priorities, budget, and available IT

resources. Therefore, it's truly crucial to weigh the pros and cons of each approach carefully.

For on-premises DMS:

1. Consider it if your customer has an IT department capable of handling software maintenance and security.
2. Ensure the DMS software includes essential security measures such as AES encryption, detailed logging, version control, and comprehensive permissions.
3. Recognise the reliability and control benefits but prepare them for higher upfront investments and ongoing maintenance costs.

For cloud-based DMS:

1. Embrace the scalable costs, flexibility, and reliability that cloud solutions offer.
2. Leverage cloud providers' cybersecurity features and disaster recovery capabilities to enhance data protection.
3. Highlight the anytime/anywhere access benefits.

Ultimately, the decision should be driven by your SMB customer's unique requirements. Each DMS deployment model has its strengths, and the choice should align with the business's specific goals and operational dynamics.

Ensuring long-term success

The on-premises vs cloud-based document management debate should not be viewed as a one-size-fits-all proposition. Instead, it's a nuanced decision that requires careful consideration of an SMB's individual circumstances.

Equipping your customers with a comprehensive understanding of the pros and cons associated with both on-premises and cloud-based DMS empowers them to make well-informed decisions. This approach will not only enable your customers to align their DMS strategies with their unique requirements - ensuring a supportive and scalable foundation for long-term growth and success - but also foster a lasting, mutually beneficial partnership between yourself as a reseller and your customers for years to come.

Embracing the total experience

John Hayes-Warren, CEO at Agilitas looks at four key disciplines that can help align customer and employee channels

Whilst the technology channel continues to evolve at a rapid pace, many companies are now considering a strategy that encompasses the 'total experience'. Not only does this help mitigate ongoing business and market challenges, but it provides solutions that are aligned with the needs of the end-user. This way of working is becoming more critical to those looking to win new customers and further support employees.

A total experience is defined as the process of meeting the goals of stakeholders, across all channels and interfaces, during an engagement or interaction. This therefore creates shared experiences that encompass the multi-experience (MX), customer experience (CX), employee experience (EX), and user experience (UX).

As employee and customer experiences mature, the need for internal and external synergies has never been more important. In fact, a recent survey from Gartner revealed that in 2024, organisations providing a total experience (TX) will outperform competitors by 25%.

Conducting good business inside and out

In an era defined by relentless connectivity and rapidly evolving customer expectations, a total experience strategy stands as the cornerstone of sustainable business success. TX can bolster Channel businesses - positioning them at the forefront of the market. By seamlessly interlinking experience ecosystems, companies can benefit from reduced customer friction, empowered employees, and exponential value offerings through unified communications.



A robust TX strategy considers the needs and satisfaction of both customers and employees. Engaged employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to deliver better customer service by identifying issues quickly, mitigating problems efficiently, and keeping client satisfaction rates high. By interconnecting experiences, businesses can also create a valuable and accessible knowledge base that allows employees to learn from each other. This can also be used to refine and improve the TX strategy, identify new opportunities, and help channel businesses grow.

TX can further be leveraged to build a customer-centric culture. By optimising total experience, Channel service providers can enable consistent delivery of information allowing consumers to solve issues while staying engaged

with the brand. TX also creates a better understanding of the customer journey, allowing companies to identify points where customers are having difficulty and improve those experiences. This in turn bolsters engagement with customers in more meaningful, relevant, and personalised ways enabling long-term customer loyalty and advocacy.

By optimising the total experience, companies can ensure that every touchpoint is as efficient and effective as possible. This helps drive further investment while allowing companies to stay ahead of the competition and remain poised for growth.

Four principles of TX

Implementing a total experience strategy requires a well-thought-out plan and commitment from all levels of an organisation. It is important to consider TX as a business strategy aimed at nurturing collaborative and supportive interactions between customers and employees, rather than fixating on any particular product or platform.

As a result, there are four key focus areas that channel businesses must consider when developing their TX strategy: the role of the chief people officer (CPO), employee and customer confidence, cross-departmental roadmaps and how best to leverage technology.

Why the chief people officer plays such an important role

The role of a CPO is to understand human behaviour and recognise the internal and external pain points across the business. This means they are critical in facilitating cross-departmental collaboration, removing any obstacles and bridging the gaps needed to create a total experience. CPOs ensure that the teams in each department and those responsible for products and services are aligned, as well as identifying areas for improvement to ensure employees and customers are engaged.

Fundamentally, a CPO is responsible for helping shape the company's culture. With a focus on engaging with managers and directors, and connecting them with employees, this creates an environment which fosters collaboration, innovation and mutual respect. What's more, a CPO will lead initiatives that promote employee engagement, well-being, and job satisfaction.

With their CPO in the driving seat, businesses can eliminate the traditional siloed approach. This will ensure that team leaders and supervisors join forces, playing an integral role in supporting the business' growth strategy and proactively reforming practices that don't align with the company's culture.

How TX can better drive employee and customer confidence

Total Experience plays a pivotal role in enhancing both employee and customer confidence within an organisation. Through the holistic management of stakeholder experiences and by interlinking the CX, EX, UX, and MX disciplines across various touchpoints, channel organisations can drive greater customer and employee confidence, satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy.

Employee and customer confidence are often interlinked. Channel organisations that support their employees will benefit from a happier, loyal, committed and high-performing workforce which can result in improved service and operational output. Satisfied employees can become prime advocates for their organisation, positively influencing customer interactions through their attitudes and actions.

Customers in turn are more likely to choose channel brands that prioritise employee experience, as they receive better service from engaged and supported employees. Total experience plays a pivotal role in valuing both CX and EX equally, fostering a customer-centric culture with messaging consistent at every touchpoint. This consistency helps to establish a cohesive brand identity that appeals to both customers and employees.

By harnessing a holistic TX approach to experience management through digital and non-digital best practices, Channel companies can provide engaging and seamless experiences across all platforms. Furthermore, TX allows businesses to develop an overarching strategy to weather the polycrisis and emerge better equipped to navigate the challenges that lie ahead in the age of experience.



TOTAL EXPERIENCE

Developing a cross-departmental TX roadmap

Until now, companies have tended to view the various experience areas as separate entities, and have dealt with them like different departments.

To deliver exceptional output organisations must

recognise the importance of cross-departmental collaboration and unifying these experiences. Cross-departmental collaboration involves breaking down silos and fostering effective communication and teamwork.

Establishing a TX roadmap that prioritises inter-department collaboration is paramount in creating seamless customer and employee experiences. Organisations can leverage tools and platforms like internal messaging, collaborative project management tools and regular cross-departmental meetings to better facilitate their communications.

By opting for a departmental view and managing teams holistically, users, products and services all benefit from journey mapping as it can flag gaps, friction points and frustrations and take note of links among departments that still need to be created.

Harnessing a cross-departmental TX roadmap also means that businesses operating in the channel can benefit from improved operational efficiency as well as enhanced innovation, customer satisfaction and overall business growth.

Leveraging technology to develop TX

Technology has always been a business enabler, but never more so than for building a TX. Integrating modern technologies like virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (IoT) can take the customer experience to a new level, providing an interactive and bespoke experience.

As the demands of today's market increase, technology hardware remains a critical part of the Technology Channel, in line with the continued supply chain challenges. Yet supporting, storing and transporting hardware is resource-heavy and can mean high customer service standards can slip. In TX-focused organisations, employee collaboration tools, dashboards for customers, operations and HR are also vital in helping to meet expectations and personalise experiences.

This not only ensures companies keep a pulse on the CX and EX, but can provide support when changes are needed for products, services and interactions. With 360-degree feedback available for these tools, employees in all departments can become agile problem solvers that can form part of the success of the business.

The future of TX

In a hyper-connected world, a total experience strategy isn't a luxury – it's the compass guiding businesses towards success. With a total experience approach, companies can create experiences that are consistent and unified for stakeholders across their organisation. By intertwining customer and employee experiences across all touchpoints, channel businesses can thrive and cement their relevance in an ever-competitive landscape.

A successful total experience strategy can help those in the technology channel advance their respective businesses. TX will likely become a focal point for transforming business models in the future to achieve world-class customer and employee advocacy levels.

Keeping pace with the evolving consumer

Daniel Todaro, founding partner and managing director of Gekko Group, looks at where brands should be focusing their attention if they wish to grow their e-commerce performance in 2024.



Shopping online became the de facto route to market for consumers in 2020 driven by necessity due to store closures. The ONS reported the proportion of online retail sales peaked at 38% in January 2021 vs 20% the year previous. While the average sales split has returned to 26% since this peak, the manner that both experienced and less experienced online consumers engage with brands and retailers, across multiple channels, has rapidly evolved. With considered purchases, in particular technology but not limited to this, it has sparked a greater importance for a brand's omni-channel customer journey. This in turn has encouraged a race for retailers to enhance their operational agility in e-commerce to remain competitive and appealing. To play in the e-commerce space is not to simply offer a transactional site online but a well-considered data stack that ultimately understands the customers' needs at each touchpoint and marries them up to the retailer's unique proposition.

Further market uncertainty in 2023 continued to drive evolving consumer behaviour. This will continue in 2024 as retailers brands adapt their strategies to convert on the now normal, lengthening online consideration phase due to squeezed budgets. Retail website traffic is increasing year on year, and mobile as a share of that is also increasing. The purchase cycle is likely to lengthen, becoming normal, as consumers sit in the consideration stage for longer across multiple touch points. This is likely to increase as we

shop on mobile devices cluttered with a multitude of content at their fingertips, from social media, bloggers and reviews.

Offsite and on-site content needs to meet the demands of the consumer, wherever they are on their route to purchase. Here we have highlighted three key elements brands can focus on to drive audience engagement and discoverability on partner retail e-commerce, increasing operational agility to succeed amid uncertain market factors.

The potential of data in e-commerce

As known, Google will in a bid to make the web more private, phase out all third-party cookies by the end of 2024, currently deprecated for 1% of Chrome users as of January 2023, which represents approximately 30 million users. This move restricts the ability to track a user's activity across multiple websites and in turn, the major resource for marketing and sales teams to personalise and deliver targeted ads. The implication for retailers and advertisers alike that rely on paid media via 3rd party cookies to target consumers and measure brand and sales impact, is about to reshape how marketing and advertising works online.

Retailers are looking to harness and better optimise their consented 1st party data to offer better solutions. The potential is positive due to the relevance of data and the control retailers will have to improve the quality of ads and personalised experiences. To realise the full potential, retailers using data as a platform to form stronger partnerships with brands and suppliers will likely uncover a better understanding of their customers and shape the narrative.

Whether it be brand-building initiatives or first-party cookies direct from transactional sites, retailers will be mindful to sensitively use the data they have on their customer's behaviour. The current reality is low metric transparency from retail websites to the brands as retailers increasingly look to monetise their online store to brands. This highlights the importance of growing data and insight models in synergy with a brand's growing media portfolio, to ensure brands see their platform as a viable solution to learn from the consumer, in a trustworthy way, to better serve their customers.

Data unlocking retail media potential

Retail media is a rapidly growing medium of advertising on retailer e-commerce sites. Global advertising revenue is forecast to exceed television revenue by 2028 and account for 15.4% of total ad revenue. Brands are following the consumer shift to digital commerce with the added appeal of reaching consumers with personalised advertising within the category. Retailers enable varied promotional formats and tools on their owned channels and sell inventory to brands and in turn boost profitability. The benefit to brands is to show up across multiple touchpoints in both physical and digital shopping environments. The ever-important omni channel journey demands content that strikes the right chord, wherever the brand is consumed. Continuity of the consumer's purchase journey with consistent brand messaging, is proven to likely lead to increased trust and confidence to bring the consumer closer to a purchase.

Retail media networks sit in the transactional channel and so appeal to bring brand messaging closer to the point of sale. An ideal touchpoint for brands to engage with their prospective customers and brand awareness amongst the target audience since visits to a retailer's

website or store is not solely to purchase but also to research the products available to them. Tech stack will drive improved accessibility and likely standardise as the shift to retail media grows. Unlike traditional TV, which retail media is set to surpass, the measures and ROI reporting available from purchase behaviour and browsing trends will in turn elevate the brands demands for transparency in metrics and insight.

The race to play in the retail media network space and maximise inventory can potentially de-prioritise the partnership of data and insight to brands. This should be guarded with caution, as retail media supply increases so will the standardised retail media and brands expectation to manage campaigns across multiple networks. Retailers with considered campaign control and insight reporting will unlock the potential of the data to truly drive innovation in the space and grow brand partnerships.

Digital shelf analytics to track e-commerce on site performance

Understanding the full potential of data and highlighting channels in e-commerce to understand consumer needs and trends only stand up with considerable thought into the digital shelf. Brands need to be discoverable quickly on listing pages and relevant search terms, showing up with accurate and consistent content across multiple retailers, customer reviews and how their pricing and promotion strategy stacks up against competitors.

While physical retail has evolved into finely tuned budgets to drive in-store presence, in-store advocacy and inventory management, e-commerce is a lesser-known channel. The digital shelf is the equivalent of someone exploring products in a physical store, the digital experience on a retail site in which consumers discover, learn, compare and purchase products. By first identifying the elements of the consumer experience available with physical retail that e-commerce is unable to match, for example, trained sales colleagues to assist the customer's purchase decision, we can then identify digital shelf assets to compliment the omni-channel journey. Ratings and reviews from like-minded consumers as well as engaging, informative 'top features' videos on product pages will all help close down the sale successfully and are elements that consumers expect to see on e-commerce platforms.

On-site performance metrics are key to measuring impact and shaping activity in the future of marketing campaigns and content to name a few. Along with benchmarking vs competitors on pricing and presence on product listing pages. The valuable source of data on retail sites is a vital cog to brands. Brands should consider investing in a web scraping solution to automate this process and enable their sales and marketing teams to better understand their e-commerce performance both in isolation and against the competition. Like media channels, clear insight reporting of the digital shelf drives understanding of a customer's interactions and partner retail opportunities.

As 2024 begins to take shape, brands should be prepared to work closely with 3rd-party retail partners to adapt to the changes coming to cookies and shopper data, as well as exploring retail media opportunities. Keeping track of on-site metrics is also vital, keeping e-commerce managers informed and enabling them to influence their brands' presence and performance on partner sites.

Second hand or second life?



Steve Haskew, head of sustainability and social leadership at Circular Computing discusses how and why we need to break the stigma around second hand tech.

Mountains of e-waste, increasingly scarce resources, and volatile supply chains; these are just three of the reasons that the technology industry should be re-considering its current model of 'take, make and replace'. We've seen across other industries, such as fashion, that the cost-of-living crisis and increasingly eco-conscious consumers have led to the second-hand market becoming a lucrative business. Through holding onto stigmas around the quality and performance of second-hand tech, we continue to purchase brand new despite the negative impact this is having on our planet. So, what needs to be done to see similar change across the tech industry?

While historically refurbished devices have been perceived as lower quality, unreliable products – the innovation within the industry has meant we now have processes that can produce products certified as high quality and equal performance to new. Couple this with retailers embracing the second-hand market such as Curry's, and the industry is in a strong position for the future. But in spite of such progress, stigmas still remain attached to second-life devices, especially at an enterprise level.

This is not only an extra cost to wallets but also to the environment, with 160,000 laptops disposed of every day in the EU alone. For every new laptop produced in replacement to an existing device, an average of 316kg of CO₂ is created, 190,000 litres of water is used, and 1,200 kg of earth and rock is mined.

The misconceptions around second-hand tech

The important consideration with technology in comparison to other second-life products is that it must perform and function to a high-level, not just look like new. A good comparable to use is buying a second-hand car. We're relaxed about buying a car as we can usually paint a full understanding of the vehicle's history and have reliable repairs available, but why is buying second user technology any different? Perhaps the reason for the stigma around second-life technology is that it is seen as 'unregulated'. A large amount of the second-hand consumer tech market are smaller businesses, refurbishing and repairing devices from larger OEMs, where using the original producer might be seen as too expensive.

In addition, the automotive industry would be perceived as very well served when it comes to repair and maintenance. Not only are there legal requirements to get a car on the road, ensuring that the car you are buying is road worthy and safe, but there is no shortage of garages and mechanics to take your car to when something goes wrong.

By taking these same principles from the automotive industry and applying them to the second-hand technology market, we can start to see where trust can be built and where we can break down previous misconceptions. Certification of quality, such as the BSI Kitemark, and a service-built industry where products can be put back through the circular economy and maintain performance without creating e-waste or adding to cost, are two of the

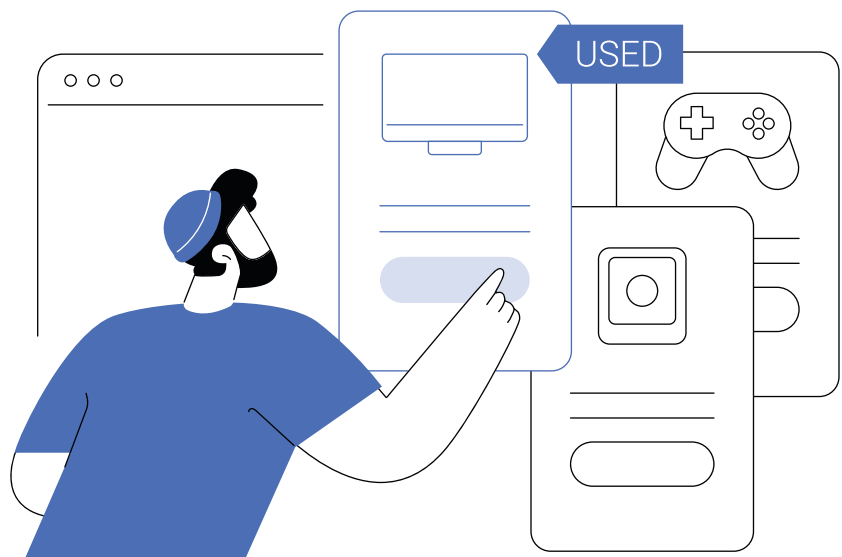
key solutions. In doing so, businesses can start to harness real cost saving in comparison to new, reduce the emissions they produce and ultimately, maintain the quality of technology they have.

How to break the stigma and why remanufacturing is key

So how do you start shifting the dial and increase the desire to consider purchasing second-life tech? It's up to both public and private sectors to work as one to help create a circular economy that embraces second-hand. As shown above, regulation and confidence in a purchase is key. While refurbishing has made great strides to open the second-hand market up to a wider range of potential users, there's little in the way of a guarantee on the performance of the product you'll receive. That's where remanufacturing comes in, and how organisations and businesses alike can take advantage of purchasing at scale.

The BSI Kitemark awarded to remanufacturing is the guarantee that end-users need to put their trust in the product, with a certification that it will perform as good, if not better, than new. With that trust in place, and a guarantee on the performance of the product over a full second-lifecycle, the stigmas surrounding second-life technology will start to break down. In our view, the growth of remanufacturing is the only way to save the technology industry from going too far in damaging the planet by mining natural resources and creating an insurmountable mountain of e-waste.

Like with many things this will rely on a few 'pioneers' being early adopters, yet this time it comes with little risk and plenty of reward. Even beyond the obvious cost saving and environmental benefits, it can help improve public perception or even perhaps attract new talent to join businesses. In fact, one-fifth of UK workers report that they would actually turn down jobs based on a company's poor ESG commitments. So next time your company looks to conduct an IT refresh, considering remanufacturing as an option is the first step to creating real sustainable change in the technology industry.



Community and core values

In 2023 **Utelize Mobile** picked up the **PCR Award for Sustainability Initiative**. Here, **Richard Slade, head of partnerships**, talks about the multi-faceted approach the company has towards the environment.



Can you provide an overview of Utelize's sustainability initiatives?

Utelize is deeply committed to integrating sustainability into its day-to-day business practices, with a specific focus on our Mobile Device Lifecycle Management Service. Our sustainability initiatives are not just standalone efforts but are ingrained in the core of our operations.

We embody key principles within our mobile device lifecycle management service:

- **Reduce:** we assist our clients in fully understanding their mobile device usage, enabling them to create strategies that eliminate waste and lower costs by investing only in devices that are genuinely needed.
- **Reuse and refurbish:** promoting the re-use and refurbishment of devices is a cornerstone of our approach. This involves extending the lifespan of devices, redeploying them for existing users, or reselling them where no longer needed, contributing to a circular economy.
- **Secure recycling:** we take responsibility for the end-of-life management of devices, engaging in responsible recycling and secure data wiping. This not only ensures the secure disposal of devices but also minimizes e-waste and the environmental impact associated with device disposal.
- **Sustainable packaging:** we utilise sustainably sourced materials in our custom-made packaging when sending smartphones to end-users from our buffer stock, reducing the environmental impact of our delivery process.
- **Delivering social impact:** we actively participate in social impact initiatives, notably our Solar Community Hubs project in collaboration with Computer Aid and Dell Technologies. This project provides education, computers, internet access, and employment opportunities in some of the world's poorest regions, aligning with our commitment to community engagement.
- **Carbon neutrality:** In partnership with Eden Reforestation, we go beyond just device sales by ensuring every device sold is accompanied by sustainability efforts. We plant five mangrove trees per device sold, contributing to carbon neutrality and environmental conservation.

Sustainability is not just a checklist, it's an integral part of how we conduct our business. We believe that by incorporating responsible practices, we contribute not only to our success but also to a healthier planet and a more socially equitable world.

What specific steps has Utelize taken to reduce its environmental impact and promote sustainability within the tech industry?

We have a multifaceted approach to reduce our ecological footprint and champion sustainability within the technology sector.

- **Responsible electronic waste disposal:** we have established robust partnerships with certified recycling facilities to ensure the responsible disposal of electronic waste. Through these alliances, we actively participating in circular economy practices that facilitate the recycling and repurposing of electronic devices. To date, we've responsibly recycled and re-sold thousands of devices, contributing significantly to the reduction of electronic waste.
- **Reforestation initiative:** as part of our broader commitment to environmental sustainability, we have planted over 30,000 trees through our reforestation initiative in collaboration with Eden Reforestation. This not only contributes to carbon sequestration but also supports biodiversity and ecological balance.
- **Community support through volunteering:** we actively support the Malvern Hills food bank through both volunteering efforts and financial assistance. By engaging with and contributing to local communities, we address social and environmental challenges, embodying a holistic approach to sustainability.
- **Support for Computer Aid International:** we have been a dedicated supporter of Computer Aid International, raising over £110,000 through the generous donations of equipment from our customers. This financial support directly contributes to bridging the digital divide, providing technology access to underserved communities worldwide.

In summary, our commitment to sustainability is not just a declaration but a series of impactful actions that span responsible e-waste disposal, energy-efficient technology adoption, reforestation, community support, and collaborative advocacy for sustainable practices within the technology sector. These initiatives collectively underscore our dedication to leaving a positive imprint on the planet and fostering a more sustainable future.

In what ways does Utelize encourage and facilitate the recycling of electronic devices?

Our comprehensive approach spans responsible electronic waste disposal through partnerships with certified recycling facilities. As we help our customers to manage their smartphone lifecycle, we actively promote circular economy practices, facilitating the recycling and repurposing of devices, and influencing positive change in electronic waste reduction. Additionally, our advocacy for energy-efficient technologies extends to smartphones, where we actively recommend and implement eco-conscious choices, aligning our practices with a commitment to sustainability.

Utelize tries to maximise the value from donated devices by not charging our customers for processing devices – data wiping, grading, etc. – and 100% of the resale value is donated to Computer Aid. This ensures that every donated device contributes to both environmental sustainability and meaningful fundraising. Through



this initiative, we not only extend the lifespan of devices through responsible refurbishment but also channel the proceeds toward impactful projects.

We employ a robust approach to measure the value and impact of donated devices, incorporating a multi-faceted evaluation.

The monetary value is determined by the price our partners are willing to pay for these devices in the circular economy. Additionally, we collaborate closely with Computer Aid, our partner, to assess the socio-economic impact of

our initiatives, particularly the Solar Community Hubs in South Africa. Computer Aid tracks metrics such as the number of South Africans benefiting from these hubs, the qualifications attained, and the skills acquired. This comprehensive evaluation allows us to not only quantify the economic value of devices but also measure their tangible contribution to education and empowerment in the communities we support.

Can you tell us a bit about the Solar Community Hubs initiative?

The Solar Community Hubs initiative is a programme championed by Computer Aid and strongly supported by Utelize. It was born out of a shared vision to catalyse social and economic development in the underserved communities of Xithhelani and Rhulani through digital empowerment.

In collaboration with the Xithhelani people, the project aims to bridge the digital divide exacerbated by the lack of access to computers and reliable internet in Limpopo, the province with the lowest development level in South Africa.

With a mission to install a Solar Learning Lab and a community-owned wireless internet service at Mahuntsi High secondary public school, the initiative is set to provide quality ICT education and connectivity for both children and adults, fostering a bottom-up, circular ecosystem that makes the community self-sufficient.

The project envisions creating new educational opportunities, improving skills, and enhancing economic prospects for the people of Xithhelani, ultimately contributing to social and economic development on both individual and community levels.

Looking to the future, what are Utelize's plans for expanding its sustainability initiatives and further promoting responsible use of technology in the communities it serves?

Looking ahead, Utelize is steadfast in its commitment to expanding sustainability initiatives and advancing responsible technology use in the communities we serve.

Our vision encompasses an ongoing collaboration with partners to support impactful projects like the Solar Community Hubs initiative, fostering digital empowerment and environmental sustainability. We plan to broaden our reach by engaging with additional communities and implementing innovative strategies to minimise electronic waste.

Moreover, we aim to amplify awareness campaigns, both locally and globally, advocating for responsible technology practices. Utelize envisions an evolving landscape where technology serves as a catalyst for positive social and environmental change, and we remain dedicated to leading initiatives that align with these principles.

Why sustainability will be even bigger for the channel in 2024

Kevin Wragg, director, environment and quality compliance, UK, TD Synnex, says that sustainability will continue to grow in importance for the channel in 2024.

Last year was a big year for sustainability in the IT channel and 2024 will be even bigger. Everyone is starting to take a serious interest in the subject. With good reason. It's becoming essential to demonstrate that both your business and the products and services that it offers, are making every effort to minimise their carbon impact and can meet the rapidly rising expectations of customers on sustainability.

Public sector tenders for new equipment will now typically include a requirement for a specific ratio of products to be remanufactured or refurbished. In France, this already has to be at least 20% of the total. Where the public sector goes, corporates will follow and in time, so will mid-sized and smaller businesses and this will certainly be the case with sustainability.

Essential data

In our experience, bids for larger and smaller projects increasingly have a higher weighting towards environment, social and governance (ESG). Two years ago, we might have expected to have been around 5% – in 2024, it's not unusual for it to be 25% or more of the scoring for some contracts. To have any chance of winning, partners will need to have a clear carbon reduction strategy and plan in place.

There are also more regulations coming into play. The EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), for example, mandates organisations to report on and provide mitigation for the impact of their operations and supply chain. It comes into force this year. If you sell to or operate in the EU, you will need to conform to this legislation. A similar directive is sure to be enforced in the UK at some point – and I'd predict this will be sooner rather than later.

Demonstrable reduction

All these factors make it imperative for every reseller business and channel company to demonstrate what they are doing to reduce their emissions and move towards net zero. They will need to show that their supply chain is as carbon efficient and sustainable as possible. Customers will also want to know how hardware products are made, packed and transported, what rare earth minerals have been used in



components, and how much of the casing is made from recycled material. They will want to see minimal or zero use of plastic in packaging and to know that everything – including the product itself – is recyclable and will never end up in landfill.

Collecting and collating all this information and then keeping it up to date is going to be a challenge. But our industry is already starting to bring it all together. Vendors are working to reduce consumption in their

manufacturing processes and the products themselves. Distributors are working with delivery partners to minimise the impact of physically getting the products from A to B. In fact, one year ago we launched our Sustainable Transportation and Logistics Tower of Specialization, as part of our Corporate Citizenship Programme, and formed a working group with all relevant internal stakeholders participating.

In this new environment, in which partners will need to provide detailed information to customers on every aspect of the solution and the supply chain, data is going to be absolutely vital. I believe AI is going to play a key role in helping channel businesses assess their carbon impact position, track KPIs and pull together, analyse, and present data.

Getting started

As a starting point, partners need to understand where they are today on emissions and set out a coherent and meaningful plan to becoming more carbon efficient.

We've also been working with partners and vendors to help them understand what they will need to do in order to achieve net zero emissions and meet their customers' expectations on sustainability. Over the last 12 months, I have met and presented to over 750 resellers, partners and vendors on sustainability. I fully expect to be even busier in the coming year. In addition, we recently started offering Net Zero Academy courses to help partners understand exactly where they are today and how to get their sustainability journey underway.

Getting started is perhaps the hardest and most important step. One we'd suggest all channel companies need to take very soon.

A perfect storm for the circular economy

Sophia Haywood-Atkinson, services director, UK, and Jay Allen, business unit director – PC Systems, UK, TD Synnex, explain how resellers and retailers can drive the circular economy and gain a competitive advantage by giving customers viable trade-in and asset disposal options.

Both businesses and consumers have been holding back on IT spending over the couple of past years. That's created a latent demand for systems that can deliver higher performance and greater versatility and it's an ideal time for the new generation of devices with built-in AI functionality to arrive on the market. As the economy recovers and confidence returns, these factors will create a perfect storm and a surge of upgrade activity.



While everyone has been riding out the extended economic downturn triggered by the unprecedented events of recent times, another important trend has been gaining strength. Sustainability has become vital to every organisation and individual and when they upgrade their devices – or any other hardware – they will want to make sure that their old products do not end up in landfill.

Disposal services

This is why we believe reseller partners and retailers must be ready to offer prospective buyers an IT asset disposal service for their legacy hardware. This is not difficult – we can provide such a service on any IT product, and there are plenty of other options out there. While we are moving in the right direction, we need to do much more to ensure that all hardware is disposed of in an environmentally safe and secure way in the UK.

The interesting thing about this is that offering IT asset disposal is seen as a real benefit by the customer. It can help a reseller or retailer make a sale; and if they can offer some kind of residual trade-in value on the legacy hardware in addition to that, it can make investing in new equipment even more appealing to the customer. This is also something we can offer to all partners. It's really simple to quote for and to process and a tangible way to add value.

Taking back old hardware products and ensuring they are ethically disassembled and sent for refurbishment or recycling is not only doing the right thing for the environment and sustainability – it is also extremely attractive to the customer and helps partners set themselves apart.

As a channel, we need to do much more of this though. Trading-in products and taking them back for renewal and reuse or for safe



disposal and recycling is something that should be routine for resellers and retailers.

Making progress

To be fair, we have made some progress. TD Synnex already takes back hundreds of thousands of smartphones and computing devices and puts them

back into the circular economy every year. Within our Corporate Citizenship Programme, a second Tower of Specialization on Circular Economy was launched with European and Global. But there is much more potential. This year will see a big wave of upgrades from Windows 10 to Windows 11 laptops and with every customer looking to upgrade their device, there is the opportunity to offer a trade-in.

We think there will be a real acceleration of trade-in activity in 2024 and we are ready to help partners make customers a good offer, along with safe and ethical disposal or recycling, on every traded-in device. We will be ready to help partners with every and any opportunity on all hardware products.

In addition, we expect to see mainstream vendors starting to offer remanufactured devices with full warranty cover and this could be a real game-changer. It's an option we will definitely be bringing to market as soon as we can.

A new circular economy

What we are seeing here are, we believe, the beginnings of a new circular economy for IT that will place much greater emphasis on recycling and, in time, the way new products are made and what they are made from. Hardware vendors are already making good progress on reducing the amount of rare earth minerals and plastic that is used in their products and packaging and lowering the carbon impact of their manufacturing processes.

As they bring new generations of more ecologically-oriented products to market and recycling and refurbishment becomes an integral part of the buying process for new products, we'll be driving a true circular economy for the industry and moving much closer to the ultimate goal of achieving net zero for the whole product lifecycle.

AI and security: it's complicated but doesn't need to be

Clyde Williamson, chief security architect and Nathan Vega, vice president, product marketing and strategy at Protegrity looks at what often seems to be a complex relationship between AI and security.



Clyde Williamson and Nathan Vega, Protegrity

AI is growing in popularity and this trend is only set to continue. This is supported by Gartner which states that approximately 80% of enterprises will have used generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) application programming interfaces (APIs) or models by 2026. However, AI is a broad and ubiquitous term, and, in many instances, it covers a range of technologies. Nevertheless, AI presents breakthroughs in the ability to process logic differently which is attracting attention from businesses and consumers alike who are experimenting with various forms of AI today. At the same time, this technology is attracting similar attention from threat actors who are realising that it could be a weakness in a company's security while it could also be a tool that helps companies to identify these weaknesses and address them.

Security challenges of AI

One way that companies are using AI is to review large data sets to identify patterns and sequence data accordingly. This is achieved by creating tabular datasets that typically contain rows and rows of data. While this has significant benefits for companies, from



improving efficiencies to identifying patterns and insights, it also increases security risks as should a breach occur, this data is sorted out in a way that is easy for threat actors to use.

Further threat evolves when using Large Language Model (LLM) technologies which removes security barriers as data is placed in a public domain for anyone that uses the technology to stumble upon and use. As LLM is effectively a bot that doesn't understand the detail, it produces the most likely response based on probability using the information that it has at hand. As such many companies are preventing employees from putting any company data into tools like ChatGPT to keep data secure in the confines of the company.

Security benefits of AI

While AI may present a potential risk for companies, it could also be part of the solution. As AI processes information differently from humans, it can look at issues differently and come up with breakthrough solutions. For example, AI produces better algorithms and can solve mathematical problems that humans have struggled with for many years. As such, when it comes

to information security, algorithms are king and AI, Machine Learning (ML) or a similar cognitive computing technology, could come up with a way to secure data.

This is a real benefit of AI as it can not only identify and sort massive amounts of information, but it can identify patterns allowing organisations to see things that they never noticed before. This brings a whole new element to information security. While AI is going to be used by threat actors as a tool to improve their effectiveness of hacking into systems, it will also be used as a tool by ethical hackers to try to find out how to improve security which will be highly beneficial for businesses.

The challenge of employees and security

Employees, who are seeing the benefits of AI in their personal lives, are using tools like ChatGPT to improve their ability to perform job functions. At the same time, these employees are adding to the complexity of data security. Companies need to be aware of what information employees are putting onto these platforms and the threats associated with them.

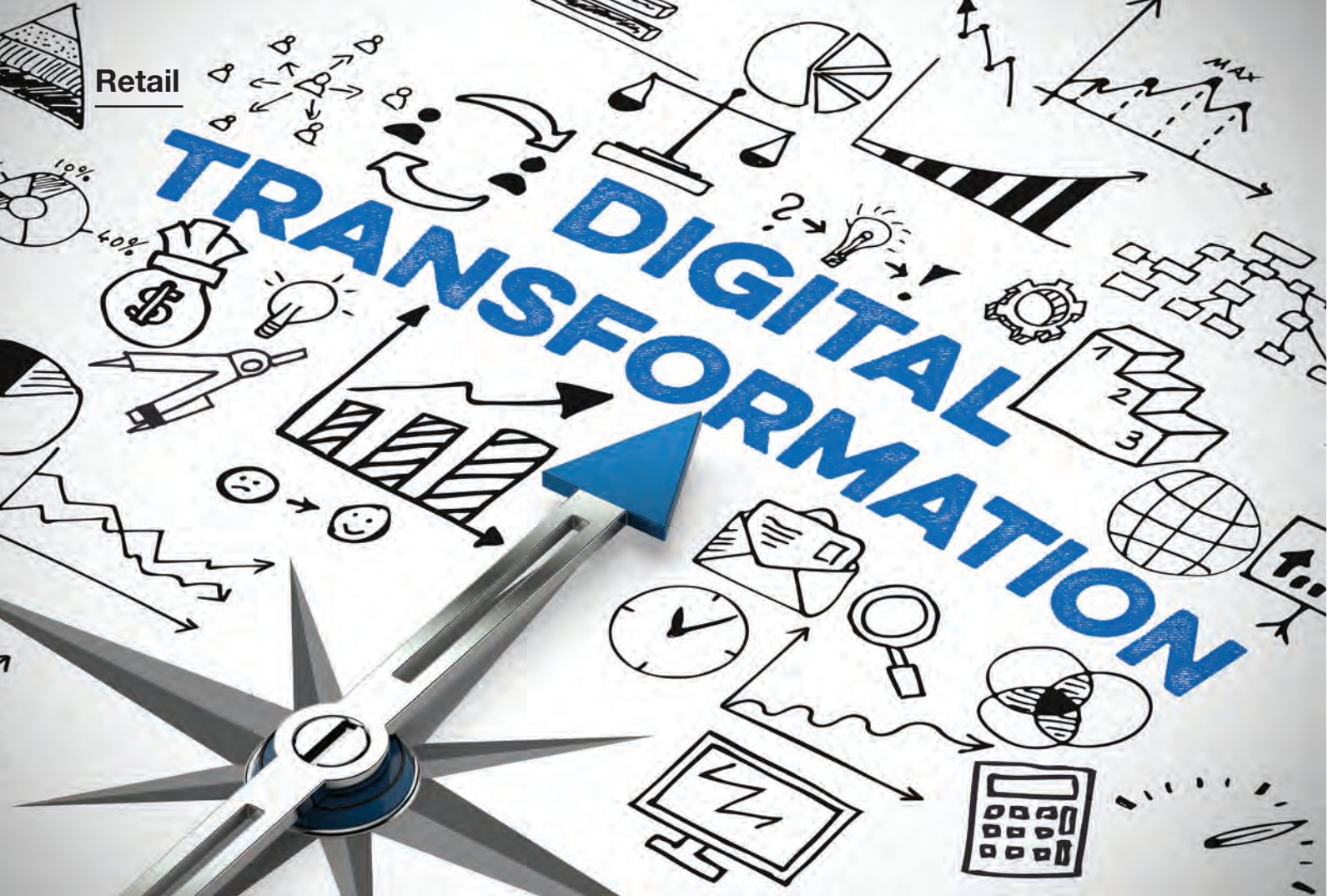
As these solutions will bring benefits to the workplace, companies may consider putting non-sensitive data into systems to limit exposure of internal data sets while driving efficiency across the organisation. However, organisations need to realise that they can't have it both ways, and data they put into such systems will not remain private. For this reason, companies will need to review their information security policies and identify how to safeguard sensitive data while at the same time ensuring employees have access to critical data.

Not sensitive but useful data

Companies are aware of the value that AI can bring while at the same time adding a security risk into the mix. To gain value from this technology while keeping data private they are exploring ways to implement anonymised data using pseudonymisation for example which replaces identifiable information with a pseudonym, or a value and does not allow the individual to be directly identified.

Another way companies can protect data is with generative AI for synthetic data. For example, if a company has a customer data set and needs to share it with a third party for analysis and insights, they point a synthetic data generation model at the dataset. This model will learn all about the dataset, identify patterns from the information and then produce a dataset with fictional individuals that don't represent anyone in the real data but allows the recipient to analyse the whole data set and provide accurate information back. This means that companies can share fake but accurate information without exposing sensitive or private data. This approach allows for massive amounts of information to be used by machine learning models for analytics and, in some cases, to test data for development.

With several data protection methods available to companies today, the value of AI technologies can be leveraged with peace of mind that personal data remains safe and secure. This is significant for businesses as they experience the true benefits that data brings to improving efficiencies, decision making and the overall customer experience.



WHY TRUE CHANGE COMES FROM WITHIN



Retail Express' Ed Betts explores the ways digital transformation can lead retailers to new horizons and help them get the edge in a crowded, competitive market.

2024 offers retailers a chance to breathe. While the inflation crisis of 2022-23 is not yet over, its effects are waning. Retailers looking to build a shield to protect against future financial crises must take this opportunity to look forensically at their business processes to find efficiency and alignment which was not there before. They must seek ways to build resilience and agility, while developing the tools to exploit opportunities quickly in a market liable to change at a moment's notice.

Understanding and embracing retail digital transformation is the key. However set in their ways a retailer might be, now is the time to commit to transforming the central functions of their business structure to support a new way of working with data at its core. Digital transformation is not a drop-in solution, but it is critical: siloed, fragmented businesses are highly unlikely to find the pace to keep up with the modern structures of those that have streamlined and unified their processes.

Applying digital transformation where it matters

Many people relate the notion of digital transformation to grandstand moves: a flashy new website, a headline-grabbing interactive dressing room or virtual rail, or perhaps digitised packing. These are, certainly, elements which could form part of a digital transformation effort – but the true worth of digital transformation is in supplying the detail that makes such actions possible. Rethinking, realigning, and redesigning the core functions of a business may be less glamorous than a new website, but improving data availability is the kind of action which enables a retailer to operate in the way it should.

Of course, many feel that if business processes work, there is no need to change. Look deeper, though: many departments are so mired in admin that they cannot perform their jobs properly. Businesses do not need to stick with inefficient workflows. Embarking on a digital transformation mission works to align every function of a business into a cohesive whole. In turn, it opens up opportunities to merge AI into retail, introduce algorithmic retailing, develop leaner systems and, ultimately, free up the time of key staff to focus on the things that really matter.

The importance of a single plan

The digital transformation of retail is creating more intelligent merchandising practices, to drive competitive advantage through improved end-to-end planning and execution. Done right, it means every department has access to the same data and works towards the same core goal from a single plan. Every employee is pointed in the same direction. And a unified data source means there is one single source of truth for a business.

This can vastly reduce the amount of duplication required to keep core functions running. Within a digitally united business, the paperwork surrounding inter-department communication is virtually eliminated – one hand always knows what the other is doing. If a core plan changes in response to a change in the market, a digitally transformed business can respond from top to bottom, communicating clearly and providing every function with the information they require in an instant.

Better business information through central data

Business information is vital, but for many businesses it can be a source of frustration. Currently, finding statistics or intelligence might be a case of contacting a central BI unit, waiting for a response, and being handed historical data which may or may not be useful. If businesses are to be agile in their decision making, they need information at their fingertips, without lag and without a clumsy process standing between people and numbers.

Digital transformation offers more than just easy access to data, however. Much of the minutiae of running repeatable functions could be handed off to AI, for example, allowing algorithms working with a central data set to discover and refine insights which teams of humans would take weeks to find – or perhaps never find at all. Digital transformation also offers the opportunity to create more dynamic reports, and incorporate predictive data built through intelligent models which consider not only past performance but the market as a whole.

Revealing powerful promotional opportunities

The power of promotion, as retailers know, is a vital driver towards increased sales and customer engagement. But the most powerful promotions, those that create a buzz beyond price, are built around a critical workflow path which puts visibility first. Every part of the puzzle must know its part in promotion planning, from suppliers to design agencies, from those planning the shelves to those establishing prices.

Media and marketing departments can no longer operate separately from buyers, logistics and store operations teams. Digital transformation presents an opportunity for the kind of unity that will revolutionise end-to-end merchandising and allows marketers to work safely without falling foul of price establishment rules or geographical variations. Central data allows a clear chain of operations to be established; with this in place, marketers can manage promotions with impact, increase the value of supplier collaboration, and discover ways to generate bespoke intelligent merchandising offers.

A new horizon for employees

Digital transformation unites disparate functions and enables a consistent, centralised and coherent approach to keeping customers happy and satisfying every one of a retailer's needs. Make no mistake, realigning one's company to take advantage of a digital transformation effort will not be an easy process. It will mean process overhauls, significant change, and lead to many key employees relearning the way they work.

But those same employees will, through ring-fenced AI initiatives, be freed from much of the day-to-day grind which today prevents them from reaching their full potential. They will be empowered, part of the engine of the whole business, rather than a cog in a closed-off department. And that business, backed by accessible data empowered by AI and algorithmic tools, will have a far stronger picture of the way it should be working – and gain a vital edge over its competitors.



PEOPLE MATTERS

James Barrett, managing director at Michael Page Technology talks to **PCR** about the current trends within tech recruitment.



Can you give us an overview of the current landscape?

To understand the current landscape, it's important to note that hiring in the tech sector has been in a state of flux for the past year to eighteen months. We've seen a series of high-profile layoffs at big tech firms such as Microsoft and Google, but these cuts have, thankfully, subsided in recent months.

Despite the latest ONS figures revealing UK unemployment rates remained at a steady 4.2%, all sectors continue to struggle to find the right, skilled workers – a problem felt particularly in tech. The current shortage of skilled tech talent means employers are stuck in an ongoing race to keep up with the rapid pace of development in the sector.

For tech resellers specifically, security remains the dominant current trend that will only gather momentum into 2024. Given the amount of recent data breaches and ransom attacks, resellers are pushing hard in this department on behalf of security providers

and SOC MSPs. As a result, security specialists are going to become increasingly in demand.

With technology evolving faster than workers can learn the skills to specialise in said tech, bridging the skills gap is a challenge for tech businesses that will never be entirely resolved. It's therefore more important than ever to hire candidates with transferable skills suited for a business' future as well as its current structure.

Another conundrum is the continued rise in salaries. Wages overtook inflation for the first time in two years last month whilst talent supply in tech is still failing to meet demand. This uncertainty is gripping businesses and job seekers alike – unfilled vacancies remain and those firms hoping to find top talent at reduced market rates are struggling.

Furthermore, the aftershocks of the pandemic and Brexit have combined to shrink the talent pool as demand for technology skills rockets – creating a fresh challenge for tech businesses to navigate.

In your view, what strategies can businesses employ to effectively bridge the skills gap and ensure they have the right talent?

It is vital for businesses to strategize both for the short and long-term. In the short-term, where there is an urgent need for talent, it may be helpful to bring in contractors or temporary workers to fill gaps. Longer-term, businesses must invest in training to enable current staff to grow and adapt to the ever-evolving technological landscape.

We are also seeing a rise in the practice of 'job hopping' – rapidly moving from one position to the next in a bid to gain seniority and higher salaries more quickly. In a constantly evolving sector like tech, offering quality upskilling and training on the job can be hugely attractive to talent, which benefits both the individual and the business in bridging the skills gap.



One of the most effective ways to combat the tech skills shortage is to trust and support employees by growing together. Providing opportunities for on-the-job training or courses to reskill workers to gain new qualifications is a tried and tested means of empowering employees as well as providing an in-house solution to the tech skills gap.

To keep top players engaged in their roles and attract high-calibre newcomers, businesses should be sure to lay out clear progression pathways from the beginning of the recruitment process. The onus then falls at the managerial level for this to be maintained, with the need to steer each employee's personal development in a direction that interests and benefits both them and the organisation.

Are there any different approaches that businesses can explore to access a broader talent pool?

An obvious yet surprisingly often overlooked approach is to look to hire for the future, not just for the here and now. If the industry is changing, then businesses should prioritise hiring candidates that offer the transferable skills needed to suit the shifting market. Business leaders should have their long-term goals at front of mind in the hiring process, selecting candidates to fit that vision.

Given the market competition, it is not always easy for businesses to find the right permanent talent straight out of the gate. Where there is a need for talent quickly, it may be helpful to bring in contractors instead whilst the longer-term hire is in the works. By redeploying part of a project budget to hire temporary workers, businesses can beat the talent shortage, hire from a higher calibre talent pool, and reduce competition.

Contractors also tend to be more efficient and flexible and, because of the nature of what they do, they are used to working in states of flux or ambiguity – all of which are highly desirable skills in the current market.

What should companies prioritise to attract and keep top talent?

Talent acquisition and retention is the lifeblood of any thriving business so firms must develop an enticing employer value proposition (EVP). EVP refers to a business' core benefits that make up the essence of the employer brand. Put simply, it's a promise

between an employer and a potential candidate; an understanding of what the business and culture can offer the candidate in exchange for their talent, skills, and experience.

Finding a balance between salary, opportunities to work with the latest tech, and flexible working is critical for creating an environment in which employees want to work. As part of our Page Pulse research into UK working habits, we found that the second most common reason for candidates wanting to stay at a company long-term was a good flexible working policy.

Can you highlight any specific technologies or skill sets that are particularly crucial for businesses to invest in?

Interestingly, data released earlier this year suggested UK businesses are moving away from university degree requirements for new staff and giving priority to candidates with specialised skills. In the tech space, particularly in demand will be those with cybersecurity skills to cater to the recent spate of ransomware attacks.

In addition, it is important to not overlook soft skills when investing in candidates. Businesses have learned in recent years the importance of soft skills, and how crucial it is to invest in a workforce that possesses more than just technical ability. Attributes such as a willingness to learn and flexibility are all key skills that are desired by businesses, who understand how personal qualities can impact a company's success.



AN ALTERNATIVE TO LTO

Media companies of any size have the challenge of increasing file sizes as resolutions become higher and, due to the nature of their work, need to maintain a comprehensive and accessible archive. These archives are mostly at rest with just occasional use. Therefore, archiving on tapes and disks that become unreadable or inaccessible over time is a high-risk strategy, and more practical storage systems such as online spinning-disk storage, or disk in cloud is expensive.

Archive owners want the lowest lifetime cost of ownership with extended media life, but without recurring costs and with low power consumption as befits data that's primarily at rest. They don't want vendor lock-in or licenses or expensive egress costs, but do want total content security. They want fast access to archive content without breaking the bank and, in today's age of sustainability, want the lowest carbon footprint achievable.

Disk Archive Corporation is a company that specialises in high-availability, high-security enterprise-class archives and content libraries designed for the film, television, and legal evidence market. The company's ALTO systems are designed to be scalable, flexible, and reliable, and meet the high-performance requirements of today's media-related organisations.

DAC's ALTO systems use a replication-based architecture that supports on-premise installations as well as data centre systems, and geographically distributed setups with vault storage for air-gap security and disaster recovery. ALTO systems also employ data file replication technology, which creates multiple non-segmented replicas on removable media, to bolster the safety of users' files.

ALTO can be used in combination with other solutions. For example, a hybrid system combining ALTO for fast on-premises access with cloud tape tiers for disaster recovery gives a good combination of performance, cost and security, with 'de-clouding' being easy and affordable.

Ultimately, ALTO is a scalable cold storage solution for infrequently-accessed media storage optimised for the needs of television and film production, preservation and archival, but equally applicable for any structured or unstructured data. ALTO replaces outdated data tape libraries and

replaces or complements optical or cloud offerings in open, standards-based systems with low lifetime cost of ownership, high performance and good environmental credentials.

The ALTO Principle, MAID-III writes non-segmented data files with user-selectable replication. The disk drives are individually managed in software, allowing disks to be spun-up and spun-down on read/write demand, reducing power consumption and extending disk lifetime for cost-effective, long-term storage with a low carbon footprint. The replication technique offers user-configurable

security, removable media and flexibility to create hybrid archives, distributed archives and vault storage.

Replication factor 2 is the default replication for an Archive with two non-segmented copies of every file created and stored on different disks for protection. The two disks may be in the same enclosure, where media preservation is the primary concern, or in separate enclosures for additional resilience and high-availability. Individual disks can be opened for forensic file recovery off the disks



Alan Hoggarth of Disk Archive presenting an ALTO solution.

with a standard Windows, Mac or Linux computer.

Replication factor 3 offers a third copy of your media for even higher security. This can apply to all of the Archive or selectively to content of strategic value. ALTO systems can be distributed between different premises or data centres to create a disaster recovery archive, or the third replica may be in a vault for 'Airgap Security'.

ALTO uses commodity disk drives that can be purchased locally from suppliers or online and added in batches to provide additional capacity when needed as an operating expense. Buying disks locally in batches allows users to take advantage of falling disk prices and increasing disk capacities over time, with no vendor lock-in.

The ALTO product family includes the ALTO-SX compact archive, a single ALTO-SX system enclosure, which holds up to 24 disk drives, or 576 TB using 24TB disks in a 4U unit. It has a short enclosure and front-loading disks for applications where rack depth is limited, and rack aisles are narrow. It's scalable with up to 4 x 24 slot expansions to create a 2.8 PB node.

The larger ALTO-III System Enclosure which holds up to 60 disk drives and is based on Linux so, as with the ALTO-SX, no Windows licences are required. With expansions available, the system is scalable to 200 PB and over.

ALTO Manager software provides monitoring and control of the disks in ALTO units. It drives the LCD on the front of an ALTO III head and provides a web server, making this monitoring and control functionality available for local and remote system administrators.

ALTOCare Support provides two years inclusive hardware, software and online operational support with every ALTO system. There are optional unlimited renewals, but no mandatory technology refresh or media replacement schedules.



RED HELIX TACKLES CYBER SKILLS SHORTAGE WITH CODING CLUB INITIATIVE

Red Helix, a leading UK cyber security managed service provider, believes in the importance of providing children with new learning opportunities and additional insight into the practical applications of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). For the UK to achieve its ambition to be a science and technology superpower by 2030, action needs to be taken now to provide a long-term boost to the cyber security sector.

In today's technology-driven world, STEM is becoming an increasingly significant part of children's education. Children of all ages are encouraged to pursue careers in this space. With this in mind, Red Helix launched an innovative coding club for primary school children that provides them with additional exposure to the real-world applications of STEM and stimulates an interest in these topics.

The goal of this project is to address the chronic shortage of cyber skills in the UK and encourage more diversity in the sector, with a specific focus on aiding social mobility. This has been achieved by targeting the program at children from primary schools local to Red Helix with higher pupil premium rates and inspiring other IT and cyber security companies to do the same.

Designed by technology director at Red Helix, Rob Pocock, the initiative runs for over six weeks, where Year 5 and Year 6 students create their own, personalised infinity mirrors with a coded control system activating different colours on the LED lights running along the outside of the mirror. Alongside coding, the children get the chance to use mathematics and work with different materials in design, before pulling it all together practically for the final outcome.

"There is a pressing need for more cyber security skills in the UK," says Marion Stewart, CEO, of Red Helix. "As security providers, we have a responsibility to address this, not only now, but looking towards the future as well. Through the coding club, we aim to mitigate the impact of future skills shortages by planting a much-needed seed of inspiration at a younger age – with a focus on greater inclusion from a more diverse range of children and young people."

The idea behind the coding club was sparked by a visit from Aylesbury's then mayor, Cllr Tim Dixon, and Cllr Sherrilyn Bateman. Following this, Red Helix approached Dawn Hanwell and Christine Sond, both teachers at Elmhurst School in Aylesbury, and took action to put together a program that would enhance the children's education by giving them access to expert learnings from a company that has decades of experience in the IT and security industry.

Alongside the immediate educational potential of the coding club initiative, Red Helix and Elmhurst School have established a long-term relationship which will see the coding club running for many years to come. With cyber-crime consistently rising, the need for talent in the industry is growing. More partnerships between IT and cyber security organisations and educational institutes will help foster a new generation of cyber-literate individuals and make important steps towards bolstering the UK's national cyber defences.

Dawn Hanwell, STEM leader and teacher at Elmhurst School was thrilled to have the opportunity to partner with Red Helix for the coding club. "It is great to see a local company taking an interest in our children's future and providing them with expert knowledge."

While the first coding club ran only for the children of Elmhurst School, Red Helix has already extended the club to another local school and will gladly share details of the program with other schools and organisations to allow them to replicate it locally. With the support of the local authority, the Mayor and the schools, Red Helix hopes to make a real difference by capturing the interest of young children to help build long-term benefits to the cyber security sector in the UK.

This month's top product picks

Here's a peek at some of latest new products...

BenQ launches beCreatus DP310 USB-C hybrid dock

BenQ has launched its latest dual source dock, the beCreatus DP310 Hybrid Dock, fitted with both USB-C and HDMI inputs, which is aimed to support programmers,



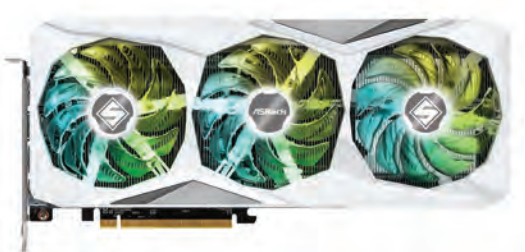
creators, designers, and editors to enhance their display productivity and efficiency when navigating different input sources. The new beCreatus DP310 Hybrid Dock, supports both hybrid and remote workers, allowing them to use their workstation as an entertainment hub.

The beCreatus DP310 Hybrid Dock enables users to seamlessly switch between inputs as needed, for both work, gaming and personal use. The two input sources—an USB-C and HDMI—have a dedicated button for switching, letting you go back and forth between sources with just one press of the button. Users can easily switch from editing to gaming to browsing with one button. With the USB-C input users can add new displays as needed.

The beCreatus DP310 Hybrid Dock has multiple inputs to allow users to connect to three monitors at 4K resolution, when using the USB-C input.

The HDMI 2.1 input supports higher resolutions at 120hz (up to 8K at 60Hz and 4K at 120Hz) for the best visual experience playing your favourite game while supporting Dolby Atmos audio and HDR visuals. Compatible with M1/M2 chipsets, it can support extended displays on up to three screens on Apple computers using the USB-C input. It has five USB ports that are easily accessible from front or back. It has two USB-C 3.1 Gen 2 ports with 10Gbps data transfer, one with an incredible 100w power distribution for super-fast laptop charging, the other with 36w support for charging smartphones and tablets. It also has three USB-A 3.1 Gen 2 ports, with 10 Gbps data transfer and 7.5w power distribution. It comes with a BenQ USB-C 3.2 100W 4K braided cable and an HDMI Association Certified HDMI 2.1 1.8m cable. It is compatible with most gaming consoles, including the PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X, and Xbox Series S.

AMD unveils Radeon RX 7600 XT graphics card



AMD has introduced the AMD Radeon RX 7600 XT, a high-performance, feature-rich graphics card designed to power demanding games and content creation applications.

The card is an upgrade solution for gamers, which offers fast, smooth, and visually stunning gaming and raytracing experiences at 1080p and better – and features 16GB of high-speed GDDR6 memory. With support for advanced technologies including FidelityFX Super Resolution2 3 and HYPR-RX3 with Fluid Motion Frames4, it's designed so that users can crank up their game settings for fully immersive and highly responsive gaming at up to 1440p.

Featuring 32 unified high-performance RDNA 3 compute units, advanced AI technology, dedicated raytracing accelerators and high-capacity graphics memory, the Radeon RX 7600 XT graphics card is optimised to render games at max settings and deliver great gaming experiences at 1080p and beyond.

Alternatively, for professionals and hobbyists looking to push the creative boundaries of their work, the new graphics card is said to deliver fast content creation performance to power professional video editing, graphic design, and 3D modelling applications, bringing photorealistic worlds to life.

Zyxel Networks provides 2.5G performance

ZYXEL NETWORK

has launched the XMG1915 series – a family of smart managed switches designed to provide small businesses and professional home users with the throughput and versatility needed to support today's high bandwidth applications and services.

Available in 8 and 16-port models, they provide 2.5 Multi-Gigabit Ethernet capability across all ports. There are also 10G uplinks for connections to the network core, and PoE++ options that will provide as much as 60W to a connected device. Flexible cloud management makes the switches easy to deploy and manage.

With Nebula, the switches can be pre-configured and installed automatically. The XMG1915 series can also be monitored and managed remotely and easily with the Nebula app.

All downlink ports on the XMG1915 operate at 2.5G speed and two 10G uplink ports ensure that sufficient bandwidth is always available to prevent bottlenecks.

The inclusion of 60W PoE++ support across eight ports accommodates high-power devices and simplifies installations. The total PoE budget of 130W/180W provides sufficient power at a competitive price for a small business. Users can also leverage their existing Cat 5 cables, eliminating the need for any costly re-cabling.

The XMG1915 also features a smaller design – it's at least half the size of most 2.5G switches on the market, making it ideal for use on desktops or confined workspaces.



Cradlepoint introduces 5G router for retail pop-ups and small offices



CRADLEPOINT has released the E100 5G enterprise router. Specifically designed to support retail and small office applications – including POS, video surveillance, inventory applications, and IOT – the E100 5G combines the performance of 5G with modern security through Cradlepoint NetCloud Exchange. Integrated SD-WAN and zero trust deliver leading edge 5G SASE capabilities and enable IT teams to provision and manage networks and security at scale with fewer staff.

Research has revealed a decline in in-store foot traffic, prompting retailers to shift their focus inward by exploring creative pop-ups and experiential stores, often smaller in size, to meet consumer demands for interactive experiences. With this, IT teams need to sustain creative business models while supporting applications and security policies consistently even in small spaces where higher performance, lower latency and minimised downtime is imperative.

The E100 5G Enterprise Router meets this demand in the retail and small office markets by enabling reliable connectivity and protecting the network and users accessing web applications, from external threats. IT teams can gain further confidence in deploying communications, IoT and point of sale (POS) devices in small and temporary sites just as they would in flagship locations.

Major refresh for Brother laser printer line-up

BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY solutions provider Brother UK has overhauled its laser print line up, launching 36 new devices to offer customers faster and better-connected printing.

The refreshed portfolio of laser printers introduces the quietest models available on the market, which are more compact and still retain enhanced image quality and high print speeds. The vendor says the improvements are in response to changing demand from businesses, with more customers now working from home or in downsized offices.

The vendor's new laser devices cover four ranges: colour and mono models for small office and home office (SOHO) users and colour and mono machines for SMBs.

Brother's SOHO models devices – with print speeds up to 26ppm, an 8.8cm touchscreen and 512mb in-built memory – are designed to enhance energy efficiency, with an eco-mode introduced into all models as standard.

The business says that speed, connectivity and efficiency have also been at the forefront of designs for its new SMB range, which are enabled to print, scan, copy and fax. Devices can print at speeds of up to 30ppm, are equipped with NFC, wireless and USB connectivity, and are supplied with in-box toners that yield up to 2,600 pages in mono and 1,400 in colour.

All of the new SMB models will be available on managed print service (MPS) contracts.



In the cloud

'PPDS Publisher' app brings creative content control and scheduling to business TVs

PPDS has launched the PPDS Publisher, a new app designed to help businesses maximise their engagement potential, with effortless content creation and scheduling opportunities on Philips B-Line 4K Business TVs. The app comes embedded into all new Philips B-Line Business TVs, and can be quickly added to existing ones via a simple software update.

Requiring zero training, users can simply download PPDS Publisher onto their preferred smart device, which can then be securely linked to their network of TVs.

The platform presents users with a list of opportunities to start creating and building a portfolio of content that can be shared directly on Philips Business TVs. It comes with a growing choice of templates. Content can be displayed on the entire screen, or presented alongside other forms, such as the screening of live sporting events.



There is also the ability to schedule content at specific times. It can also be fully managed as part of a playlist, with all content set to be presented for specific durations. It can be looped throughout the day, or as part of a slide show. Ad hoc content can easily be created and immediately displayed in real-time, all managed securely via a single device.

Malwarebytes launches new offerings for ThreatDown OneView

THE THREATDOWN multi-tenant console, OneView, unifies management of endpoint security, licensing subscriptions, role-based access, customer reporting and more. Recent updates underscore the company's focus on reducing threats, costs and complexity.

Security Advisor analyses an organisation's cybersecurity and generates a health score based off what it finds, illuminating gaps in defences and providing actionable recommendations for improvements that can be made in minutes. Partners are armed with a snapshot view of their customer's security and are provided easy reporting to show measurable before-and-after security score improvements.

Advanced Device Control automatically scans and quarantines any USB device connected to an endpoint. It also allows admins to block the device until the scan is completed, ensuring every device is scanned for potential threats or vulnerabilities, making it easier to defend against USB malware.

New reporting features offer a more streamlined approach to reporting within OneView so admins can quickly show ROI and value to their customers. Users now can schedule individual reports directly from the OneView reports page and access a streamlined interface, making it easy to select what to include or not for a final report.

Close Software for Patching is a new addition for Patch Management allows administrators to configure settings to force close software applications, even if they are currently running. With this release, MSPs can now initiate the closure of software applications on an end-user device within a specified timeframe before initiating updates. By closing applications, critical updates can be installed promptly according to the admin's schedule, significantly reducing the risk of having outdated and potentially vulnerable software on endpoints.

Lenovo expands hybrid cloud platform and services for AI

LENOVO has expanded its hybrid cloud platform for AI with new ThinkAgile hyperconverged solutions and ThinkSystem servers that advance cloud deployment, hybrid connectivity and AI capabilities, powered by the next generation of Intel Xeon scalable processors. The new AI ready platform delivers improved performance and the latest accelerators as a critical next step for delivering a dynamic hybrid AI approach across public, private, and foundational models to enable AI for All.

The new hybrid cloud solutions are engineered to boost AI performance and build cloud agility by delivering more compute and faster memory to its portfolio when and where it is needed.

IT teams need edge-to-data centre solutions and cloud services that are deployment ready, compatible with existing infrastructure, and built for complex workloads out of the box. Optimised for AI, Lenovo ThinkAgile HX, MX and VX are engineered, turnkey hybrid cloud solutions with the new 5th Gen Intel Xeon Scalable processors and open ecosystem of partners, including Microsoft, Nutanix, and VMware. The new ThinkAgile integrated hybrid cloud solutions offer cloud software enabling new capabilities, faster backup and recovery, and reduced deployment time.

Life in the channel

Infinity and beyond

Rob Young, CEO of Infinity Group talks to **PCR** about the company's journey from its founding to its current growth and expansion plans.

Can you tell us a bit about Infinity Group's history?

We launched Infinity Group in 2001, initially specialising in managed services, particularly in IT and telecoms, seeing a real need to support businesses in building effective systems. Our partnership with Microsoft marked a pivotal and transformative phase for us, as we zeroed in on helping businesses better embed Microsoft's Office suite and CRM system.

With Microsoft's foray into the cloud in 2016, Infinity Group expanded its portfolio to include the Power Platform, concentrating on the cloud version of Dynamics 365 Customer Engagement and venturing into Business Central for Enterprise Resource Planning. Today, we've grown to support over 500 businesses right across the country, helping SMEs accelerate their digital transformation journeys, especially as they look to adopt new tools such as AI.

Focusing on providing more tailored solutions to specific verticals is a big part of our expansion drive. In this vein, we acquired Redkite CRM in November, one of the few specialist CRM providers serving the social housing associations. This sector is really crying out for digitalisation as they transition from legacy systems. We've seen a 40% customer growth over the past year, and we're excited to see what the future brings.

How has the industry changed since 2001?

When we started out, it was still very much still in the days of on-premises solutions. Since then, the solutions we offer have really tracked the emergence of the cloud in the early 2010s, and now the rise of AI.

Cloud has been a game-changer enabling greater flexibility, scalability, and accessibility. It has also fundamentally altered the way products and services are delivered, meaning that we as technology providers increasingly emphasise consultative work over traditional development. But smaller SMEs, have struggled to make this jump to the cloud as fast, or migration has been done in a more piecemeal fashion.

At Infinity, we help them define a cloud strategy, so it is not just about file storage but all data and services are centralised in the cloud through the suite of Microsoft services, from Teams to integrating CRM and ERP data. Getting this data in place is vital for the next phase we are entering to unlock the productivity gains promised by the advent of AI. The goal is to help clients harness the capabilities of technology platforms to their fullest potential, rather than building everything from scratch.

What challenges do SMEs face in their digital transformation journeys, and how does Infinity Group assist them in overcoming these challenges?

SMEs born out of the entrepreneurial spirit, often end up with a mishmash of different systems without a cohesive IT strategy. The lack of a structured IT approach poses a significant challenge in embarking on digital transformation journeys.

Infinity Group addresses this tech tangle, by initiating a Business Value Assessment to understand the company's history, future vision, pain points, and opportunities. This collaborative exercise results in a prioritised roadmap, highlighting high-value, low-cost

initiatives that promise maximum benefits. Assisting SMEs in organising their ideas and challenges into a strategic plan, enables us to create a more seamless digital transformation.

In today's digital landscape, the prevalence of cyber-attacks and phishing attacks is a significant concern. So how does Infinity Group help SMEs stay protected from threats?

We've designed a product, Secure Core, tailored for businesses with up to 300 users, using Microsoft's Business Premium license. It's all about maximising the features of this product.

Inside Secure Core is Defender, which acts like your security guard and offers antivirus and email scanning to protect your data. We make sure every one of our customers has multi-factor authentication in place, adding an extra layer of security, and we also set up conditional access policies. One great feature of using Microsoft's tools is that they come ready packaged with security features, but not everyone takes full advantage of them. That's where Secure Core comes in. It's here to boost your security game and help businesses of all sizes stay safe in the digital jungle.

What's the current demand for AI services among clients and how is Infinity Group delivering new technologies to benefit businesses?

The current AI scene is like a playground for small businesses, and everyone is testing the waters, dabbling with tools like ChatGPT. But workers are using it directly without realising they could be leaking sensitive company data. As it's an open-source model, any question you ask gets fed back into the data model and could appear in another user's search result, if relevant.

We're focused on helping businesses mitigate these cybersecurity risks, while also getting the maximum productivity gains. The safest way businesses can use LLMs is by integrating with a tech partner.

We enable businesses to integrate Microsoft Copilot, which runs on OpenAI's data model, the parent company of ChatGPT, and is embedded across all Microsoft 365 applications. The crucial point is that all your organisational data is not fed back into this public data source but is still harnessed to drive radically more personalised results and automation.

Could you provide any examples of how you'd help SMEs design CRM systems, and integrate AI and LLMs?

A good example of the work we are doing is the Redkite CRM acquisition. This gave us the human expertise and industry

knowledge to provide more tailored solutions to serve the unique challenges and processes required in the social housing sector. These include digitising communications and automating processes across damp and mould, rent arrears, rent accounting, compliance, customer services and more. Although we use Microsoft products, including Dynamics 365, we believe solutions should be tailored to businesses' unique needs.

On the AI front, Microsoft Copilot offers businesses some really exciting productivity features, especially as it is entirely embedded in an employee's workflow. Also, it's trained on your business's vast reservoir of data, such as emails, documents and CRM data, which helps to drive greater personalisation. This results in key features such as generating automated client emails that are hyper-personalised and can help drive sales, or instantly creating PowerPoint reports based on company figures. It's like having a super-smart virtual assistant right at your fingertips.

Emerging trends and technologies?

There are two big megatrends that are stealing the spotlight right now. Firstly, the platform approach is going mainstream. When we think of platforms, we think of the big Tech Giants but now this approach can be adopted by businesses of every size. Businesses can centralise all their data and services through solutions, such as Dynamics 365 and the Power Platform. These platforms serve as all-in-one hubs for various business teams, fostering collaboration and centralising customer data.

And then there is the AI chat. Once you have got all your data neatly organised on that platform, it is like a buffet for AI models. We are just getting started with AI, especially in areas like sales and customer service. Microsoft's Copilot concept is already a cool thing, and it's only going to get better, helping us work smarter.



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A man in a light blue shirt is leaning over a desk in an office, working on a computer. In the foreground, a large green indoor plant is visible. The background shows a doorway and office equipment.

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