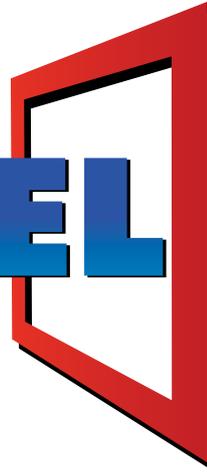


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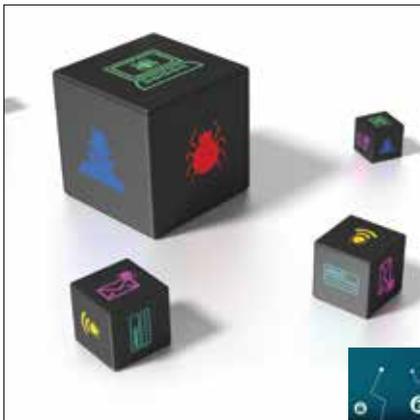
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CONTENTS

Volume 17 – Issue 4

JULY – AUGUST, 2018



EMERGENT

- 8** Contact center chat
- 8** Blockchain land grab
- 8** Residential VARs?
- 10** Future factory
- 10** Telecom RPA

CYBER PATROL

- 12** **California Crack Down**
The Golden State's new privacy laws
By Gerald Baldino
- 16** **Threats and Opportunities**
Cybersecurity expert update and roundtable
By Martin Vilaboy

ZETTABYTES

- 22** Fiber M&As
- 22** DC dollars
- 22** USDA funding
- 23** Expanded networks
- 24** **WAN Simplification**
Simple is the WAN sell
By Gerald Baldino

MOBILE & WIRELESS

- 28** Words from WISPA
- 29** Cable's collaboration
- 30** Medical mobility growth
- 32** **The Case for DAS Hybrid**
Indoor signal boosting
By Tim Lewis

AT YOUR SERVICE: XAAS

- 36** **Full Contact**
Navigating the rise of the smart contact center
By Gerald Baldino

BUYERS' SIDE

- 40** **The Dawn of DevOps in Corporate IT**
By Martin Vilaboy
- 41** Tech by generation
- 41** IT nearshoring
- 43** Telepresence robots

CHANNEL MANAGEMENT

- 44** **Stacking Your Channel**
Three questions to qualify partners
By Wayne Monk
- 46** **Silent Partners**
MSP as solution integrator
By Larry Thompson

VIRTUAL REALITY

- 48** BCM enhances SD-WAN
- 48** Monitoring the multi-cloud
- 48** Easing migration
- 49** **Ultimate Data Center Security**
Means more than technology
By Arturo Maqueo

CORE COMMUNICATIONS

- 50** **Firing on All Cylinders**
TeleSystem, LSI unified and ready
By Gerald Baldino

6 Editor's Letter

52 ICYMI

54 Ad index



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Change in Strategy

One way to qualify a company's willingness to spend is by asking a few questions to gauge decision makers' underlying sentiments toward IT and technology as a whole. More bluntly, do they view IT as tactical or strategic?

Even the very basic questions channel partners tend to ask can shed light as to which side of this fence a company falls. "What are the goals you're looking to achieve through IT? Or, "How do you use the current technology you have in place?" If the answers suggest a strategic mindset, the sales scenario immediately improves, suggest analysts at 451 Research, and such a mindset is becoming increasingly common.

Traditionally, IT departments have tended to be more tactical, says Tracy Corbo of 451 Research, focused on the day-to-day operations of keeping systems up and running. But the rapid digitalization of the business world is forcing enterprise IT departments to become less tactical and more strategic in their approach.

"Digital transformation is key for business survival," writes Corbo. "Digital transformation is not possible without IT, making IT a more strategic part of business going forward."

When respondents were specifically asked if they saw the role of IT as strategic or tactical, things pretty much split down the middle, show 451 figures, but it's the more progressive, forward-thinking companies that tend to view IT as a strategic resource with a key role to play in driving business outcomes.

"Progressive companies are already executing on their digital transformation plans, are early technology adopters, and have integrated their IT and app/dev teams," says Corbo. They are also most likely to have plans to grow their IT staffs. The financial vertical stands out as having strategic IT thinkers, show 451 surveys.

IT Department Viewed as Strategic	
Executing on digital transformation	65%
We are early adopters on the leading edge	59%
High-level of collaboration	59%
Finance company	58%
Plan to increase full time IT staff	56%
IT Department Viewed as Tactical	
Considering digital transformation (no formal plan)	68%
Retail company	67%
Skeptical of new technology and are usually late to the game	65%
Government/Education	58%
Low level of collaboration	58%

Source: 451 Research

Meanwhile, companies that view IT as tactical are skeptical of new technology, have no formal plans for digital transformation and are highly siloed, says Corbo. The larger and older the organization, the more likely legacy systems keep them mired in the tactical, she says. IT departments within government, education and retail are most likely to be consumed with just keeping the lights on.

Ultimately, companies that view IT as strategic are most likely to understand and appreciate the value of staying ahead of the technology curve. And it's not just about qualifying the likelihood of closing a deal. The "tactical or strategic" question also can indicate long-term customer value. After all, a company that is IT tactical likely will be looking for a service or a product. A strategic-minded IT company will be looking for a partner.




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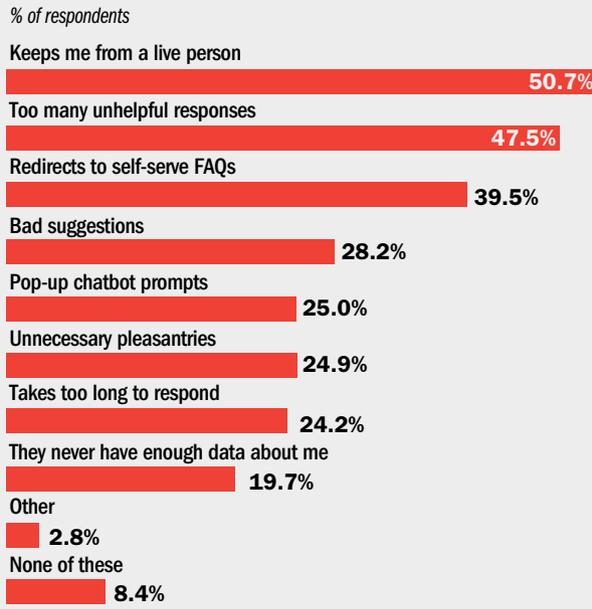
Chatbot Customer Service Concerns

There's good news for agents investing in smart contact center services. According to a May 2018 survey of U.S. internet users by Helpshift, 76% of respondents said chat-based messaging would be a preferred means to contact customer service if they knew they would get an immediate response. Full disclosure: Helpshift is a messaging-based platform invested in texting for customer service.

Still, not everyone is enamored by chatbots. According to the study, 51% of respondents said dealing with chatbots prevents them from connecting with a human, while 48% said they lead

to too many unhelpful responses. Above are some ways chatbots must improve moving forward.

Challenges of Using Chatbots According to US Internet Users, May 2018



Source: Helpshift; eMarketer

California Property Sold on Blockchain

A historic move for both real estate and cryptocurrencies, Propy, a global real estate store with a decentralized title registry, announced this summer the execution of the first comprehensive blockchain-recorded property deal in California. The Bitcoin-to-Bitcoin sale of 10 acres of land in Southern California was processed through Propy's Transaction Platform. Since every step of the conveyance was executed via Ethereum smart contracts, this marks not only the first fully recorded blockchain transaction in California but in the entire U.S. as well.

"We believe that blockchain technology can truly revolutionize the real estate purchasing process and the management of public records," said Natalia Karayaneva, CEO of Propy. "Propy streamlines a complicated process into a simple online transaction, and we've seen significant traction in the industry already."

In September and October 2017, Propy partnered with the government of Ukraine to facilitate the first online international real estate purchase in the world via the blockchain.

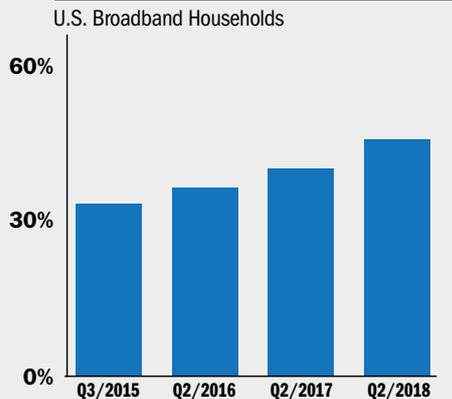
Healthy Home Market?

The economics are tough for residential IT channel sales and support, but at some point the home becomes too connected for the average home owner to keep it all up and running smoothly without professional help. Consider all-important home health care alone. A Park Associates survey found that 46% of U.S. broadband households now own a connected health device, while nearly 60% are interested in remotely interacting with medical professionals under certain circumstances. Yes, someday, the whole world becomes plug and play, but we are certainly

not there yet as Parks estimates that more than 50% of smart home device

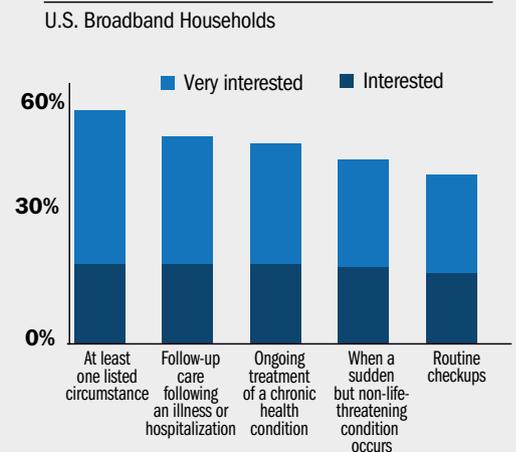
users experienced problems setting up their devices.

Overall Adoption of Connected Health Devices



Source: Parks Associates

Interest in Remotely Interacting with Medical Professionals Under Specified Circumstances





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Telecom Sees Major Productivity Boosts via Robotic Process Automation

According to automation software provider Kofax, a major telecom company was able to digitize 95 percent of its accounts payable operations and increase invoice productivity by a whopping 400 percent by comprehensively implementing Kofax's robotic process automation (RPA) software.

Kapow RPA software automates and digitally transforms a wide range of human and information intensive processes across front and back office operations, said the company. It allows users to develop and deploy smart robots that mimic human actions while driving continuous improvement using AI and machine learning. Kapow robots interact seamlessly across desktop software, traditional enterprise and browser-based systems, and web

sites, automating processes, aggregating data, transforming it into actionable information, triggering responses, and communicating with other applications.

The telecom built dozens of Kapow robots that automatically retrieve approximately 9,000 invoices per month from 30 online portals, delivering the information to its finance systems for automatic processing and payment. The telecom provider is steadily expanding its web data extraction work, and ultimately plans to cover more than 100 vendor sites, using Kapow to retrieve more than 15,000 invoices every month. With the company's Kapow usage escalating, full return on investment is expected within a year of the original implementation, said the company.

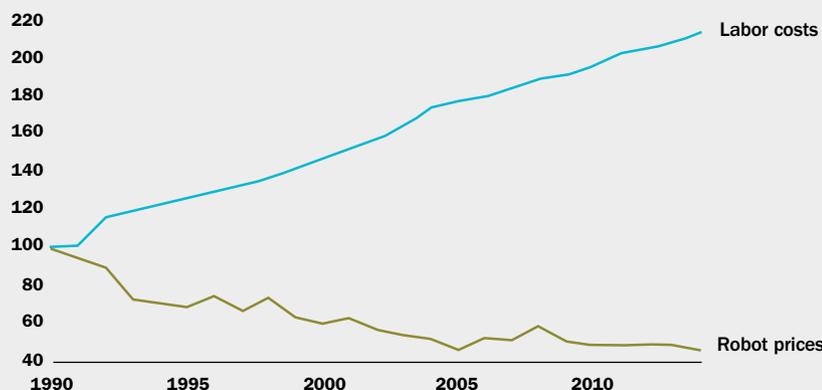
Factories of the Future

This "lights out" production concept – where manufacturing activities and material flows are handled entirely automatically – is an increasingly common attribute of modern manufacturing, say McKinsey & Co. analysts. In part, the new wave of automation will be driven by the same things that first

brought robotics and automation into the workplace: to free humans from dirty, dull or dangerous jobs; eliminate human error and variability; and to cut manufacturing costs by replacing increasingly expensive people with ever-cheaper machines, says Jonathon Tilley, McKinsey & Co. senior expert.

Robot Prices vs. Labor Costs

Index of average robot prices and labor compensation in manufacturing in United States, 1990 = 100%



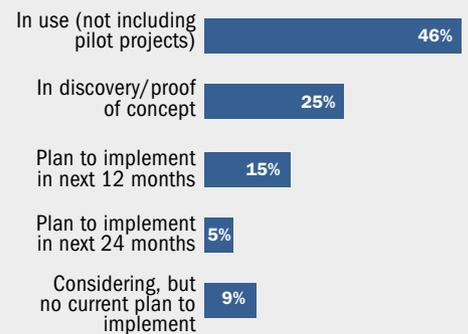
Source: McKinsey & Co.

Enterprise IoT Gaining Traction

Nearly half of the enterprise IT departments recently surveyed by 451 Research (46%) said that they currently use IoT in production environments. Another quarter are still in the discovery phase and another 20% will implement IoT during the next two years. Only 9% are considering IoT but have no plans to implement.

Q. Which of the following best describes your organization's adoption of Internet of Things (IoT)?

Enterprise IoT Adoption

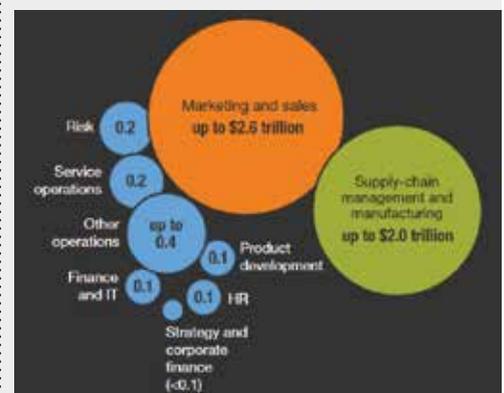


Source: 451 Research

AI in All Sectors, Two Functions

The application of artificial intelligence to real-world business problems extends across nearly every sector of the economy, say researchers and McKinsey Global Institute, but the biggest impact could arise in two particular business functions, they argue.

Potential value unlocked by all applications across functions in 19 global sectors, \$ trillion



Source: McKinsey Global Institute



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California Cracks Down on Privacy

Groundbreaking consumer privacy law puts California businesses on notice

By **Gerald Baldino**

About a month after enforcement began for the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a second major privacy overhaul was announced here in the U.S.

On June 28, California Gov. Jerry Brown signed the California Consumer Protection Act of 2018 (AB 375), which is widely regarded as the most far-reaching privacy act in the U.S. to date. AB 375, which will start being enforced in January 2020, gives Californians five new rights: The right to know what personal information is being collected about them; the right to access personal information; the ability to know whether personal information is being sold or disclosed, and to whom; the ability to decline the sale of personal information; and access to equal service and price, even after exercising privacy rights.

As of right now, the law will apply to organizations that conduct business in California, or are controlled by an entity operating in California, that have an annual gross revenue exceeding \$25 million. It also will apply to businesses that collect data from 50,000 or more consumers or devices, or generate 50 percent or more of their annual revenue from selling consumer data.

Privacy an 'inalienable' right

While AB 375 may come across as an immediate reaction to GDPR, the wheels for privacy reform have actually been in motion for a long time in California.

Section two of AB 375 points back to 1972, when California voters amended the state's constitution to make privacy an "inalienable" right of all people. That amendment declared that consumers have the right to control the use and sale of their personal information. Since that time, the document explains, California has adopted several initiatives including the Online Privacy Act, the Privacy Rights for California Minors in the Digital World Act and the Shine the Light law, which is one of the first major acts to limit how businesses could use consumer data.

With AB 375, lawmakers hope to provide an updated set of privacy laws to address today's rapidly changing technology landscape.

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section three states. “Yet the proliferation of personal information has limited Californians’ ability to properly protect and safeguard their privacy. It is almost impossible to apply for a job, raise a child, drive a car, or make an appointment without sharing personal information.”

California law, AB 375 explains, has not kept pace with the privacy implications surrounding today’s developing technologies. Many businesses are collecting extensive amounts of consumer data and are privy to sensitive details such as how fast a consumer drives, how many children that person has, their personality and their sleep habits as well as biometric, financial, health, social and geolocation information, among other categories. This trend will accelerate, too, as the Internet of Things (IoT) continues to develop and consumers become increasingly connected.

AB 375 mentions the March, 2018, Cambridge Analytica incident where tens of millions of people had their personal data misused. This event, the Legislature claims, has heightened the need for privacy controls and transparency.

“The unauthorized disclosure of personal information and the loss of privacy can have devastating effects for individuals, ranging from financial fraud, identity theft, and unnecessary costs to personal time and finances, to destruction of property, harassment, reputational damage, emotional stress, and even potential physical harm,” reads section “e.”

Whole new ballgame

The law is similar in some ways to GDPR, as well as some of the above-mentioned laws that California has already passed. According to privacy attorney Kirk Nahra, though, AB 375 is a “whole new ballgame.”

“It’s particularly important because it essentially applies to all personal data in all situations,” Nahra stated. “There are some exceptions to that, but the idea is that it applies to everything. That’s very different than not only the prior California laws, but also the entire approach to privacy and security regulation that we have seen in the United States to date, where the

laws have been either industry-specific like HIPAA or the Gramm-Leach-Bliley for the financial services industry. Or they have been practice-specific, which deals with a particular law for a particular activity.”

As Nahra explained, we don’t have one-size-fits all laws here in the U.S., which is why AB 375 is being compared to the EU’s GDPR so frequently. This is the first time we have seen something like this in the U.S.

It’s very important to keep this in mind when talking to customers about AB 375.

“There are both similarities and differences,” Nahra continued. “I think the analogy is an easy one to make because it’s the most obvious comparison. That doesn’t mean it’s a perfect comparison. At the broadest level, why we’re seeing a comparison is [because] GDPR is so new and it’s in everyone’s mind. Lots of companies have gone through that exercise. It’s a good comparison in terms of overall scope.”

Mounting concern

While AB 375 is being hailed as a victory among consumer advocate groups, not everyone is jumping for joy. There is a considerable amount of concern across the technology and retail sectors that the law is too strict and could limit the way that businesses are allowed to market to consumers.

Despite heavy criticism, the law — which was quickly passed through the California Senate and Assembly in a last-minute ballot initiative — was allowed to commence without protest out of fear of a much stricter privacy proposal that was being discussed. That proposal wound up getting scrapped when Brown signed the bill into law.

One of the biggest concerns for business owners right now is that AB 375 could prevent consumer loyalty programs, as consumers who choose to revoke their data will have to be treated the same as people who choose to give away their information.

Targeted marketing campaigns, and app-based geolocation services, are also in the crosshairs as a result of AB

375. This, experts fear, will hurt more than just businesses. Consumers will feel the pain, too.

“It will expose businesses to unwarranted lawsuits while potentially taking away many of the innovations and special services consumers have come to expect,” said David French, senior vice president for government relations at the National Retail Federation.

What’s more, there is concern about how the law will impact businesses beyond the state’s borders. Companies, Nahra explained, will have to analyze how much they deal with California residents — and whether they want to extend the same rights to citizens from other states.

The waiting game begins

We are still more than a year away from January 2020 and so it’s possible that we will see some changes or rule clarifications before enforcement begins. Agents should therefore keep close tabs on this developing story in order to accurately advise customers on the steps they need to take to remain in compliance.

According to Julie Dzubay, vice president of sales operations at Southern California-based WTG, the master agent and its partners have noticed that the sales cycle has increased for opportunities that were impacted by GDPR. With it being so new, Dzubay explained, everyone is now cautious in their approach to ensure compliance. It’s likely that we will see a similar impact from the AB 375.

“We are in the education stage where I feel providers are beginning to talk about it, but agents are more in a wait and see mode,” explained Dzubay.

Even so, there is definitely an opportunity to leverage AB 375 when selling security and privacy services, said Dzubay.

“There are some providers that are already incorporating a warning flag into their content,” Dzubay said. “I feel like the providers that are doing that have a competitive edge being able to say that they will ensure their solutions will be compliant with the new law.” □

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Threats and Opportunities

A panel of cybersecurity experts discuss the current challenges facing business networks and the opportunities they provide to channel partners

By **Martin** Vilaboy

Unlike a phone line, storage space, contact center suite or even private data line, all of which a company can set-up and assume will work properly for some time, security services must be continually reconsidered and possibly re-deployed.

An evolving threat landscape, increasingly sophisticated attacks and more cunning attackers mean buyers and sellers of security solutions must be ever-aware and vigilant or face the well-publicized and widely reported ramifications.

"The existing tools and resources that organizations used in the past may no longer be applicable to the modern threat and regulatory landscape," said Tony Rock, vice president at Lockpath, a pro-

vider of corporate governance, risk management, regulatory compliance and information security software. "In light of this challenge, many organizations will find that they have to change the way they're doing business."

With that in mind, *ChannelVision* questioned Rock and a panel of security experts about the current security challenges and emerging threats facing business networks and employees, and the

opportunities the current state of cybersecurity presents channel partners and their solution providers.



Tony Rock; Lockpath

For starters, it's no longer safe to assume that attacks can be prevented.

"Hackers will continue unabated to innovate and expose new vulnerabilities," said Joseph Carson,

chief security scientist at Thycotic, which offers privileged password and endpoint protection solutions.

In other words, cybersecurity is not just a matter of how bad guys will penetrate networks and devices but when they will penetrate, and how quickly a company can react.

"It is increasingly clear that motivated threat actors can circumvent defenses," agreed Rick Moy, chief marketing officer for Acalvio, a provider of autonomous deception solutions. "However, organizations are still facing an unacceptably long dwell time to detect and address breaches, with the average around 99 days."

"One challenge is inertia," added Mike Banic, vice president of marketing at Vectra, which utilizes artificial intelligence to power its threat detection and



Joseph Carson; Thycotic

response platform. While organizations have made significant investment in preventative security, such as firewalls, proxies, secure web gateway and endpoint security, said Banic, attackers continually

search for ways to outpace prevention products. Banic points to a recent Gartner report in which the research firm boldly states that "prevention is futile in 2020," making a call to action for enterprises to shift their investments to rapid threat detection and response.

"While CISOs today often admit that cyber-attackers may already be inside their networks, the majority of their spending is still on prevention defenses," said Banic.

That's starting to change. Gartner forecasts a 39 percent increase in spending on detection and response security in 2018, growing to an increase of 50 percent in 2019 and a 60 percent increase in 2020.

Even so, "Most organizations have not yet made the re-balancing adjustment from prevention to detection recommend-



Mike Banic; Vectra

ed by Gartner two years ago," added Moy. "Channel partners can differentiate themselves from the pack by offering cost-effective detection solutions, including emerging technologies like deception,

managed detection and response and orchestration."

"Integrating the new detection and response solution with the existing endpoint, NAC, firewall, workflow, ticketing and SIEM solution creates a high-value opportunity for services," said Banic. And AI-based detection and response automation platforms such as Vectra's Cognito are SaaS-based offerings with annual recurring revenue that increases business-model predictability for channel partners, he added.

Similarly, the awareness that "breaches are a fact of life" means IT departments will be looking for partners and providers that prioritize resilience, or the ability to bounce back from attacks, said Carson.

"CISO's quickly realize that no man is an island when it comes to staying ahead of the threat landscape and that third parties with the latest advanced knowledge and expertise will be part of their resiliency program," said Carson. "By addressing threats of the type and scale mentioned above, IT firms that can demonstrate their ability to consult, advise and implement infrastructure that will adapt rapidly to changing conditions

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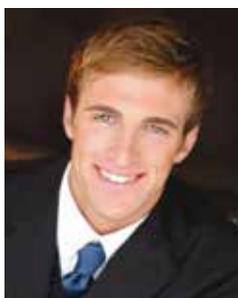
Rick Moy; Acalvio

and recovery from disruptions will reap the largest windfall in 2018.”

The Connected Conundrum

Another challenge, or opportunity, depending on your perspective, is a direct result of the technological processes that have come with the industry 4.0 and IoT (Internet of things) trends we have seen during the past five or so years. More specifically, “the accidental system threats and undiscovered vulnerability resulting from the multiplying amount of connected corporate devices,” said Thomas Nuth, product marketing director for Nozomi Networks. Nuth points to modern industrial control systems (ICS) and operational technologies (OT), such as those common in manufacturing, oil/gas, chemical, government and utilities industries. These networks are now made up many devices, systems, networks and controls used to operate and/or automate processes.

“The increased connectedness of non-consumer devices has filtered down to mission-critical networks and industrial control systems such as DCS (distributed control system), MES (manufacturing execution systems) and SCADA (supervisor control and data acquisition),” said Nuth. “As these industrial applications grow more intelligent, so does their exposure to cyber-born threats; whether they are internal or external.”



Thomas Nuth; Nozomi

Budgets are starting to be allocated to ICS/OT cybersecurity projects on a larger scale than in years past, continued Nuth, as companies and organizations realize that

their critical infrastructure is too exposed not to invest in improved oper-

ational visibility and ICS cybersecurity technologies.

“To achieve an improved cybersecurity posture, companies are looking for ways to extend the utility of their existing IT/OT infrastructure, such as firewalls and SIEMs, and they’re looking for technological expertise and guidance from channel partners to support them,” said Nuth. “The opportunity to guide companies and organizations in their ICS cybersecurity selection journey is tremendous for channel partners on both sides of the IT or OT fence.”

Along with all those connected machines are the growing numbers of



Ken Ammon; OPAQ

connected workers. In turn, cybercriminals are shifting some of their attention from attacking systems and infrastructure to finding breaches through those individuals.

“Cybersecurity is quickly becoming part of our daily lives and can no longer be separated between personal and professional,” said Carson. “In the past, cyber-attacks were usually only a concern for the workplace. However, today that is no longer the case.”

“Today’s security incidents often involve attackers pursuing employee privileges or crafting malware that evades detection by existing security tools,” said Lenny Zeltser, vice president of products at Minerva Labs, which offers endpoint security solutions.

Email phishing campaigns also continue to be highly effective, said Zeltser, since they often succeed in tricking recipients into revealing login credentials to business applications. “Attackers are also finding ways to sneak malicious code past defenses by embedding malware in document files or by concealing it inside the memory space of benign applications,” he said. “Attackers also exploit security bugs in web browsers or steal computing resources to mine cryptocurrencies.”

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Identity theft also has become a corporate concern. "It is much easier to steal a trusted insider's credentials and bypass traditional cyber security controls than it is to break through the fire-wall," said Carson.



Lenny Zeltser;
Minerva

Ransomware that can lock people out of any device or system, meanwhile, is going to become platform agnostic, said Carson, while cryptocurrencies make it as easy as one click to extort funds. Carson also foresees the emergence of "ransomscare," which will threaten life and death situations unless a ransom is paid. This could include malicious hijacking of healthcare or city street traffic control systems.

The success of these and other tactics, said Zeltser, forces organizations to think beyond traditional security approaches that focus primarily on identifying a clearly malicious program on the endpoint or detecting an obviously unauthorized connection on the network.

"Given the ever-increasing complexity of attacks, enterprises are looking for advice on defensive measures that withstand real-world attacks and also don't overwhelm their IT team or interfere with business applications," said Zeltser.

All the while, "Organizations will struggle to find and retain qualified personnel who understand the threats and how they apply to the business," said Lockpath's Rock.

"For most companies, the ability and knowledge required to cut through the marketing hype and to determine the best design/selection for implementing the most resilient defense against attacks requires a deep functional knowledge that doesn't exist in relevant measure at most firms," Carson agreed. "The high demand for cybersecurity specialists makes them the most difficult positions to fill and one of the most ex-

pensive. Though money and talent isn't lacking, deep meaningful experience is, and this is where the opportunity for channel partners arises."

In addition, the number of security solutions on the market has exploded, creating a challenge for enterprises to determine the right toolset to appropriately manage their specific risks. Channel partners that are able to help enterprises select best-in-breed technologies that fit a particular situation have a huge opportunity to expand their relationships with clients.

"Channel partners offering recommendations that provide the greatest risk reduction while accounting for budget and resource capabilities will establish themselves as trusted advisors," said Zeltser.

"Professional services will be even more important in the coming year to help companies bridge shortages in



Andrew Lloyd; Corero

IT talent," added Andrew Lloyd, president of Corero Network Security, a provider of DDoS solutions. In particular, professional services combined with leading technologies that enable automation can save companies time and money while providing an environment equipped to swiftly handle and respond to sophisticated cyberattacks, he said.

"The biggest challenges, especially among mid-size enterprises, will be lack of skilled security professionals, limited capital expenditure budgets and a shortage of internal resources to manage security tools," concluded Ken Ammon, chief strategy officer at security-as-a-service company OPAQ. "These factors create a perfect storm of opportunity for channel partners to offer managed security services that can be funded as operational expenditures and do not require customers to make big upfront capital investments." □

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M&A Large Among U.S. Lit Building Leaders

Vertical Systems Group's 2017 U.S. Fiber Lit Building Leaderboard included 10 retail and wholesale fiber providers with 10,000 or more on-net U.S. fiber lit commercial buildings as of year-end 2017, along with 12 companies in the Challenge Tier qualifying with between 2,000 and 9,999 U.S. fiber lit commercial buildings. Along with growth in the market, however, the big news was the impact of merger and acquisitions among these groups.

2017 U.S. Fiber Lit Leaderboard

1.	AT&T
2.	Verizon
3.	Spectrum Enterprise
4.	CenturyLink
5.	Comcast
6.	Cox
7.	Crown Castle Fiber
8.	Zayo
9.	Frontier
10.	Altice
Challenger Tier: Cinti Bell, Cleareon, Cogent, Consolidated Comms, FiberLight, IFN, Logix, Lumos, Unite Private Networks, Uniti Fiber, Windstream	

"With fiber footprint expansion in the strategic plans of every major network service provider, we're seeing a significant ramp up in new lit building deployments," said Rosemary Cochran, principal of Vertical Systems Group. "Merger, acquisition and re-branding activity across the fiber provider landscape is so intense that it takes a scorecard to keep track. Nearly every one of this year's Fiber Leaderboard and Challenge Tier companies has been impacted by one or more fiber-related transactions in the past year."

Major transactions include: Verizon (#2) acquired XO (2016 Challenge Tier); CenturyLink (#4) merged with Level 3 (#6 on 2016 Leaderboard); Crown Castle Fiber enters at #7 with the acquisition of Lightower (#8 on 2016 Leaderboard) and operations consolidation that included 2016 Challenge Tier companies, Sunesys and FiberNet Direct; Zayo (#8) advances from #9 in 2016 with the acquisition of Electric Lightwave (2016 Challenge Tier); and Frontier (#9) advances from #11 in 2016 with fiber assets acquired from Verizon.

USDA's Latest Rural Broadband Funding Round Announced

The latest round of USDA rural broadband funding was announced this month, with \$97 million allocated for projects in 11 states. The funding is a mix of loans and grants, flowing from the USDA Rural Development Telecommunications Loans and Community Grants program, and targets more than 22,000 subscribers.

The largest loan, \$21.4 million, was awarded to Chibardun Telephone Cooperative in Wisconsin. The rural carrier will add FTTP capabilities and construct 675 new miles of fiber, impacting 2,700 sub-

scribers, according to USDA.

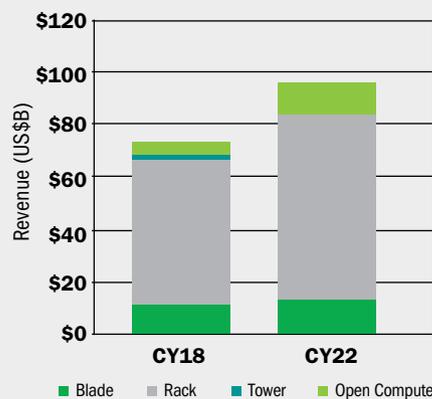
The largest grant, \$2.7 million, was awarded to Osage Innovative Solutions of Oklahoma. The grant will help fund a hybrid fiber-fixed wireless project to bring broadband to an unserved portion of the Osage Nation in Osage County.

All told, the funding impacts projects in Arizona, Iowa, Idaho, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming. Loan funding amounts to \$87.9 million, while grant funding comes in at \$9.3 million.

Richer Server Configurations Push Data Center Revenues

Richer server configurations, say researchers at IHS Markit, supported by new compute and memory-intensive workloads, led to a 32 percent year-over-year increase in data center server revenue, which hit \$17.9 billion in the first quarter of 2018. After three consecutive quarters of growth, average memory prices started to stabilize in the first quarter, but compute and data-intensive workloads kept server prices 20 percent higher than the previous year's first quarter.

Data Center server revenue forecast by form factor



Source: IHS Markit

Server shipments grew ahead of seasonality in the first quarter, growing 10 percent over the first quarter of 2017. It was also the first time density-optimized blade servers out-shipped shared-resource blade servers. In fact, nearly every vendor offering density-optimized blades reported soaring demand from cloud service providers, said IHS.

Demand for open-compute and white-box rack servers also continued to drive a form-factor transition in the data center server market. "As in the past, server vendors offered new products targeted at telcos, with Open Compute Project servers taking center stage," said Cliff Grossner, Ph.D., senior research director, IHS Markit.

Consolidated Expands MPLS to Northern New England

Consolidated Communications has expanded its MPLS offering to the company's Northern New England service area. Consolidated's MPLS offering is fully-managed and provides a variety of access methods and speeds, multiple classes of services, scalable bandwidth options and proactive network monitoring.

"When Consolidated Communications merged with FairPoint one year ago, we committed to enhance and expand the products and services available, ultimately giving businesses in-demand solutions that are increasingly suited to meet their

needs and backed by a national fiber network," said Doug Abolt, vice president of commercial product management at Consolidated Communications. "We have made significant progress on bringing new solutions to the region, including our latest MPLS offering, and look forward as we continue to expand

our business offerings to meet the growing needs of our customers."

In addition to expanding MPLS to Northern New England, Consolidated Communications has recently launched several advanced communications solutions, including SD-WAN, Cloud Peer Connect, BusinessOne and DDoS Mitigation.

Windstream Wholesale Links Phoenix to Las Vegas

Windstream Wholesale recently announced an ultra-long-haul network expansion between Phoenix, Ariz., and Las Vegas, Nev. The new route will add approximately 300 miles to Windstream's existing coast-to-coast long-haul network and provide a new diverse route option for customers out of Phoenix, including unique low-latency routing to and from Reno, Nev.; Salt Lake City; and Silicon Valley.

Customers along the route will also be able to access to the company's entire suite of cloud-optimized connectivity solutions, including optical wavelengths, MEF 2.0 certified carrier Ethernet, MPLS, SD-WAN and more.

In addition, the extension offers Las Vegas and Reno customers direct low-latency connectivity to markets in the Southern U.S. including Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, and Miami.



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WAN Simplification

Not simply a replacement technology, the SD-WAN sell is simplicity

By **Gerald** Baldino

All we have been hearing about in the enterprise networking arena is how SD-WAN is on track to displace MPLS. But is this actually going to happen, or is it all hot air? More importantly, is this even the question or concern providers and partners should have on their minds?

On one hand, the most recent figures indicate that SD-WAN adoption is skyrocketing. We are now looking at a maturing market that is on pace to reach \$861 million in 2018, with no sign of slowing down. Despite this growth, though, enterprises can't seem to shake their reliance on traditional MPLS services — and it's important to remember this when speaking to customers about migrating to SD-WAN.

According to IDG Connect, about 40 percent of businesses are now looking into hybrid models that use SD-WAN alongside MPLS connections.

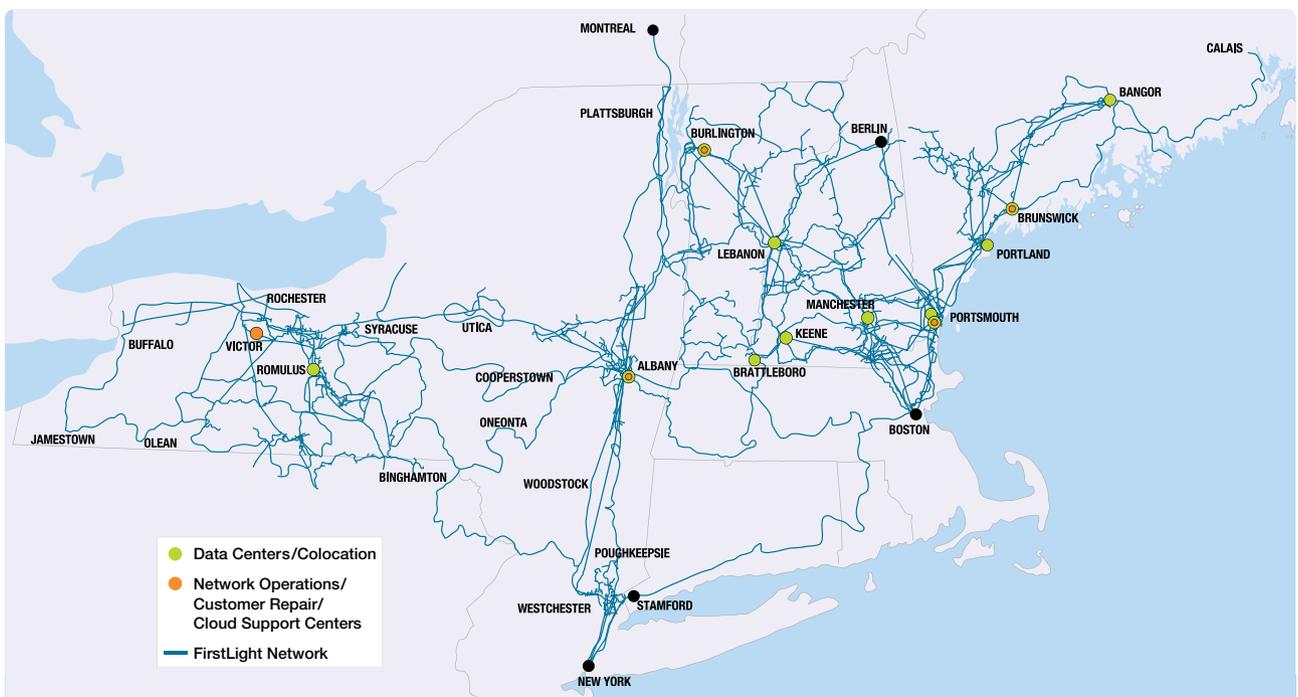
What's more, in a new study from Cato Networks, 57 percent of respondents with SD-WAN implementations said they expect MPLS investments to either increase or remain the same this year.

"The persistence of MPLS stems from the underlying problem of relying on the public internet as an enterprise backbone," Cato's report states. "Whereas internet connectivity has improved and is often sufficient for regional connectivity, the internet continues to be too erratic, too unpredictable for the consistent, end-to-end connectivity required by loss-or-latency sensitive applications, such as voice."

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That doesn't necessarily mean everyone is happy with MPLS, though. In fact, according to Dave Greenfield, a secure networking evangelist at Cato and longtime industry veteran, most businesses are looking for other options — despite the fact they are continuing to invest in MPLS.

as their backbone, nearly 50 percent of respondents said that simplifying network or security architectures will be a primary focus during the next 12 months — making it the most popular use case for SD-WAN in 2018. At the same time, 32 percent still see SD-WAN appliances as too complex, while

“At times, IT professionals explicitly point to ‘complexity’ as a challenge. In other instances, complexity is implicit, such as when they express interest in ‘network automation’ or point to concerns around selecting, integrating and managing multiple tools and platforms.”

Cato ultimately makes the message loud and clear in the report: If SD-WAN is to develop fully in 2018, the company says, and enable enterprises to truly transform their networks, then the complete, secure networking experience must become simpler and more seamless.

SD-WAN providers that cannot offer a simplified and consolidated line of services are going to be in for a rude awakening.

“If you're a company that only delivers connectivity, or you only deliver SD-WAN, you have a real problem,” Greenfield said. “You are truly in a race against time. Cato is an example of how SD-WAN functionality is being packaged with additional capabilities for greater value. Firewall vendors are doing this, too.”

“The fact is,” Greenfield continued, “the pure SD-WAN industry is probably going away or becoming intertwined with other capabilities. As we look out into industry over the next 24 months, greater convergence will take place. Security and SD-WAN in particular are coming together in a closer and closer way.”

The Cato model, Greenfield said, brings together data centers, as well as cloud data centers and applications and remote users into a single and unified network.

“It's a new kind of IP and enterprise backbone that is much, much easier to manage and maintain because it is one network,” Greenfield stated. “You don't have separate networks, separate remote access solutions, a separate solution for the cloud or a separate solution for site-to-site connectivity. You have one solution for all of them. Plus, our security services are baked into that.” □

Primary networking challenges facing your IT organization

Bandwidth costs	42%
Equipment maintenance and updates	39%
Performance between locations	38%
Managing the network	35%
Performance to the cloud	25%
Providing and managing secure mobile/remote access	23%
Last-mile availability	21%
Finding and retaining skilled networking personnel	19%
Time to deploy new locations	17%

Source: Cato Networks

“Every organization today that runs a major MPLS deployment is looking for an alternative,” he said. “Or they are at least open to an alternative. This is different from 12 to 24 months ago when SD-WAN was still a novelty. We're still in the early days of SD-WAN.”

“There has been a lot of interest in moving off of MPLS or augmenting it in one way or another,” Greenfield continued. “[In the report] we took a deeper look at that and honed in on the area of simplification. With wide area networking, enterprises often complain about the complexity of running their networks.”

In the Cato study, which focused on organizations with MPLS

25 percent see SD-WAN services as too complex.

As Greenfield pointed out, customers won't always voice complexity concerns directly in conversation, but these concerns are very real. Customers may, for instance, mention pet peeves such as having to open trouble tickets with carriers instead of troubleshooting errors themselves. Or, they may balk at the thought of having to move from a centralized, secure architecture with a single internet connection to one where every office has a unique one.

“The complexity of today's network, and the push for a simpler one, expresses itself in many ways,” the Cato report continues.

Which of the following use cases will be a primary focus for your company during the next 12 months?

Simplify network or security architectures	50%
Provide secure internet access from any location	46%
Integrate cloud datacenters into the WAN	36%
Replace MPLS with a more affordable alternative with suitable performance	32%
Improve visibility into and control over mobile access to cloud applications like Office 365	31%
Decrease the time users want to access remote servers or transfer files	16%
Eliminate appliances from branch offices	14%
Other	7%

Source: Cato Networks

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WISPA President Testifies to Fixed Wireless Economics

In written testimony presented to the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Communications and Technology last month, Claude Aiken, president and CEO of the Wireless Internet Service Providers Association (WISPA) explained how the economics of broadband fixed wireless are better than those for fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP). In turn, Aiken urged subcommittee members to support spectrum policy that was favorable to rural WISPs, arguing that WISP-friendly policy could help minimize the need for government subsidies to support broadband buildout.

have 10 or fewer full-time employees. “These are truly small, entrepreneurial companies with a local, rural, and small-town focus,” said Aiken.

Aiken presented findings from a 2017 report by the Carmel Group, showing how WISPs can deploy fixed wireless service to residential consumers at about one-seventh the cost of FTTP and about one-fourth of the cost of cable.

“These favorable economics enable WISPs to serve smaller and more remote communities where it is not cost-effective for wireline technologies to be deployed,” said the testimony.

ploy to 100 customers is approximately \$37,500 – an almost \$900,000 savings – and at an average service fee of \$39 per month for speeds up to 150 Mbps, they are in the black in just 10 months.

“The economics for both the provider and the consumer make much better sense,” argued Aiken’s testimony.

A key concern for WISPA and its member is the ability to obtain licensed spectrum. This ability could hinge largely on decisions by the Federal Communications Commission on two key upcoming auctions – the auction of Citizens Broadband Radio Service (CBRS) band spectrum at

Residential Consumer Broadband Comparative Economics

	Fiber	Cable	Satellite	Mobile	BWA
Capex/sub relative to BWA1	70	45	10.52	21	10
Speed3	1 Gbps	150 Mbps	12-35 Mbps4	10-12 Mbps	100 Mbps
Upgrade costs	MODEST Only fiber remains same	HIGH Complete CPE & network change	LOW/HIGH Incremental upgrades until satellite fails	HIGH Complete device & network change	MODEST Incremental upgrades in CPE and network
Broadband ARPU	\$69	\$42	\$61	\$59	\$51
Payback period	60 months	38 months	12 months	21 months	11.5 months

(1) This is a relative presentation comparing all of the technologies to BWA, which is set to an index value of 10. See above for explanation.

(2) Does not include the cost of satellites.

(3) Max speeds; most service providers are not yet offering max speed. For cable, the DOCSIS 3.0 standard is capable of 1 Gbps. For BWA, point-to-point links and millimeter-wave, point-to-multipoint connections can provide more than 1 Gbps to end users.

(4) Anticipated typical speed.

Sources: Wisper ISP; National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative; The Carmel Group

“WISPs boldly go where other technologies and companies do not go,” said Aiken’s testimony.

According to WISPA’s latest member survey, more than 75 percent of its operator members serve primarily rural areas and have fewer than 2,000 customers. More than half serve fewer than 1,000 customers. Significantly, almost all members have fewer than 25 employees, and almost 70 percent

He also put forth a case study from one member with operations in rural Illinois and Missouri that estimated the cost of fiber deployment to 100 customers to be about \$928,600. Based on an average customer service fee of \$69 per month, it would take 11 years for a fiber deployment to deliver a return on investment. However, in the same area, to deliver broadband via fixed wireless technology, the member’s cost to de-

3550-3700 MHz and the C-band auction of adjacent spectrum in the 3700-4200 MHz band.

WISPA advocates small license areas for the CBRS auction, but large nationwide providers want to limit the auction to large license areas. Within the C-band auction, WISPA is pushing for a portion of the total spectrum to be reserved specifically for broadband fixed wireless use.

Comcast, Charter Form Mobile Operating Unit

In a move that's expected to expand both cable MSOs' continued move into the mobile broadband ecosystem, Comcast and Charter announced a joint venture focusing on developing and operating backend systems that support both Xfinity Mobile and Spectrum Mobile. Each company will continue to operate their own mobile brands and their own customer-facing sales and marketing operations. This partnership, meanwhile, will focus on the backend and develop customer sales and support platforms, device logistics and warehousing, and billing, the companies announced.

Comcast launched Xfinity Mobile in 2017 and counted 380,000 subscribers by the end of 2017. Spectrum Mobile has not yet been launched, but Charter chief mobile officer Danny Bowman said the service, which is patterned after Xfinity Mobile, will launch in the coming months.

The operating "50/50" partnership will leverage much of what Comcast has already developed for Xfinity Mobile. Charter reportedly will fund the joint venture as its contribution, said the companies.

"We have built a best-in-class mobile platform for Xfinity Mobile that is resonating with customers," said Sam Schwartz, chief business development officer for Comcast. "By collaborating with Charter, we will help drive operational and cost efficiencies for both companies."

Both companies leverage access to Verizon spectrum, operating in a hybrid-MVNO model. Primary coverage is provided through Wi-Fi access, for both voice and data. When quality Wi-Fi is unavailable, Xfinity and Spectrum mobile customers revert to Verizon coverage.

The partnership will be governed by a four-person board, with each company gaining two board seats. The new business unit will be based in Philadelphia, Pa., utilizing primarily Comcast employees.

OVERHEARD

"The biggest challenge for the future of wireless communications is not data speeds but scalability, in every sense," said Ashutosh Sabharwal, professor of electrical and computer engineering at Rice University. "There will be order-of-magnitude increases in network nodes, number of users and types of applications. And these networks will have to be everything to everybody. They'll be the backbone connection not just for our smartphones, but for self-driving cars; the lights, water mains and buildings of smart cities; and every imaginable sensor and gadget."

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Hospital Mobility is Skyrocketing, Study Shows

Spyglass Consulting has released a new report that explains how mobile devices are shaping the future of the hospital industry. In the study, 90 percent of hospitals indicated they are making enterprise-wide investments in smartphones and secure mobile communications platforms to drive clinical transformation and improve mission and patient-critical communications.

At the same time, hospitals are upgrading their technical infrastructure to improve care quality, lower costs and increase satisfaction for patients and staff members, all of which are necessary for achieving the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Triple AIM framework. There is growing interest in supporting technologies such as unified communications, enterprise-wide directories, event-driven communications, reporting and analytics tools as well as cross platform enablement, Spyglass analysts attest.



The study also found that 73 percent of hospitals have developed mobile strategies to streamline communications, collaboration and computing for clinical professionals and mobile workers, while 68 per-

cent of hospitals use middleware to collect, manage and monitor data, alarms and alerts from legacy-based systems. About half (48 percent) of hospitals have created ROI models to prove cost reductions, outcome

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Interestingly, there was no mention of how hospitals are migrating away from paper-based systems, which is another major driving factor for mobile adoption in healthcare right now. This is particularly important from a security standpoint. In a recent study published in The American Journal of Managed Care, for instance, researchers found that paper and film records are actually the most common location for data breaches in hospitals. Paper and film-based records made up 65 percent of hospital data breaches from 2009 to 2016.

The key takeaway here for channel partners is that now could be a great time to start a conversation about mobility with healthcare and hospital clients. Just remember that every hospital will have different needs. For example, the report explains how many clinicians are feeling overloaded with all their different

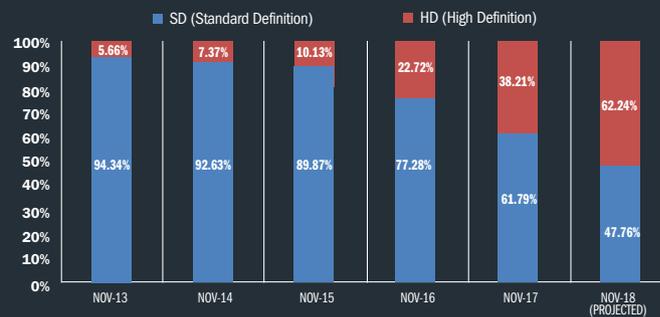
communications systems such as overhead pagers, voice and text messages and more. So in some cases, channel partners may want to consid-

er simplifying, unifying or improving technologies that are already in place instead of selling new systems that will add to the noise.

HD Share of Mobile Video Jumps

The high-definition (HD) share of mobile video traffic is now 38% globally – a far higher percentage than mobile operators had predicted a few years ago, according to new research from OpenWave Mobility. HD video was only 5.7 percent of mobile video traffic four years ago, but now is expected to be at least half of video traffic by the end of 2018.

Mobile Video Traffic by Resolution (Volume, %)



Source: Openwave Mobility

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The Case for DAS Hybrid

Atlantic Technology Group solves cellular signal problems for law enforcement agency and major newspaper with new active DAS hybrid

By **Tim** Lewis

Spotting disruptive technology is not always easy. Even so, the most successful channel partners are in tune with the ebbs and flows of market fluctuations. They constantly keep an eye out for opportunities to expand into bigger markets, leveraging new technologies that enable them to keep pace with, or ahead of, lucrative market trends.

Historically, there have been pretty clear lines between system integrators depending on the type of cellular coverage solutions they offer and the types of customers they are willing to service. There are big iron DAS (distributed antenna system) integrators that only do massive venues of more than a million square feet; passive DAS installers of repeaters and coax for small businesses; broadband and cabling installers, microwave tower solution providers; as well as IT network and Wi-Fi installers that are contracted by IT departments.

During the past year, however, the lines between these integrators and installers have been blurring. This is partly due to the introduction of cellular connectivity technology for the massive and underserved middleprize market that provides the QoS of solutions at the top end of the spectrum, with a price point and remarkably faster and easier installation than virtually any installer in any of these niches could previously deliver.

Atlantic Technology Group, based in Maryland, is one of the integrators that has kept on top of the



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cellular connectivity technology market and related trends since 2002. It has strategically grown its product and service portfolio to help clients achieve the maximum ROI for their investments in mobile technology by specializing in solutions that improve cellular reception in commercial buildings.

The following two case studies showcase how Atlantic Technology Group has expanded its business in the last year by leveraging disruptive technology.

Cellular connectivity for law enforcement agency

A law enforcement agency was having cellular coverage issues at several locations after transitioning from one service provider to another. The agency provided employees with cellular phones, but they were unable to get a signal when inside its buildings. To address these challenges across 10 different sites (ranging in size from 30,000 to 240,000 square feet) in locations from Seattle to Maryland, the agency turned to Atlantic Technology Group.

“There were a multitude of factors at the different locations that were causing the poor indoor signal, from RF blocking and building materials to the environment outside,” says Keegan Harrington, project

lead at Atlantic Technology Group.

To solve these coverage challenges for the agency, Atlantic Technology Group installed Cel-Fi QUATRA, an active DAS hybrid, at all 10 locations.

One agency location outside of Washington, D.C. was 240,000 square feet and had experienced cellular service issues since it was built. The building had a fire control laboratory where tests and investigations were done. Equipment to improve cellular coverage could not be installed inside the labs due to the type of testing that was done.

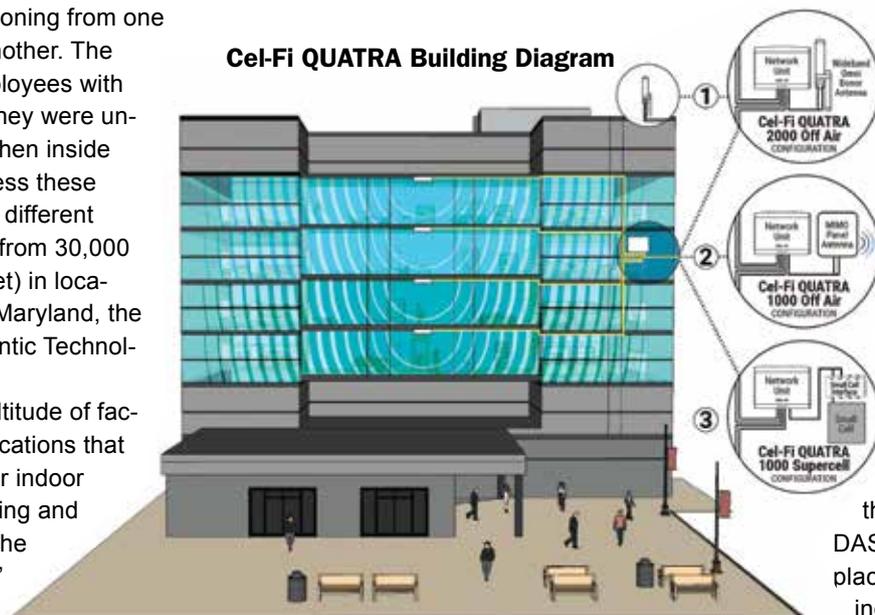
“There was terrible service in the laboratories, especially in the base-

ment. There were cinder block walls about two feet thick and a lot of windows,” says Harrington.

Atlantic Technology Group installed five network units (NUs), the head ends of the system, and put 20 coverage units (CUs) – which are the remote internal antennas – in the hallways and office space. It installed five MIMO antennas on the roof, wanting one antenna per NU to facilitate specific management of each individual NU.

“We weren’t allowed to put things in the labs, so we put coverage units in the hallways and office space to bleed through signal into the labs,” explains Harrington. “We were able to push

Cel-Fi QUATRA Building Diagram



through the windows and cinder blocks because system has 100 dB gain, so this strong signal made the bleed-through possible. With a passive DAS, you get only 72 dB gain.”

The other law enforcement agency locations had both similar and unique challenges, but according to Dan Connelly, president of Atlantic Technology Group, the active DAS hybrid was an effective solution for each. “We were able to go into 10 different locations, including some pretty big facilities, and within a few months got all these sites done to rapidly assist the client during their transition from one carrier to another.”

Nothing stops the news, except poor reception

The Atlantic Technology Group also was called in to help a major daily newspaper that relies on its corporate AT&T subscription to ensure staff are connected while working in its Washington D.C. newsroom. However, reporters and other employees on the AT&T network experienced spotty coverage and dropped calls when using their cellphones inside the eight-story building that spans a city block and houses the newspaper’s 350,000 sq. ft. headquarters.

“Reporters were actually walking outside the building to take their cell calls or were stuck near their desks waiting for

important calls to come in, which hurt productivity,” says Connelly. “They got a great signal outside, but the reception inside the building was really lousy.”

A multitude of factors – mainly its location in the heart of Washington D.C. and its building materials (concrete and glass) – were blocking AT&T cellular signals inside the building. The passive DAS that was already in place inside the office building did not improve the poor AT&T signal.

To resolve the problem, Atlantic Technology Group proposed Cel-Fi QUATRA, but before installing it throughout all eight floors, it agreed to set up one floor as a proof of concept using one NU and three CUs. Based on the initial results, the newspaper agreed to expand the installation to all eight floors.

Since the building is leased, Atlantic Technology Group also reviewed the site survey with the building owner and got its approval for antenna placement on top of the building.

“The nice thing about the Nextivity solution is that the antennas are very non-obtrusive. They’re relatively small in size, not these big satellite antennas.

Building owners are typically pleased with the size,” says Harrington.

Overcoming the obstacles

Washington D.C. is a very congested environment with a lot of interference from other cellular traffic. “In the heart of D.C., no matter where you are, inside buildings the signal doesn’t always give you a good signal-to-noise ratio,” explains Harrington. “It was pretty bad on the roof, and we had to move the antennas many times to get the best signal.”

According to Harrington, the company used the installation tools provided with the system to determine the best positioning of the antennas. “We used the Cel-Fi MIMO antennas, with data and voice on separate ports, and moved the antennas many times to get the best signal. We used Nextivity’s AntennaBoost solution to determine the best direction. Then we went into the individual NUs with Cel-Fi WAVE

to see the signal-to-noise ratio and looked at the RSRQ and RSRP, RSSI and SINR to see the gain we were getting. In the end, we had to point the external roof antennas down to get out of the noise area.”

Hard ceilings in the building were another issue encountered. This was resolved by putting the CUs in strategic locations, such as lights and access panels. Harrington explains that because the system utilizes Power over Ethernet (PoE) and RF over Ethernet, there was a lot of flexibility on where the coverage units could be placed.

“With PoE it is easier because you don’t have to find a source to light up your coverage unit. Not too many companies have power sources in the ceiling. You would have to get an electrician out to either put in power or power cables hanging from the ceiling, which wouldn’t work,” says Harrington. “The client also really liked

the way the coverage units look. They look like access points, so blend in well with their existing infrastructure.”

Atlantic Technology Group also was able to use the newspaper’s existing Cat 5e and Cat 6 runs. “This saved the client money and saved us time. I like working with Ethernet cable more than coax – it costs a lot less. It’s also thinner, so it doesn’t snag as much if I have to go through holes. It’s also easier to run. The installation would have taken at least an extra week to run the cable if we didn’t use the existing cable.”

Almost one year after installation, Harrington reports that the client hasn’t called with issues relating to cellular coverage. □



Tim Lewis is senior director channel sales, North America at Nextivity.

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Full Contact

Navigating the rise of the smart contact center

By **Gerald** Baldino

To say the customer experience (CX) is important would be a massive understatement.

Financial Executives International, for instance, recently referred to CX as the new currency of omnichannel retail. The majority of enterprises are now implementing advanced, data-driven CX strategies to better understand how their customers think and act.

Of course, the nature of data collection is in flux due to GDPR and the California Consumer Protection Act of 2018 (see p. 12), but looking forward, it's clear that big data and artificial intelligence will continue to be a main driver of CX initiatives.

It's important to realize, though, that a strong CX rating doesn't just happen on its own. CX is a massive ongoing production that requires having the right people, processes and systems in place. The contact center — often the first place a customer will interact with a brand — plays a pivotal

role in shaping it. Your customers that fail to modernize their contact centers and implement smart solutions will be left in the dust as their competitors skyrocket ahead in the coming years.

For agents, this should be a call to action.

The changing landscape

As customer expectations have changed in the digital era, so too have the challenges and needs of contact center managers.

Customers today spend most of their time on their computers and mobile devices, and have gotten a bit spoiled as a result. They expect seamless, fully optimized omnichannel support across all of their systems and have little patience when companies can't deliver. Some companies are now offering amazing omnichannel

support while others are lagging far behind. For consumers, the experience of moving back and forth between optimized and outdated channels can be jarring.

Digital, as Forrester explained in a recent report, is just one piece of the CX puzzle though.

“Enterprises should think beyond channels — and beyond just shifting conversations to digital channels,” Forrester stated. “They must focus on delivering the best experience based on context and inquiry type, including via chatbots, visual engagement, and voice interfaces.”

Strong customer service, Forrester continues, is not just about reducing expenses or streamlining backend processes. Rather, the company says, it requires a systematic reinvention of technology, data and operations. It involves leveraging automation, data and agents together to exploit their unique strengths.

Liveops echoed this sentiment in its recent “2018 Call Center Industry Report,” where the company described a top-flight — or fully-optimized — contact center as one where the company's customer experience is a “dynamic and evolving part of the organization's business processes.”

At the opposite end of the spectrum, traditional contact centers have “little

formal feedback process around customer experience.”

In many ways, what we are seeing in the contact center space mirrors what is happening in data centers, marketing and sales departments: Companies are shifting away from stagnant, legacy-based systems and processes in favor of agile, responsive strategies.

Massive Opportunity

The reality is that many businesses are far behind in their customer service efforts. Of the four potential categories that Liveops outlined for contact centers today (optimized, mature, developing and traditional), the vast majority fall into the least-two sophisticated categories: Traditional (23 percent) and developing (46 percent).

For agents, the goal should be to get all customers into the optimized category, where workforce is viewed as a competitive advantage and strategy is baked in to enable continuous improvement.

There is a tremendous opportunity at hand for agents that can identify businesses that fall into the lower tiers and help them improve their efforts.

Technologies to know

To capitalize on this opportunity, it will require having a working knowledge of the latest available technologies. Here are some of the smart tools that companies are working into their contact centers:

Artificial intelligence: AI is the driving force behind many of the contact center technologies that we see today, from interactive voice response systems (IVRs) to chatbots.

In a contact center setting, AI can be used for natural language processing or the ability for a computer to understand human language in real time, and make mechanical decisions to complete basic tasks. Natural language processing is often used in voice-based identity verification systems and IVRs.

Then there’s machine learning, which involves feeding computers large amounts of data, so they can “learn” how to better handle customer inquiries. Machine learning algorithms are being used in contact centers today to perform smart call routing, to reduce the amount of time that it takes for customers to reach the right agents.

Another form of AI is sentiment analysis, or the process of scanning customer chats, voice and

email interactions to read emotions. This type of software can help a business understand how customers are reacting to certain programs and initiatives.

According to Oracle, eight out of 10 businesses have already integrated or are planning to adopt AI as a customer service solution by 2020. The technology is rapidly improving, and it’s becoming more affordable for mid- to small-sized enterprises.

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Chatbots: Chatbots are automated programs that use AI to have real-time, text-based conversations with customers.

Since AI is still somewhat primitive, and limited in its scope, most companies using it today have a system in place that allows agents to oversee multiple automated chats and jump in for seamless live experience when it's needed. This system allows the computer to do most of the heavy lifting, but also makes it possible to intervene at a moment's notice. When properly orchestrated, a customer will never know whether he or she is speaking with a chatbot.

With a chatbot program, an agent can do the job of five or more people at once — saving money, while improving productivity.

Workforce optimization: In a traditional contact center setting, managers have limited tools for interacting with agents. In this type of setting, agents are typically only spot-checked for quality, security and productivity. This results in low agent engagement and high turnover.

Workforce optimization software, such as the kind offered by Aspect, puts a contact center manager directly inside of the contact center platform for real-time coaching, feedback and analytics.

Research shows workforce optimization is incredibly effective, too. According to one study, organizations with high employee engagement outperformed their competitors by 202 percent.

CRM integration: Some unified communications providers, such as Star2Star, offer services that can pull

data from a customer relationship management (CRM) system and integrate it with the organization's phone system. With CRM integration, agents can have immediate access to a wealth of information that would otherwise go unused in a backend database.

Self Service: A balancing act

When speaking to administrators about investing in smart contact center services, agents are likely to receive questions about self-service — especially if they are pushing automated systems.

Proceed with caution here. Many executives today are interested in using self service to lower telecommunications and staffing costs, and to make service easier for customers. If abused, though, it can have a negative impact on a business's overall reputation. Take Uber as an example; the company makes it very difficult, if not impos-

sible, to contact customer service by phone and has received a considerable amount of backlash as a result.

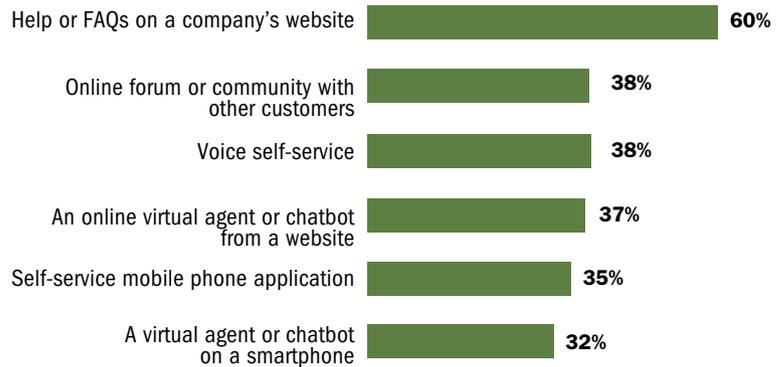
Radial found that 80 percent of consumers prefer to try and resolve their issues online first before contacting customer service. So there is nothing wrong with setting up a knowledge database or using chatbots to provide fast and efficient assistance. Just keep in mind that automated tools are limited in their capabilities. Only 32 percent of customers that have used IVR, for instance, say it was sufficient for their needs. Thirty-seven percent will bypass an IVR completely to reach a live agent.

Remind sales prospects that there are certain processes that simply require a human touch. For this reason, any business offering self-service should provide speedy access to a live agent. It's okay to push customers toward self-service, as long as you throw them a life raft that they can grab if they cannot solve a problem on their own.

If there's one thing to remember above all else when advising customers about smart contact center services, it's that there is no one magic solution that can streamline the entire process. The contact center services industry is completely saturated, and there are many different providers all claiming to offer one-stop-shops that can streamline support.

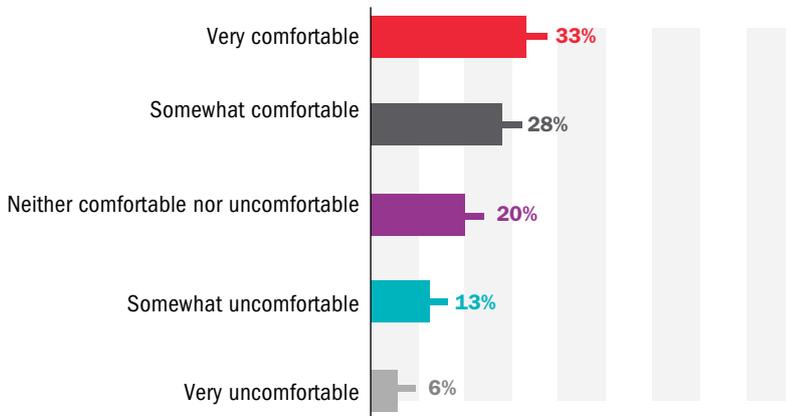
Many of these technologies, however, are expensive and unnecessary. So it's important to be discerning when shopping for technologies, and to be wary of vendors offering the latest and greatest solutions. □

Which of the following self-service channels have you used in the past 12 months?



Source: Forrester; among U.S. online adults

How comfortable are consumers with Artificial Intelligence?



Source: Radial

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The Dawn of DevOps in Corporate IT

By **Martin** Vilaboy

For provider of cloud services, DevOps is practically a given. Developers at Google, Amazon, Netflix, and others can spend significant resources on this IT practice of linking software development with software operation.

Within traditional corporate IT organizations, however, DevOps has limited adoption relative to other practices, according to an IT management best practices survey recently compiled by research firm Computer Economics.

“Nevertheless, this is beginning to change, as IT organizations realize the benefits of continuous development and continuous delivery for customer-facing and strategic in-house developed system,” said CE researchers.

For the less initiated, DevOps is a mashup of the words development and operations, denoting an organizational model with a set of processes and tools that promote collaboration between software developers and IT operations

and applications, allowing frequent deployment of system changes, explained Computer Economic.

Traditional software change management processes treat development, testing and deployment as discrete steps carried out by different IT organizational units, explained Computer Economics. Software developers build a new release of the system, another group is responsible for testing and the operations group is responsible for applying the new release to the production environment. There are typically checklists and approvals at each step, and the whole process can take months or even years.

Under DevOps, developers are empowered to build, test and commit small changes directly into the production environment. New releases are rolled out incrementally as a series of smaller changes that can be implemented much more quickly than under the traditional model.

In software development firms, SaaS providers in particular, DevOps is a well-established model for software change management. But a sizeable 46 percent of survey respondents – which were primarily traditional

corporate IT organizations – do not practice DevOps at any level.

“For many tech providers, DevOps is engrained in the culture,” said Tom Dunlap, director of research for Computer Economics, an IT analyst firm based in Irvine, Calif. “But too many traditional IT organizations, if they’ve heard of DevOps at all, just assume it’s not for them. This is a mistake. IT leaders need to think about how they can apply DevOps for in-house written systems where the pace of change is high – or, if the rate of change could be increased, it would represent a competitive advantage.”

DevOps is a natural extension of agile development, said CE. “Just as agile development builds software in small, iterative build cycles, so DevOps applies enhancements as small incremental changes that are committed daily, hourly or even moment-by-moment into the production system,” said the research firm.

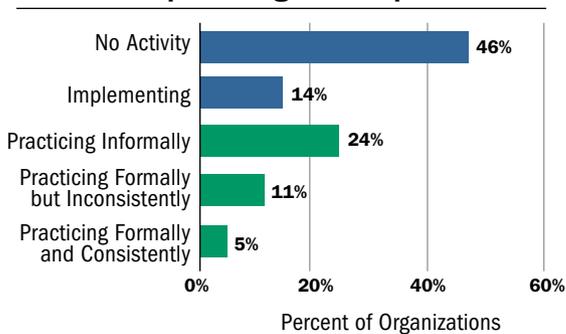
According to Tracy Corbo, analysts with 451 Research, DevOps is critical to IT departments as they embrace digital transformation.

“Organizations that have integrated their IT and applications teams and embraced dev/ops are well ahead of the curve,” argued Corbo. “Because applications are the fuel that powers the digital transformation engine. Companies that lack the benefit of a collaborative app/dev team will lag in the transition.”

Still, only 20 percent of the IT departments surveyed by 451 report that their IT organizations have integrated their developer and application teams.

“It is still early days in the shift away from siloed IT teams,” said Corbo. □

Practice Adoption Stages: DevOps



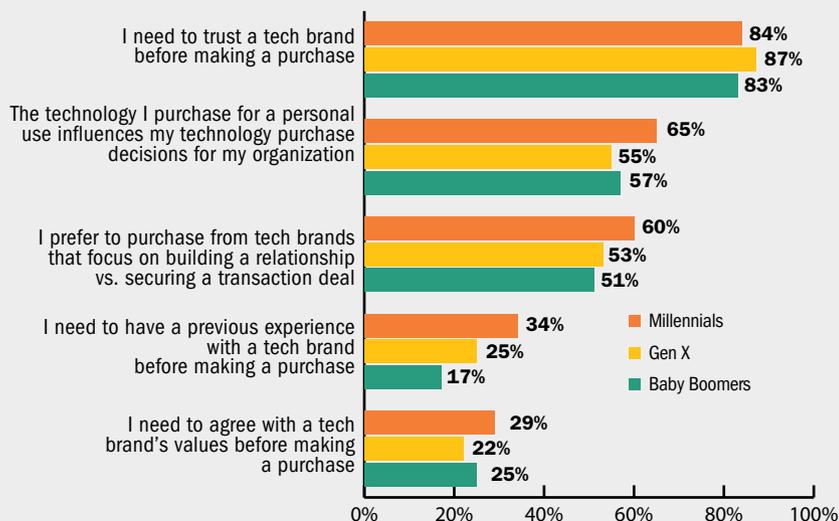
Source: Computer Economics

Tech Purchase Decisions by Generation

Despite the noise that millennials are so different from previous generations, at least some IT purchase considerations are fairly consistent across generational cohorts, suggest surveys of Spiceworks' member base. Trust, not

surprisingly, is a key consideration for all, and the need to build a relationship or some level of familiarity is most important among millennials, suggesting simple search and social posts are far from enough to close a deal.

Percent of IT buyers who agree or strongly agree with each statement



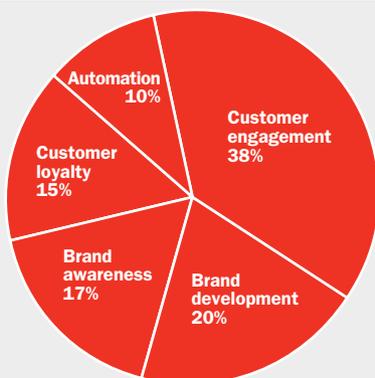
Source: Spiceworks

Customer Engagement is King

Brand building and brand awareness have taken a back seat to customer engagement, at least in terms of marketers and their technology investments. A February survey of 504 U.K and U.S. marketers by OnBrand and Bynder found that the number one motivation for investing in emerging technologies is to drive customer engagement.

Primary Motivation for Investing in Emerging Technologies According to UK and US Marketers,

% of respondents



Source: OnBrand; Bynder; eMarketer

Offshoring IT Help Losing its Luster

According to a study from technology staffing firm Genesis10, the appeal of offshored IT work has declined significantly in favor of domestic outsourcing strategies. While the use of offshore sourcing has been almost a default position for realizing labor savings, recent moves have been toward domestic strategies that include contracting with third-parties to staff teams offsite as well as workforce augmentation. Indeed, moving forward, only 11 percent of survey respondents are looking offshore to acquire talent while 46 percent are outsourcing domestically.

"As we expected, there is a growing realization that sending work offshore often translates to decreased productivity, security risks and hidden costs that negate intended cost savings," said Genesis10 CEO Harley Lippman.

During the past several years, enterprises have invested significantly in acquiring technologies capable of yielding increased operational efficiency, more profitability and higher customer satisfaction, said Lippman. Now they have turned their focus to effectively leveraging these investments in order to implement tech-driven business strategies faster and better than their competition. At the same time, the supply of talent with the necessary skills, experience and training to lead and staff these initiatives is historically tight.

In turn, 70 percent of the companies surveyed are rounding out their mission-critical delivery teams with outside contract workers who can seamlessly integrate into projects and who intuitively understand the relationship between project goals and business impact.

"Companies have placed huge bets on IT modernization, and the data is clear," Lippman said. "With no margin for error and a tight market for talent, there is a critical mass looking outside the enterprise for talent management solutions that allow them to separate from the pack and then maintain market leadership. Staff augmentation, training and domestic outsourcing are proving to be the key ingredients."

Bring Value to B2B Sales Cycles

It's often reported that B2B buyers frequently fully define their needs before engaging with a sales person and identify specific solutions before ever reaching out. What might be lost in these realizations, however, is a change in the value buyers place in the role of the sales rep.

According to a CSO Insights global survey of 500 B2B decision-makers responsible for making purchases greater than \$10,000 at companies with revenue of \$250 million or more, just 23 percent of B2B buyers view sellers as a top resource for solving business problems, while less than a third say sales reps exceed their expectations, and 68 percent see little to no difference between vendors.

"B2B sellers must adjust by bringing insights and expertise into the sales process," said Seleste Lunsford, managing director of CSO Insights. "Sales reps today must add value beyond simply facilitating transactions, or they run the risk of being replaced by technology."

Even so, the study found that buyers still want to engage with sales reps under the right circumstances. Two-thirds of B2B buyers still find value in discussing their needs with salespeople, and only 3 percent want to make all their purchases online and never work with sellers again. In addition, a full 90 percent of buyers are open to engaging sellers earlier in the buying process, especially when facing a new, risky or complex situation.

All told, B2B buyers are looking for reps that demonstrate high levels of customer knowledge, leverage superior communications skills, present a results-orientation and educate buyers with perspective. Of course, none of these register as new buyer requirements, but the CSO Insights study suggest that few consistently excel at these competencies.

"Unfortunately, sales organizations continue to fall short," Lunsford said. "The ability to provide buyers with perspective offers the most promise for differentiation. Sellers must bring ideas, shape vision and make customers aware of solutions they hadn't considered."

In other words, said Lunsford, "There are no short-cuts."



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Survey Says: Cloud Better for IT Budgets

IT organizations continue on a path of steady but modest growth in operational budgets, while capital budgets and hiring are essentially flat, according to an annual study by Computer Economics. And these trends, said the research firm, are tangible evidence of the effects of cloud computing on corporate IT budgets.

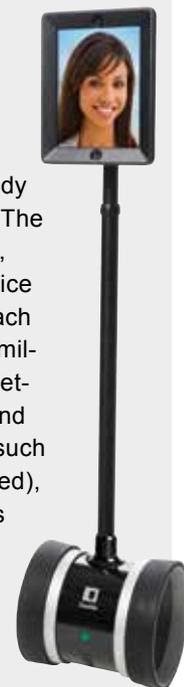
IT organizations have decreased capital spending from 24 percent of total IT spending in 2013 to 18 percent in 2017, show Computer Economics' figures. The main reason for the shift from capex to opex is that cloud infrastructure and software-as-a-service afford greater elasticity and do not require large capital investments to purchase computer hardware or software licenses.

"Unless you are an IT equipment manufacturer, this is good news," said David Wagner, vice president, research

at Computer Economics. "The cloud transition is far from over, and we're already seeing more efficient IT departments, particularly on a cost-per-user basis, which is at a new low. Business applications and network infrastructure are the top areas of new IT spending while the data center, for the first time, is at the bottom. We take this as a sign the cloud transformation is continuing in earnest." In terms of where IT spending is focused this year: the survey shows that IT executives are investing more of their budgets in business applications, networking, security and end-user devices. "More evidence of this is the finding that data center spending is not much of a priority at all," said CE researchers, "as IT departments shift some of their workload off-premises and increase efficiency for what remains in the data center with virtualization and automation."

Telepresence Robots

A trend that's slowly picking up speed in the modern workplace is the use of telepresence robot devices, according to a study by Wintergreen Research. The firm forecasts that by 2022, the telepresence robot device market is anticipated to reach \$7 billion — up from \$825 million in 2015. From DIY tablet-on-a-stick setups to high-end offerings from developers such as Double Robotics (pictured), such solutions are billed as another way to enable employees to work from any location while also being virtually active in the corporate office. □



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Stacking Your Channel



Three questions to qualify partners

By **Wayne** Monk

Behind most every successful enterprise technology company is an equally successful channel — comprising a network of partners dedicated to extending an organization's reach and enhancing its sales performance.

Channel partners are integral modules in a company's go-to-market (GTM) machine, with 36 percent of companies surveyed by CSO Insights reporting that their top-tier partners generate more than 70 percent of all channel revenues. The best partners are true assets — adding complementary solutions and strengthening sales capacity to enrich business value — but when they're not the right fit, they can throw a wrench into the system.

Before investing time, energy and trust into a channel partner network, companies should take time to qualify what a potential partner brings to the table. Channel partners are only effective if they truly understand an organization's solution and its value to the market — and are willing to fully embrace it. To cultivate the most strategic channel, companies can ask these crucial questions throughout their partner selection process.

What is success and does the partner have a business plan with clear objectives and supporting go-to-market activities to build sufficient demand to achieve it?

It is very important to understand how a partner defines success. They may express success using totally different metrics than the vendor, which ultimately measures success in customer acquisition and/or the number of wins/orders. Vendors should work with their partners to build a revenue plan projecting wins during the next 18 to 24 months and ensure the GTM plan delivers enough impressions to drive adequate pipeline to support the projected revenue.

The vendor should be able to use industry standard conversion metrics to ensure there are sufficient impressions to drive the number of wins required to achieve success. If the GTM plan is credible, the vendor should be willing to

invest resources and develop funds to help the partner execute the plan and close the business.

Is the prospect's market coverage and customer reach sufficient to reach the business goals the company is trying to achieve?

No matter how dedicated partners are to driving GTM strategy, they need the tools and means to do it. By asking smart, comprehensive questions about a prospective partner's sales, network and internal organization, companies can confirm if they have the reach and coverage needed to expand business. When it comes to assessing a potential partner's coverage, companies should look at its sales and marketing capacity, asking questions such as:

- **How many sales representatives does it have?** Are they field or inside representatives? In the enterprise software field, it's important to have a field sales team that can meet with clients in person to represent the solution and its related business outcomes.
- **Where are they located?** Customers often prefer buying from people they have relationships with. Channel partners selling enter-

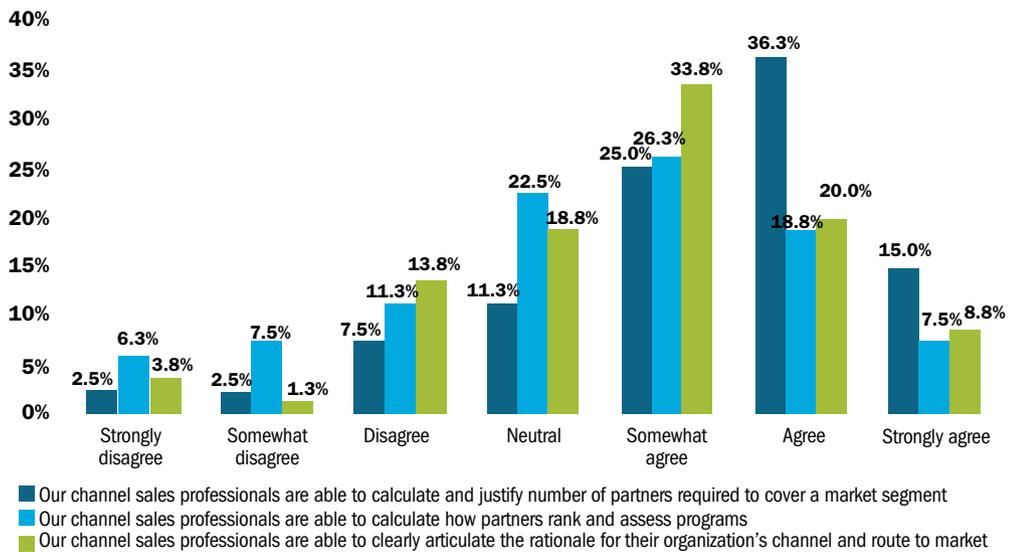
prise software often reside within a four-hour drive of most of their clients.

- **Does it have a dedicated marketing team?** If so, how big is it? Marketing reach can provide a significant value add for companies. If a partner has an in-house marketing database with thousands of active contacts, a company may only need one partner to reach a target market segment.
- **How many customers does it have?** Does it have the network to help reach

nesses should have a complete understanding of their partner's capitalization and current financial position. And, in addition to having the required capital, companies must determine that a partner is willing to invest to achieve and sustain growth.

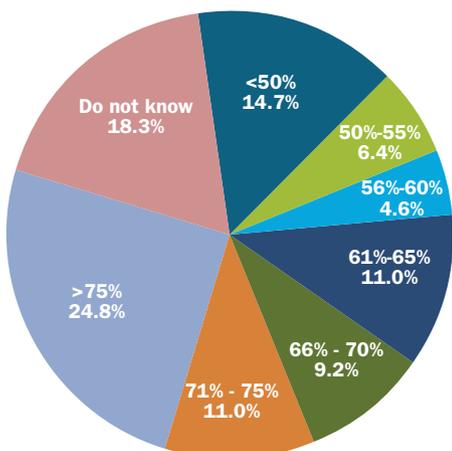
Addressing these questions and finding the right partners can take time, patience and resources — especially since the success of the channel can depend on each

Channel Sales' Core Fundamentals



Source: CSO Insights; Miller Heiman Group

Revenue Generated by Top 20% of Channel Partners



Source: CSO Insights; Miller Heiman Group

new buyers? Companies can more accurately estimate ROI by measuring a potential partner's market reach. Companies can first determine the size of the market and then how many customers the prospect engages on a frequent and meaningful basis.

While coverage may be one of the key indicators of a quality channel partner, companies must also ensure that the prospect can demonstrate the technical expertise needed to understand the company's solution and position the value proposition to targeted customers.

Is the partner willing to make investments to achieve growth and sustain it?

To ensure prospects can follow through on their commitment, busi-

nesses should have a complete understanding of their partner's capitalization and current financial position. Once a pool of partners is selected and trained on the product, it's crucial that companies define success, set objectives supported by clear metrics and align business goals and values up front. That way, partners will understand how their performance will be evaluated from the get-go, and the best ones will rise to the challenge.

Building out a channel can be demanding, but finding and teaming up with high-quality channel partners can bring a company to places it's never been, both in the markets it's reaching and the revenue it's raking in. □

Wayne Monk is senior vice president of global alliance and channel sales at ASG Technologies.



Silent Partners

As clients demand more sophisticated services and better protection, MSPs must integrate with companies that offer complementary technologies

By **Larry** Thompson

Roland Technology Group, a managed IT services and consulting group operating out of Plano, Texas, had a client that was constantly losing contract bids and couldn't figure out why.

"A rival company just happens to bid a little under the client, time after time," recalls Roland CIO Ken Nix. After using user activity monitoring and user behavior analytics (UBA) software, "We discovered an individual at the client company whose spouse worked for the competitor. It became obvious the employee was leaking sensitive information about bids to his spouse. That software allows me to track something suspicious as it happens, sending me an alert and letting me play back the activity for the last 30 days."

Nine in 10 companies feel vulnerable to insider threats, according to a 2018 survey of cybersecurity professionals by Crowd Research Partners, to say nothing of their exposure to outsider attacks such as ransomware.

But that's not the only thing the clients of managed service providers (MSPs) worry about. They're concerned about the accidental, as well as deliberately malicious, extraction of sensitive information. They fret about employees who aren't pulling their weight. And, as contractors of various sorts, they want to make sure they are compliant with regulations in place, such as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), which safeguards private medical information, and NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology), which manages cybersecurity risk.

Increasingly, MSPs need to provide a full suite of vital services to clients, many of whom are too small to have an IT team to oversee the most dangerous threats to their business-

es or to ensure they're abiding by the laws. On the other hand, not every MSP is equipped to satisfy all those needs. But they can extend their reach by partnering and integrating their platforms with companies that offer additional or complementary technologies.

Steve Fredricksen, a network engineer at Stacey & Dennis IT Solutions, a Klamath Falls, Ore.-based MSP, recalls the case of a client that was experiencing sudden spikes in internet usage. This customer was a medical firm with fairly predictable online activity by employees.

"We picked up that anomaly through a big jump in traffic—and we used user activity monitoring software to verify and pinpoint the par-

A Roland client had its suspicions about employees in a certain department that didn't seem to be working very hard. According to Nix, "They were constantly going to management and complaining, 'We can't get all our work done; we're so busy we need more people to help!'" A bit of user activity monitoring suggested strongly that the request for extra hands was a coverup for low productivity. "You had four people in the department, and two of them spent a lot of time on social media and visiting websites," Nix explained. The most productive work seemed to be filling online shopping carts.

The issue of compliance comes up for a lot of MSP clients. Although HIPAA requirements have been around more than two decades, some companies still aren't equipped to deal with

"When you apply for a DoD contract, you have to answer very specific questions and have your logbook set up to show you're certified," Nix explained. User behavior analytic and user activity monitoring software offer proof of compliance without which, said Nix, "your contract with the government can be canceled."

Intentional bad behavior by employees isn't the only thing that can get companies into trouble. Cybersecurity experts say the most common variety of insider threat is inadvertent, and two out of three such episodes occur when employees fall victim to a phishing attempt and mistakenly reveal sensitive data or expose the company to some kind of malware.

According to Fredricksen, Stacey & Dennis had a law firm client that made frequent use of FedEx, particularly through emails. "The front desk people started opening them. One came in that had the colors, the format, and the font just right. An employee opened it up thinking, 'It's FedEx, nothing bad here.' But there was an encryption program embedded in the email, set to do a lot of damage." Using user behavior analytics software, "we did a targeted recovery – finding the user and what files were affected – and were able to help restore the system a lot faster."

Partnering with complementary technology providers not only help MSPs round out vital security services, it becomes instrumental in expanding their businesses. "As outsourced IT, we have a responsibility to provide the best solution to our customers so they can maintain usability and productivity for their systems," Fredricksen said.

"Having a full package enhances our ability to sell our products," added Nix. "Prospective clients think, 'Why go somewhere else?'" □

Larry Thompson is president of Veriato, which provides employee activity monitoring and behavior analytics software for business, government and education.

► What type(s) of insiders pose the biggest security risk to organizations?*



Source: Crowd Research Partners; CA Technologies

ticular machine and its activity. Then we started to go over the course of a 14-hour shift. We watched for a week, compiled the information, and found that a certain person had had Facebook auto-playing all day long on the machine." And how did the culprit respond when confronted? "Originally, the person claimed Facebook was on in the background. We presented the activity information and said, 'Unfortunately, that's not true.'" Stacey & Dennis merely reported the findings to the client but declined to make a recommendation about how to discipline the employee.

all the complexities involved with protecting patient privacy.

By discrete monitoring of employee activity, we make it possible to verify employees are doing what they should be doing, along with ensuring that the right protocols are being implemented as they should," said Stacey & Dennis' Fredricksen. "That lets companies apply corrective action early so they can leverage the dollars they're spending to maximize output."

NIST certification for contractors with the Pentagon started just this year. Lack of compliance carries stiff penalties.

Involta Announces Hybrid Cloud Management Platform

Involta announced the launch of Involta Hybrid Cloud, a platform that connects a company's multi-cloud environment enabling a single, easy-to-use cloud provisioning and management system. The platform reportedly allows a company's IT department to optimize its cloud service experience over a blend of cloud infrastructure locations and vendors by delivering automated control and deployment of resources.

"Today's business lives in multi-cloud environments that combine solutions across the public cloud, private clouds and hybrid clouds, but companies struggle deciding what belongs where and optimizing the use of their environments to meet changing organizational needs," said Bruce Lehrman, Involta founder and CEO. "Involta Hybrid Cloud allows companies the ability to manage all of their cloud infrastructure in one convenient place and respond rapidly to organizational changes."

Involta Hybrid Cloud allows IT departments to centrally control varying workloads, instantly expand or decrease compute and storage needs, automate patching, monitoring and backup schedules and standardize functions such as security measures and billing.

"One of the biggest problems our clients experience is around their ability to scale management of cloud workloads," Lehrman said. "IT staffs are being asked to fill infrastructure requests quicker, coordinate resources and security and move more workloads to the cloud without the tools needed to optimize tracking, usage and costs in a multi-cloud world. With Involta Hybrid Cloud, the size of an organization's IT department is no longer a limitation when it comes to managing a multi-cloud environment."

Involta will be offering this new service in all of its markets nationwide.

BCM One Enhances SD-WAN with Versa Network-aaS

BCM One has added the VergX Versa's Network-as-a-Service (VNaaS) offering to its select SD-WAN ecosystem, offering its agent channel and enterprise clients another reliable SD-WAN choice to support their underlying communications infrastructures. The VNaaS offering, which is built on the Versa cloud-native, multi-tenant software platform and comprehensive suite of networking and security services, provides fully managed SD-WAN and SD-security services.

The BCM One engineering team recommends and relies on the VNaaS solution especially for its advanced SD-WAN, next-generation firewall and unified threat management, as well as for its ease of deployments with real-time access to application routing, network performance, next-gen firewall settings and advanced network analytics, said the company.

"The combination of the feature-rich Versa software, coupled with sales-enablement tools and operational efficiencies from VergX, empowered us to make a very valuable decision to partner with VergX and the VNaaS offering," stated John Cunningham, founder and co-CEO of BCM One. "This partnership allows us to offer our partners and clients a multi-tenant platform-based approach which really rounds out our select SD-WAN offerings to our client base."

Virtualization Eases Workload Migration

When 451 Research asked IT managers what are the easiest on-premises environments to migrate, a resounding 75 percent said virtualized environments to other virtualized environments, making this the hands-down winner. In sharp contrast, non-virtualized environment migrating to other non-virtualized environments pose the

biggest challenge according to 39% of respondents.

"However, the hope is that this will change in the near term, as 80 percent of these same organizations expect to be automated with some manual exception handling (49%) or even fully automated (31%) over the next two years," said 451 analyst Tracy Corbo.

Monitoring the Multi-Cloud

Maintaining end-to-end visibility into the cloud's impact on user experience is vital but very difficult, suggests a CIO survey by Dynatrace. Each major provider comes with its own monitor-

ing system, so IT teams are forced to spend time instrumenting monitoring processes on every new cloud they add to the mix. Even some of the solutions, such as containerized infra-

structure, can add to the problem by obscuring visibility. Dynatrace argues that AI eventually must be deployed to handle the complexities of the cloud-native world.



For Ultimate Data Center Security, Technology Alone is Not the Answer

By **Arturo** Maqueo

The security of data – and in particular people’s personal data – has been a hot topic in recent months. The EU’s rollout of new GDPR regulations; the Cambridge Analytica scandal; or the seemingly weekly revelations of financial institutions or consumer service providers which have had their databases hacked, are all examples most of us will be aware of.

Less often discussed but just as important as the security of our data is the security of the data centers that house it. And at first glance, identifying, reviewing and prioritizing all the elements that a data center must contain in terms of security would appear to be a very complex subject, depending on myriad variables including facility size, organization type, service commitments, system complexity, customer requirements ... the list goes on.

However, independent of the variables mentioned above, data center security can be boiled down to just two areas – physical security and operational security. And while both of these clearly depend to a great extent on technology, the single most important element is the establishment of appropriate policies, processes and operating procedures – and critically, of course, actually following them.

Unfortunately, over the years we have seen many examples of security – both physical and operational – being seriously compromised through the lack of clear and

well-defined security processes and procedures. And ironically, we have seen this most often in data center facilities that had state-of-the-art security equipment installed. For example, implementing the latest and most sophisticated biometric access systems does not, by itself, ensure that supposedly secure areas are actually secure and that access is fully controlled. On the contrary, I have witnessed unauthorised and unsupervised personnel wander in and out of secure areas at will. The failure here not being due to any fault with the access control equipment itself but to appropriate security protocols not being implemented or maintained.

As for operational security, a standard requirement for any modern data center is to have redundancy capabilities fully integrated in order to ensure continuous operation even if disaster strikes. And for many data center operators’ customers, this is non-negotiable, given their dependence on the often mission-critical systems the data centers house.

However, just as with ensuring physical security, implementing systems for fully redundant facility operation is not simply a matter of installing more of the latest equipment. Ensuring data center redundancy is a hugely complex undertaking. Initial design is clearly important, as is the correct installation and interlinking of redundant systems, whether for power, cooling, monitoring or communications. But most important of all, once again, are the protocols and procedures that must be implemented and followed in order to ensure that redundant gear actually kicks in to action if and when it needs to.

Regardless of whether the data center in question is hyperscale or a relatively small edge facility, having the right processes in place and the right people following them are typically what makes the difference between, on the one hand, a data center’s security being fully maintained and on the other, a catastrophic failure.

So when securing even the most technical of environments, technology is only part of the answer. Without the disciplined application of associated policies and processes, success cannot be guaranteed. After all, the best tools in the

tool box are of little value without the appropriate knowledge and experience to use them. □

Arturo Maqueo is regional sales engineering director LATAM, Flexenclosure.



Firing on All Cylinders

Telesystem and Line Systems Inc. are now unified as a single brand. Here's what you can expect to see moving forward.



Telesystem announced in July that its four-year transition into a unified brand with LSI was officially complete, signaling the start of an exciting new chapter for the voice and networking provider.

"We wanted to make sure folks understood that the team they've grown to trust at LSI would remain intact, and that we would continue to maintain the confidence they have developed," said Telesystem CRO and EVP Warren Reyburn, formerly of LSI, who elaborated on why the company chose to undergo such a long gestation period. "Our goal was to ensure people get the message that continuity would remain at the forefront of our migration."

Reyburn spoke about what unification means for Telesystem's partners and customers.

"It's the marriage of a type 1 service model based in northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan to a type 2 provider represented by the legacy OSI group, and the coming together of those entities with over 21,000 locations serviced across the globe," Reyburn explained. "We have customers in 46 states, four international destinations and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Plus, the company has nearly 35 network-to-network interfaces (NNIs), with over 75 interconnection points. So we are very, very sensitive to diversity and geo-redundancy. We are also considering expanding to 100G in Chicago and Atlanta, and will be cutting the ribbon on our new Denver PoP within the next 60 days."

That move, Reyburn said, will

mark the tertiary deployment of Telesystem's Metaswitch platform, featuring a fully redundant data core in addition to the company's award-winning DDoS mitigation hardware.

Telesystem is also working on enhancing its voice platform. Customers will be able to fail across geographic and platform-diverse systems.

"This diversity is resonating within the agent community," Reyburn said. "We have channel management resources now in Miami, and soon to be in Denver, Toledo and the Mid-Atlantic region. The partnerships we now boast include companies like Telarus, TCG, CNSG, TBI and Telegra — all of the big hitters."

Part of the reason for Telesystem's recent success has been its ability to help multi-location, geographically disparate enterprises with its SD-WAN offering (which is available with or without security) and reliable voice service.

"Simply put, calls do not drop on our platform," Reyburn said. "We also go the extra mile by adding LTE failover, and we are able to aggregate a wide range of broadband connections."

One organization that has benefited from Telesystem's service is the HoneyBaked Ham Company. Telesystem was able to aggregate seven different broadband providers into a single invoice for the company. Tele-

system also implemented a single monitoring platform.

"We are taking ownership of the relationships with those seven disparate broadband carriers," Reyburn said. "That's powerful when you boil it down."

According to Reyburn, new Telesystem partners and customers will experience firsthand what the LSI family has known about for years: An unrelenting commitment to accountability.

"One of the things we take a lot of pride in is being true and available," Reyburn said, before explaining how the company goes above and beyond to take care of its customers. "For example, if someone wants to add a location and it's not a part of our current portfolio, we have gone out and negotiated wholesale agreements to accommodate their needs. We are willing to be creative and agile, and that's one of our big differentiators when you ask how we stack up against the big boys. We have the products and services to go toe-to-toe with the behemoths, but we spare the customer many of the bureaucratic elements that come with larger organizations."

Proof of the company's success, Reyburn pointed out, can be seen with its astounding sub-1 percent attrition rate.

"We are hyper-focused on retention, and mitigating attrition," Reyburn said. "Being in the sub-1 percent level puts us right at the top of the industry."

The company, it should be noted, surveys customers annually as well as after every installation and ticket closure.

"We are constantly looking for feedback to reinforce our accountability," Reyburn said. "Where we make mistakes we atone for as much, and that's where we can make a huge difference in the marketplace." □



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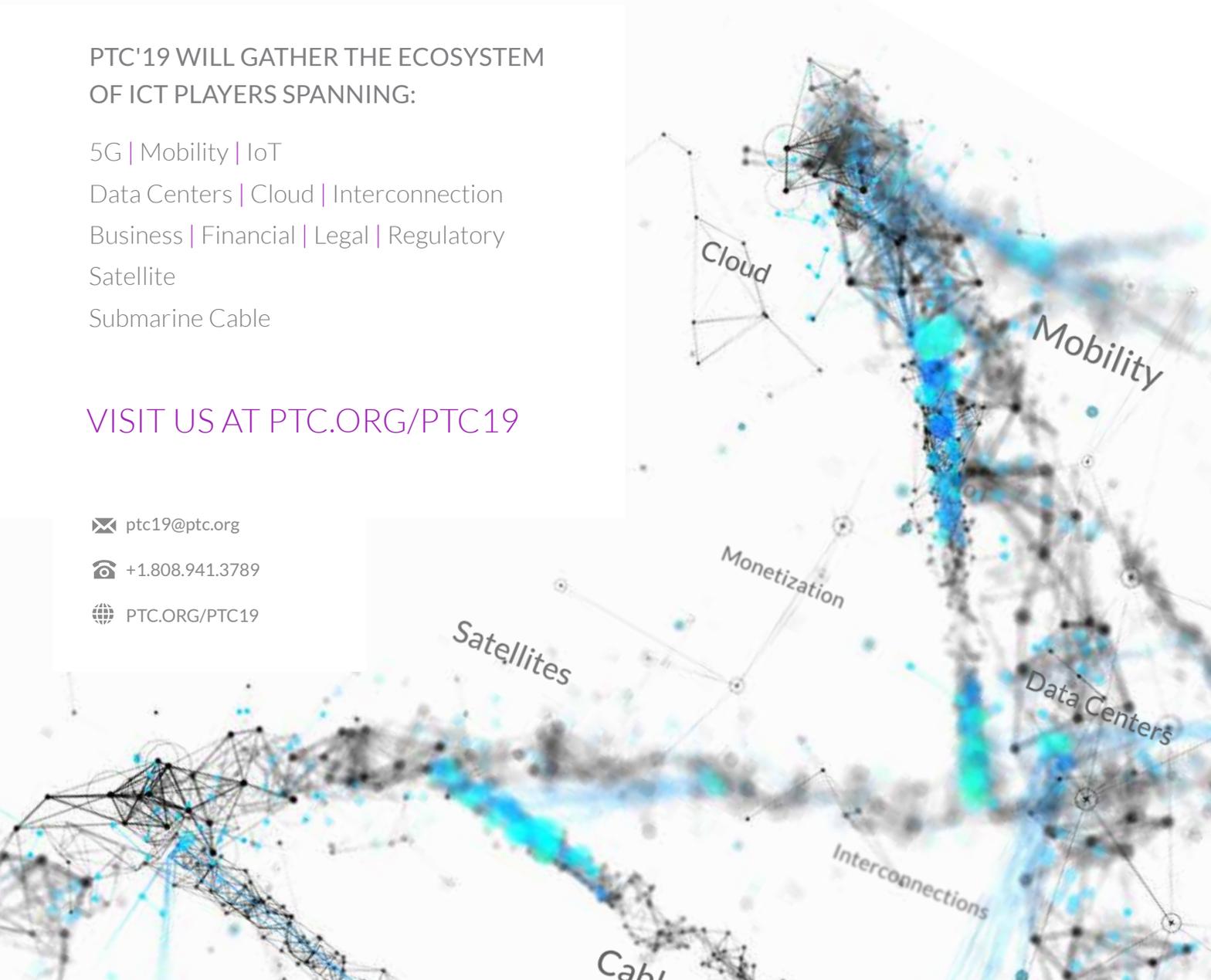
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BullsEye Launches VirtualTech

BullsEye recently launched a diagnostic testing product called VirtualTech — a remote diagnostic tool that isolates root causes for intermittent and chronic network issues and provides non-invasive troubleshooting as well as VoIP readiness testing without disrupting day-to-day business operations, said BullsEye.

Using an on-premises device, VirtualTech provides real-time, synthetic testing for advanced diagnostic scans such as “VoIP trickle” and UDP capacity. Examples include circuit review

(packet loss, jitter, and upstream/downstream latency); VoIP mean opinion score (MOS); firewall port assessment (for different CPE and edge devices); and TCP/UDP stress testing for internet, VoIP and UC. It also allows for real-time, 4,6,8 and 24-hour testing periods.

The solution is available to BullsEye’s VoIP and broadband customers as an add-on service, and as a stand-alone service to companies that receive broadband and VoIP services through another carrier.

Fusion Hires Fair as New Channel Chief

Fusion has hired Michael Fair to manage its channel sales programs and to integrate and consolidate the company’s partner program following the recent acquisitions of Birch and MegaPath.

Fair has more than 30 years of experience creating, managing and integrating channel programs. He’s held key leadership roles at Charter, EarthLink, One Communications and Qwest. Most recently, Fair served as managing partner at MarketRace.

Fair’s hiring is a key step in CRO Dan Foster’s plan to build his sales and marketing and leadership team with a

strong focus on the indirect channel.

“A successful channel program is critical to Fusion’s ambitious plan to scale. As we combine our offerings, teams and programs following the recent acquisitions of MegaPath and Birch, it is essential that we build on each company’s existing success in the channel to create a unified sales and marketing organization with expertise that spans our combined companies,” said Foster. “Michael’s experience and knowledge of the industry make him perfectly suited to lead this effort, and I am excited to welcome him to our sales team.”

AireSpring Updates AirePBX Hosted Phone System

AireSpring has released an update for its AirePBX’s CommPortal User Interface (UI). AirePBX CommPortal has undergone a GUI refresh, giving the program a modern, updated look while retaining all features and functions.

The major update introduces support for 911 emergency call notification. Administrators can identify up to five individuals to be immediately notified by phone call, email or both whenever an individual within the

organization calls 911. And if a caller can’t convey important details, other staff members can do so while pointing first responders to the right location. This technology is especially useful for healthcare facilities, government organizations and schools.

AireSpring’s new CommPortal UI is compatible with Adobe Flash, mobile devices and multiple plugins. It also features a restructured, user-friendly dashboard.

Reinvent Strengthens Engineering, Partner Support Teams

Reinvent Telecom has added two VoIP engineers and a partner success specialist to support the growth of its white-label reseller partner program for cloud-based UC, collaboration and contact center services.

The new hires include Jake Livingstone, VoIP engineer III; Nija Richie, VoIP engineer I; and Adrienne Jones, partner support specialist.

The partner program is supported by experienced technical, sales and marketing professionals who assist resellers with planning, launching and selling UCaaS, conferencing and collaboration, contact center and SIP trunking solutions, said the company. The recent hires will strengthen those efforts as the company continues to sign new reseller partners and scale.

BCN Partners with AVANT to Expand Channel Reach

BCN has signed an agreement with AVANT to engage and enable sales partners to design and deploy entire, truly customized solutions from POTS, PRI and broadband to SD-WAN, 4G wireless backup and fully managed equipment and network monitoring services.

BCN is 100 percent channel-focused and offers single-source solutions for custom-configured voice, data, wireless and cloud services based on a portfolio of more than 75 underlying wholesale network providers.

“We are excited to offer our trusted advisor channel partners the power of BCN to deliver nationwide multi-product, multi-carrier solutions with billing for all services consolidated into one monthly invoice,” commented Shane McNamara, AVANT executive vice president. “BCN is a winning addition to the AVANT Communications portfolio. You can find them listed in our award-winning AVANT BattleApp.”

Globalgig Grows Channel Program with AVANT

Globalgig has signed an agreement with AVANT in a move that will empower AVANT's channel partners to develop next-generation IT technology leveraging its fully managed global wireless and mobility solutions.

A global MVNO providing wireless connectivity to more than 200 countries, Globalgig simplifies communications while delivering cost savings, said the company. AVANT channel partners can now incorporate Globalgig in its offering for business enterprises looking to seamlessly connect widespread offices and employees. Globalgig's patented Multi-IMSI SIM can estab-

lish local wireless access with 400 plus carriers globally, connecting diverse communication technologies and devices securely, without interruption.

AVANT channel partners can now leverage Globalgig's solution for: wireless backup for SD-WAN and business continuity, IoT/M2M applications for supply chain logistics and sensor-based tracking solutions, primary wireless connections for locations inaccessible by wireline services, immediate connectivity for temporary events and field offices and mobile broadband for global travelers and personal WiFi hotspots.

Broadvoice Acquires YipTel

Broadvoice has acquired YipTel, a move that will enable Broadvoice to accelerate its entry into the enterprise communications space using YipTel's customer base, which includes midmarket and enterprise organizations.

YipTel's services include hosted VoIP solutions, audio and video conferencing, SMS/MMS automation, contact center, SD-WAN and more. Broadvoice plans to run both companies and brands separately

through the end of the year.

All 54 YipTel employees will come aboard as part of the acquisition. YipTel leaders, including CEO Robert Brown, will continue in senior management roles. Broadvoice and YipTel also have indirect channel programs, which also will be run independently. Broadvoice will honor partners' contracts with YipTel and will offer them an opportunity to sell Broadvoice's portfolio to their customers, said the company.

nexogy Adds VoIP Key System for Retail, Food Industry

To fulfill high demand for legacy key systems, nexogy has designed a first-of-its-kind hosted VoIP key system for retail and food chains.

The company offers commercial call path models that can lead to savings over a per-user model. So if a retail store requires 16 IP phones

but needs only six simultaneous calls or lines, for instance, nexogy will not charge a monthly fee for the phones or users in service.

Additionally, nexogy offers a full set of features that can be used to add functionality to enterprise VoIP key systems.

FileCloud Launches MSP Partner Program

FileCloud has launched the FileCloud Online partner program, enabling managed service providers to resell FileCloud Online — a customizable, secure EFSS service fully hosted by FileCloud. FileCloud Online offers direct, low latency access to on-premises windows file servers and the cloud for remote access, while delivering data ownership, residency and control with compliance in Canada, APAC or Europe.

What's more, headquarters also can gain low latency, direct file access to on-premises file servers and remote users can access files via the cloud. The program synchronizes files between cloud and local servers to fulfill disaster recovery and backup needs.

With FileCloud Online, MSPs own the customer relationship and receive access to special partner pricing every year as their customers renew subscriptions. Contrary to other channel programs, the FileCloud Online MSP partner program has no annual sales quotas. To qualify, partners should run a managed service provider or IT reseller business with an established track record.

PlanetOne Expands Channel Development Team

Lanny Gray has joined PlanetOne as vice president of business development, while Tanya Palmateer has been named inside sales manager for key strategic accounts.

Gray is responsible for leading PlanetOne's national partner recruitment efforts and for identifying high potential channel partners who want to expand their business. He brings more than 20 years of accomplishments and relationships in telecom.

Palmateer joins PlanetOne from TPx, where she served as senior channel manager. With a 10-year career in the telecom channel, she also served as a partner business manager for ShoreTel.

CloudJumper Now Available on CenturyLink Cloud Marketplace

CloudJumper has announced the availability of its cloud workspace-as-a-service (WaaS) solution in the CenturyLink Cloud Marketplace. This arrangement grants CenturyLink platform customers all the necessary elements to deploy a customized and secure WaaS offering, said the companies.

The CenturyLink Cloud Marketplace Provider Program allows participating technology companies, such as CloudJumper, to integrate with the CenturyLink Cloud delivery platform for rapid delivery. CloudJumper's business-ready solution is available to CenturyLink's cloud, hosting and network customers

seeking to reduce IT infrastructure costs while improving business agility.

CloudJumper's cloud-based WaaS solution enables easy migration, scalability to any size environment, integrated business continuity and disaster recovery, said CloudJumper. It offers access to more than 2,200 business applications and user data within the cloud desktop interface. Partners also can select their preferred cloud infrastructure vendor and customize the service to meet a range of business performance, security and compliance requirements.

The solution is priced 40 to 60 percent lower than competitive technologies, said CloudJumper

TPx Rolls Out Nationwide Managed Firewall, Endpoint and Backup/DR

TPx has unveiled a line of Managed Firewall, Endpoint and Backup/ DR services. They are now available nationwide after extensive field testing.

Managed Firewalls from TPx offer 24/7/365 monitoring and protection, visibility into what is happening in the network and control over the traffic.

The Managed Endpoints service includes application patching for critical updates, next-gen endpoint protection software, system performance monitoring, inventory reporting and more. Critical customer systems can remain healthy and stable with the help of TPx's 100 percent U.S.-based engineering and support teams, freeing in-house resources to focus on other needed tasks.

Managed Backups can protect critical server data and minimize the risk of loss by delivering a turnkey, fully managed backup and DR solution. This service handles everything from implementation and management to nonstop monitoring, making the backup process pain-free for business owners. □

Ad Index

AireSpring	(www.airespring.com)	11
BullsEye Telecom	(www.bullseyetelecom.com)	2
C3 Cloud	(c3cloud.com)	55
Channel Partners	(www.channelpartneronline.com)	18
DynaLink	(www.dynalink.com)	23
Easton Telecom Services	(www.eastontelecom.com)	3
Fiber Light	(www.fiberlight.com)	37
First Light	(www.firstlightfiber.com)	25
Fusion	(www.fusionconnect.com)	15
INCOMPAS	(www.show.incompas.org)	39
IPFone	(www.ipfone.com)	29
Kadence	(www.gokadence.com)	35
NetCarrier	(www.netcarrier.com)	43
NetGen	(www.netgencommunications.com)	30
nexVortex	(www.nexvortex.com)	7
One Stream Networks	(www.onestreamnetworks.com)	17, 19, 21
PTC	(www.ptc.org)	51
Ritalia Funding	(www.ritaliafinding.com)	42
Spectrum	(partners.spectrum.com)	9
Star2Star	(www.star2star.com)	Back cover
Telesystem	(www.telesystem.com)	5
Telstra	(www.telstraglobal.com)	13
Wave Broadband	(www.wavebroadband.com)	31
WISPALOOZA	(www.wispalooza.com)	20

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