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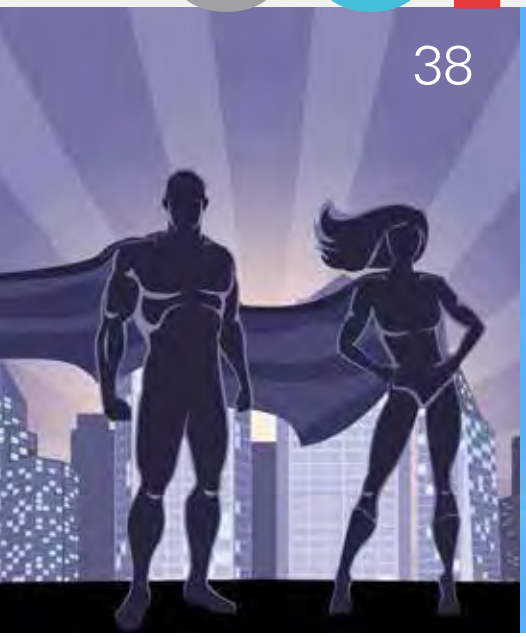

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LETTER

Get Ready for DCIM

Enterprise spending on software-defined infrastructure (SDI) is picking up steam in 2016, and that is likely to drive adoption of SDI-enabling datacenter infrastructure management (DCIM) software, according to 451 Research.

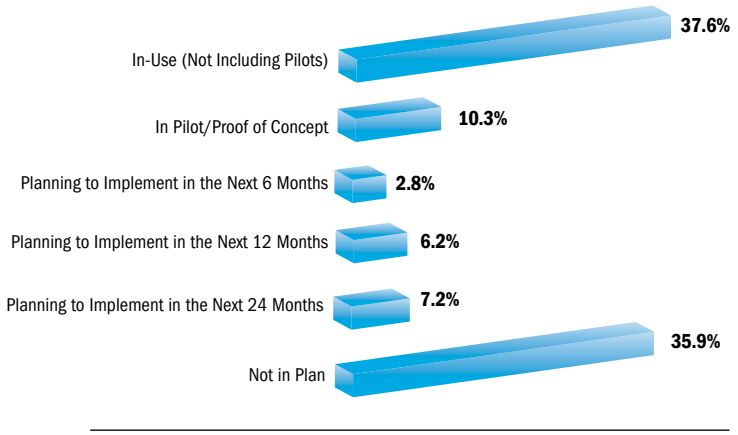
Today, the role that the physical datacenter plays in SDI, including facility design and operational management with DCIM software, is often overlooked; "however, this will change," says 451.

As IT organizations virtualize more networking and compute resources, they must also make datacenter resources more flexible in order to achieve the maximum agility and efficiency promised by SDI. And that is where DCIM comes into play.

DCIM platforms, says 451, enable not just the operational management of datacenters but also the automation of key datacenter resources, such as power and cooling.

In a 451 Research survey of more than 630 IT managers, 37.6 percent said they had deployed DCIM, and another 10.3 percent were in pilot deployments. Among organizations that have already adopted DCIM, nearly half, (46 percent) has also deployed SDI. Incidentally, slightly more than half of all the companies surveyed expected spending on DCIM to stay about the same as in 2015, while about one-third planned to increase their DCIM spending in 2016.

DCIM Adoption Plans



Source: 451 Research

Although SDI adoption rates are low, they are growing, and with them grows the promise that SDI will change the way IT designs, manages and operates datacenters. In order to realize the full benefits of agility and lower TCO, argues 451 Research, IT will have to extend SDI initiatives to the physical datacenter and DCIM.

"Virtualizing only IT resources optimizes just the top layers of the stack," says the research firm. "The underlying physical datacenter resources – power, cooling, space – must also be tightly coupled to IT demand and resources, and automated via DCIM and other tools."

CHANNELVISION magazine

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Sandler Partners Acquires X4 Solutions

In a move that reportedly creates the second largest distributor of telecom and cloud services in the nation, Sandler Partners announced that it has acquired X4 Solutions, a master agency based in the Midwest. Together, the companies serve more than 4,000 sales partners in the West, Northwest, Southwest and Midwest.

The combined company will generate approximately $65 million in revenue this year. Terms of the deal, which closed July 21, are not being disclosed.

With X4, Sandler Partners is adding about 30 new providers for a current total of 140 direct relationships with providers of voice, data, connectivity, cloud computing, cloud communications, mobility, security and more.

Sandler Partners says it's welcoming all X4 employees into the company with no planned layoffs. X4 president Curt Allen will become president of channel for Sandler Partners, while co-founder and CFO D.J. Fioretti will remain with the company as a consultant overseeing the financial integration of X4 into the Sandler Partners organization. X4 co-founder and CEO Steve Braverman reportedly will provide ongoing assistance in the transition of marketing platforms and events as well as being available to key partner contacts as an ambassador to the new Sandler Partners organization. Steve Snure, X4 co-founder and CIO, reportedly will provide ongoing assistance with the integration of back-office systems.

Agents will not be asked to sign new agreements with Sandler Partners, but there may be situations where they might want to update their agreements, said the company. Sandler Partners currently has more than 3,400 agent partners, and X4 has 1,200 for a total of more than 4,600. The crossover in partner bases is less than 3 percent, and partners that work with both companies can continue to work with whom they choose, said Sandler executives.

Through the economies of scale, Sandler believes the combined agencies will be able to better meet the increasing needs for partner training on ever-changing solutions and enhance the ability to serve enterprise accounts.

"X4 is a respected company in our space that shares our values of personalized service and support for our sales partners," said Alan Sandler, founder and managing partner for Sandler Partners. "This deal generates significant value for Sandler Partners and X4 sales partners and their customers, including stronger provider contracts, a broader and more robust portfolio, additional layers of support and a larger footprint."

"The combination of Sandler Partners and X4 will be able to offer sales partners even more resources to deliver best-in-class telecom and cloud solutions, packaged in partner programs designed to fit each of their unique business models," Allen said. "Our combined provider portfolio offers more options for our sales partners to deliver the cloud and connectivity solutions their customers demand."

"We've always grown organically, and we still have a very strong organic growth engine that will continue to power significant growth for our company," added Sandler. "However, we are actively looking for other companies and agencies that would benefit the partner and customer ecosystem and integrate with our culture."

LSI Rolls Out Virtual Office for SMBs

Line Systems formally announced its Virtual Office product, a completely cloud-based phone system solution that integrates with the increasingly mobile workforce within SMBs.

Providing a way for SMB organizations to manage and run their business completely in the cloud, the solution utilizes any broadband Internet connection to access the feature server, rendering full office product suites and the functionality of a PBX. Call routing can be configured to send all calls to the mobile device of the customer's choice.

"In the past, small business organizations and home-based businesses have struggled with balancing their service needs and presence with associated budget constraints," said Bruce Wirt, LSI vice president of sales and marketing. "Virtual Office allows a central number, local or toll free, to take inbound calls using a cloud-based auto attendant, with preprogrammed extension options to deliver phone calls to the device of the customer's choice."

Virtual Office will be offered to the market with an introductory rate starting at $29.95, moving upward depending on call volume packages and subscribed extensions. LSI is also incenting the indirect sales channel by offering a $50 per instance spiffs for agents that sell the product.

"This is another step in our effort to expand our presence throughout the nation," said Warren Reyburn, executive vice president at LSI. "This product fills a need in the SMB/SOHO marketplace, with a level of support, functionality and ease of use that rivals options enjoyed by upstream markets."

Equinix Partners with Datang in China

Equinix has announced a strategic partnership with Datang Telecom Group in China. As a part of the partnership, Datang Telecom, which currently holds a cross regional Internet data center (IDC) license in Beijing and Shanghai, will become the service delivery partner for Equinix in China, enabling Equinix to expand further into the growing domestic enterprise market. On behalf of Equinix, Datang will offer Equinix customers in China a broad range of interconnection services, including Equinix Cloud Exchange.

This partnership comes as Equinix continues to extend the reach of its global platform to 145 data centers.

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"As the digital economy continues to transform businesses in China and around the world, companies are becoming increasingly interconnected, and Equinix is the place where they come to physically connect to each other," said Samuel Lee, president, Equinix Asia-Pacific. "The China market is an important element of our global platform, and our partnership with Datang Telecom Group enables greater expansion into key vertical markets and locations within China. By combining the strength of both companies, we will offer customers a full suite of value-added services with the same levels of service quality Equinix is known for throughout the world."

Cologix Expands Data Center in Toronto

Cologix has completed and commissioned a major expansion to its TOR 2 data center, located at 905 King St. West in Toronto. Customers have immediate access to up to 1MW of new high-power density data center capacity.

"Toronto is at the forefront of three key trends impacting the data center market: 1) IP traffic interconnecting closer to the edge in emerging markets, 2) enterprises outsourcing data center operations and 3) the rise of hybrid cloud models," explained Sean Maskell, president, Cologix Canada. "Our TOR 2 expansion is a direct response to the demand Cologix is seeing for high availability, highly connected, neutral retail colocation based on each of these trends."

Toronto's data center capacity introduces enterprise cage solutions to the hot-aisle containment pods and in-row cooling at the facility.

"Toronto has become one of the most important markets in North America and has been a high-growth market for Cologix," explained Grant van Rooyen, CEO, Cologix. "We are proud to push the market forward with our new capacity and unique access to dedicated connectivity to public clouds like Microsoft Azure and SoftLayer."

WTG Joins DSCI's Partner Program

DSCI recently announced that WTG, one of the nation's top master agents, has joined the DSCI Channel Partner Program. WTG now offers DSCI's unified communications, managed IT and Internet connectivity services to its partners, backed by 24/7/365 technical support from DSCI's New England-based customer care team.

DSCI announced in March that it is merging with TelePacific Communications in a move that creates a premier national managed services carrier. WTG is taking full advantage of that synergy to expand the solutions it offers, said the companies.

"Being one of TelePacific's largest agents enables us to upsell DSCI services into our TelePacific base yielding a much more national service area," said Vince Bradley, CEO of WTG.

"The market for managed services continues to grow at an accelerated pace, representing a tremendous opportunity for both of our organizations," said James Maloney, senior vice president of sales at DSCI. "We look forward to working in partnership with WTG to take advantage of this dynamic market and drive new business."

ARRIS Launches Channel Program in North America

Broadcast technology system provider ARRIS International has expanded its channel program into the United States and Canada. Partners can now provide support and sales for ARRIS's product and services portfolio in every major market.

ARRIS has also enhanced the program with additional tools and resources, enabling channel partners to design solutions for cable operators, telecom operators, ISPs, broadcasters and enterprises. The program now offers added support — including sales tools, training, incentives and joint marketing and activities — designed to expand sales and enhance customer relationships for qualified ARRIS VARs.

"By strengthening our channel resources and extending our reach, ARRIS is positioning our company to take advantage of new growth opportunities in every market. The evolution of our channel program also reflects our commitment to our partners and their customers around the world," said Pete Wagener, senior vice president, sales and business operations, ARRIS. "Our channel members play a crucial role in bringing ARRIS products to a range of customer environments, and we'll continue to collaborate with them to expand our channel program and drive sales and market share across the globe."

Most SMEs Expect to Add UC Within 2 Years

Between a third and two-thirds of all small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will either add unified communications or replace existing systems with UC within the next two years, according to a recent survey by Jabra.

The study also found that nearly half of all SMEs believe that having a headset to allow employees to keep hands free while on a call is important, and mobility is a priority for about one third.

Another study from Jabra found that call-centric workers, such as those who support customers or serve in an advisory capacity, are more productive and 25 percent more engaged in their jobs when enabled with the right supporting technologies. These technologies could include advanced headsets that enable crisp-sounding calls, offer comfort for long call durations and include noise-canceling technologies to insulate from noise and interruptions.

"Productivity and concentration are critical in the increasingly competitive small business environment," said Mark Derby, vice president,

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Processor: Quad-core (64-bit)
Memory (RAM) and Storage:
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2GB RAM + 16GB storage
Removable Storage: Micro SD card
Supports up to 64GB additional storage)
Cameras:
Rear: 13MP w/ LED two-tone flash
Front: 5MP w/ LED selfie flash
Battery: 2,000 mAh
Wi-Fi: 802.11 b/g/n
Bluetooth: Version 4.0
Location Services: GPS
Dual SIM: Convenience to access two different phone numbers simultaneously.
Bands:
GSM/GPRS/EDGE 850, 900, 1800, 1900 MHz
4G HSPA+ 850, 1700/AWS, 1900, 2100 MHz
4G LTE 2, 4, 5, 7, 17
MSRP: $129 (1GB/8GB) / $149 (2GB/16GB)

5.5" unlocked smartphone

Model: S55
Display: 5.5" HD, IPS (720x1280)
OS: Android 5.1, Lollipop
Processor: Quad-core (64-bit)
Memory (RAM) and Storage:
1GB RAM + 8GB storage, or
2GB RAM + 16GB storage
Removable Storage: Micro SD card
(Supports up to 64GB additional storage)
Cameras:
Rear: 13MP w/ LED two-tone flash
Front: 5MP w/ LED selfie flash
Battery: 2,400 mAh
Wi-Fi: 802.11 b/g/n
Bluetooth: Version 4.0
Location Services: GPS
Dual SIM: Convenience to access two different phone numbers simultaneously.
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4G HSPA+ 850, 1700/AWS, 1900, 2100 MHz
4G LTE 2, 4, 5, 7, 17
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6.0" unlocked smartphone

Model: S60
Display: 6.0" HD, IPS (720x1280)
OS: Android 5.1, Lollipop
Processor: Quad-core (64-bit)
Memory (RAM) and Storage:
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2GB RAM + 16GB storage
Removable Storage: Micro SD card
(Supports up to 64GB additional storage)
Cameras:
Rear: 13MP w/ LED two-tone flash
Front: 5MP w/ LED selfie flash
Battery: 3,300 mAh
Wi-Fi: 802.11 b/g/n
Bluetooth: Version 4.0
Location Services: GPS
Dual SIM: Convenience to access two different phone numbers simultaneously.
Bands:
GSM/GPRS/EDGE 850, 900, 1800, 1900 MHz
4G HSPA+ 850, 1700/AWS, 1900, 2100 MHz
4G LTE 2, 4, 5, 7, 17
MSRP: $179 (1GB/8GB) / $199 (2GB/16GB)

6.0" unlocked smartphone

Model: P600
Display: 6.0" FHD, IPS (1080x1920)
OS: Android 5.1, Lollipop
Processor: Octa-core (64-bit)
Memory (RAM): 3GB Storage: 32GB
Removable Storage: Micro SD card
(Supports up to 64GB additional storage)
Cameras:
Rear: 13MP w/ LED two-tone flash
Front: 8MP w/ LED selfie flash
Battery: 3,300 mAh + 8,000 mAh external
Wi-Fi: 802.11 b/g/n
Bluetooth: Version 4.0
Location Services: GPS
Dual SIM: Convenience to access two different phone numbers simultaneously.
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Logicworks Unveils Cost Management Solution for AWS

Logicworks recently unveiled a cost management solution that helps customers plan, monitor and manage their AWS spending and reduce overall costs by up to 40 percent, said the company. Logicworks is an Amazon Web Services (AWS) Premier Consulting Partner in the AWS Partner Network (APN) and a member of the AWS Managed Services Program.

With CostLogic, Logicworks performs gap analysis and develops cost strategies that adjust and/or eliminate underutilized instances. This enables customers to reduce waste, improve performance and more accurately predict future costs, said the company. In addition, CostLogic's analysis recommends the purchase of on Amazon Elastic Cloud Compute (Amazon EC2) Reserved Instances where appropriate, further cutting on-demand costs. Cost tagging simplifies reporting, provides transparency into resource usage and enables bill backs and return on investments tracking. Lastly, Logicworks automation can match Infrastructure as a service (IaaS) supply with end-user demand, handle scheduled shutdowns to streamline resources and eliminate waste.

"Implementing a cohesive spend management has become increasingly difficult due to lack of visibility or predictability in the cloud, its dynamic nature and still-maturing best-practices," said Jason McKay, CTO and senior vice president of Logicworks. "CostLogic was designed both to give customers this visibility and drive significant cost savings, freeing up resources to migrate more projects faster and realize greater value from AWS."

Logicworks also brings the advantages of Amazon EC2 Spot Instances to customers through integration with Spotinst, an Amazon Web Services (AWS) Technology Partner that provides sophisticated EC2 cluster management using predictive analysis and machine learning capabilities to increase avail-

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ability and improve resource utilization while keeping overall EC2 costs low. This combination of the Spotinst algorithm and Logicworks' proprietary automation platform lets companies more reliably use Spot Instances by leveraging a prediction engine that anticipates the failure of Amazon EC2 Spot Instances and automatically launches and integrates a new instance based on customer needs.

"Spotinst's highly developed workload management strategy consistently saves companies 70 to 80 percent on AWS EC2 costs and 40 percent on overall costs, allowing mission critical and production workloads to benefit from the EC2 Spot Market." said Amiram Shachar, CEO and founder of Spotinst. "Partnering with Logicworks means our customers can combine the data driven intelligence of Spotinst with fully managed automation and maintenance, so that even companies that are new to AWS can achieve dramatic cost savings."

SkySwitch Unveils Contact Center as a Service

SkySwitch white label resellers that have built their brands selling hosted PBX and unified communications as a service (UCaaS) can now realize new revenue opportunities by offering contact center as a service (CCass) from the same platform.

The SkySwitch CCaaS solution is a multi-tenant cloud service that delivers all of the features and functionality of an enterprise grade contact center platform while minimizing the need for a capital investment by the companies that need the service, said the company. With SkySwitch, CCaaS resellers can empower any small business, such as a doctor's office or a real estate agency, with the type of contact center tools used by the largest corporations.

In addition to delivering basic CCasS, resellers can leverage the SkySwitch platform's open architecture, to create bespoke solutions that meet specific or unfulfilled needs in distinct vertical markets. iCommerce, an early customer of the SkySwitch CCaaS service, did exactly that when it deployed the SkySwitch platform to fill a void in the fitness industry. Their GymPhone service combines a call center featuring knowledgeable and experienced agents with a virtual PBX for every fitness center customer.

The SkySwitch CCaaS offering has an open API that allows SkySwitch resellers to integrate and customize applications system-wide or on a per-tenant basis. With these options, it is possible to tightly integrate third-party applications, such as CRM or ERP, into agent desktops, as well as allow business customers to build and execute their own custom applications.

According to the research firm Exact, businesses that embrace the cloud achieve 25 percent additional revenue growth and more than double their profits compared to cloud skeptics. With the penetration of CRM systems forecasted to reach more than 50 percent of businesses in 2016; the demand for contact center solutions that marry business communications with customer data is not far behind.

"Offering the basic CCaaS delivers a new revenue stream for our resellers," said Jayson Jones, vice president of business development for SkySwitch. "Those that can leverage the open API and integrate it with other services can significantly enhance the offering and their bottom line."

Mitel Enters Partnership with TCG

Real-time communications provider Mitel has signed a master agent partner agreement with TCG, a master agent located in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., serving more than 1,500 agents. TCG Partners can now offer Mitel's MiCloud business communications portfolio to its growing base of MSPs, system integrators, telecom agents and IT consultants.

"At TCG our aim is to take the complexity out of IT decision making and solution planning," said Dan Pirigyi, managing partner at TCG, "Mitel is a recognizable brand and is an established carrier with millions of users on their service. We are impressed with Mitel's channel leadership and look forward to offering their level of support and service to our agents and their customers."

Convey Tracks Catalog Views in Telecom, Cloud Space

Convey Services announced a new premium program for vendors that subscribe to the Convey for Channel platform that automatically adds catalog banner advertising to master agent site home pages and measures viewer engagement. Convey is a cloud-based solution that hosts and delivers content, training, promotions, spiffs and events to engage the sales partners of master agents, improve communication and create calls to action in order to increase deal flow and sales.

"Convey created an automated process for catalog owners to select banners from inside their catalog, designate master agent home pages for those banners to appear and schedule when each banner will be seen," said Carolyn Bradfield, CEO of Convey. "Selected banners now appear on the master agent site home pages and are tied to Convey's analytics engine so vendors can adjust their strategy, refine messaging and focus on what's needed to drive engagement and improve revenue production."

With 40 top master agent sites, 10,000 subscribed site members and an estimated overall audience of 16,000 commissioned agents, Convey represents a strong promotional opportunity for suppliers in the telecom and cloud space, said Bradfield. Individual catalog views increased this year to 37,000 per month, with more than 500,000 content posts viewed or downloaded in the first half of the year.

"The Convey for Channel platform has changed the way sales agents engage with their vendor partners, automating the process and improving information flow," said Bradfield.

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Automated banner advertising is now available through a premium subscription in the Convey Channel program and is designed to increase click-throughs to vendor catalogs. The analytics engine is available to both master agents and vendors.

Catalog owners that are subscribed to multiple sites can view catalog activity reports on Convey Channel and see a comprehensive analysis of activity across all master agent sites. Reports can be filtered by activity date, as well as by master agent. Reports analyze views and clicks for each banner, page or content post. Reports are available in a summary, in a detailed view and can be downloaded or saved in the custom report dashboard.

CarrierSales Joins Cox Master Agent Program

CarrierSales has been selected by Cox Business to be a master agent within its newly redefined Partner Program. The Utah-based master agent is now able to source Cox Business services in multiple Cox markets including San Diego, Orange County, Las Vegas, Omaha, Virginia, Georgia and Florida.

Cox Business expects to add additional markets in the coming months.

"The addition of CarrierSales as a master agent for Cox Business is an important step in expanding our presence in the telecom sector," said John Muscarella, national sales director, Cox Business. "CarrierSales provides a cohesive and powerful group of agents focused on solution sales in the communities they serve."

"To be one of the first out of the gate within the newly redefined Cox Business Partner Program is very motivating," said Richard Murray, president of CarrierSales. "CarrierSales and Cox Business have partnered successfully for many years, and we've continued to see an increase in our partners requesting Cox Business."

Tiffany Wolf, vice president of sale operations for CarrierSales added, "The revamping of the Cox Business Partner Program is going to be a game changer for CarrierSales and our partners. This newly refined focus will add additional resources and support."

BCM One Strengthens Microsoft Cloud Strategy with Acquisition

BCM One has signed a definitive agreement to acquire certain assets of CloudStrategies Group, a leading Microsoft Gold Partner and cloud computing professional services company. With the transaction BCM One's existing expertise is now supported by a team of professionals from CloudStrategies that brings years of experience managing customer deployments across the entire Microsoft suite of

cloud services including Office 365, Skype for Business and Azure.

CloudStrategies was founded in 2009 and was "born in the cloud" as one of the first Microsoft computing resellers in the industry. The company deployed Microsoft cloud services to more than 500 customers nationwide, across various key verticals, and supported the migration of 100,000-plus users. Its delivery of services ranged from solution design to migration and also included ongoing training and client support.

"Our transaction with CloudStrategies was a natural evolution of our established partnership," stated Frank Ahearn, founder and co-CEO of BCM One. "It allows us to expand our existing in-house cloud specialists with a proven team that delivers and supports best-in-class Microsoft solutions."

"The acquisition of CloudStrategies by BCM One builds on the strengths of both partners and will allow the combined company to extend their services to deliver new cloud solutions to our joint customers," added Stephen Boyle, vice president, U.S. partners at Microsoft. "The focus on Skype for Business, Cloud Productivity and Azure is well aligned to the priorities we are driving across the Microsoft partner ecosystem."

BCM One became a Microsoft Partner close to two years ago and is certified to host Microsoft Customer Immersion Experience sessions (CIEs).

Telarus Announces New Partnership with Fusion

Telarus has entered into a partnership with Fusion whereby it will distribute Fusion's fully integrated suite of cloud communications, cloud connectivity and managed network service, and cloud computing solutions through its national distribution network.

"Telarus is focused on providing hands-on support from pre-sale to post-sale, helping develop marketing and business development strategies and working in concert with our providers to ensure an exceptional customer experience. That's why we're delighted to partner with Fusion, whose unwavering commitment to delivering the highest level of service is every bit as passionate as our own," said Patrick Oborn, Telarus co-founder.

"Telarus and Fusion share a passion for service excellence and a desire to help our mutual partners and customers grow faster, stronger and smarter," said Russell P. Markman, Fusion's president of business services. "Telarus is well known and respected for its innovation in seeking new ways to help its agents succeed and grow. With Fusion's single source solution for the cloud, Telarus partners will be able to offer everything an enterprise needs to successfully migrate to the cloud, and profit from its many benefits."

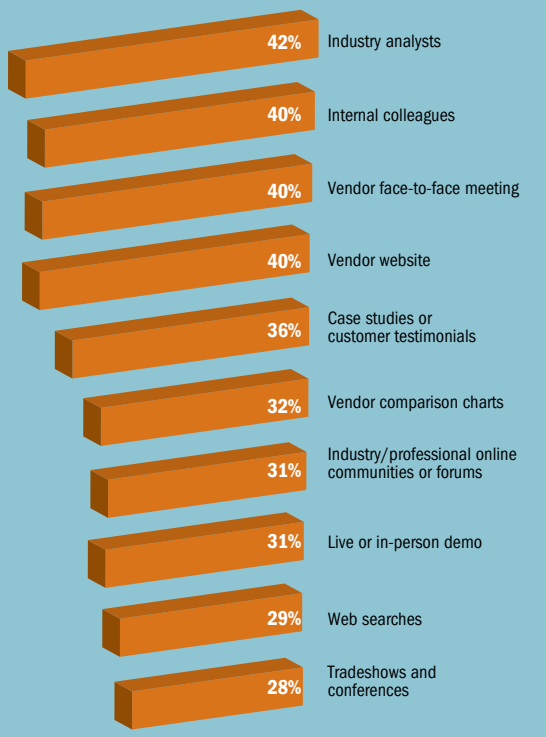
data POINT

NUMBERS WORTH NOTHING

By Martin Vilaboy

B2B Chatter

How fragmented is B2B marketing? When considering B2B tech purchases of $10,000+, at least a quarter or more of respondents site any one of 10 possible sources of research and information prompted in an Arketi Group survey. We could easily add a handful of others sources to the list.

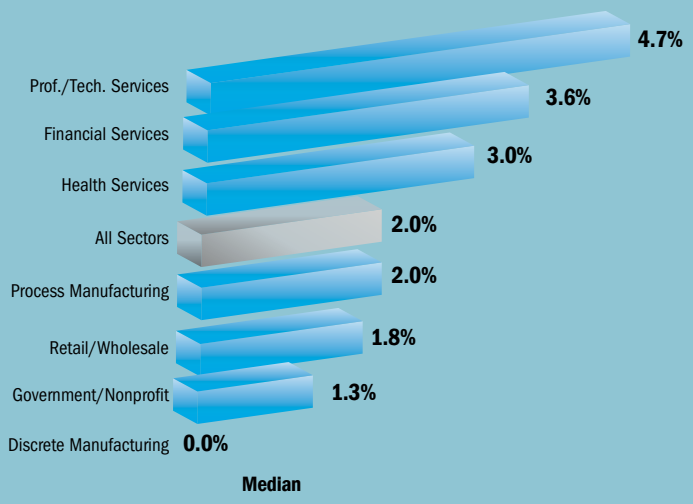


Source: Arketi Group

Services Sectors Lead Opex Growth

The modest growth in IT operational spending in 2016 is being led by the services sectors, which far outpace the slow or no-growth manufacturing, distribution and public sector, according to the annual Computer Economics IT spending and staffing benchmark study.

Change in IT Operational Budgets from Prior Year: All Sectors



Source: Computer Economics

Small Clouds but Forming

Research from IDC suggests smaller firms are still on the fence about cloud computing but moving forward are expected to rapidly increase adoption over the coming years.

Cloud Enthusiasm Among Small Businesses (Fewer than 50 Employees)

Small businesses "embracing" the cloud	11%
Small businesses currently deploying cloud	29%
Small business saying they are "evaluating" whether to adopt cloud	35%
Small businesses planning to deploy cloud-based office tools and productivity software	56%
Small businesses that are using or planning to adopt a cloud solution for email and collaboration	63%
Small businesses that will "fully adapt" to the cloud by 2020	78%

Source: IDC

21 Percentage of an average employee's work week spent away from their desk, 25% for middle managers and 37% for executives, according to BT Research.

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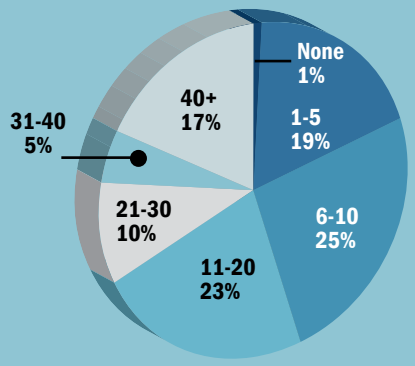
Hit the Bricks (and Mortar)

Despite sales moving online, physical retailers remain a lucrative target for telecom and IT providers. For one, the in-store experience is becoming increasing reliant on technology. What's more, retailers plan on opening new stores in 2016, suggest findings by research firm CBRE.

Number of Stores that Retailers Worldwide Plan to Open in 2016



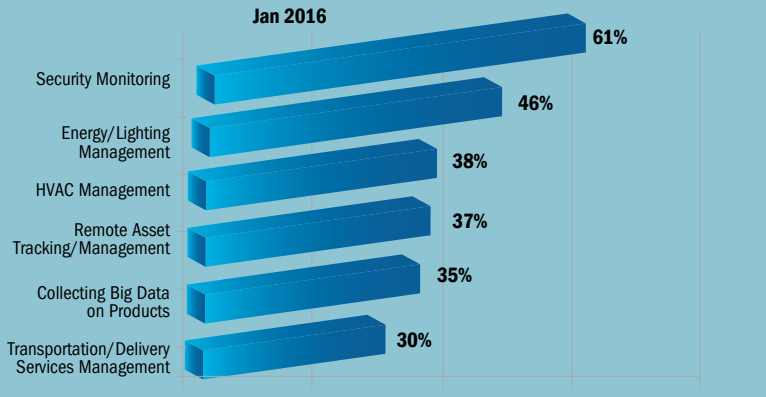
Source: CBRE, eMarketerx

IoT So Far

It's probably not so surprising – since security is top of mind right now – that security monitoring is the primary way companies are applying IoT technologies, according to 451 Research surveys. Smart lighting and HVAC management follow behind, suggesting IoT is seen as a way to reduce energy consumption, at least early on.

Ways Companies Are Using (Internet of Things) Technology

In which of the following ways does your company currently use, or plan to use, "Internet of Things" technology?

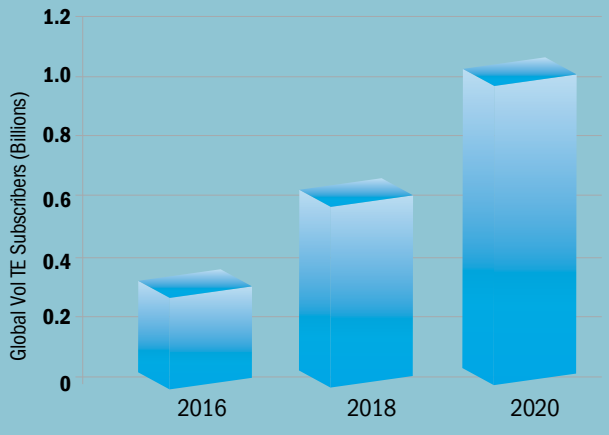


Source: 451 Research

LTE Finds its Voice

Driven by improvements in network efficiencies and spectrum reuse, voice over LTE is quickly ramping up, say researchers at IHS. There are currently 63 VoLTE commercial networks up and running, a net addition of 23 VoLTE networks to the existing 40 that were online at the end of December 2015.

Number of Global VoLTE Subscribers



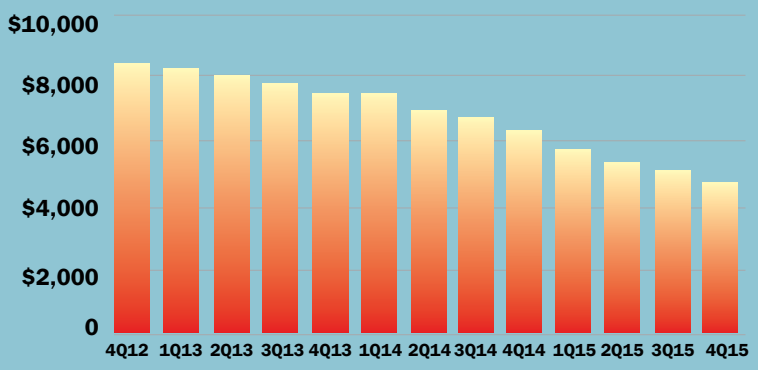
Source: IHS

40 Percentage of respondents to a Frost and Sullivan survey who said their cellular phone is their primary device used for business communications.

Loud Voice

Need more proof of the declining importance of voice revenues in service providers' business models? Check out Verizon's mobile voice revenues as reported by 451 Research.

Verizon's Quarterly Mobile Voice Service Revenue, $M



Source: 451 Research, company records

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On the MAP

Fiber in the Sunshine State

GeoTel Communications and *ChannelVison Magazine* have partnered to provide a telecommunications related map or infographic in every issue. These maps are created using GIS (Geographic Information Systems) software, analysts and skilled cartographers to produce commercial-grade maps of fiber optic infrastructure from around the world.

Each issue of *ChannelVision* will now include a new map to view ranging from fiber, cable and wireless infrastructure. In honor of summer, we start in the Southeast with a map of carrier fiber routes in the Sunshine State.

"GeoTel is honored to be given the opportunity by *ChannelVison* to bring its readers high quality telecom maps in its print and online editions," said Dave Drazen, CEO of GeoTel. Maps also can be purchased online by visiting the GeoTel website. GeoTel can create and print a variety maps and sizes of up to 5 ft. on high-quality, semi-gloss paper.

GeoTel is a leading provider of telecommunications location-based datasets in GIS and Internet-based spatial technologies for more than 15 years. By layering this data in GIS software or by viewing it in one of the web-based platforms, the company makes it possible to analyze detailed carrier fiber routes and other telecom datasets throughout North America. These integrated datasets are digitized onto high-quality street data and aerial imagery. GeoTel's databases encompass millions of miles of carrier fiber routes from more than 605 different carriers, more than 300,000 cell towers and rooftop sites, and more than 1,400,000 on-net fiber lit buildings, data centers and central offices across more than 7,000 U.S. cities. GeoTel currently offers 15 different telecom datasets, professional services and predictive analytics of big data.

GeoTel will be releasing a SaaS product exclusively for agents. A pay-per-search feature will allow an agent to quickly query locations based on GeoTel's database. Popular queries include locating carriers in a building and the carrier fiber routes that are within 10 to 250 ft. of the building in urban areas, and up to 1000 ft. in rural areas. Agents also can engage GeoTel for predictive analytic reports to better understand market penetration, competitive analysis, or several other types of information.

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Brexit: Wide-ranging Consequences for Tech and Cloud

By Tara Seals

After 43 years of inclusion, the U.K. has voted to leave the European Union in the historically unprecedented "Brexit" referendum vote. Aside from causing reactive uncertainty in the world's financial markets (some would say "carnage"), and sending jitters across the political landscape, the result has longer-term implications for technology and cloud-based companies, as Britain undertakes the two-year process to extricate itself from the EU.

The vote seemed to catch much of the world by surprise and left many people wondering whether they should act quickly to protect their investments. U.S. trade with the 28-member EU totaled $1.1 trillion last year – making it the world's largest bilateral commercial relationship. Of that, 21 percent was with the U.K. alone, according to U.S. Commerce Department data.

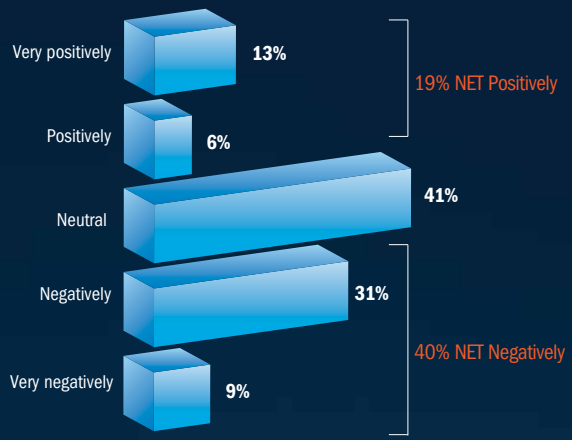
A Bullish Investment View

Joseph Mallen, chief investment officer for Sawtooth Solutions, a technology-focused company that concentrates on wealth-management platforms, said that puzzled American investors and businesses should wait to see how this unfolds over time, rather than taking drastic measures they may later regret.

"I believe this is much ado about nothing until further clarity on the result of the vote is determined," Mallen says. "This may take years to sort out. The Brexit may not happen at all."

In terms of the long-term investment outlook, the Brexit likely will be a further catalyst for U.S. interest rates to remain low for the next couple of years. "I don't see the Federal Reserve raising rates, as that would be highly unpopular given the prevailing market sentiment," Mallen said. "Also, I believe U.S. treasuries will continue to be a safe-haven asset for nervous international investors."

How do you think a Britain exit from the EU would affect your company's competitiveness in UK and European markets?



Source: CompTIA, among UK members

Mallen also said that if other European countries elect to follow suit with their own exits, there could be disruption in Europe-based equities. But Mallen said he doesn't believe the Brexit, in isolation, will be negative either for the U.S. or for the United Kingdom. Ultimately, Mallen says he believes the U.K. will become a pseudo-member of the EU, similar to the relationships Norway and Switzerland have with the EU.

"I believe it's a positive move for the U.K., giving it more freedom to act independent of EU governance," Mallen said. "The U.K. has more to offer the EU than the EU has to offer the U.K."

In terms of impact on the market, the attention actually should be on the presidential election, he added.

"As much as Brexit was a welcome reprieve from the election, I believe that within weeks the U.S. elections will become the primary global-market media focus and that will continue through November," Mallen says. "It promises to be a volatile campaign that, I believe, will impact global markets directly."

Tech Company Operational Worries

Despite positive outlooks such as Mallens, others point out that there will almost certainly be consequences for those that do business with the U.K.

For tech companies, currency fluctuation is at the center of much of the short-term concern. As companies are looking to invest more in overseas growth markets, a strong dollar works against those efforts. According to Mark Mulligan, managing director of MIDiA Research, "buying goods and services from across the globe, not just Europe, looks set to become more expensive for media and tech companies of all sizes due to the weakening of the pound on the international currency markets. Though the flip side of a weakened pound is that British goods are cheaper to buy, so export demand could rise."

The British pound hit its lowest point since 1985 right after Brexit, losing 7 percent of its value against the dollar, while the euro saw its biggest drop (16 percent) since it was introduced in 1999. It recovered but has trended weaker than before the vote.

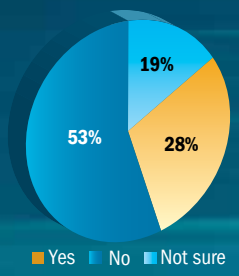
Some companies have plans in place to combat this, including Discovery, which said: "In the short-term and medium-term, our currency hedging program will significantly minimize the foreign exchange impact of the Brexit vote on our financial performance."

That said, it's not just the big guys at risk. "There could be countless implications for the U.K. media and [related] sectors, but smaller companies such as independent labels, independent production companies and tech start-ups look set to be hardest hit," Mulligan said.

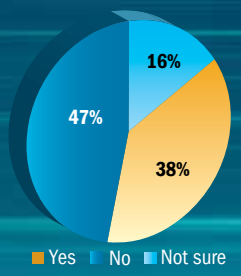
For instance, companies are also evaluating whether to keep outposts in the post-Brexit capital.

CompTIA UK Members Respond to Brexit

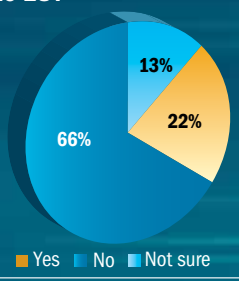
Are you in favour of Britain leaving the EU?



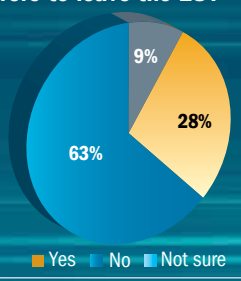
Do you think Britain leaving the EU would affect the purchsing decisions of your clients



Would your employment strategy change if Britain were to leave the EU?



Do you think US vendors will shift their focus away from the UK if it were to leave the EU?

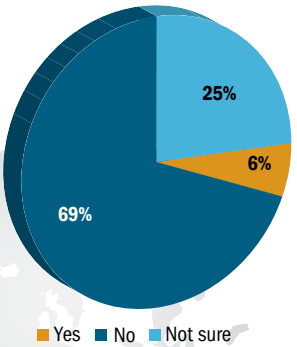


Source; CompTIA

"Our R&D department in Shoreditch, London, comprises of developers from several different EU nations – including Italy, Finland and Germany," Jamie Moles, security consultant for Lastline, American cybersecurity firm, told the *International Business Times*. "These guys live and work in London and travel around Europe for research purposes – as well as to return home to visit family. There is an obvious concern post-Brexit that the rules might change regarding their ability to stay in the U.K. and/or travel freely around Europe. We will have to wait and see if these concerns are founded or not and will of course support our team to remain employed and productive."

There may also be a dampening impact on the country with regards to the U.K. workforce skills pool. Brian Spector, CEO of Miracl, a cybersecurity firm based and operating in U.K., told the *International Business Times*, "The U.K. has a well-documented shortage of tech talent that means it simply cannot compete globally without tapping into highly skilled overseas workers. Splitting away from Europe would make it even more difficult for U.K. tech firms to compete with the U.S. tech giants, because their talent pool would be so much larger than ours. To cut ourselves off from the rest of Europe therefore does nothing to protect the U.K.'s reputation as being open for business."

Do you think that government efforts to cut EU red tape for businesses have been successful?



Source: CompTIA, among U.K. members

From a data privacy and protection perspective, there's also the question of whether the U.K. will align with the upcoming GDPR and NIS Directive. Further, according to Michela Menting, research director for ABI Research, the U.K. faces a decision whether to retroactively repeal or keep all past EU legislation adopted to date for data protection and privacy. This will have far-reaching ramifications for any tech company providing cloud services to Europeans.

"Currently, all EU laws still apply in the U.K.; at least over the course of the next two years as the U.K. untangles itself from the Union," she said. "However, the U.K. will need to determine not only whether they will (unilaterally) implement similar legislation in the future."

For some technology companies, the U.K. might be inclined to ease rules on privacy policies, since the European Union has some of the strictest in the world, said Todd Thibodeaux, president and CEO of CompTIA, a global technology trade association.

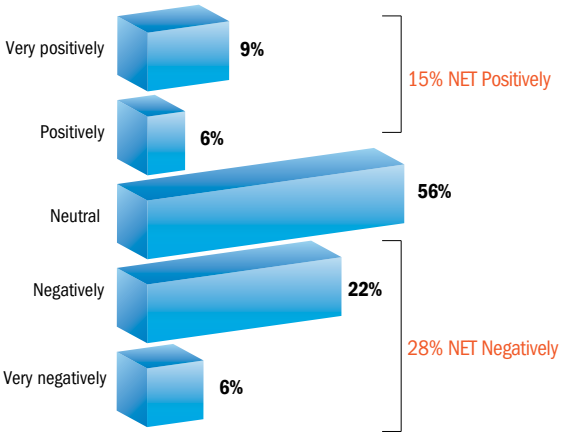
"Over time, we may see opportunities open up and the U.K. go after some sectors like Ireland has," Thibodeaux said.

Even if Britain ultimately adopts regulations identical to Europe's, it will take a couple of years. And in the meantime, there will be a new "regulatory island," with its own rules for tariffs, duties and material standards – causing complications for any U.S. business looking to establish a pan-European presence.

There are directives on e-commerce and data protection that date back to the early 2000s, the EU Directive on Data Retention from 2006, and the Directive on Attacks against Information Systems, adopted in August 2013. The U.K. has adapted all of these in some shape or form into national legislation.

"The U.K. will have to rule on the continued applicability of these instruments, as well as how they will address the incoming GDPR and NIS Directive," Menting said.

If Britain were to leave the EU, how do you think it would affect your company's profitability?



Source: CompTIA, among U.K. members

Many U.S. companies find the EU regulations onerous and an impediment to trans-Atlantic commerce; which on the one hand would point to Brexit being helpful from a U.S. trade perspective. However, both the GDPR and the NIS Directive state that operators and data controllers will be covered by the legislative requirements if they operate within EU markets and involve EU citizens – which leaves Britain in a position of little power to forge its own path.

"Seeing the high level of trade that the open market has brought in the U.K. in the past four decades, many U.K. organizations will need to comply if they want to continue trading and operating in EU markets," she said.

Despite the uncertainty around these issues, it's important to keep a level head, according to An Ananth, CEO of EventTracker.

"Brexit is affecting everything," he said. "What's happened is unprecedented, and there is a lot of confusion as to the next steps. This is the kind of chaotic environment in which insecurity thrives."

He added, "This is reminiscent of 2008 when the U.S. financial system suffered. That type of environment hurts security, which is already hard enough to maintain. At times like this, process and discipline can help. You should train like you fight, because you'll fight like you train, as the saying goes. I would recommend that everyone keep calm and carry on."

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Cloud Backup, Storage Boost MSP Chops

By Tara Seals

When it comes to making the transition to being a managed service provider, offering cloud backup services is one way to increase business revenue opportunities and customer retention – especially in compliance-driven verticals, such as healthcare and financial services. A recent survey from Asigra shows that 89 percent of MSPs offering cloud backup services are profitable, and 87 percent expect profit margins to grow in 2017. About 67 percent of those profitable MSPs are offering cloud backup as a bundled service.

In terms of the vertical markets most commonly served by cloud backup services, financial services, professional services, healthcare and medical, and legal markets topped the survey. The data reinforces the importance of comprehensive backup solutions for industry verticals with compliance requirements such as HIPAA.

Top Reasons MSPs Add Cloud Backup

Grow monthly recurring revenue	78%
Expand total addressable market	46%
Increase top line revenue	44%
Increase wallet share from existing customers	42%

Source: Asigra

"This survey re-affirms that cloud backup services offer an excellent path for MSPs to increase revenue from existing and new customers, and become trusted advisors by reliably managing customer's vital business data no matter where it resides," said Eran Farajun, executive vice president, Asigra.

The survey also revealed that the majority of MSPs that offer cloud backup services today are marketing this offering as a trailing complementary service. This go-to-market strategy positions cloud backup services as a component of an overall portfolio, enabling MSPs to bundle these services for free or low cost, increasing customer retention and wallet share with existing customers. One area not being fully utilized, as evidenced in the survey data: few MSPs perform regularly scheduled recovery drills for customers. Only about half of the surveyed MSPs are performing them at all, and of those, fewer than 3 percent of customers are consistently performing scheduled drills. MSPs can re-evaluate this aspect of their cloud backup service offering to protect customer data, realize additional revenue and cross-sell other services.

A perfect example of this is TIG, an MSP in the U.K., which has put together a high-performance file and block storage offering alongside a cloud backup solution. Cloud services are one of the fastest-growing revenue sources for TIG, and the company was intrigued by a new business opportunity: leveraging cloud-based multi-tenancy to manage a number of customers in segregated environments on the same server. This enables TIG's customers to receive dedicated storage not shared with any other users, yielding high, predictable performance.

It turned to Zadara Storage to build a storage and backup solution that TIG could promote to its customers as a flexible pay-as-you-go service. In a more traditional service model, offering storage services to end customers would require MSPs like TIG to procure and support large storage arrays in their own environment – a major up-front capital expense investment. However, in this model, if TIG weren't able to sell enough storage capacity, or if they lost a major storage customer, the company would run the risk of losing money on that investment. Creating a storage and backup solution based on software and on-demand services allows TIG to offer aggressive, agile services that meet changing customer requirements very quickly, for faster revenue realization.

"For a service provider like TIG, it's vitally important to maximize the resources at hand, and as clients' storage needs ebb and flow, to be able to meet their needs quickly and without incurring a significant infrastructure expense," said Nelson Nahum, CEO and co-founder at Zadara Storage.

It was also important to TIG that the solution enabled agile management, allowing the service provider to move quickly and strategically in times of peak usage or unplanned events, to take advantage of the fact that storage and backup capacity can scale in minutes.

"[This allows] us to be extremely nimble – in combination, they really align our business around a pure opex model," said George Georgiou, sales director at London-based TIG. "In the past, if a customer needed more storage, we would have to order and build the capacity, and it could take six to eight weeks to expand the environment. And if the customer's need was only temporary, we were stuck paying off a big capex investment. These channel-friendly service-based models from Asigra and Zadara give us the ability to scale our environment on-demand, according to customer requirements. If you don't have this kind of flexibility and agility in today's marketplace, you're not even in business."

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- Global IP network
- Cloud and Managed Services

For more information, please contact the Telstra Channel Team at **usapartners@team.telstra.com**

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PTC Corner

Smart Architecture

The rise of network automation and shared infrastructure in delivering real-time communications

By Ian Reither and Jason Craft

"R2-D2, you know better than to trust a strange computer." - C-3PO

The public Internet was not purpose-built for the delivery of real-time communications. However, delivering real-time communications is essential for businesses, large and small, and it is being done through the adoption of modern software, network and infrastructure paradigms. With the ever-decreasing costs of these technologies, the industry has seen adoption from even the smallest businesses in the most remote parts of the world. An upstart operator can now leverage now generally available technologies to provide real-time communications services alongside industry incumbents using more traditional paradigms.

Real-time communications can be made ultra-reliable and high-fidelity through combining network automation, strategic peering relationships and cloud-agnostic points of presence (PoPs). Whether you are familiar with these concepts or they're something that your company has not yet encountered, you will see why some of the most forward-thinking firms are driving adoption of and placing their trust in these architectures and technologies.

Network Automation

Network management has been going through an evolution during the past few years in which network operators and organizations are making automation a key driver in their strategy for building and managing their infrastructures. While software-defined networking (SDN) and network function virtualization (NFV) tend to receive the most attention, there are a number of obstacles that are making the transition difficult and slowing adoption. In the interim, however, there are intermediary steps that operators can take to begin the transition to more centrally managed and automated networks. One such step is the implementation of network automation such as zero-touch provisioning (ZTP).

A zero-touch network implies the shift away from direct configuration via command-line interface (CLI) of network devices to the use of automation platforms. These platforms come in a variety of forms, but have the common goal of removing human interaction from the CLI by allowing the creation of deterministic environments through configuration management. With ZTP, organizations can pre-determine everything from baseline configurations to more complex configurations such as building configurations to implement a customer network that spans a global IP backbone.

This can ensure that something as simple as an interface description or a VLAN name follow the designed naming conventions. We can deterministically build everything without concern over whether a BGP (border gateway protocol) peering was built correctly. Therefore, if your BGP peers should always "send communities," then ZTP is your best bet in being 100 percent deterministic. That's compared to an engineer who may mistakenly skip a line of configuration due to manual configuration from the CLI.

After provisioning is complete, these same platforms can be used to maintain networks. For example, using tools like Ansible, network engineers are beginning to build complex platforms and create front- and backend systems to manage an entire network infrastructure. Imagine that the source of truth of an environment now exists within your automation platform's backend database instead of text files of configurations that may or may not be current and relevant.

Clearly, the benefits of this paradigm are enormous. Engineers can build platforms that routinely check for changes in the live environment and can take action against rogue configurations that do not meet

implemented design. For example, automation in the system can detect if a network engineer modifies an Access Control List (ACL) that leaves certain systems vulnerable. This integrated automation employs a series of probes and watchdogs that revert the configuration to a properly functioning state that is kept in the backend databases within configurable intervals. Using the same example, changes to ACL can be deployed to hundreds, if not thousands, of devices with the click of a button. What makes this even more powerful is that an engineer can input an ACL rule in a single format once, and the automation platform can in turn transform this rule, so that it can be enabled on a variety of devices in a mixed-vendor environment. Thus, through network automation and ZTP, operators can eliminate vendor lock-in, increase adoption of new platforms, and reduce overall network costs.

Strategic Peering

For organizations building a global IP backbone, strategic PoP placement and peering are essential to gaining the best possible performance and routing visibility. With many choices of carrier-neutral vendors and facilities available, organizations can plan their backbone and network locations within close proximity of nearly any network needed for interconnection. The benefits include direct peering with major transit providers, Internet exchange points, cloud service providers and direct cross connects with customers, business partners, CDNs, etc.

When combining strategic PoP placement and peering, organizations can effectivity shorten the cable between their network and customers, along with any networks needed for building resources, such as cloud service providers and CDNs. As an example, a network can be built in major markets on both coasts. On the East Coast, PoPs built in the New York and Washington D.C. metro areas offer many options for establishing peering to networks of choice. Likewise, adding PoPs in the San Francisco Bay Area and Seattle are examples of West Coast coverage. These locations can be interconnected with transport services to complete the backbone for your organization.

Today, peering sessions can be built in each major metro area of the backbone in order to announce networks that can be locally served in those areas. This example essentially shortens the path. Network services can be built and replicated at each location, thereby increasing the likelihood

that customers will ingress at the closest PoP (i.e., customers located on the West Coast will have a high probability of ingressing at San Francisco or Seattle). If the desired service is at each location, the traffic will be handled locally, or will route to the nearest PoP across the backbone.

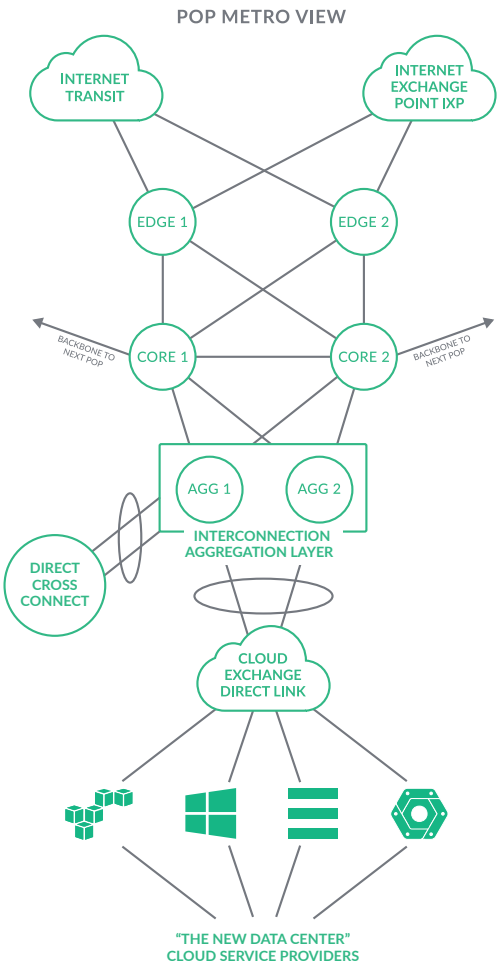
One of the keys to establishing this environment is peering on an Internet exchange point (IXP). When an IXP link is established, networks can peer with other IXP networks in a given region. This method allows companies that exchange significant traffic to form a peering relationship over the exchange, resulting in direct traffic exchanges between the networks and thus eliminating the need to rely on costly Internet transit. Another option is to form a direct connection within the same carrier-neutral facility if private peering is desired.

This is just one example of a strategy that can be used to build a global IP backbone with multiple PoPs, peering arrangements and connectivity options to increase performance and routing visibility on the Internet. The end result enables you to be closer to your customers and partners, leading to higher service quality and reduced costs.

Cloud-Agnostic Data Centers

The classic approach to networking typically involves building facilities with cages and rows of bare-metal servers and network gear to establish connectivity. An alternative is to use cloud service providers as the new data center. Using a small footprint of network hardware and direct connections, organizations can build IP backbones that establish routing with cloud providers to route virtual networks.

Using a cloud-agnostic approach, companies can strategically build network PoPs within close proximity to cloud providers offering direct cross-connects. A simple network model can be used to route traffic to and from a PoP with standard Internet transit. An edge and core layer of routers is used to manage routing decisions at the PoP, and an aggregation layer can be used to establish local cross-connects to build routing peers. This model allows an organization to peer privately with Amazon Web Services, Microsoft Azure, IBM SoftLayer, Google Cloud (GCE) or any other cloud provider offering similar services.



An example multi-cloud strategy using cloud providers as the "new data center," connecting directly into the backbone network

Once the network is live and peering is established, the virtual network built in the cloud is then routed using the IP backbone of the network. A virtual network in AWS East can talk to a virtual network in Azure Central all over the same private IP backbone, as if those virtual networks were actual data centers. Once this connectivity is in place, all virtual instances within the cloud provider are essentially just a server within the network. Each cloud has networking limitations that organizations will need to creatively work around to meet their needs, but basic configurations, such as building NAT translations or using your own IP space, are simple advantages that can be implemented. This model allows for a small and cost efficient network footprint when compared to building traditional data centers, as the data center burdens are consumed by the cloud provider.

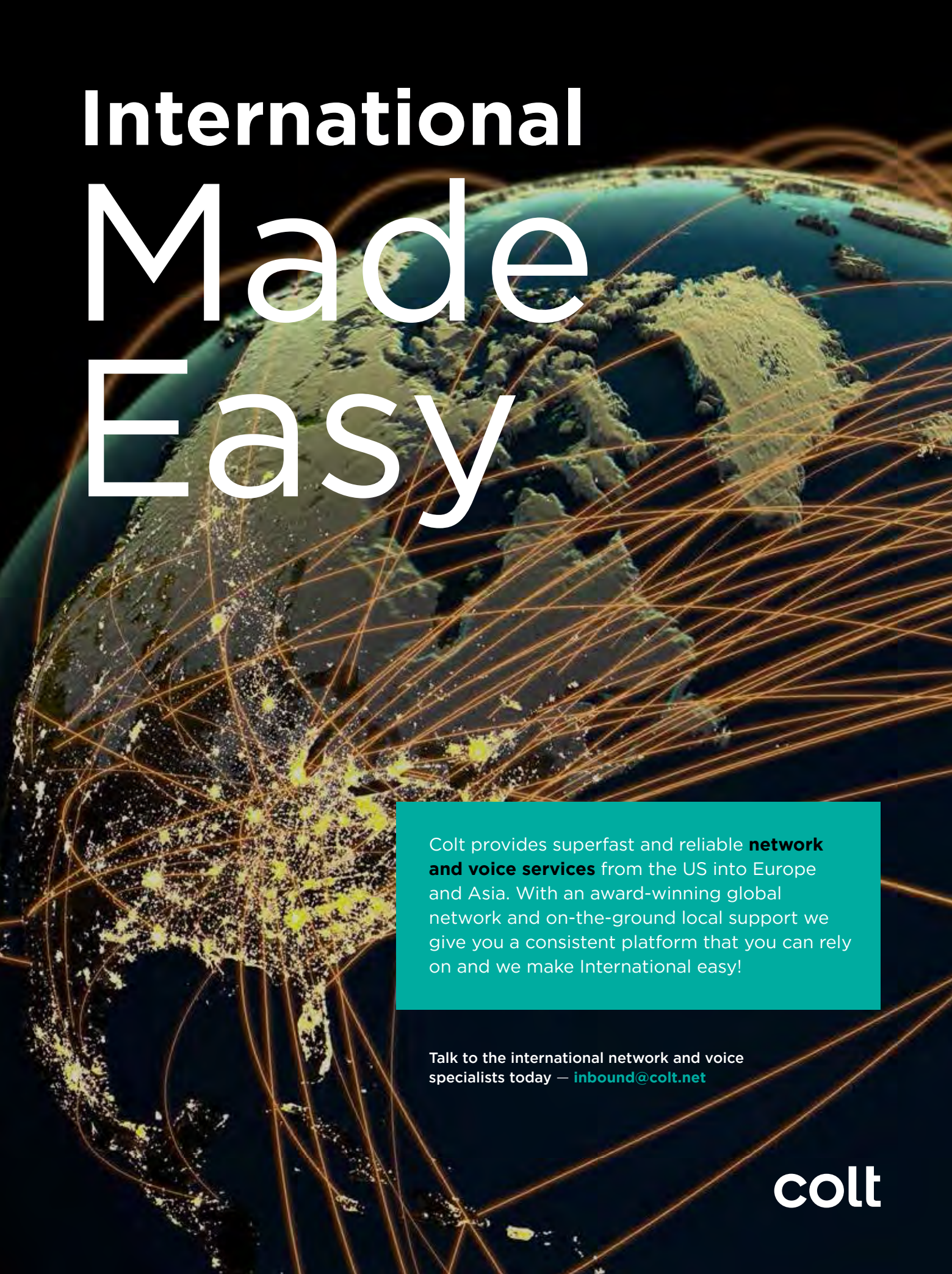
Another benefit of this model is that control of the network is maintained by the organization. All routing decisions, IP space, QoS policies, etc., can be handled within the network layer, which provides additional flexibility. Depending on the use case of the network, the total footprint can be as small as a single 45RU cabinet filled with only the necessary hardware needed to build the model and establish connectivity.

So What?

During the past decade, the public Internet and cloud computing have truly gone global, with even the smallest business in the most remote part of the world leveraging the ability to spin up compute and storage with the likes of AWS, IBM SoftLayer, GCS or Azure. This new ubiquitous capability, coupled with the increasing focus on DevOps automation and user-friendly software applications, has deeper implications for the delivery of real-time communications over the Internet.

Quality of service and reduced costs are the main benefits to an organization's ability to deliver diverse, resilient and redundant real-time communications associated with the adoption of these technologies. Network automation, building select peering relationships and deploying cloud-agnostic PoPs all contribute to increased QoS. Further, the start-up investment cost and effort for implementing these strategies has decreased dramatically in recent years—and will continue to do so in the coming decades.

Ian Reither is co-founder and COO at Telnyx, and Jason Craft is senior network engineer at the company. Learn more at www.telnyx.com.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Digital Signage Lights Up the Scene

By Tara Seals

Digital signage – that is, screens that offer public information in retail stores, transportation hubs, next-gen billboards, hospitals and more – is a fast-growing market fueled by ever-better broadband and technological innovation in the content arena. And while it may seem like a niche play, the role for channel partners in the space could be a large one.

According to MarketsandMarkets, the digital signage market was valued at $16.88 billion last year, and is expected to reach $27.34 billion by 2022, at a CAGR of 6.7 percent between 2016 and 2022. The firm said that improvements in technology offerings and infrastructure expansion is likely to fuel the additional opportunities to offer the integration of real-time data management tools, big data analytics and smart content, with multiple presentations and dynamic interfaces to further drive the market for public commercial displays.

The firm also said that the growth of the digital signage market for software offerings is higher than that for hardware offerings considering that displays, media players, projectors, mounts and other accessories don't require frequent purchases or replacements.

Kiosks held the largest market share of the global digital signage market last year and are expected to dominate the market till 2022. Kiosks play a significant role in the digital signage market for providing access to information and communications, commerce, entertainment, education and other applications; put simply, they are quick and effective solutions, which can be used virtually in all locations.

Aside from the overall market opportunity, SpinetiX research found that digital signage is a great segment for channel partners, with small installations from one to 20 screens being the most common sale in both EMEA and North America. Big projects with more than 100 screens only represent 11 percent of total market.

SpinetiX also found that the average digital signage project duration is typically three to five years. Content production is a key element in the equation, so channel partners have to understand how the end user will update the content on the screen. Accordingly, professional services represent 41 percent of the average digital signage budget. The scope as well as the overall budget envelope (including capex and opex) should be appreciated as a whole.

The small to medium enterprise segment is obviously a sweet spot for most channel partners, which here have a golden opportunity to offer ancillary technology, connectivity and more along with the digital signage solutions themselves.

"There is great potential for channel partners to bundle digital signage solutions with third-party integration to further differentiate themselves," a SpinetiX spokesperson told us. "There's a huge potential with CCTV, queue management, building automation and more."

In terms of specialized knowledge or training, professional A/V and IT channel partners are already skilled to address the digital signage market requirements – and networking and IP skills are additionally valuable.

Above all, to be successful, partners should vet their portfolio providers wisely.

"Channel partners need to work with brands which value their role in the ecosystem and have an integrity on how they work with their channel partners," the SpinetiX spokesperson said. "Too many players in the market use the dealer to open the door of the end user and then bypass the dealer to take the good margin out of them."

To put its money where its mouth is, Convergent and SpinetiX kicked off a channel partner program for North America earlier in the year. SpinetiX sells its digital signage solutions primarily through distributors and dealers. And as a strategic partner for North America since 2011, Convergent said that it made a commitment to deliver more digital signage business opportunities, additional business coaching and support to SpinetiX channel partners.

"Our goal is to continuously improve the digital signage experience of our customers in every aspect," said Francesco Ziliani, CEO of Spinetix. "Following the success of our channel partner program in the EMEA region, we are focused on growing our commercial presence in North America. By growing our partnership with Convergent in this way, we are now truly ready to take the digital signage business to the next level."

The program consists of four levels tailored to reward participating partners for their commitment, expertise and performance. A partner gains increasing benefits commensurate with their commitment and proven performance, such as special project pricing, volume discounts, incremental program support and supplemental marketing resources.

"We are proud to expand our business relationship with SpinetiX as a SpinetiX Distribution Partner and play a key role in growing the digital signage market in North America by making it more accessible to the companies who previously considered it too complex or unreliable for their environment," said Steve Schilling, president of Convergent. "SpinetiX solutions fit very well with Convergent's mission to bring simplicity, reliability, scalability and accountability to the digital signage industry."

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IoT Connects Up New Channel Opportunities

By Tara Seals

The Internet of Things (IoT) is perhaps the most buzzed-about technology evolution out there at the moment, and no wonder: during the past decade, digital technologies have begun to blanket our lives, forming the backbone of a large, intelligent infrastructure that can support, in theory, billions of new devices with connectivity to the Internet and to each other.

That means installing a sensor on everything from home thermostats and fridges to wind turbines, self-driving cars and even cattle and wheat fields. According to Ericsson's latest Mobility Report, IoT connections will overtake phone subscriptions by 2018. And, overall mobile connections will number 27.5 billion by 2021, with the IoT accounting for 15.7 billion of that total. By comparison, the number of mobile phone connections is expected to reach 8.6 billion in that time period. Further, a recent BI Intelligence report found that nearly $6 trillion will be spent on IoT solutions during the next five years.

And indeed, money-making opportunities associated with IoT are coming into focus for companies across the channel. Businesses see the ways the IoT can improve their bottom line by lowering operating costs, increasing productivity and expanding market and product development. A Verizon Wireless report this year found that 72 percent of businesses see IoT as "critical to their competitive advantage."

CompTIA found that 23 percent of channel companies surveyed say they've already made money from IoT offerings, compared to just 8 percent in 2015. Looking forward, one-third of channel firms expect to make money from IoT in the next 12 months.

"The channel is making significant progress with monetizing the IoT opportunity and, unlike past years, view themselves as strong profitability candidates," said Seth Robinson, senior director of technology analysis at CompTIA.

Three-quarters of channel firms in the CompTIA survey said they have a more positive view of IoT today than they did a year ago. Another 21 percent have not changed their opinion during the past 12 months, a group that certainly includes firms that were bullish on IoT to begin with.

"First, the complexity of IoT projects is beyond what many companies can handle internally, especially on the SMB end of the spectrum," Robinson explained. "Second, many areas of IoT are essentially extensions of the skills and lines of business that solution providers already have."

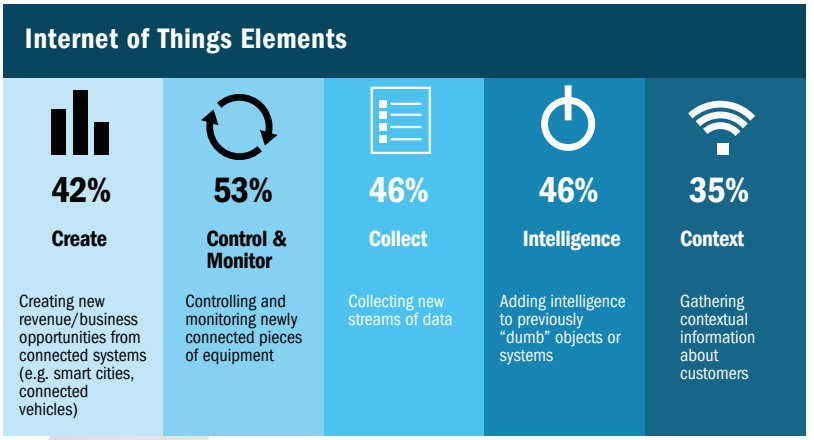
Consulting is currently the most popular IoT channel offering, with 40 percent of companies offering something in this space. The next most popular offering is security, provided by 36 percent of firms. Analytics, managed services, custom app development, reselling, and infrastructure services are offered by between 30 percent and 35 percent of companies.

Some IT solution providers are carving out unique niches in the IoT market. For example, Presidio provides a fleet management solution for a Texas school district, allowing administrators to track student safety and bus routes across 625 square miles. Dimension Data empowered the Tour de France with a range of IoT applications – including custom network transported sensor information from bicycles – to deepen fan engagement. Axians helped to develop an in-building IoT lighting system that enabled a European energy network company to slash its energy consumption by up to 70 percent; and Impetus Technologies created a factory-floor IoT system that helped a customer improve its manufacturing processes and reduce the volume of product defects.

Much of the early work is being done in Europe. For instance, Telia Carrier and Ericsson have signed an agreement that enables IoT operators to connect via any of Telia Carrier's 220 IPX PoPs directly to Ericsson's Device Connection Platform in a single network hop.

Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, KPN has blanketed the country with LoRa (long range) wireless access, with 1.5 million objects hooked up to the network. Initial projects include port of Rotterdam depth sounders being outfitted with sensors and network connections, a trial to connect all railway switches so they can be monitored centrally, and tests with baggage tracking at Schiphol airport in Amsterdam.

IT Executive Perceptions of where the Internet of Things will Most Likely Have an Impact or Provide Value



Source: CompTIA

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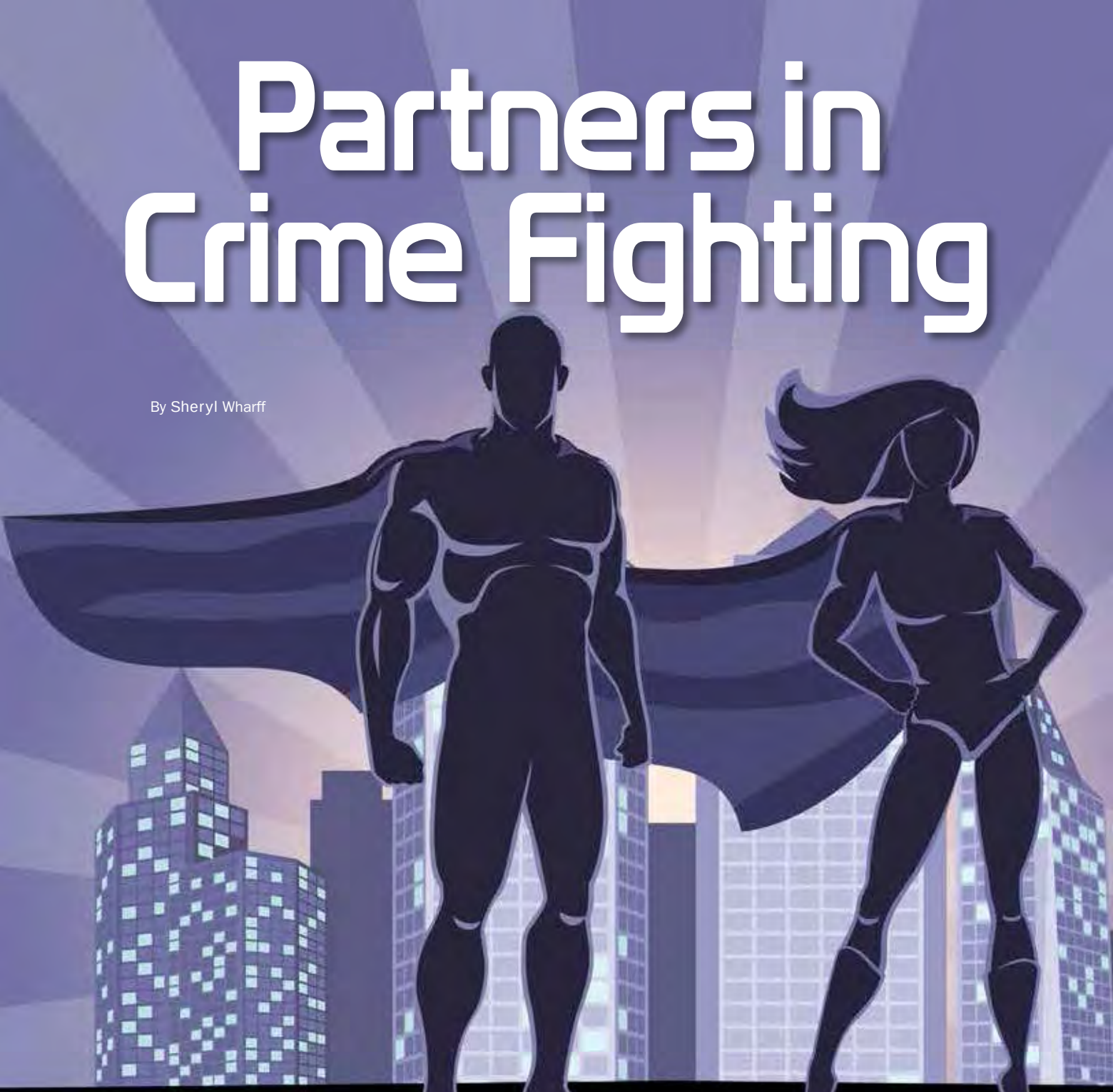
THE BRAINS OF THE NEW GLOBAL NETWORK

Partners in Crime Fighting

By Sheryl Wharff



Building security expertise through partnerships

They say a leopard cannot change its spots to stripes – and many would assert the same principle holds true for most partners in the channel. If a partner's business is "stripes" based, common wisdom would say they cannot easily adopt and sell "spot" solutions. However, that's what many technology partners today are attempting to do by adding security solutions to their portfolio of offerings.

So, what are the security issues and trends that a "stripes-focused" channel partner needs to keep in mind today to successfully add "security-spots" to its portfolio and grow its business?

Data Is Criminal Currency

As cyber-thieves continue to find new ways to steal, misuse and profit from the sale of sensitive enterprise data, more and more end-user customers want solutions that will help them protect everything from their employee and customer information to their corporate reputation and brand image. Regulated, corporate and financial data and intellectual property are the lifeblood of organizations. The more data organizations collect, the more there is to protect, putting the pace of growth in the security sector at an astonishing trajectory. With this growth

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Global Regulations, Local Businesses

The continued upsurge in malicious data breaches worldwide have heightened interest among regulators, IT professionals and corporate executives in data security technologies that mitigate the risks of sensitive data falling into the wrong hands.

It's this keener interest that may be leading to the recent influx in cross-border security regulations. Take, for example, the General Data Privacy Regulations (GDPR) recently adopted in Europe, which are having a big impact on security. Companies today are just starting to sort out what GDPR implementation means to them, and these new rules governing trans-Atlantic data transfers will have an even greater impact in the coming months and years. Taking the GDPR legislation one step further is the EU Privacy Shield regulation – recently adopted between the EU and the U.S. – which imposes even stricter obligations on American companies to safeguard the personal data of European citizens, covering everything from health data to social media activities.

Regulations such as these – and the direct obligations they impose on U.S. enterprises – present enormous opportunities to channel partners looking to expand in the security space.

Innovative Solutions = Channel Growth

Digital disruption is constantly changing the IT landscape, presenting opportunities for vendors to innovate and bring new, game-changing solutions to customers. While the host of new opportunities has been transformative for the way companies do business, it also has introduced new challenges that businesses are not used to dealing with. The good news, based on recent Ponemon Institute studies, is that encryption technologies provide the second-highest ROI for customers in safeguarding their data. Partners open to learning about encryption and tokenization technologies that address an existing and growing customer problem will thrive in this changing environment.

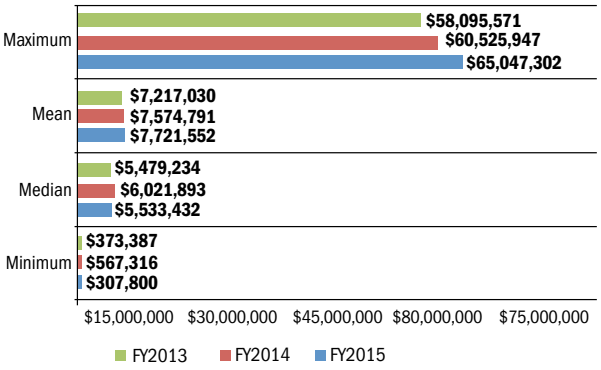
To help partners bring encryption solutions to the market – and achieve profitable ROI for the organization – it's important for a vendor to take a strategic approach in bringing their solutions and offerings into the channel. They must research their distributor and their reseller base to understand their strengths and weaknesses in adopting security solutions that are "channel ready" today. They must ensure that the partnerships targeted are those that "match" the offer with their expertise, services skills and installed-based customers in key market segments and industries. It's very important for the vendor, as well as their distributors and resellers, to ensure all their investments pay off and achieve their long-term revenue growth and success.

For example, resellers that focus on storage and server hardware infrastructure are a logical choice for a security "attach" solution. They are already selling to the individuals and organizations that buy servers and disk arrays. Adding on or upgrading to a solution within that customer's environment to provide greater security for data-at-rest is a logical next step and great way for partners to begin to "add data security" and secure solutions to their portfolios and business expertise.

Partners that focus on Microsoft-based software solutions can also add an encryption email solution easily to their portfolio. They can use their services expertise to help customers protect their current Outlook or Office 365 customer base with added functionality and benefits through offering a new email encryption solution.

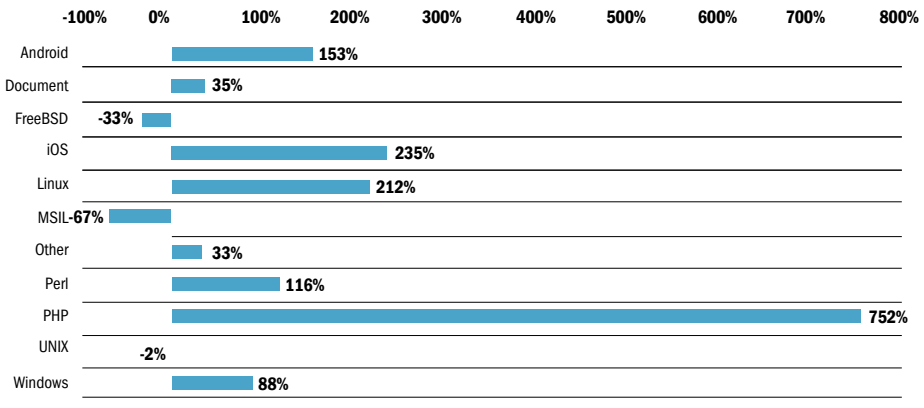
Not all security solutions for the channel, however, are as turnkey as the two examples above. Tools that provide security for data in-use and data in-motion solutions are a perfect example. Here, successful partners need a robust knowledge of tool kits, API, ETL tools, integrations, business applications, etc., as data is moving in and out for analysis. These security solutions require robust security knowledge and security consulting expertise to understand how to have customer conversations, find projects, address needs, do a proof-of-concept and close the deal.

The cost of cyber crime



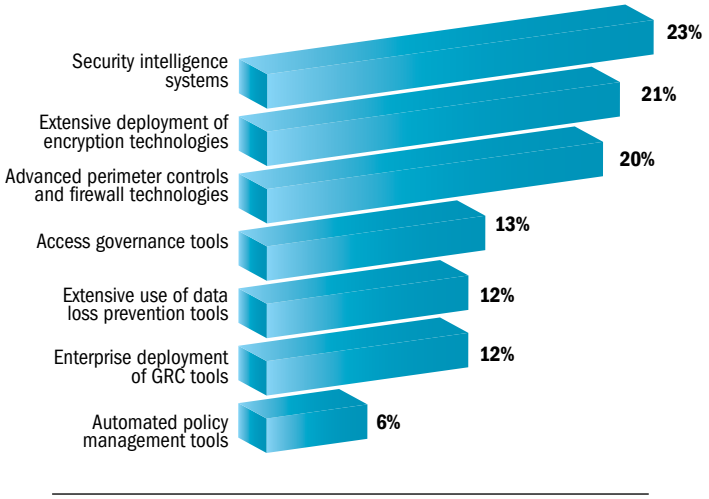
Source: Ponemon Institute; HPE Security; among 252 companies studied

Yearly growth in newly discovered malware samples by platform (ReversingLabs)



Source: HPE Security

Estimated ROI for seven categories of enabling security technologies



Source: Ponemon Institute; HPE Security

For many channel partners, there is a great deal of energy and excitement to get started in the security realm. But excitement does not equal enablement, which is often the biggest challenge. Having solutions, programs and promotions is one thing – but having highly eager and equipped partnerships with deep data security depth is another. Protecting sensitive data and meeting compliance mandates is of utmost importance to end users today. Data-centric security technology offers differentiators that other vendors and their partnerships simply do not have. For HPE partners, this means market differentiation and revenue growth opportunities are available now.

Ultimately, each reseller must perform an analysis to understand their own DNA and determine if they wish to make incremental strategic investments in the area of security for skills they do not have. For vendors desiring to expand their channel, a data security sales specialist is critical. These specialists can help the robust and talented partnership community through the first couple of sales until they feel comfortable and capable.

Sheryl Wharff is in global product marketing at HPE Security – Data Security.

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APP-ETIZING OPPORTUNITIES

Growth, transitions create openings in business process application market

By Martin Vilaboy

Telecom channel executives have long heard the warnings to move "up the stack" and avoid becoming "dumb pipe" providers, but there are also some good reasons on the demand side why agents should be to looking to delivere more cloud-based business applications across those pipes. Several categories within business process software are currently experiencing double-digit growth trajectories, show findings from Forrester. It's also a market presently seeing "significant technology disruption," says the research group, and that could be good news for attacking providers. After all, common sense suggests it's easier to attack under the shadow of some disruption rather than when things are good and customers are content.

Not surprisingly, the technology disruption also is a key driver of the revenue growth, with businesses looking to accelerate the pace of replacing aging on-premises software with subscription-based software as a service. Traditional licensed software sales, meanwhile, are expected to come in flat to declining. As the market evolves toward

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subscription-based (SaaS) business applications, we have and will continue to see a proliferation of new players and new types of application categories, says Forresters. For example, in the e-commerce application category alone, Forrester cataloged 45 subcategories and nearly 500 vendors. All the while, many non-incumbent providers have been able to gain a significant foothold.

"The leading SaaS pure-play vendors by revenue size continue to grow at rates exceeding 20 percent," finds Forrester. Salesforce (23 percent), NetSuite (35 percent) and Ultimate Software (23 percent) all have enjoyed sustained and consistent growth over multiple years, says Forrester. Workday's growth rates, though slowing recently, have been even higher.

Indeed, "Forrester's analysis of the evolution of the business applications market over the past decade indicates that the large, traditionally on-premises vendors (IBM, Infor, Microsoft, Oracle, SAP) are losing share to faster-growing, cloud-native rivals," said the research firm. The five largest traditional vendors, named above, will go from a collective business process applications share of 25 percent in 2010 to a share of 21 percent in 2017.

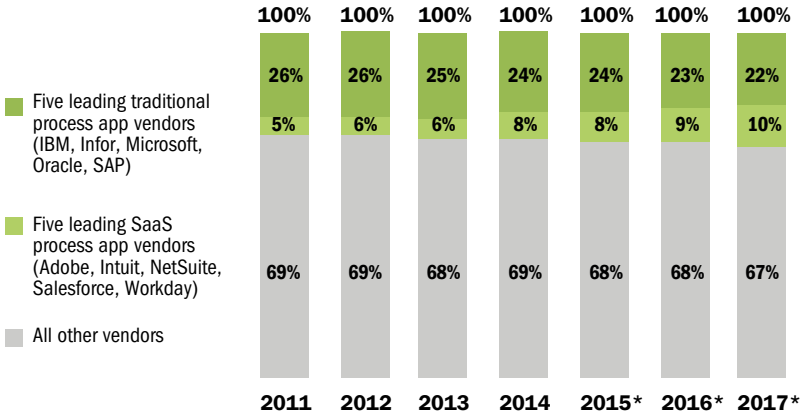
SaaS pure-plays Salesforce, Workday and NetSuite, meanwhile, plus SaaS converts Intuit and Adobe have grown their collective share during the same period from 4 percent to 11 percent, says Forrester. "All other providers" – presumably the group telecom channels would fall under – account for just less than 70 percent of global business application revenues.

Not that traditional providers have fallen asleep at the switch. "Virtually every traditionally on-premises software vendor we have spoken with in 2015 is seeing significant growth in subscription revenues and flat to declining license revenues," said the Forrester study on the business process application market.

In terms of the overall size of the opportunity, Forrester's global market analysis indicates that the core business process applications segment, supporting both customer and efficiency-focused solutions, will grow from $141 billion in 2015 to $156 billion in 2016 and $169 billion in 2017. Among the primary categories that fall under "business process applications" are customer relationship management (CRM), call center/contact center systems, human resource management (HRM), product lifecycle management (PLM), e-purchasing, and specific products within financial management such as accounts receivables.

Global application revenues by type of vendor

(percentage of total market share)



Source: Forrester Research

"The market is a dynamic one because clients are continually looking for new packaged apps for increasingly specialized business processes," say Forrester researchers.

U.S. sales dominate and set the pace of the market, with 52 percent of the $156 billion market for business process applications in 2016 coming from purchases in the U.S., Forrester estimates. An additional 5 percent will originate in Canada and Latin America. CRM, commerce servers and human resources management are the fastest-growing categories of process apps, at 20 percent, 17 percent, and 16 percent, respectively, reports Forrester.

SaaS business process applications represent about one-third of the market currently and will grow by 24 percent in 2016, significantly faster than the overall market, which has a 12 percent growth rate. The U.S. share of the global SaaS process application market is even higher than the overall, rising to 64 percent, up from 61 percent in 2013.

Once again, SaaS subscriptions are driving revenue growth for the business applications landscape, as license revenues decline and maintenance revenues grow at a slower pace, says Forrester. In 2012, subscriptions represented $22 billion in revenues; in 2016, Forrester projects that subscriptions will be $53 billion. Looking beyond 2017, Forrester expects SaaS subscriptions will continue to grow rapidly through 2020, generating more than half of total software revenues by 2020.

That's partly because a quarter to a third of enterprise buyers surveyed by Forrester in the fourth quarter of last year said they plan to replace most or all of the 12 types of business applications covered by the Forrester study with SaaS within the next two years. In addition, 19 percent to 23 percent have already replaced these applications with SaaS.

"While SaaS adoption is growing in all process application categories, adoption rates vary widely across categories," according to Forrester researchers.

In 2016, for instance, more than half of all product revenues in CRM, commerce servers and e-purchasing will come from SaaS subscriptions. The SaaS share is even higher in some subcategories in marketing automation in CRM, as well as services procurement and network services in e-purchasing, where 80 percent to 90 percent of revenues are from SaaS subscriptions.

All the while, human resources software, risk management and payment, and supply chain management (SCM) apps are tilting toward SaaS,

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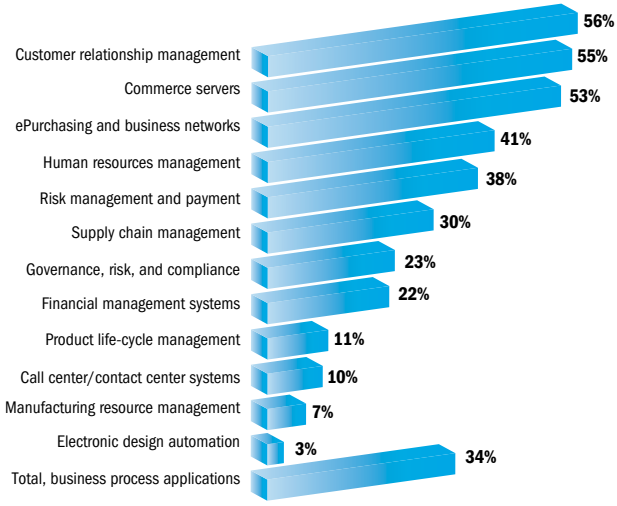
say Forrester researchers, with SaaS representing a third to two-fifths of total revenues in 2016.

Financial management systems, PLM, call center/contact center, manufacturing management, and electronic design automation, on the other hand, are still predominantly single instance licensed or hosted applications, reported Forrester. "These categories have lower adoption of SaaS because of more limited buyer choices, but also because these systems tend to be heavily customized, making SaaS deployments more challenging," says the research firm.

Top Category Breakdowns

The rock star of business process software, CRM applications, which span the customer life cycle through marketing, sales and customer service, is both the largest and fastest-growing segment within the category. Forrester estimates robust growth rates of 20 percent for 2016, followed by 13 percent in 2017, from approximately $24 billion in 2015. Salesforce is the dominant vendor in this category, with projected 2015 total revenues of $6.65 billion and revenue growth of 24 percent.

Software-as-a-service (SaaS) subscription as a percentage of total product revenues 2016



Source: Forrester Research

"The core CRM app of Salesforce automation is widely adopted, so growth will increasingly come from related apps such as marketing automation and customer services and support," says Forrester researchers.

The second largest process application category, the finance systems software market represented about $23 billion in sales in 2015, with growth expected of 12 percent in 2016 and 5 percent in 2017, driven largely by usability and obsolescence challenges in existing on-premises finance systems and an increasing appetite for SaaS.

In addition to core accounting capabilities at the heart of ERP systems, such as NetSuite, Oracle and SAP, financial management software also includes adjacent capabilities that are moving to SaaS even more quickly than the core, says Forrester. These include revenue-focused systems such as billing, receivables, tax and collections;

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systems for financial assets (e.g., cash); and expenditure solutions (e.g., travel and expense management). "Enterprise performance management (EPM), which includes solutions planning, financial reporting and analytics, is part of this overall category and is experiencing a major shift to SaaS," say Forrester researchers.

Next up in terms of size and growth potential, HR applications support a broad range of people and talent processes, ranging from core administration of employee records, benefits and payroll to talent acquisition, employee performance, career development and training.

"While people and talent are traditionally viewed as cost centers with onerous compliance implications, customer-obsessed companies view them as a growth-oriented investment that drives customer engagement," says Forrester.

The research firm pegs this market at $16 billion in 2015, growing by 16 percent in 2016 and 9 percent in 2017 to $20 billion.

"Significant growth is being driven by replacement of older, on-premises systems with SaaS alternatives as well as by increased process innovation for talent acquisition, employee engagement and talent development," says Forrester. Leading vendors in this segment include ADP, Ceridian, Oracle, SAP SuccessFactors, Ultimate Software and Workday.

Another relatively mature business process application, call and contact center software saw approximately $12 billion in global sales last year and is expected to grow 7 percent annually both this year and next. Investment here has been driven by a need to provide a "consistent customer experience across various interaction channels at various life-cycle stages," says Forrester. "The category has become more complex as the array of new customer interactions methods has expanded, leading to considerable churn in the vendor landscape."

What Forrester defines as e-purchasing software includes products designed to help improve all the stages of the buying process, such as online procurement and sourcing, contract life-cycle management, automated spend analysis, electronic invoice presentment and payment, services procurement, supplier risk and performance management, and supplier network services. The market (including supplier and EDI-based networks) is valued at $7.8 billion in 2015, and is expected by Forrester to grow by 9 percent in both 2016 and 2017 to more than $9 billion.

"Even though procurement functionality is typically included in ERP suites, it remains fertile ground for specialist vendors across the various subcategories in the segment, and it is frequently deployed in the cloud to leverage managed supplier networks," says Forrester.

Also worth noting, PLM and SCM are mature business process categories, with the former estimated to grow at a 4 percent rate in 2016 and 2017, and the latter by 12 percent this year and 8 percent in 2017.

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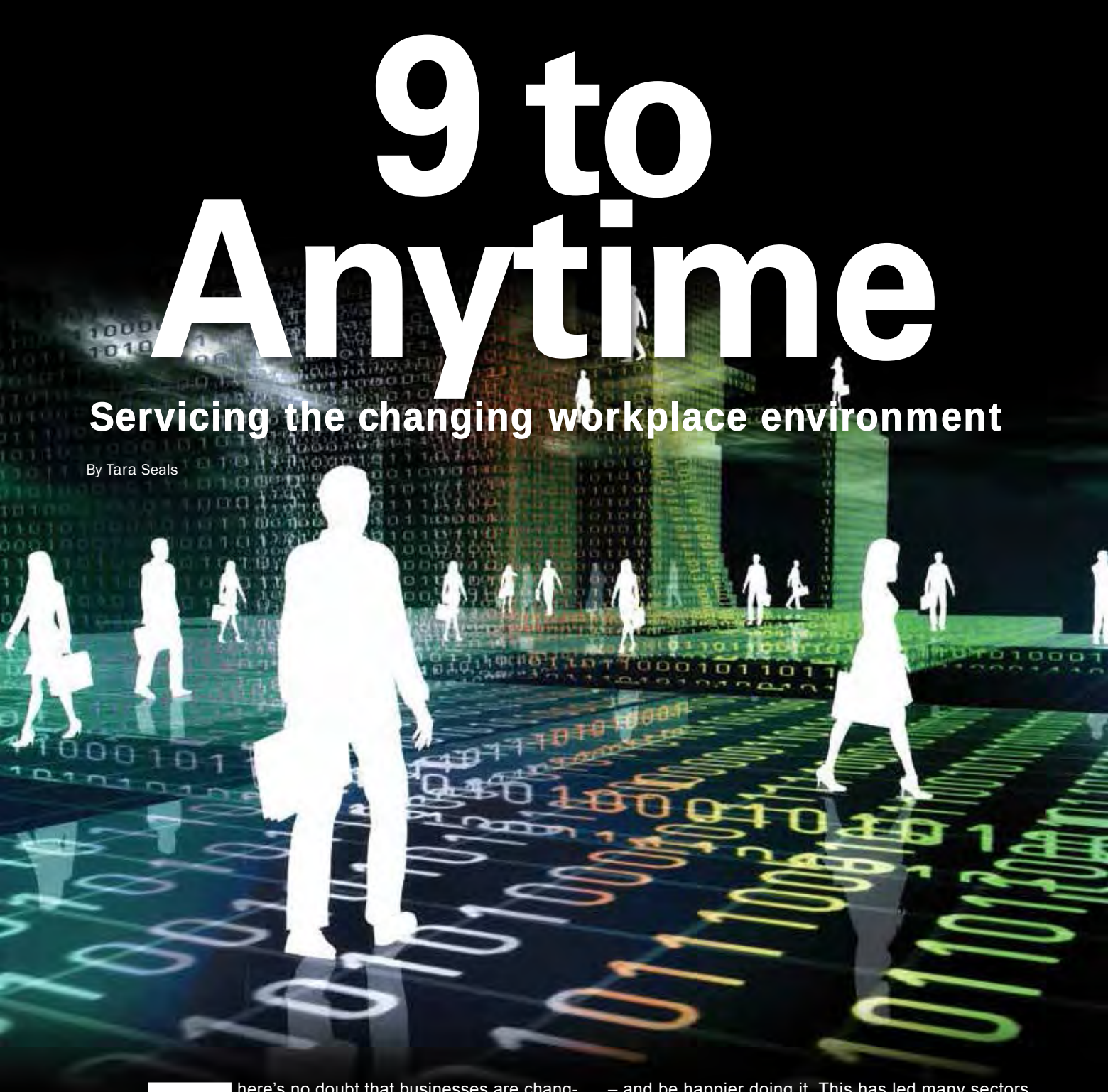
By Tara Seals



There's no doubt that businesses are changing in terms of how they work. They're more mobile, more cloud-based and more app-centric. In turn, this is changing the landscape for channel partners looking to sell into the marketplace.

Make no mistake, the changes are sweeping. A Unify Square-Osterman Research survey for instance reveals that Skype for Business usage on mobile is expected to nearly double by 2018 – from 20 percent today to 39 percent in 2018.

Essentially, businesses are looking for ways to allow people to better work together to create value – and be happier doing it. This has led many sectors – especially tech companies – to be progressive in adopting flexible working practices and collaboration tools because they understand the value they bring, especially in combination.

The borderless office is now truly a reality as well. A Dropbox survey from earlier this year found that in the U.S., 40 percent of all surveyed employees said they could occasionally work from home or from a location other than the office. This was a familiar pattern across all the countries surveyed. Such "flexible" companies are not only poised for business success, but they will also attract and retain the best talent, broaden their diversity and further a virtuous cycle.

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Interestingly, the biggest myth that the survey explodes is the technological advantage of the millennial "digital natives."

"Although younger workers see their older co-workers as slower to adopt new technologies, our data shows that adoption levels are quite even across age ranges," the report noted. "Older workers are just as likely to use as much technology as their younger peers."

That said, younger workers are more stressed out, anxious and frustrated by technology than their older peers. For example, in the U.K. more than a third (36 percent) of Millennials aged 18 to 34 find using technology at work stressful, compared to only a quarter of those aged 55 and up (25 percent).

This seemed counter-intuitive at first, but when one considers that "it just works" technologies such as smartphones, social networking and so on have become completely ubiquitous in the personal lives of younger workers, the fact is that the software used to get work done in the office hasn't historically met that same standard of simplicity.

"Perhaps when Millennials in the office are confronted with a messy array of technologies that do not function seamlessly, stress levels increase," Dropbox noted. "For workers who have been around a bit longer, technology has always been a work in progress."

Changing Technology Adoption

Channel partners see some trends of their own that are changing how end-user customers use communications technologies to do business – especially the move to the cloud and to unified communications (UC).

"So many organizations are finally fully embracing the full gauntlet that UC has to offer," said Josh Lupresto, vice president of sales engineering at Utah-based master agency CarrierSales. "It's no longer just Hosted Exchange. It's Hosted Exchange, document collaboration in real time, chat and CRM, all under the same roof, so companies can grow and scale."

On the UC front, businesses are starting to expand the functionalities that they actually use – most notably, video and presence technology are seeing increased adoption, often working hand in hand. But integrated ways of working across the board are increasingly sought-after.

"There is no question that the decentralized workforce is a driving phenomenon," explained Sam Ghahremanpour, president at UC and cloud PBX specialist Broadvoice. "But when you think mobility and teleworkers, you have to understand that they want the same performance across laptop, tablet and phone, whether they're at HQ, their home office or a coffee shop."

He added that UC has become considerably more democratized than it was even 24 months ago.

"UC used to be a lofty term that was pitched to higher-end clients; now it's much more within the grasp of your average customer, whether they're an SMB or a large enterprise," he explained. "And it's the same with the video piece – that used to be very high-end technology for a very few. And now the barrier to entry is much lower, and it's much more commonplace."

And those systems are increasingly in the cloud. Dominic Antonini, president at technology distributor and master agency, Telecom Brokers, noted that businesses are rarely buying boxes these days.

"It's very rare that someone wants to buy a new premises-based PBX system," Antonini said. "Back in the '90s they wanted that 100 percent of the time. Today, it's maybe 5 percent. The question almost all businesses we serve are asking is, do I keep my existing system or convert it to a cloud-based system?"

Bringing cloud and UC together is an undeniable change as well: One of the biggest and hottest markets at the moment is UC as a service, or UCaaS market.

"This is a market that's only 9 to 12 percent penetrated today," explained Drew Lydecker, president at master agency AVANT Communications. "But for UCaaS, the deals are very, very large, so it's an opportunity that never existed before. We think of it as the three Cs: Cloud, colo and carrier/connectivity, and all three are being disrupted right now."

Antonini has also seen a trend toward carrier migrations – the rise of the cloud has brought into play a lot of smaller service providers.

"It used to be really hard to get customers off an AT&T – but now, customers are more open than ever to switching to new service providers," Antonini said, noting that the market changes have driven Telecom Brokers to expand its portfolio from a comfortable 50 to 60 providers to now, up to 170. "Today, it's the applications and their business needs that are driving business investment, whereas before it was a question of just saving them money with a replacement service."

Another top trend is the consumerization of IT. With the advent of more and more fiber availability and the rise of the app-centric economy, consumer-grade and enterprise-grade options are starting to blend together. Channel partners have a role to play in educating their customers.

"The business environment of the future is going to quickly move to a be more along the lines of Slack, HipChat, WhatsApp," explained Greg Praske, CEO at master agency ARG. "Those consumer-oriented apps are quickly leaking into the business environment because it's how people want to interact. The good news is that business-appropriate options like Cisco's Spark are here now with the appropriate controls, persistence and security. The channel partners who have experience in integrating voice, collaboration, email, chat, etc., are in the position to assist companies in their evaluation of what's right for a particular company and then assist with the implementation and support."

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Changing Sales Landscape

As businesses start to use technology in new ways, the sales process for channel partners is also changing. Decision-makers are often a team rather than one person, the cycle is longer, and the trusted advisor role is more important than ever.

There's also the matter of institutional and mindset shifts.

"You have to accept that the market has changed," said Antonini. "For instance, T1s as an industry standard were around since the '70s. Now, the average bandwidth is 10-20 megs. 20 megs is the most common bandwidth. The move to the cloud has driven bandwidth needs way up, and prices are coming down dramatically, so you have to account for that."

It's also about understanding the scope of the opportunity ahead. "Telecom isn't just selling phone service or bandwidth solution, it's how these pieces tie together, and partners need to embrace the tools they have," said Broadvoice's Ghahremanpour. "The era of selling dumb pipes is coming to a close – and there are so many other opportunities to go in and solve a problem, such as offering an SD-WAN to create a much more high-quality, resilient network than they have today."

The additional challenge is the fact that the IT and telecom worlds have almost completed their collision and are in many cases fully melded. Yet telecom partners still struggle with speaking IT's language, and vice versa.

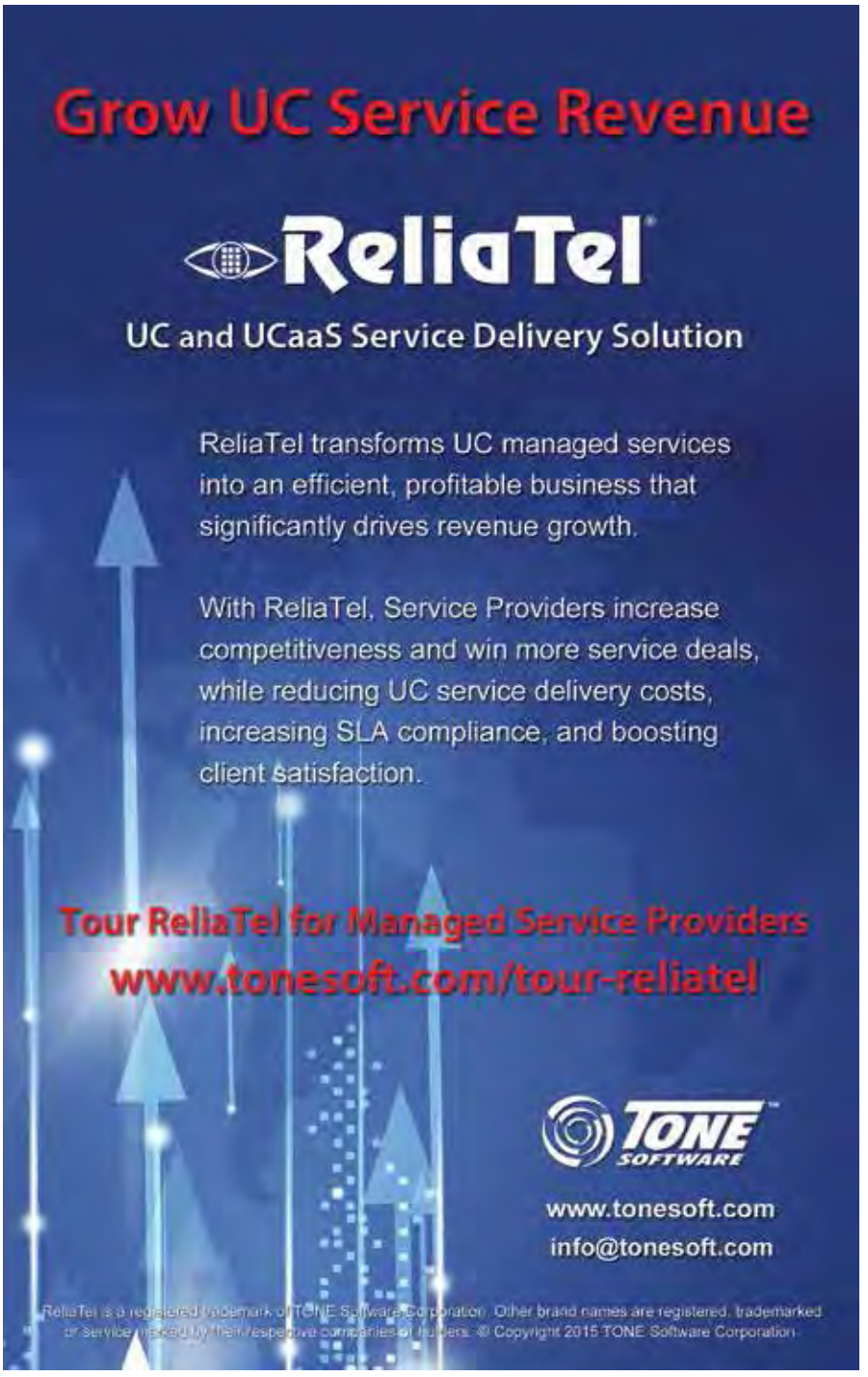
"The challenge is to try to gain that credibility in a market where the IT suppliers have traditionally had VARs in place," said Antonini. "You have to learn a new language."

ARG's Praske said that his agency has been retooling for the new market realities for at least four years.

"It has become a more integral conversation," he said. "Before, you may have talked to the IT department, but what you're doing now is discussing the business challenges of each business unit, so you're talking outside of the technical aspects about what this can do for your customer. You spend a lot more time than ever before on the total cost of ownership and ROI, and opex vs. capex, and you'll find yourself having some pretty complex finance conversations."

That means that the channel partner's role has become more complex in general.

"The IT department may have researched some things, but you're now partnering with them to consult with their company," Praske explained. "That requires a bunch of different people – usually an engagement with a larger group on the client side – and on your side you need a lot of specialities and knowledge sets. But there's definitely an opportunity for the independent channel person to go in and educate and assist through the business process for their clients."



Recommendations for Change Management

For partners looking to ramp up and thrive in this new landscape, the biggest piece of advice seems to be to educate oneself, and acquire expertise. That should be in the form of classic education opportunities – webinars and downloadable docs, for instance – but also setting oneself up to be an expert in a given arena.

"You have to scope out what you want to specialize in, and you have to do your homework on both the technology and the provider options," said Praske. "On the UCaaS side, there are literally over 1,000 providers. How do you sort out who's who, and who's appropriate for which market? Some providers don't want to touch opportunities under 250 seats, and some can't approach those over 100. Do you know who plays where? It takes a lot of work in vetting this."

Lydecker noted that not everyone is going to be an expert across the board, and that's okay.

"This is a complete transformation for the partners as much as for the customers themselves, and there are more swim lanes than ever before," he said. "Everything is around speed and agility. Large VARs, MSPs, agents, systems integrators – everyone wants to get up to speed the fastest way possible, but everyone in the company has to be committed to the change and understand and believe that change is coming. This is a journey, not an overnight flip-the-switch situation. My best advice is to partner with those that have been through that change already."

So, channel players should be open to asking for help. "Anyone starting now … well I'm not sure they'll catch up," Praske said. "Partners that are just getting around to it, they're probably going to need to partner with a master agent and look for a 'sell with' model instead of the 'sell for.' But regardless, it's time to get serious about the business. It requires an investment, so invest quickly."

Lydecker noted that channel partners should be excited – despite any lingering uncertainty about how to adapt.

"This is a golden era of the trusted advisor," he said. "There's so much disruption and confusion in the marketplace, and businesses are transforming from the way they've done things for so long. This is actually an incredible opportunity for partners and for end customers to reinvent themselves."

One thing's certain: it's unlikely that the rapid pace of change is going to settle down anytime soon.

"I'm already looking ahead," said Antonini. "Telecom Brokers is building out next-gen portfolio, with services built on WebRTC that allow direct, native calling and video from a website. It's also getting more difficult for enterprises to control their networks, so security and things like multifactor authentication are going to be the standard – we've added that to our portfolio."

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CHANNEL MANAGING THE MESSAGE

Selling your partner base on selling more than network

By Peter Radizeski

How do you convince your channel partners to sell beyond network? That seems to be the biggest problem after getting partners to sell your network.

On a recent webinar, the carrier channel manager rambled on about the entire catalog of services. There are two hitches with that approach. One, he was not treating the listeners' attention like the gold that it is. You want the channel partner to hear you and realize you have something valuable for them, but he discounted the expense of the Attention. Two, he didn't properly prepare and forgot to include WIIFM.

In today's world the most valuable item is Attention – or put another way: Time.

There are so many hurdles to a webinar. First is getting the potential attendee to read the invite; then to register; then to add it to her calendar as an appointment. The big step is getting the attendee to actual dial-in. After that, it is up to the presenter to capture the attendee, prove the value of the webinar and try to get the attendee to take action.

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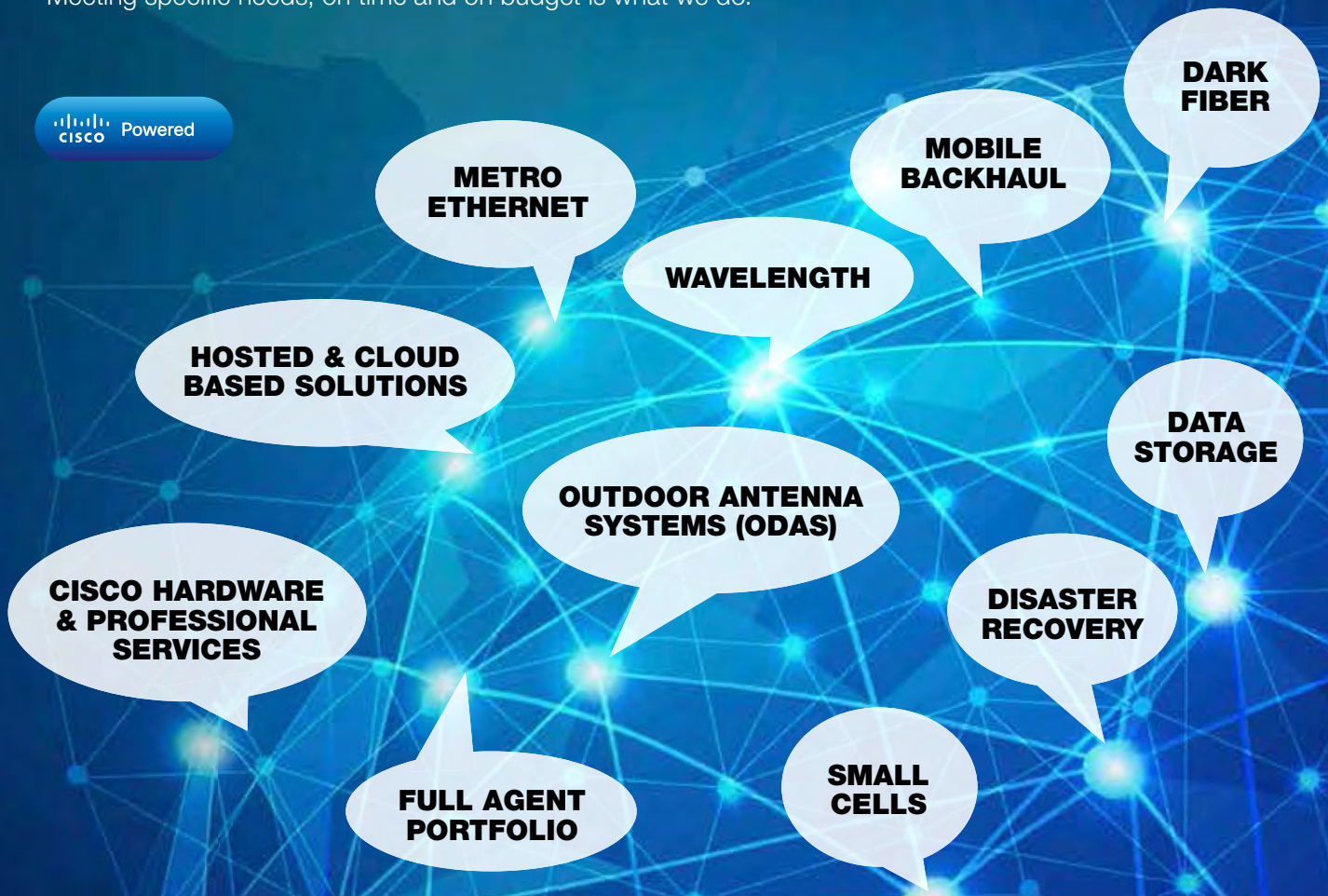

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All of that goes up in smoke when the presenter sucks. After having attended numerous conferences and webinars and moderated many panels, I've come to realize that speakers are a lot like politicians; they have talking points to get out whether it fits or not. That makes for an awful presentation.

I watched a senior vice president at Cisco years ago show videos during his keynote when he wasn't reading the slides to the audience. Is that how he presents to the Board or his CEO? Of course not. He would get fired. How is that audience any different than a conference audience?

Attendees have paid to be there. They are giving up their time to listen. And the presenter chooses to cheapen it by not preparing and giving an ordinary talk.

This brings us to the second hitch: Getting the attendee to hear and take action.

Humans like stories. It is how we relate and how we learn. It is why case studies are popular.

I understand that you want to show off your company, but you need to frame it in a way that says, "What's in it for the listener?" Would you have coffee with a friend and give the same presentation? Then why do it to a stranger?

Today, with the number of conferences, road shows and webinars increasing, there is more opportunity to get in front of potential partners. This is a chance to make that first impression. Are you going to do that by puking on them about the company fact sheet? I hope not.

There are a number of ways to personalize it. One way is to start with what you like best about the company or why you joined the company (other than I needed a paycheck). Maybe the company culture is better than most providers or the uptime is higher. What is the value prop?

Another way is to just talk about the last deal. Or talk about an upsell: "A partner brought in a client to buy network and after discussion we found that the client was also worried about security so we bundled managed security with the WAN."

These will be required to sell SD-WAN. It will be use cases over and over to get the word out about

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Tactic	Most Effective	Most Challenging
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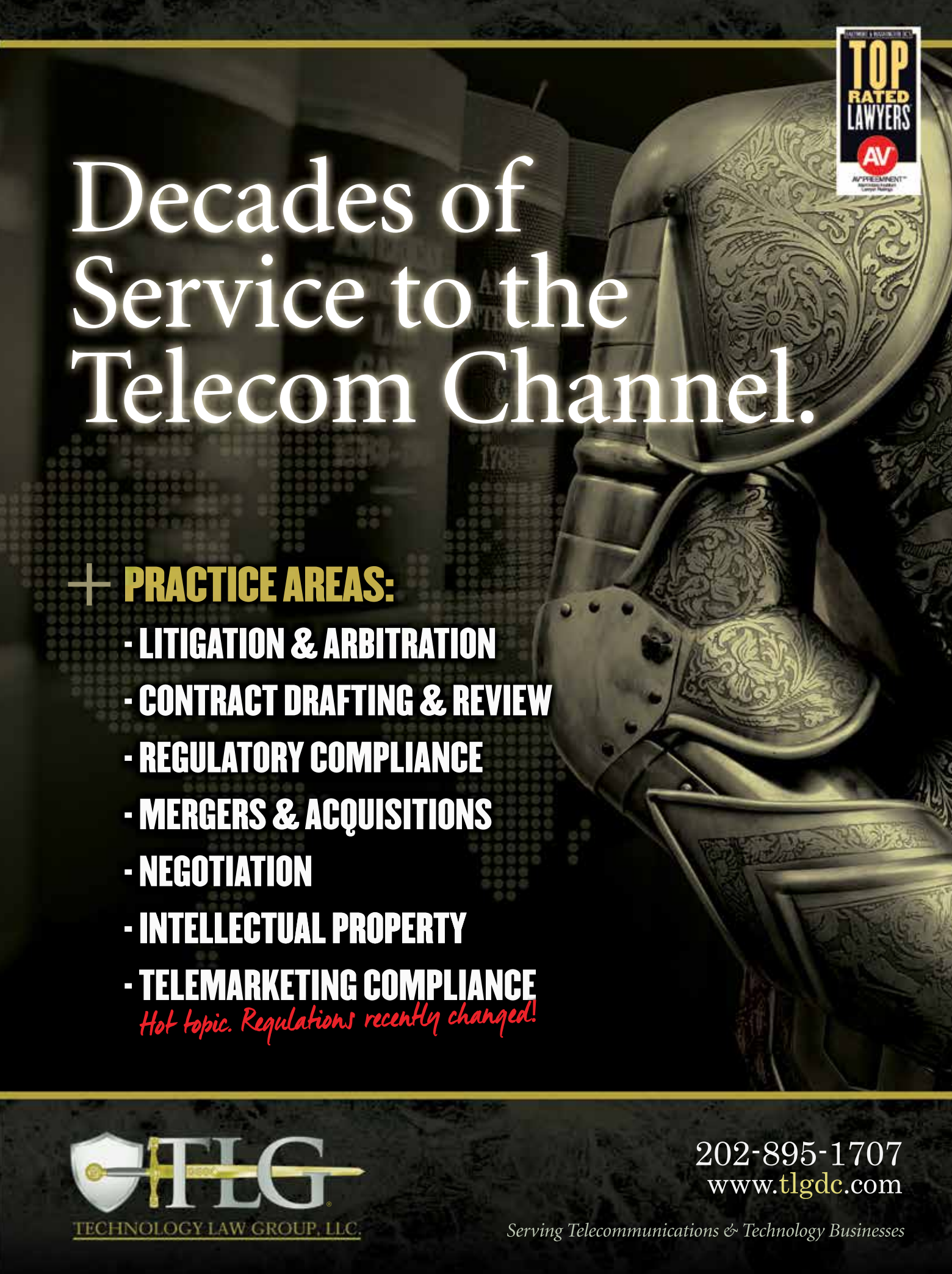
Personalizing campaigns	40%	32%
Targeting by prospect persona	39%	39%
Targeting by decision stage	38%	40%
Nurturing campaign workflows	35%	33%
Segmenting lead data	31%	29%
Multichannel integration	20%	31%

Source: Ascend2/Research Partners, December 2015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Most Effective B2B Sales Content Types (Top 3 for each group)

	Group Reporting		
Type of Content	**Buyers**	**Sales**	**Marketing**
Product info/features/functions	35%	31%	24%
Demos	31%	23%	18%
Best practices	20%	18%	13%
Case studies	19%	24%	27%
Expert opinions	18%	19%	18%
Product ratings/reviews	16%	23%	18%

Source: LinkedIn, February 2016

how SD-WAN is being deployed for the customers and implemented by the provider.

Remember: the channel manager is the conduit to the company. The channel is about relationships. Everyone who has been in the channel more than five years understands that. It is about relationships because telecom is messy and trust is hard to establish.

This doesn't preclude the need to tell a compelling story.

Telecom is a me-too business. Thousands of hosted VoIP and UCaaS providers have a problem with both differentiation and positioning (where they fit best in the marketplace). Competition in the UC space from Microsoft and Cisco is strengthened by their strong brand and their certified ambassadors making the purchasing decision. In addition, the softswitch vendors – Metaswitch, GenBand Broadsoft – are now selling direct on top of white-label options that are just adding to the muddy waters. How do you break through that noise?

Leverage the advantages that you have. These include your current relationship with the partner, the deployment process that the partner is already experienced with and the uniqueness of your company. Listening to customers will give you content to discuss. Why did the customer pick you? What was the pain point or hot button? Was it mobility, portal, user management, analytics or something else that was the tipping point? This is what the presentation should contain.

If your UCaaS is based on Broadsoft, how are you different than the other 300-plus? You better make that crystal clear – or we go to a price war.

Think about how you buy a smartphone, a business tool that you will look at 2,000 times per day for two years. The look and feel of the device is as much a part of the story as the choice of operating system is. Can you see how relevant that process might be to your services?

If you can't tell a story that will resonate with the partner, you bet-

ter start talking about the price and the spiff then!

A spiff war already is happening. Partners are being bombarded by spiff. Some of it is to capture attention. Some of it is to buy market share.

Carriers would be wise to use spiffs to get partners to take notice of other types of services such as Office 365, conferencing or backup. These services are different to sell than bandwidth, but they are stickier and can lead to the sale of other services. They also allow the partner to have a diverse conversation with the prospective customer. It is a good time to take advantage of all the noise and hype around Microsoft. Leverage that brand and press to get meetings, get a small sale, and prove yourself.

Understandably, getting partners to sell services such as hosted email, cloud, conferencing, backup and SaaS is the struggle. Chief reason is that they are heads done just trying to sell enough to stay afloat. Price compression on DIA, T1, broadband and voice means that you have to sell two or three times as many deals to make the same as you did a few years ago.

That is exactly why when you have their attention at the next conference or webinar that you cannot give the same spiel that you have been using during your entire career in telecom. You want change? Then your spiel has to change. Start telling stories about successes, deals, business outcomes and hot buttons – even ways to newsjack.

We live in a social media world with sound bites. You have to adjust for that. Choose words carefully. Be impactful. Be visual. Be emotive.

This sounds like a lot. It is, and it isn't. If you aren't preparing for presentations then it is a lot of extra work (over winging it). If you are preparing, it is the same amount of time used in a different manner.

Many blogs today use tweet-able phrases with a link to tweet this now. Every presentation has one goal. What is that? The entire presentation should be that one concise goal. That goal should be about 140 characters. The stories should underscore that goal.

"The key in mastering any kind of sales is switching statements about you and how great you are and what you do, to statements about them, and how great they are and how they will produce more and profit more from ownership of your product or service," advises business trainer, speaker and author, Jeffrey Gitomer.

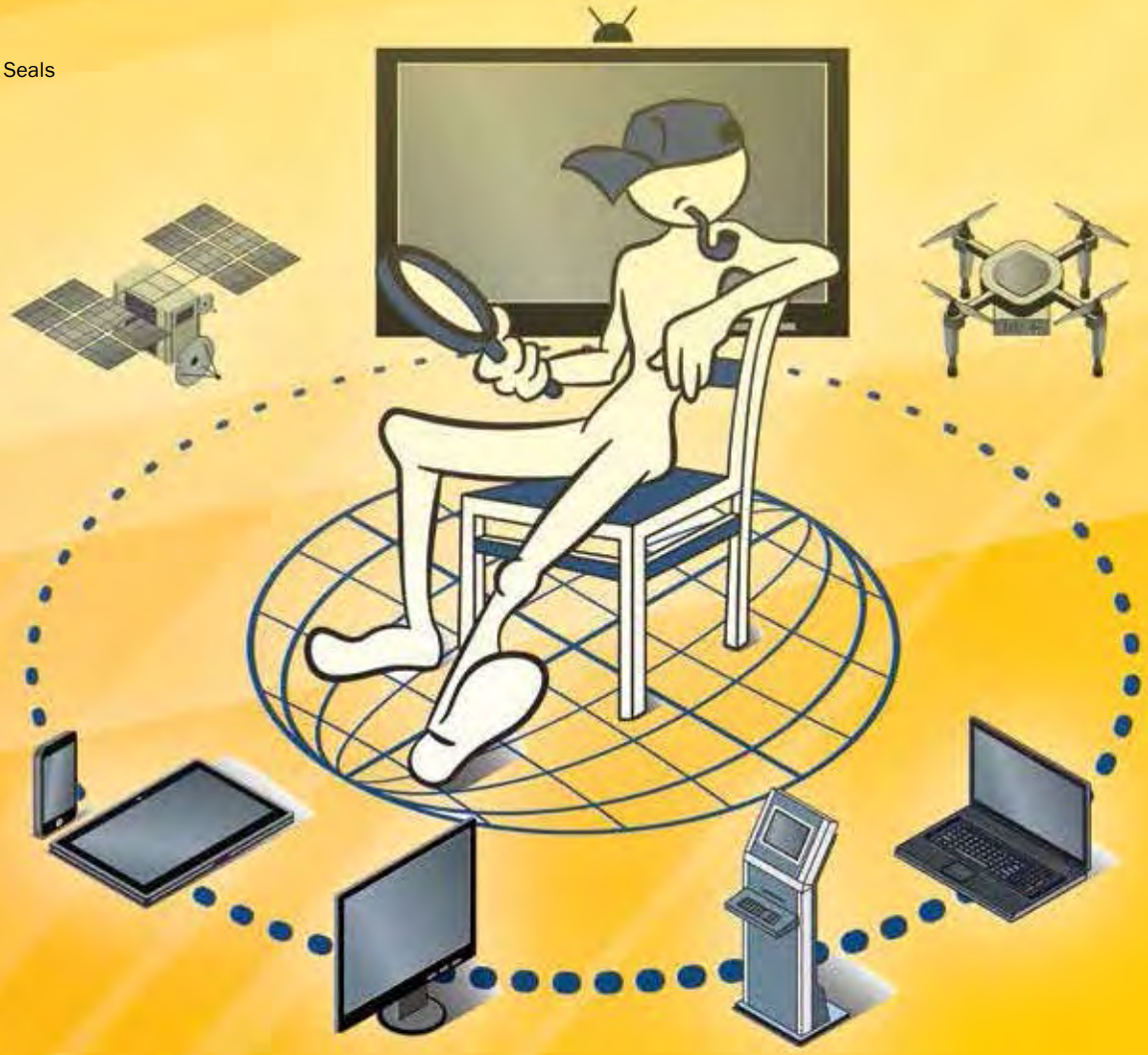
"If leaders are to be followed," he says, "it starts with clarity of message."

Peter Radizeski, president of RAD-INFO INC, started as a VAR, then became an agent. Now he writes about the channel and the telecom space while consulting to service providers and occasionally still selling some circuits.

CYBER PATROL

IoT cybersecurity is a snowballing channel opportunity

By Tara Seals



The Internet of Things (IoT) promises to revolutionize the way consumers and enterprises interact with hardware in their daily lives – making the connected world pervasive and in some ways, inescapable. Against this backdrop, cybersecurity has come to the forefront and offers channel partners a rich new vein of opportunity.

By 2020, there will be nearly 21 billion devices connected to the Internet, including smart refrigerators, water meters, wearables and even binoculars, according to IDC. And according to Spiceworks research, the presence of IoT devices in the workplace has already rapidly increased across the board in the last 18 to 24 months – with networks having to handle everything from connected video equipment to appliances, smartwatches to GoPros.

This state of affairs will make our all-digital lives that much more productive, collaborative and efficient (in theory), but there's a significant downside. With so many connected things out there, the threat landscape will only widen.

After all, each connection is a potential portal into a consumer's personal information, or an additional way into an enterprise network rich with competitive and personal information.

Further complicating things, IoT also means the interconnection of devices within the existing Internet infrastructure. So, everything is connected to the Internet but also to each other. As such, IoT is expected to offer advanced connectivity of devices, systems and services that goes beyond machine-to-machine communications (M2M) with a variety of protocols, domains and applications.

Bottom line: more connections and more portals for the bad guys to target.

An Escalating Threat Landscape

It's not like the bad guys don't already have plenty of targets: data breaches, put simply, have become the norm. In the healthcare vertical alone, a full 89 percent of organizations and 60 percent of their third-party business associates have experienced data breaches during the past two years, according to the Ponemon Institute. And 79 percent of healthcare organizations experienced multiple data breaches (two or more) in that time period – up 20 percent since 2010.

More than one-third, or 34 percent, of healthcare organizations experienced two to five breaches. And nearly half of healthcare organizations, or 45 percent, had more than five breaches.

Criminal attacks are the leading cause of data breaches in the vertical, up 5 percent to 50 percent this year. Medical records are the most commonly exposed data, followed by billing and insurance records, and payment details.

Critically, while the majority of breaches are small (under 500 records) and are not reported to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the media, the financial impact is significant. Overall, breaches in healthcare are costing the industry a whopping $6.2 billion per year.

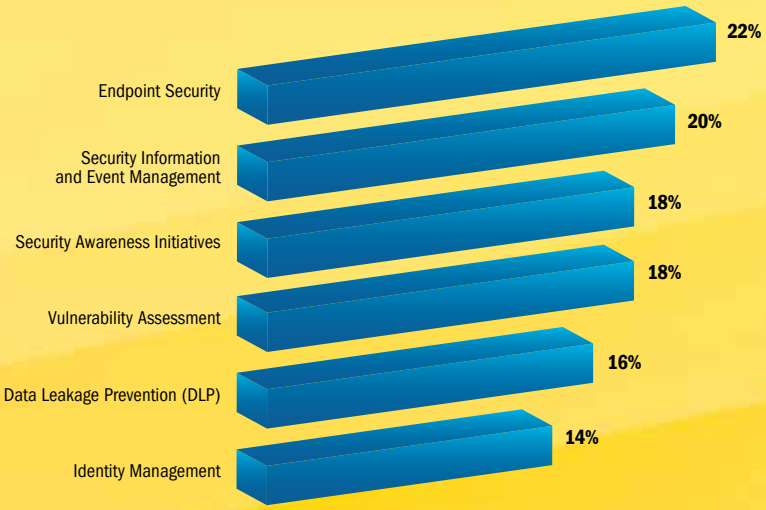
Unfortunately, businesses across the board, from retail to finance to SMBs and beyond, are facing similar statistics. And at the heart of their crisis is the fact that their internal resources simply can't keep up with the risks.

Consider that as few as one in five (22 percent) of IT leaders believe their organization is "very well prepared" to identify and respond to cyber-attacks, according to research by Harvey Nash and KPMG. And 12 percent now believe their business is exposed in multiple areas.

IoT is already exacerbating the situation. For instance, the number of organizations connecting wearables to their networks has nearly doubled since 2014 – increasing from 13 percent to 24 percent, according to the research from Spiceworks. As such, wearables are expected to be the top source of security breaches among IoT devices in the near term (53 percent of respondents believe this).

Top Security Projects - Next 12 Months

What are your organization's top three information security projects over the next 12 months



Source: 451 Research; 919 IT security professionals

That's followed by video equipment at 50 percent, physical security at 46 percent and appliances at 45 percent.

But most companies, despite awareness of potential threats, are doing little to create IoT security postures. Only one in three organizations is actively preparing for the impact IoT could have on their businesses.

The reasons for that lack of prep are myriad: 47 percent said the value of monitoring IoT devices is still unclear, but 38 percent said they lack the time and staffing resources. And 65 percent of respondents say skills shortages are preventing them from keeping up with the pace of change in technology.

"If you look at cyber, it is a multi-dimensional problem; it's also unpredictable, intangible and constantly changing," said George Quigley, cybersecurity partner at KPMG. "It's a very complex area to try and get your head around. We've seen a lot of large and sophisticated organizations breached, so if you're sitting in an organization that is not as large, not as sophisticated and doesn't have the same sort of budgets and standing, then culturally you're also going to have your confidence dented."

(ISC)2 research shows that due to the predicted increase in demand for information security personnel outpacing the supply, a global cybersecurity workforce shortage will reach 1.5 million within five years. This is despite the fact that researchers Frost & Sullivan predict that the size of the global infosec workforce will actually increase by 6 percent within one year.

As it stands, 62 percent of (ISC)2 survey respondents – from a sample of nearly 14,000 qualified security professionals worldwide – report that their organizations have too few security professionals. Healthcare and education are the two verticals where the shortfall is most keenly felt – 76 percent of respondents from each of these sectors report being understaffed in terms of security.

Channel Opportunity Emerges

This endemic lack of internal cyber-resources opens the door to a big opportunity for channel partners.

"There's undoubtedly a significant skills gap in cyber," Quigley said. "There are challenges in terms of getting people with a cyber-mindset; what we're finding is security companies having to invest time and money in training people. Across the industry we're probably paying more than you would otherwise do in a normal functioning market because you've got to pay to retain people."

It's a ripe opportunity for channel partners to leap into this breach. IT distributor Tech Data in May launched its Security and Information Management business unit, which includes the company's software and network security vendor portfolios, to its channel of solution providers throughout the Americas. The new business unit is strategically focused on customer enablement, reseller recruitment and

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onboarding new and emerging security vendor partners.

"As the number and complexity of cyber threats continue to increase, Tech Data is developing simplified ways for our solution providers to help their customers identify, protect against and respond to this rapidly evolving landscape," said Brian Davis, the company's senior vice president, U.S. marketing.

He added, "The cybersecurity market is expected to grow exponentially over the next several years, and we are well-positioned, both from a skills and scale perspective, to help our solution providers capitalize on market opportunities and proactively address their customers' security concerns."

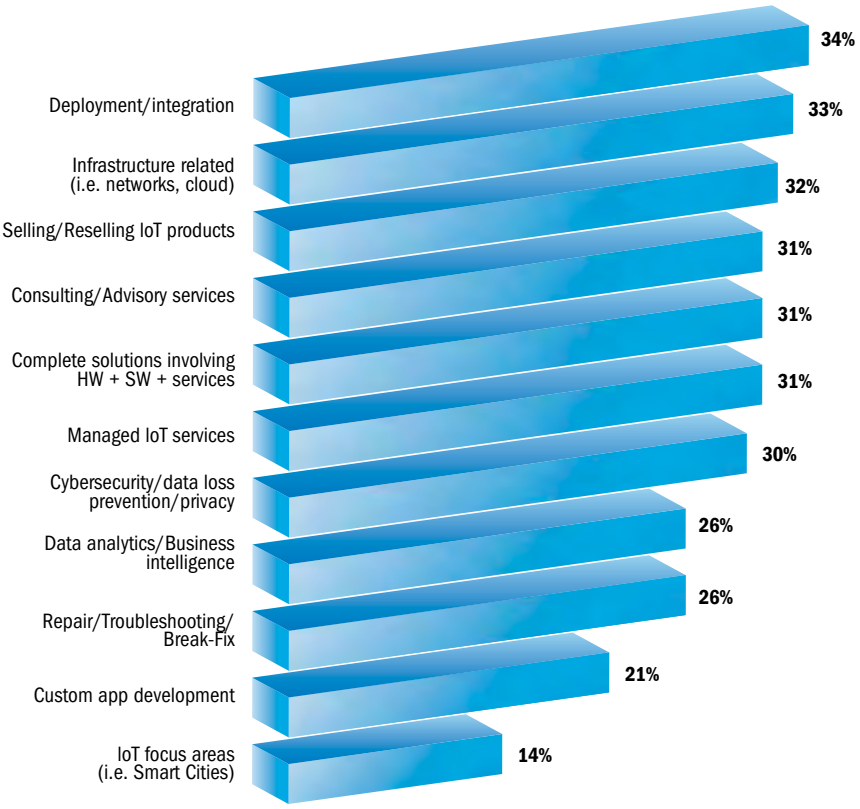
That's especially true in the IoT space. IoT represents a rich set of emerging applications, within which channel partners can find pent-up demand for smart security solutions. These include wearables, building and home automation, supply chain management, patient information management, energy and utilities management, customer information security, asset optimization, manufacturing process management, communication technology management and telematics.

For channel partners that invest in acquiring the right skill set, the revenue opportunities are staggering. Almost every cybersecurity vendor has a channel program; and the end-user demand is hockey-sticking.

In fact, MarketsandMarkets forecasts that the global IoT security market is expected to grow from $6.89 billion last year to a whopping $28.90 billion by 2020, at a compound annual growth rate of 33.2 percent. Further, North America is expected to be the largest market

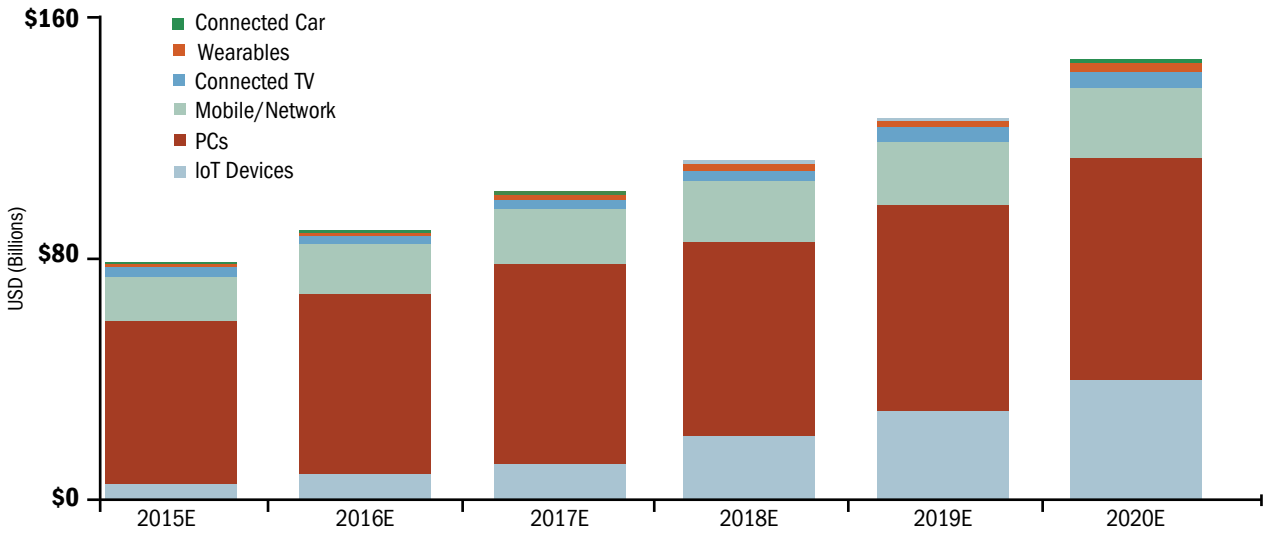
Channel-Oriented Revenue Expectations in IoT Maret

Opinions based on those expecting to make money from IoT within 2 years.



Source: 451 Research

Estimated Global Cybersecurity Market



Source: BIA Kelsey, U.S. market

based on market size and technological advancement.

It should be noted that with the infiltration of modern malware, zero-day exploits and new advanced threats, traditional approaches to security will not succeed in the era of IoT. As a result, collective or shared threat intelligence will be a top priority for IoT security. At the same time, the solutions are myriad. They include information asset management, analytics, encryption, data loss protection (DLP), intrusion detection and prevention (IDS/IPS), distributed denial of service (DDoS) protection, vulnerability management, device management and others.

In addition to the software platforms, partners can offer a range of services: consulting services, managed services, risk assessment, and support and maintenance services.

Also, cloud-based security solutions are providing good opportunities for the growth of the IoT security market by minimizing implementation and maintenance costs, and organizations are shifting toward the deployment of cloud-based security solutions.

For channel partners, adding such IoT security profiles to their portfolios will go hand in hand with connectivity and solution sales, and the time to strike is now. A study from cybersecurity specialist Webroot found that businesses are really taking IoT seriously this year, with 87 percent of respondents saying they will be implementing IoT focused projects and strategies in 2016. And, 68 percent are expecting to see real, tangible paybacks from their investments. Offering security will be a critical piece of the picture.

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Mutually Beneficial

How to make yourself indispensable to your channel partners

By Chris Clearly

The key to a successful channel sales program is to create a mutually beneficial relationship between you and your partners that increases profit margins and adds value to the product offerings of everyone involved.

These four insights can help you forge an ironclad channel partner program and build long-lasting business relationships with your channel partners.

No. 1: See it from their POV

One essential practice in a strong channel program is to consider things from the other side: instead of having a mentality of "go out and sell my product," you need to understand your partner's business.

Understand what your partner's value proposition to the end customer is and then align your solutions with your partner's portfolio. Otherwise, you're trying to fit a square peg into a round hole – as much as you may strive to give your partners everything they need to be successful, unless you align with what they bring to the marketplace, the strategy is not a revenue-generating one.

This does not necessarily mean you need to create an individual, granular plan for each partner you work with, but you can build programs geared toward supporting the types of partners in a few key ways.

Messaging is an important part of this. You must understand your partner's messaging and target your own message in a way that accentuates your partner's portfolio, thereby allowing the partner to strengthen its value proposition to its customers.

Reasons for Becoming Channel Partner

Product quality	69%
Quality support	55%
Training, sales/technical	9%

Source: Vision Solutions survey

No. 2: Add value through support

Your channel partner is your customer, and you need to serve your customer in a way that allows the partner to be successful with its own customers.

Ensure your products seamlessly integrate with those of your partner's solution set. The partner should be able to see that distributing your product strengthens and enhances its own value proposition to its customers. However, while quality products are vital to a channel partner program, a partner also needs to feel confident that a supplier can support it in other ways as well. In fact, a 2016 Vision Solutions partnership survey found that more than half (55 percent) of respondents said the reason they had chosen their current partners was because of support.

Therefore, you need to build a business case around other ways in which a partner would want to work with you. While you must show that you can make the partner more profitable, you also must demonstrate that you can give the partner the resources it needs to be successful, such as technical training, marketing development, targeted campaigns for customers, sales support and expertise in the field.

No. 3: Understand the customer's customer

When building out a structured channel sales program, bear in mind your partners' go-to-market strategies and how they serve their customers. This will help you build systems that allow your partners to deliver your products effectively.

For example, when Vision Solutions, a software-as-a-service (SaaS), disaster recovery and migration services provider, partners with global systems integrators (SI), we understand the SI will have different needs from a product delivery standpoint than a regional solutions provider, although the core elements of partner training and enablement will be the same.

To illustrate, the SI might need to deliver our services to customers in highly regulated industries, such as the financial industry. For us to get software licenses to that kind of end

IT Executives Who Consider Each Core to Their Businesses

High availability disaster recovery	73%
Virtualization	62%
Data migration	45%
Date sharing	25%

Source: Vision Solutions survey

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customer, we would need to configure our product portfolio and delivery mechanisms for the SI to ensure the SI is in compliance during product delivery.

No. 4: Always ask for feedback

Constantly solicit feedback from your distribution partners and, most importantly, listen to it and incorporate it. Ask how the selling is going, whether they think the relationship is successful and how it could be improved.

The answers will vary, but any and all feedback is valuable. For example, a partner may say you need to improve your products because customer demand is decreasing, or that technology has moved beyond the old value proposition. This sounds negative, but you should look at this as a positive – this is a way to always make better products and improve customer satisfaction. We've gotten some of our best feedback from the field on ways we can improve our products and services and, many times, those recommendations make their way into product updates.

Alternatively, any negative feedback might reveal that you have not provided key information – a specific tool or proper training during a technical enablement. You then can take the opportunity to retrain and re-engage with your partners and improve their knowledge and understanding of the product. In the Vision Solutions partnership survey, almost nine out of 10 respondents (89 percent) indicated that when selecting partnership programs, technical pre-sales and post-sales support was either "very important" or "important."

Remember, the sellers in the field are a valuable resource and have the power to help you improve anything from product development to delivery mechanisms. Partners often want to give that feedback and soliciting and utilizing it is one of the greatest ways a manufacturer can maintain its relevance, demonstrate its commitment to its partners and evolve as a company.

Successful channel partner programs are about more than just contracts and handshakes – they're about creating value. While you depend on partners for your own profits, you also need to ensure you are always making your partners more successful with their own customers as well. If you do this, you'll make yourself so valuable to your partners that they can't be successful without you.

Chris Cleary is senior vice president of Double-Take global sales for Vision Solutions. Cleary can be reached at Chris.Cleary@visionsolutions.com.

Is Your Business Growing Too Fast?

How to maintain market-share mojo

By Debora McLaughlin

Extremely rapid growth for a business might sound good, but it can be a mixed blessing.

Certainly, high growth yields greater returns, offering shareholders five times more than medium-growth companies, says Debora McLaughlin, CEO of The Renegade Leader Coaching and Consulting Group.

Growth predicts long-term success, she says, and it matters more than margin or cost structure.

But sustaining growth is extremely difficult.

For example, a business may have tremendously high growth in the start-up phase, as did the daily-deals pioneer Groupon, which had a stellar valuation of $6.4 billion in 2010.

"By 2012, Groupon had lost a mind-boggling 80 percent of its stock value since its initial public offering," McLaughlin says. "What happened? The tech company never figured out customer retention."

While Groupon is a prominent example, it's certainly not the only one. Approximately 85 percent of super-growers, defined by McKinsey as companies whose growth is greater than 60 percent, are unable to maintain their growth rates, and once lost, less than a quarter were able to recapture them.

McLaughlin, author of "The Renegade Leader: 9 Success Strategies Driven Leaders Use to Ignite People, Performance & Profits," offers tips for maintaining momentum for businesses that are experiencing high growth.

- **Define your Culture.** You can't afford not to invest the time to define the culture needed to support your strategic plan. What is the purpose of your company, its guiding values, and its top priorities? Defining the culture allows you to align senior leaders, stakeholders and investors, make faster decisions, attract top talent and engage employees.
- **Do your best to retain the right people.** Often, the problem faced by fast-growing companies is that they need to hire people fast so they fill positions based on talent versus fit and attitude. Hire people who align with your culture and its values. Have the right mix of visionaries with executers.
- **Maintain the quality of your product.** Whatever it may be – an online service or your town's best muffins – exponential growth can have you running in 100 different directions. Don't forget what got you to this point: quality. Continue to wow the customers who trusted in you at the beginning.
- **Make sure you have the money you think you have.** It's easy to confuse growth of accounts receivable for tangible, cash-based growth. If your company isn't collecting the cash it's due, there's a risk of running into a cash crisis during growth. There's nothing more valuable for an expanding business than cash.

"You want to manage your growth in a smart way," McLaughlin says. "You want growth that easily translates to profit, which means collecting data, doing the research and challenging your business instincts. Don't be so focused on your product or service that you fail to notice the shifting sands of your consumer demands."

Debora McLaughlin is a certified executive coach and CEO of The Renegade Leader Coaching and Consulting Group. She helps business leaders ignite their inner renegade leader to unleash their full potential, drive their visions and yield positive results, both in business and in life.

Cash Option

E-Recap allows you to get cash out of your business and maintain ownership

By Scott Ford

Is your business your largest asset? A 2014 CNBC study revealed that most small business owners have 70 percent of their wealth invested in their businesses, with 20 percent of owners having more than 80 percent tied up in their firm. What if you could take considerable cash from your business to live your life the way you want to now, instead of waiting for retirement?

An E-Recap transaction may allow you to take significant resources without crippling your business or giving up management control. The process includes a third-party investor providing cash to help facilitate an ownership restructuring. There are costs and risks associated with the transaction, which should be considered along with the benefits to the firm and its owners.

In my new book, "The Sustainable Edge: Fifteen Minutes a Week to a Richer Entrepreneurial Life," Ron Carson and I study what it means for entrepreneurs to find true fulfillment. We've witnessed so many "successful" business leaders toward the end of their careers feeling empty and unfulfilled. Finding real balance means having the resources and time to live life on your terms throughout your career before your family and health suffer.

By cashing out of your business, you can take some chips off the table, diversify your family's wealth and find the time to pursue what is most important to you. This process doesn't require selling your firm or compromising the future of your business and employees. It's possible to step away from your firm and actually improve its long-term value.

Why cash out now? Many small business owners have achieved financial certainty by earning enough to meet their needs or even financial independence. But a large majority are unable to achieve true financial freedom without taking assets from their businesses. Financial freedom allows entrepreneurs to find balance in their lives, with their families, and to contribute to the causes they care about most.

What's more, cashing out of your business allows you to lower your overall financial risk by diversifying your wealth. By removing assets from your business, you potentially lower your exposure to events such as economic downturns, industry changes, lawsuits and tax changes. The proceeds can potentially compound free of business risk, however, investing does involve risk including loss of principal.

Many business owners who choose to cash out of their businesses do so because they are nearing retirement age and their appetite for risk has decreased. Often, they aim to spend less time running their firm and more time enjoying their families and passions. While many do not wish to fully retire, they seek to transfer management to younger partners and step aside from day-to-day operations.

The E-Recap transaction can be an effective solution for a firm with one partner who wants to exit with cash and another who wants to continue running the firm. By introducing a new source of capital, the exiting owner can sell his share of the business, while allowing the remaining owner to continue running the firm without disruption.

Of course, the E-Recap program ultimately was designed to allow business owners to get cash out of their businesses while keeping majority ownership and operational control. Business owners who seek liquidity but also want to retain ownership of their firm may benefit the most from this transaction.

So who should consider an E-Recap transaction? Business owners who are considering selling their firm within five years should understand the unique benefits of an E-Recap. These include the ability to take significant cash out of a business, maintain operational and ownership control, step away from day-to-day operations and accelerate growth.

As entrepreneurs, we often lose sight of what true success means for us. In "The Sustainable Edge," we review how being busy with balance can help you find real fulfillment. Being busy with balance allows us to find sustainable growth in both our business and personal endeavors. Having the resources to be truly financially free and the time to put toward our families and passions can unlock lasting satisfaction. E-Recap transactions present unique benefits and risks that must be evaluated.

Scott Ford, founder and CEO of Cornerstone Wealth Management Group and a Carson Institutional partner, serves on the investment committee as the technical strategist. He is a registered principal at LPL Financial and is a registered financial consultant. Scott is ranked in the top 1 percent of all LPL registered financial advisors based on annual production.

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Master Plan

A channel chat with Telegration's Denis Raue

By Tara Seals

The role of the master agent, like the role of any channel partner, has been changing significantly as the forces of cloud communications, mobility and an exploding level of technology innovation have presented new challenges and opportunities. At the same time, the TDM-to-IP migration and the advent of bigger bandwidth is shaping agent opportunities in big ways. We sat down with Telegration president Denis Raue to find out more about what the master agency has been up to, and the role technology and these industry shifts have been playing in its channel approach.

ChannelVision: What's been new for Telegration in the past year?

Denis Raue: We've had quite a few major initiatives the past year. First, we launched TelePortal last year and continue to make upgrades. Our agents never have to waste time searching multiple vendor sites or get frustrated with outdated provider information. That's because it has all the up-to-date information on providers, promotions, spiffs, training and events in one revolutionary site. Our agents can use TelePortal to get our providers' most current information on industry trends and new provider services to make the best decision for their clients. We recently added commission statement history and a document saving depository for their most important files from our site. Our agents also have full access via TelePortal for quoting and service requests and channel contacts – it can be difficult for even the most organized agents to stay current on the ever-changing personnel at providers. We are quite proud of our TelePortal site.

CV: You also launched something called "TeleApp"?

DR: Yes – TeleApp is available to download on both the Apple App Store and Google Play. Our app has complete Telegration channel support contact info, as well current provider contact info. Our agents can do quote requests and place service request from their Telegration app anytime, from anywhere they have Internet access. We also added a cable locater to the app to allow our agents to check real-time cable or Internet availability simply by entering an address from their mobile device. In addition, our agents can call or email Telegration support team members right from the app, or call customer service direct from the app to open service cases. Finally, our agents can access commission reports from the app, as well as our master agency calendar and marketing materials.

CV: Tell me about your Salesforce.com initiative.

DR: We spent the past year investing hundreds of thousands of dollars implementing Salesforce.com to improve our business. We service over 17,000 locations, and have incorporated it into every facet in our business – from creating SLAs for quote turnaround and funnel reports for our agents to doing campaign notices on provider promotions and spiff announcements. Our website forms dump directly into Salesforce, so that agents immediately get sales opportunities and service cases assigned to them. This allows them to meet the "better here" SLAs that they need to be more efficient in the "get 'er done now" world we live in.

Telegration president Denis Raue

We are now finishing the order fulfillment process in the system and dashboard reports to better manage thousands of orders in the provisioning pipeline more efficiently for our agents. The investment has been worth the year for our executive team and internal Salesforce team members, and we are positioned for API access with providers. We're also adding much more robust support apps, such as MapAnywhere, and developing a lead program for our agents with Dunns information and provider prequalification data. We look forward in 2017 to rolling out Salesforce for our top agents too.

V: Have you made any important channel-related personnel moves?

DR: I would say the most important channel move we made was the construction we did in Q1 to expand our order fulfillment and project manager teams, and expand our help desk team and corporate account managers team to assist our agents to help them renew their accounts and get quotes for new service in Q2.

We also are planning to add regional channel managers in 2017 to continue our growth in the channel.

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CV: From your perspective, what are the top trends that are changing the enterprise and SMB landscape these days?

DR: I believe the top trends are still coax and fiber plays for access, and satisfying Internet growth plans. While cloud and other services like hosted PBX are starting to take off, I still see fiber and coax access as the top current trends and source of income for our agents. The replacement of the TDM network with fiber is in full force now. I expect mobility opportunities and IoT to become more relevant for specific verticals, as well as hosting and cloud services to continue to grow, but I believe the next few years will be filled with new requests for hosted and fiber/coax access as customers move away from the TDM telephone network to IP networks.

CV: What's new for you from a portfolio perspective?

DR: we are rolling out our Tele-IP hosted product. We still have a $2.5 million long-distance business, mostly servicing 800-number customers that cannot be VoIP'd. We have been in the resale business since 1994, and we look forward to providing our own resale program for our

Computer rendering of Telegration's new HQ.

Computer rendering of Telegration's new HQ.

agents. We will still distribute and support Star2Star, Vonage and Fonality, among others, through our sales engineers and help desk teams.

We still expect to grow the master agent hosted products business into a $2 million-per-year business in a few years, like we did our cableco business with Comcast, Spectrum and others. But we know from our past experiences that our agents and customers appreciate the simplicity of Tel-IP hosted service and the personnel support they have become accustomed to with our award winning service department, pre-sales support and higher commissions. We look forward to more announcements as we will be kicking off the product after our Agent Council event in Traverse City, Mich.

CV: Do you see fresh opportunities for channel partners in today's market? Which are the most important?

DR: I think there are new opportunities for niche agents to get into our business in the cloud space, and for telecom expense management (TEM) agencies in the mobility space. But the majority of new opportunities will be in hosted PBX space, as the marketplace appears primed to take off. All the analyst info says that hosted will explode over the next few years. I also believe agents can still make a living selling coax and fiber for access, and selling hosted opportunities to increase and sustain long-term residual checks.

CV: Is the sales process changing and if so, how?

DR: The sales process is becoming more specialized in my opinion, and project management is becoming more important for agents. For those that don't hire support teams of their own, we provide assistance in sales engineering and order fulfillment. More and more, we are project-managing network installations with our agents and our pre- and post-support teams.

CV: What moves have you made in terms of modernizing to make the most of the next-generation of technology demands?

DR: We've made several moves to increase our knowledge base. We joined CompTIA, and invest in their training programs for cloud essentials, project management and cyber-security training for our sales engineers and order fulfillment teams. Obviously, TelePortal was a major investment for our knowledge base for our agents and internal employees. And Salesforce is another major investment in software to make our business modernized and in a position to scale. I am fortunate to sit on the CompTIA Distributor Advisory Board with a few other master agents, and HP, Microsoft and Ingram Micro executives, among others. We spend a lot of time finding ways and publishing research on the next generation of technology demands to help members of the industry capitalize on new trends such as managed service business models. I'm fortunate to learn a lot from other leaders and share that with our channel support team members to prepare for future opportunities.

CV: What is your best piece of advice for channel partners going forward?

DR: "Remember that you are in telecommunications sales for the rest of your life!" The industry is always changing and new opportunities will continue to present themselves. I founded the business in 1990 and have had fun working on changing our business models and becoming proficient at selling the services that are trending and building a business.

The future sales arena will change, but regardless of whether it's the TDM PRI days or the upcoming IoT selling days, we will be employed to keep helping our customers master the use of technology to improve their business and reduce costs as new services replace the old ones. That is the biggest challenge we all face, especially as the players in the industry increase and we all enter other sellers' markets.

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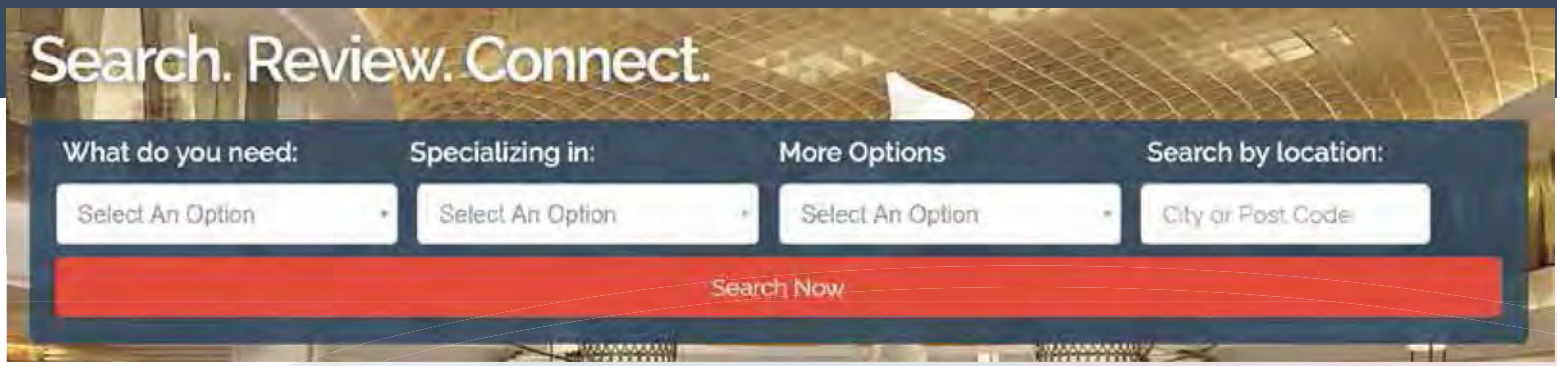

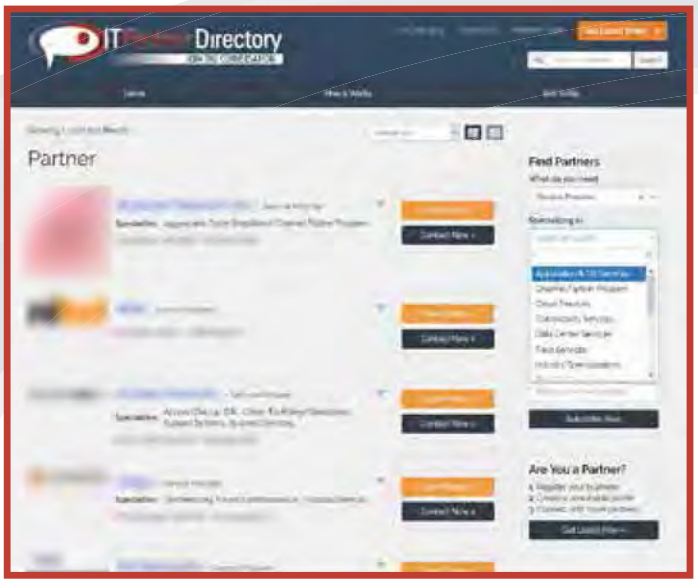

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BullsEye Goes High-Touch

By Tara Seals

There's little doubt that the channel partner landscape is in a state of flux, in terms of both technology and the sales process. Recognizing this, BullsEye Telecom is focusing on differentiating itself and its partners in the increasingly crowed hosted VoIP and UCaaS arena. To do so, BullsEye is emphasizing high-touch customer service, including hands-on, personal installations.

"We differentiate on 17 years of experience," explained Tim Basa, executive vice president of sales and marketing at BullsEye. "A lot of companies do self-installs. They want you to download the software and watch a couple of videos, and you're on your own. Our client services team is there to help clients and channel partners execute on what they're selling. With all these services available across all devices, we've focused on how to make that experience great – and on how we product-manage and focus and really make the client experience special for them."

The company also has continued to expand its channel management team, with more hires on the way, and has added a success center in Boston. Partners can come in for training, but also to do customer conference calls with BullsEye support or to bring clients in to meet with sales engineers.

The move is indicative of how the channel process is evolving for BullsEye.

"We certainly use more video and conference calls than ever before, but the thing that we do in the channel that seems to be the most effective is more face time, whether that's running appointments in the field, being on site, working with partners' sales, business development and solutions engineering teams or interacting with prospects," Basa said.

He added, "With all that technology available, the thing that our partners love is being able to call an account manager to, say, run a report for them. A live friendly voice takes their calls and someone helps them, whatever they need."

This high-touch approach is especially important given how complex the landscape has become as technology use shifts.

"Phones are coming off the desks, and mobile and softphones are the norm – we're not dealing with a lot of chunks of black plastic on the desks. And that has created a lot of noise for partners," said Basa. "How do you get time on the calendar? If someone has a workflow or communications tool, you have to convince them that you have what meets their need."

Accordingly, the sales process has certainly evolved, Basa noted. "You used to be able to one-call close someone on long-distance using savings and fear, uncertainty and doubt – old-school sales methods. For the large part, those just don't work anymore."

BullsEye has developed what it calls a "big account sales accelerator," a disciplined process that involves educating end users and then sticking with them. The idea is that partners have to nurture the relationship with the customer, offering opportunities to purchase different solutions at different times with different plans and rate structures, depending on the context – and they must be ready to tailor something to fit specific business needs.

"Partners must be patient and involve more buyers within the company," Basa said. "The focus used to be on finding a decision-maker, but that's a group of people now, so the sales process addresses many different specific job functions. The accounts payable department has a different need than the regional manager in the field, but you have to make them all comfortable."

BullsEye has continued to add more feature functionality to its VoIP platform, as well, and can customize it for the needs of clients, including applying the technology in inventive ways. For instance, consider its contact center platform that's built to manage hundreds of people in a room answering phones. The company has been able to implement that same technology for multi-location businesses that have four or five phones per site. In one restaurant example, an Italian restaurant with seven locations, the analytics package allowed the end user to see peak times of day for carryout, or whether employees were not answering the phone at 9 p.m. on Saturdays because they're high school kids that want to leave to meet their friends.

On the other hand, Basa noted that sometimes the oldest products in the portfolio – POTs and broadband – still offer the best path into an account.

"Because there's so much noise around network and cloud services, partners forget there's a big opportunity with consolidating analog POTS lines and things like auto-attendant," Basa said. "As crazy as it sounds, sometimes that simple product, as unglamorous as it is, is a way to open up a new revenue stream and build trust on the telephony side. From there you can create a roadmap to VoIP. Partners don't need to ram the hosted product down a client's throat immediately."

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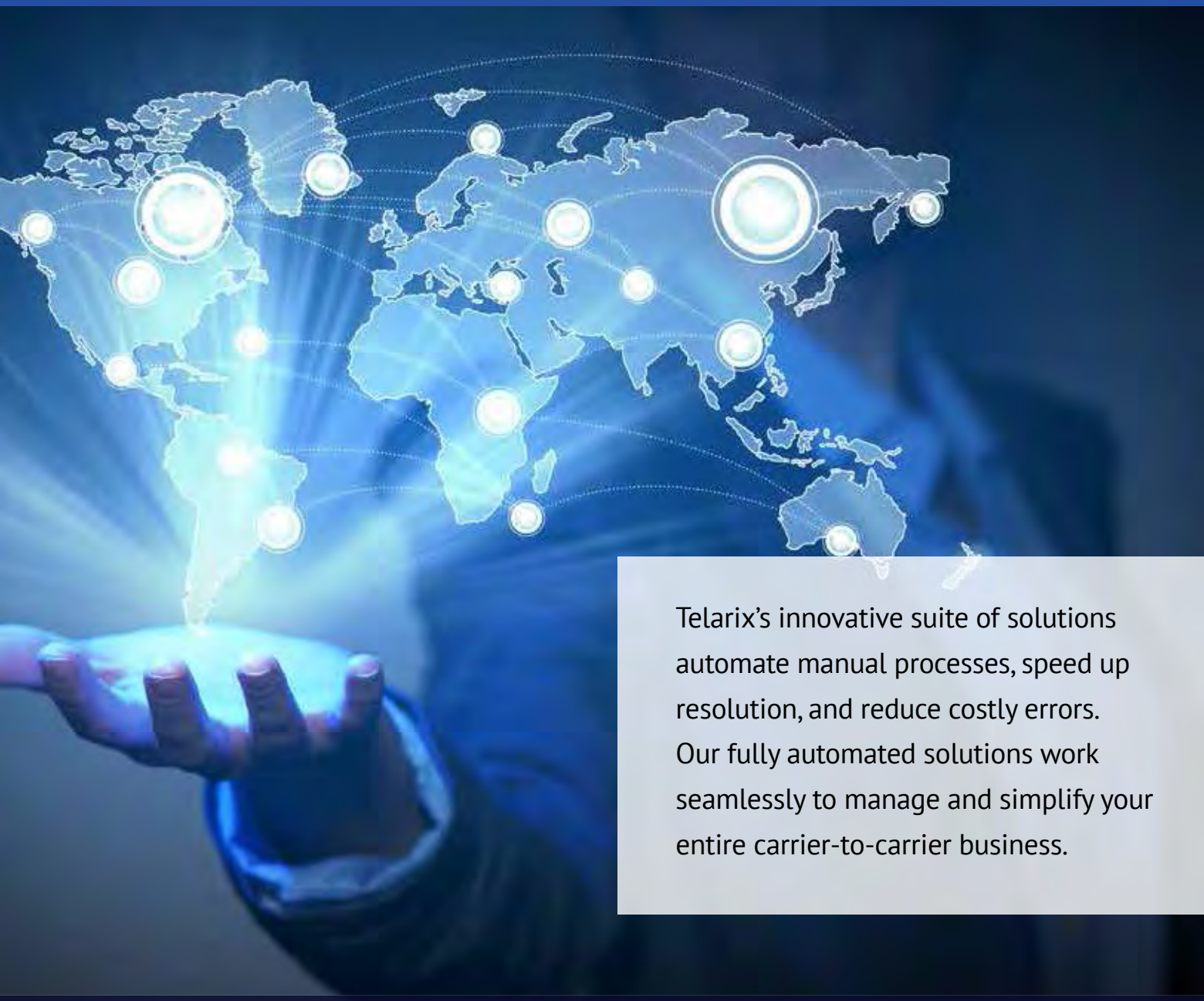

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