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ACT NOW TO CATCH THE SOFTWARE-DEFINED WAVE

RESELLERS NEED TO LEARN FAST AND FOCUS ON BUSINESS BENEFITS IF THEY ARE TO CASH IN ON GROWING INTEREST IN SOFTWARE-DEFINED NETWORKING AND STORAGE

SPENCE-HORNBY/ISTOCK

PLUS:

- ◆ HELP CUSTOMERS EXPAND IT INVESTMENTS WITH FINANCE
- ◆ WAYS TO RECOVER DEBTS WITHOUT LOSING VALUED CUSTOMERS
- ◆ DOES MICROSOFT OFFICE 2016 HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN THE CHANNEL?

SIMON QUICKE EDITOR'S COMMENT

Lessons in business come in many shapes

You often find that a sportsperson has been booked to provide some inspirational thoughts at an IT industry event.

The idea is that as they relate their strategies for winning a world cup/climbing Everest/winning a gold medal, they provide some life and business lessons for everyone in the room.

I recently attended an event where a former England Rugby World Cup winner had been booked to talk to the assembled guests before they shuffled off to Twickenham to watch the current wearers of the rose-emblazoned jerseys be humbled by Australia.

His post-rugby career had taken him into the world of business consultancy, through which he had tried to bring some of the experiences of being part of a winning team to those hoping to use that knowledge to boost profits.

He talked of trust and leadership. Of a common purpose and a feeling that each member of the team would sacrifice for each other.

Those platinum partners winning reseller of the year awards are able to provide some useful lessons for the rest of the channel

All of it made sense and, if applied, could have helped some of those present to develop more of a winning mentality among their sales teams.

But what was interesting was the belief that the lessons of what made a successful business could then be taken back and applied to sport.

With the gaze of the world now firmly on the RFU and its situation after a dreadful World Cup, the former player suggested it was a business that was not working. The results had not been there and the leadership, at various levels, was something that should be questioned.

Inspiration can come from more than one direction: Those platinum partners winning reseller of the year awards are able to provide some useful lessons for the rest of the channel.

A winning team doesn't have to be confined to the sports world and inspiration can come from the sales floor and boardroom as much as the pitch and the track. ■

If you would like details of forthcoming themes running in the *MicroScope* ezine, wish to share your reaction to this one, or make any other contribution, email squicke@techtarget.com.

BILLY MACINNES COLUMN

Are big data projects destined to fail?

A press release from Gartner caught my eye recently. It made the startling claim that 60% of big data projects up until 2017 "will fail to go beyond piloting and experimentation, and will be abandoned".

Gartner argued that for companies getting started with advanced analytics, focusing on changing mindsets and culture was as important as acquiring tools and skills.

Gartner research director Lisa Kart said many business intelligence and analytics leaders "were unsure how to get started with advanced analytics, and many organisations feel they must make a significant investment in new tools and skills".

"But a successful advanced analytics strategy is about more than simply acquiring the right tools. It's also important to change mindsets and culture, and to be creative in search of success," she added.

Gartner set out four best practices to get advanced analytics projects off the ground:

1. Choose a business problem that offers an initial win;
2. Use outsourcing and buy packaged apps when you lack advanced analytics expertise;
3. Identify stakeholders in the organisation that need to be convinced of the value of advanced analytics;
4. Decide if you want to build the skills and tools internally.

While interesting in its own right, I found myself wondering if big data projects might continue to fail or disappoint for the very simple reason that the more we try to analyse the ever-growing volumes of data being generated, the more likely it is to yield fascinating but useless results.

The real value of data

We live in an age where data is being generated by more and more devices in our daily lives and the advent of the internet of things is going to make this trend even more pronounced. But how valuable is most of that data? And how do we go about extracting the valuable data and deleting the dross?

When I look around my kitchen in the morning, I can see the leftovers from breakfast and the dog hairs scattered over the floor mat. I know I have to throw the leftovers

away, wash the dishes and hoover the dog hairs up. I am never in any doubt that the dog hairs have any value to me. I don't have to store them for a specified period in case they may be of value to me further down the line. I can remove them in complete confidence.

Similarly, I can wash the dishes and erase the evidence of the morning's cereal without a qualm. No one tries to convince me that I would be best served stashing all my leftovers and dirty dishes in a wardrobe and keeping them for several years on the off-chance they might elicit some interesting information at a later date.

Eventually, I'd have to build another kitchen to house all the hairs and leftovers. I'd have to be mad to do that.

And yet, for the most part, that seems to be what the IT industry is saying to customers: Keep everything, just in case. And the rate of data generation is so rapid that it's actually quicker and cheaper to add storage capacity than to try to delete non-essential data before you store it. How mad is that?

No wonder our data keeps getting 'bigger' when the approach to data storage is akin to keeping all the dog hairs and leftovers rather than throwing them away and building more kitchens to store them. No wonder organisations are so desperate to find a mechanism to extract value from all their data.

Time for a clear-out?

But if you think about it, it's a bit like those hoarders you see on TV programmes who fill their houses with stuff and end up with less and less space for their daily living. They think that stuff is valuable but, in reality, nearly all of it is junk. Even if there is anything of value, it's buried under so many layers of rubbish that no one can ever find it. In the end, someone has to come in and throw everything out.

Most of us sort the rubbish we accumulate in our lives from items of value at a much earlier stage and throw the junk out long before it has any chance to overwhelm us. It's bizarre that so many people and organisations don't expect the IT industry to help them do the same when it comes to their data. ■

FINANCE

Syscap bolsters channel support and looks for growth under new owner

A few months after it was acquired by Wesleyan Group, channel finance specialist Syscap is already investing in the future and increasing the support it offers resellers. **Simon Quicke** speaks to its managing director, Philip White

It has been just over six months since channel finance specialist Syscap embarked on life under new owners and started to flex its muscles, having gained access to more capital.

It has been a fairly momentous year for Syscap so far, with the firm celebrating its 25th anniversary in April and sealing the acquisition deal with the Wesleyan Group in February.

The steps that led to the acquisition started towards the end of 2014, with a list of potential candidates being drawn up. The favoured candidates were those that would provide Syscap with a platform for growth and access to liquidity for the SME community.

During the years of recession, some of the growth plans that Syscap had intended to follow through on were undermined by woeful economic conditions. One of the main benefits of getting involved with a firm that had billions of pounds' worth of assets was the ability to push through some of those plans and ambitions that had perhaps stalled because of economic constraints.

A good fit

Syscap managing director Philip White says one of the main things that attracted the firm to the Wesleyan Group was a shared culture, with staff and customer needs a high priority for both businesses.

"I spent a lot of time with the management and the people, and the cultural fit is a big thing," he says. "To be able to find another company with the same culture as ours was a very big driver for me."

White adds that the Wesleyan Group also brings some serious financial muscle that will help its growth

"We are making investments in systems, infrastructure and people. We have got access to capital that allows us to better control our own destiny and allows us to innovate"

Philip White, Syscap

plans. "We were driving with the handbrake on – this allows us to take that handbrake off and make appropriate investments," he says.

Self-service platform

Those in the channel wondering what a post-acquisition Syscap will look like have already seen plenty of evidence of those investments taking place, with the firm relaunching its partner programme and investing in its technology platform to make it easier for resellers to use self-service to provide finance to customers.

"We are making investments in systems, infrastructure and people. We have got access to capital that allows us to better control our own destiny and allows us to innovate," says White.

"Finding another company with the same culture as ours was a big driver"

Philip White, Syscap



He says it will continue to look at the way it can provide support to the channel, and is delivering help for those adapting to a subscription-based model driven by moves to the cloud and managed services.

Financial backing

Over the past couple of years many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have weaned themselves off credit and avoided turning to the banks, getting into a position described as "happy non-borrowers", but many still need finance for growth.

White believes the channel still needs to understand finance more to take advantage of some of the products available. Customers and resellers are looking for ways of making their expenditure more predictable

and getting a clear picture of how IT investments will hit budgets – and finance can deliver that.

"The challenge is education, and encouraging people to be prepared to invest time and to accept the need to re-engineer their business model," he says, adding that going it alone is also a potential problem because few in the channel could be specialist enough to get on top of the regulations and compliance that comes with providing finance. "We can support collecting payments by direct debit, making sure they are keeping to FSA regulations, as that is what we do," White concludes. ■



See the feature on p9 for more about channel finance

PRODUCTIVITY SOFTWARE

Does Microsoft Office 2016 have a role to play in the channel?

Sean McGrath considers whether the recently launched desktop suite has a future in Microsoft's cloud-focused world

Microsoft released its Office 2016 suite of desktop applications on 22 September, but with the Redmond firm's head so firmly in the clouds, is there a compelling reason for partners to take notice?

The answer seems to be a resounding "no".

When Satya Nadella took the helm of Microsoft at the start of 2014, he wrote an email to employees, saying: "Our job is to ensure that Microsoft thrives in a mobile and cloud-first world."

While many disregarded the words as the clichéd ramblings of a new CEO, Nadella has remained true to his cloud-first philosophy, prioritising not only Microsoft's cloud infrastructure business, but betting the house on Office 365. And the bet appears to be paying off.

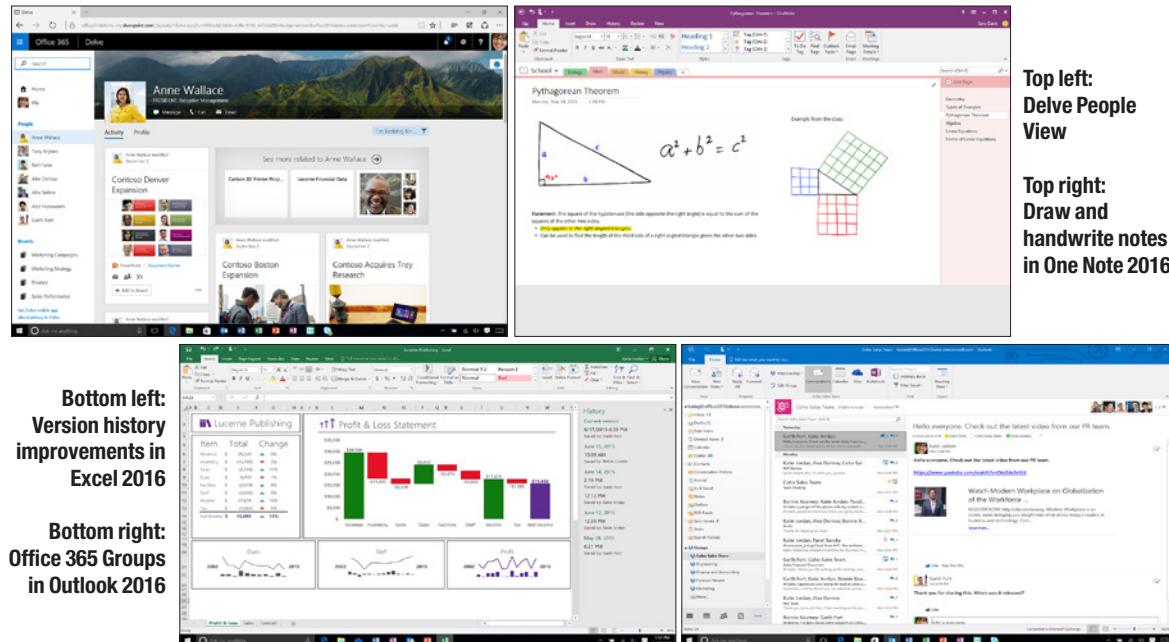
Office 365 has become Microsoft's fastest growing business of all time, and recently overtook Salesforce as the most deployed app on Okta. Consumer and business subscriber numbers are growing by the quarter and the revenues are beginning to trickle down to the bottom line.

Office 365 focus

Looking through Nadella's cloud-focused lens then, does the desktop suite really have a future?

The general consensus among early testers seems to be that while Office 2016 is stable and perfectly usable, the most significant updates are designed for Office 365 users.

For example, Outlook 2016 now supports Office 365 Groups, a new feature that enables group members to easily connect with colleagues, information and applications across the Office estate. For the feature to work, however, you need to be an Office 365 subscriber.



Clutter is another example. Using machine learning, Clutter watches users' actions to determine the messages they are likely to ignore. As less important messages arrive, they are automatically moved to the Clutter folder. It's a neat feature that actually works, but – you guessed it – Clutter is not available to people stuck in the 20th century.

The reality is that Office 2016 is less of a major release and more of a final farewell to the on-premise applications of yesteryear. For Office 365 users, it's a worthy upgrade; for everyone else, it's little more than a gateway drug, designed to remind you what you're missing out on.

Channel return

So where does Office fit into the channel these days? Office 365 has been a tricky product for the channel

to wrap its head around. For a start, it combines all of Microsoft's productivity applications and Exchange into a single package. This has uprooted the very foundations on which many Microsoft partners had built their business – namely managed service providers and systems integrators.

As well as practically wiping out the Hosted Exchange industry overnight, Microsoft bid aggressively on fixed-fee migration services, making it difficult for partners to find where exactly their value-add was. Many partners were left feeling frustrated and abandoned.

But Microsoft has changed its tune in recent months. At the Worldwide Partner Conference in July, Microsoft came to town with a much more channel-friendly approach. The firm has introduced a series of rebates focused on selling cloud services and introduced the Cloud Solution Provider (CSP) programme, which allows certified resellers to take ownership of the billing and support relationship, thus reclaiming a role in the Office ecosystem.

Many of the partners that have got on board the Office 365 train have struggled to fit the smorgasbord of

services into their sales portfolio, however. Writing on a blog post earlier this year, Microsoft's senior product marketing manager, Caroline Stanford, admitted it was a difficult concept to push.

"One thing we often hear in contrast to some of our competitors is that our line-up of products is too complicated, and navigating what to sell [is] too difficult for our partners," she said, adding that the best way is to categorise the customer's needs.

"Our experience with top performing partners has shown that the vast majority of selling situations fall into the three big categories – customers coming to you for Office, customers looking for email solutions, and customers who want to move to the cloud in a more holistic sense – and simple frameworks can help you quickly identify the right solution to pitch," said Stanford.

If you haven't already, get on board. For partners hoping for some form of salvation in the new Office 2016 suite, there is none to be found. Microsoft is marching unapologetically towards a cloud-only existence and Office 2016 is nothing more than a sojourn on its journey. ■

While Office 2016 is stable and usable, the most significant updates are designed for Office 365 users

OPERATING SYSTEM SOFTWARE

Finding life on Mars looks to be more likely than seeing iOS on Macs

Billy MacInnes looks at Apple's argument for not combining its iOS and OSX operating systems

They may have found water on Mars, but it looks as though there's still some way to go before anyone finds iOS on a Mac.

Microsoft is already well on the way to making Windows its common operating system across desktops, laptops and tablets, but Apple is proving to be something of a refusenik when it comes to merging its desktop and mobile device operating systems.

Apple CEO Tim Cook confirmed the company's opposition to running iOS on its computers in conversation with Aaron Levie, CEO of Box, at the recent BoxWorks conference in San Francisco.

"We don't believe in having one operating system for PC and mobile," he said. "We think it subtracts from both, and you don't get the best experience from either. We're very much focused on two."

To be fair, you can't fault Cook for inconsistency, as Apple has held the line on separate operating systems for PC and mobile for a number of years.

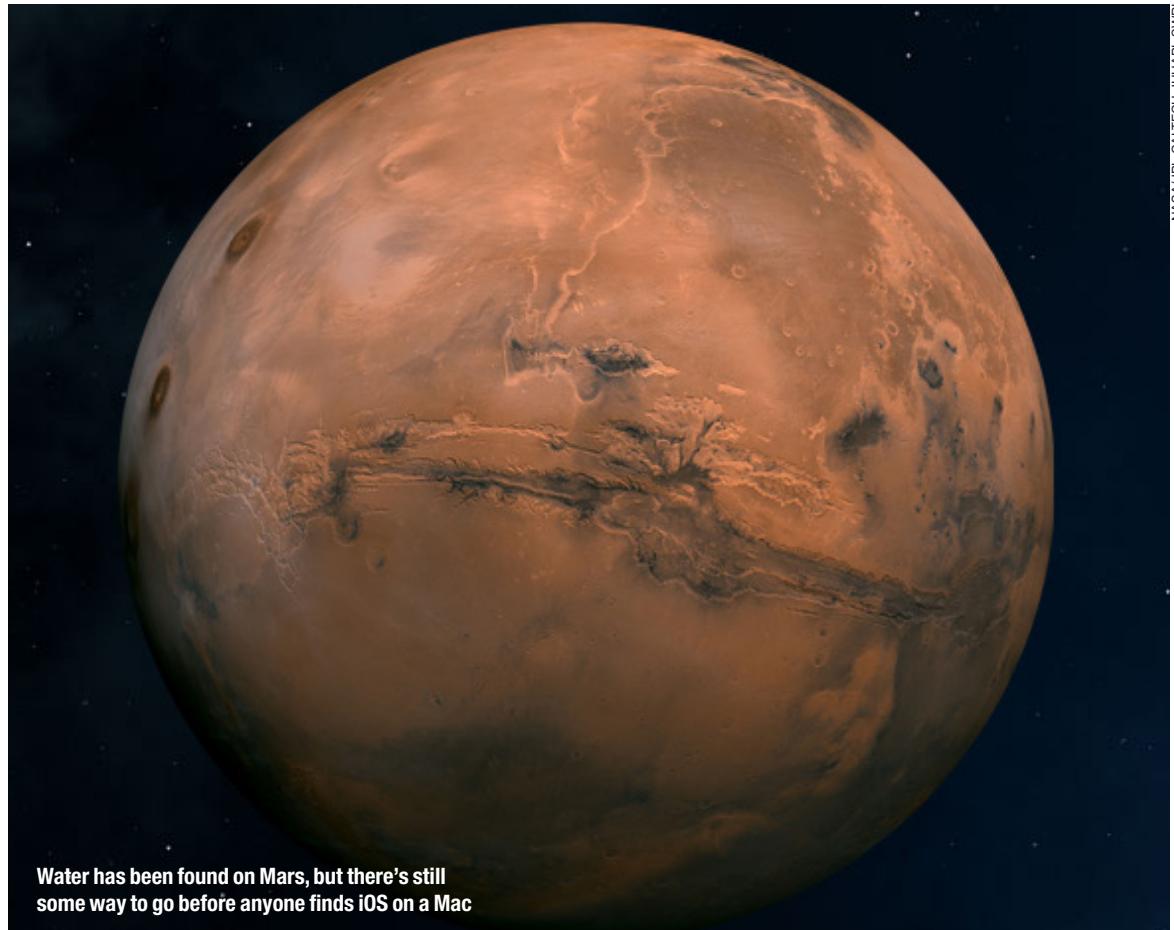
However, it's probably worth noting that his comments didn't implicitly rule out a combined operating system at some point in the future when Apple (and users) deem it to be more appropriate.

User experience is key

What Cook appeared to be saying was that at the moment, the best experience on computers and mobile devices is provided by separate operating systems.

While a touch-based interface works well on smartphones and tablets, Apple's argument, at least for the present, appears to be that working with a vertical touch-based screen on a desktop computer rather than a horizontal one is likely to be a physically uncomfortable experience for the user.

That was the argument advanced last year by Craig Federighi, Apple's senior vice-president of software engineering, when he seemed to rule out a touch-based Mac, telling *CNet*: "We don't think it's the right interface, honestly. Mac is sort of a



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sit-down experience." He said it would be "awkward and uncomfortable" to continually reach forward to touch a computer screen while sitting at a desk.

Federighi has been consistent in his stance, *telling Macworld* in January 2014: "It's obvious and easy enough to slap a touchscreen on a piece of hardware, but is that a good experience? We believe, no."

He added: "To say [OSX and iOS] should be the same, independent of their purpose? Let's just converge, for the sake of convergence? [It's] absolutely a non-goal."

New worlds ahead?

Does that mean it will never happen? I suspect the fact Cook referred specifically to "one operating system

for PC and mobile" leaves some wriggle room for deploying OSX on more powerful iPads in the future if that makes sense, or for iOS to be installed on Apple laptops.

But the arguments in favour of Apple producing 'one operating system to serve them all' right now aren't that compelling. Long term, it might make sense but just as plausibly, it might not.

Everyone accepts that the presence of water on Mars raises the likelihood of there being life on the red planet while also providing potential landing sites for human missions in the future.

The question for Apple users is this: Would the presence of iOS on a Mac open up new worlds for them? ■

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SHANNON STENT/ISTOCK

Catch the software-defined wave

Resellers need to learn fast if they are to cash in on growing interest in software-defined networking and storage but, with the financial benefits less clear, the focus should be on business benefits. **Billy MacInnes** reports

Are we on the verge of the software-defined era in IT? Some say it's already arrived with the huge adoption of server virtualisation and the rising number of virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) implementations demonstrating the enthusiasm for software-defined processes at the compute level. People may not have called it that, but virtualisation is software-defined compute.

Now, the focus is shifting to the two other major silos in the IT ecosystem: storage and networking. According to a recent report from Research and Markets, the total software-defined datacentre (SDDC) market (which includes compute, storage and networking) is expected to grow from \$21.78bn in 2015 to \$77.18bn by 2020, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28.8%.

The report – *Software Defined Data Center (SDDC) Market by Solution, by End User and by Regions: Global*

Forecast to 2020 – predicts the software-defined networking (SDN) market will register the highest CAGR for the period. Looked at from the outside, you would expect software-defined storage (SDS) to be a more likely candidate for the next wave of adoption due to the perception that networking is a far more complex environment to shift to a software-defined model.

SDN adoption ahead of SDS

Graham Brown, managing director of Gyrocom, acknowledges SDN is the last silo to feature in the software-defined conversation because it's a more complex model for people to get their heads around, but he claims: "In terms of customer interaction, software-defined networking is very quickly overtaking software-defined storage. We have a

core capability in SDS, but feel we get more traction in the SDN space."

Brown argues this is because moving to a software-defined model requires automation to deliver the real benefits. Merely introducing automation at the storage level won't provide much of an advantage if you still have to break out of the automation to perform network tasks.

Phil Croxford, UK channel head at VMware, is another who believes SDN is getting more traction from customers than SDS. He says there is unprecedented interest in the networking model.

Croxford reveals that two particular use cases are driving customer interest in SDN. On the security side, micro segmentation, which allows customers to create firewalls and security at the virtual machine (VM) level, is piquing interest. They might not be asking specifically for SDN, but they are keen to secure their environment down to VM level. It's also

"Modern SDS solutions reduce the likelihood of corruption and data loss if they are correctly implemented, but enterprise storage managers are wary of being the ones to test this out"

Alexander Jeffries, Stordis

software-defined technology

tractive from the DevOps side because networking has “typically been the bottleneck” in trying to provide an agile development environment.

Alexander Jeffries, managing director of Stordis, a specialist networking and storage distributor, agrees SDN is further advanced than SDS in terms of market readiness and acceptance. He says this is partly down to a reluctance by enterprise storage managers to risk storage corruption and data loss. “Network downtime is irritating, storage corruption and data loss are irreversible,” Jeffries observes. “Modern SDS solutions reduce the likelihood of corruption and data loss if they are correctly implemented, but enterprise storage managers are naturally wary of being the ones to test this out.”

Evan Unrue, Emea converged infrastructure technical lead at Avnet Technology Solutions (ATS), says there has been “accelerated uptake” of SDN in the service provider and enterprise space “due to the scale of services each needs to deliver and the need to rapidly make these services available to their customers and internal users respectively”.

But while SDN reduces the manual and laborious networking-related tasks involved through automation and policy, Unrue says it is not for the faint-hearted: “It fundamentally affects the core of how these businesses have been delivering network services for years. As such it is still in the early adoption phase, but many users have the appetite to implement SDN and reap the rewards.”

The path to maturity

Jason Peach, principal consultant at Networks First, hasn’t seen any demand from its channel partners for SDN at present. “SDN is still immature, service provider-centric, and not yet something most enterprise customers, and therefore our partners, are considering much at all,” he says.

Peach argues that aside from very large enterprises with lots of skilled technical resources, SDN remains the domain of large cloud service

providers and will probably continue to be so until it becomes simple to understand (from a business as well as technical perspective), deploy, maintain and operate.

He believes that without serious demand from customers, few channel partners will invest in skills and certifications for SDN – unless they are engaging very large multinationals.

Describing SDS and SDN as strategic building blocks towards the SDDC, Markus Nispel, vice-president of solutions architecture and innovation at Extreme Networks, says they are maturing at different paces but both are being deployed by customers today. He believes it is perfectly viable to implement an SDN solution but it is reliant on how well vendors can articulate the benefits and requirements of SDN to the organisation. “Currently, the solution is not as open as expected,” he admits, “and in this sense it is lagging behind SDS.”

Tarkan Maner, CEO at SDS vendor Nexenta, says the technology is still young, but SDS has continued to build momentum throughout 2015. Enterprises across the globe in industries such as financial services, healthcare, telecommunications, technology and hosting are moving petabytes of their storage to open-source-driven SDS solutions, he claims, citing the likes of Vesk, Bluebolt and Wipro that have embraced SDS deployments in the past 12 months.

Channel acceptance

Whichever silo is further advanced in adopting a software-defined model, the fact that customers are interested in the technology represents a potentially significant opportunity for channel partners, especially as it fits so neatly with cloud computing.

“You can’t talk about software-defined without talking about hybrid cloud – the two are intrinsically linked,” says VMware’s Croxford. “Software-defined technology is a stepping stone to the hybrid cloud and the ability to seamlessly move workloads around from public to private to on-premise.”

“There is still misunderstanding and a lack of education around what SDN is and how to implement it, there’s still a lot more education that needs to be done, certainly in the reseller space”

Mark Pearce, Dell

ATS’s Unrue believes the role SDS plays as an enabling technology behind a raft of hyper-converged offerings hitting the market over the past year has helped it gain wider channel acceptance. “As user demand grows for SDS, the channel will be ready to respond to maximise on the opportunity,” he says.

In addition, many storage vendors have started to package their software with x86 hardware, making it more accessible to traditional infrastructure resellers.

Unrue accepts that many business partners are still inclined towards the traditional approach to selling storage, but says there is definite interest in SDS. “Partners are being asked by users to focus on delivery of applications and services rather than simply providing point storage products. As a result, more conversations are happening around converged and hyper-converged solutions, including SDS,” he says.

Vendors are making it easier by packaging SDS, giving partners an opportunity “to broaden their capabilities and offer the storage agility true SDS promises to their customers”. Unrue singles out hyper-converged infrastructure as a means to provide potential “for the delivery of margin-rich services and application consulting to help customers maximise their return against this new architecture model”.

For its part, Avnet is investing in programmes to help business partners gain the skills and capabilities to sell

SDS, converged and hyper-converged technology more effectively.

Learn from vendors

Nexenta’s Maner argues vendors need to take the responsibility to ensure the channel is ready to engage in the software-defined trend.

“This can be achieved through investing in programmes which raise awareness, enablement and lead generation,” he says. Because SDS is still new for a lot of the channel community, the Nexenta Partner Programme allows partners to work closely with Nexenta teams on early deals so they gain the knowledge of the technology.

He adds that partners looking to capitalise on this software-defined trend should be having conversations with customers now while they are building their future SDS strategies.

Stordis’s Jeffries says the promise of being able to use low-cost commodity hardware with massively reduced margins in all areas of software-defined infrastructure could be viewed as a disaster for the channel. “It promises just as many opportunities for shrewd channel partners. It is the ‘usual suspect’ big-brand vendors and those resellers that align their business models too tightly with this dying paradigm who are going to suffer,” he says.

He draws a parallel with a similar transition at an earlier point in the history of IT when he warns that partners need “to be careful they don’t get stuck selling the networking/storage equivalent of Sun Solaris servers or proprietary Unix hardware in a market that runs Linux on a commodity x86 box”.

Mark Pearce, Emea channel director for networking at Dell, observes there is “still a lot of misunderstanding and a lack of education around what SDN is and how to implement it, there’s still a lot more education that needs to be done, certainly in the reseller space”.

He says partners have a very familiar role to play as trusted advisers to their customers: “SDN is a

“Software-defined technology is a stepping stone to the hybrid cloud and the ability to seamlessly move workloads around from public to private to on-premise”

Phil Croxford, VMware



software-defined technology

burgeoning market with a number of companies bringing out solutions to market offering different types of functionality and capability. It's difficult for customers to understand the difference between them and what is best for them, so this is definitely an area for the reseller community."

Software-defined datacentres

Pearce claims enterprise networks are starting to seriously consider how they could utilise SDN in their environments and predicts it could become a mainstream type of deployment in the datacentre environment in the next three to five years, so it's important to ensure resellers understand the technology and the benefits it can provide to customers.

Pearce also draws an analogy with an earlier period of the IT industry's history, pointing to the time when people were tied in to large mainframes with a limited choice of applications until the arrival of x86 encouraged application development on servers: "SDN is the next iteration of that taking place, and this time it's in the networking world."

Gyrocom's Brown says he's surprised more channel partners haven't got to the stage that his company has with SDN, especially bigger companies such as SCC and Computacenter. He wonders whether this may be because the software-defined model and the move to the SDDC brings with it the requirement to consolidate many technical disciplines which makes navigating difficult. With the silo model of IT, many of those that deliver IT take a silo approach in the way they sell and support technology.

Gyrocom has had to bring on board new skills, including an element of coding, as well as in areas such as automation and workloads.

"It's been relatively straightforward for us to take those skills on board," Brown claims, "but some of our peers are struggling with that. There's a recognition that you need to build an automation capability to leverage the SDDC. That isn't something the big players have typically done."

There's also the fact that some big Cisco resellers are "protecting large installed bases, so how do they take



CIO181STOCK

on a proposition like VMware NSX? We didn't have a Cisco installed base to protect".

Changing the sales pitch

Croxford agrees that software-defined technology represents a challenge in the way its partners address customers. "They're set up and structured in a way that maps how customers are set up and structured, with networking people talking to networking people for example," he says.

Partners need to change that dynamic as the conversations need to take place above the networking or storage level "because a lot of people we're talking to about networking or storage have deep skills but what we're talking about is disruptive". They see it as threatening to them individually. "People need to look objectively at IT infrastructure, and partners have to engage organisations in very different way."

Also, the business case for SDS or SDN isn't as clearly defined as it was for server virtualisation where the

battle to convince people to adopt the technology and understand the business case was helped by the fact it had "such a clear ROI". Many benefits of SDS or SDN are not directly apparent in immediate commercial terms, Croxford admits. "Micro segmentation is about better security, DevOps is around agility and faster time to market. The financial benefits are less clear so SDN has to be sold on the business benefits."

Unrue says that with customers "articulating the business outcomes they want to achieve rather than the technology they want to buy, the channel needs to align its go-to-market model to support business outcomes rather than product sales". To achieve this, he says they need to make customers aware of what's available, invest in the skills to deliver and consult on the technologies and help customers "understand how they can bridge the gap between the age-old methods of deploying and managing their infrastructure and the brave new world of the software-defined datacentre".

Skills and understanding

SDS is a significant change that requires a rethink when it comes to pre-sales, design and services skills, says Unrue. Sales teams will need training "to look for additional opportunities around services and consultancy alongside technology". By gaining the skills and

capabilities to sell SDS, partners will have the ability to transform their businesses and capitalise on future customer demands.

As for SDN, partners will need to broaden their skills. "They will need to take a more consultative approach to get closer to a customer's core business processes and move away from being technology or product focused. An emphasis on policy-driven, automated processes will drive the demand for SDN and it will happen, just not immediately," says Unrue.

Dell's Pearce is bullish about the software-defined age, particularly when it comes to SDN: "We have conversations [about SDN] on a daily basis and we're winning business around deploying SDN. It's happening today. Resellers need to stop being afraid of the technology. They need to understand SDN to help them to move forward."

Nispel describes SDN and SDS as critical in nature to the operation of a software-defined datacentre. He sees a role for channel partners in augmenting solutions to virtualise the network with professional integration services to guide the customer during their journey. "The SDDC offers a great opportunity for channel partners to provide differentiated services as part of a large-scale project and even change their business model to become a managed service provider using SDDC technologies as a delivery vehicle," he says. ■

"The channel needs to align its go-to-market model to support business outcomes rather than product sales"

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Help customers expand IT investments with finance

Amro Gebreel looks at how clients can fulfil their ambitions despite dwindling budgets



HH5800/STOCK

Over the past few years the subject of finance and credit has never been far from the minds of those in the channel business, as they look to improve their own fortunes in the hope that their customers will start investing in IT.

Although the economy has recovered from one of the worst recessions in living memory there have been consequences from the years of tough times and belt tightening.

One of the main ones is that whenever you read a survey of the state of finances in the SME market, it tends to show that many now describe themselves as "happy non-borrowers". Faced with rejection from the banks and a lack of knowledge about the alternatives, many customers have looked to live within their means and stop using credit.

That might have worked when the economy was stagnating but now, as things start to improve, the lack of credit is causing problems. Trying to find the funds organically to pay for investment and new recruits is a difficult proposition for some SMEs.

It is at that point that the channel should roll up and talk to the customer about finance options.

Not everyone will be in a position to do that and Philip White, UK managing director of Syscap ([see interview, page 3](#)), accepts that there continues to be a need for education around finance and credit as the customer need remains high. "Despite an improving economy and irrespective of what the banks say, you just need to look at the reports and SMEs still struggling to get access to liquidity," he says.

White adds that even with many "happy non-borrowers" there

remains a need for a source of credit because the mainstream and challenger banks are not providing the support that specialist financiers with channel knowledge can.

Shrinking IT budgets

Resellers need to understand the credit options on offer that can unlock some of the purchases customers would make if they had access to the capital.

"Financing can be of huge benefit as it allows their available – and often small – budgets to go much further. But, very few SMEs use ICT financing; many are unaware how it works, while fewer still understand the benefits of it, and instead prefer to spend cash on large purchases. But finding large amounts of cash for up-front costs is a massive concern, and often not possible, for a lot of SMEs – but

with financing there's no capital outlay, so cash-flow problems are reduced," says David Ellis, head of technology and services Emea at Arrow ECS.

"Many believe financing is unnecessary if the cash is available, but with IT budgets expected to shrink in the next year, financing can help the cash go much further. On the flip side many ICT vendors hardly mention financing when discussing deals, if at all – more SMEs actually raise the option of finance themselves. Clearly, more needs to be done to help SMEs understand the benefits of ICT financing – vendors and resellers need to be more proactive in discussing finance options with their customers," he adds.

As well as encouraging customers to take up external finance, channel operators themselves are encouraged

"Customers want a flexible service contract that meets the technology needs of each of their users"

Nick Beardsley, Olive Communications

to use the funds distributors make available to fuel user growth.

Darren Maynard FCICM, head of credit at Avnet Technology Solutions UK, says the distributor has seen the take-up of leasing finance increase by around 50% in the past 12 months, and expects this trend to continue.

"This increase is partly due to more awareness of the different financing options available, plus the need for the channel to respond to customer demand by way of a shift from fixed (capital expense) to variable (operational expense) cost models. As users request monthly payments or payment spread over 12 or 36 months, business partners are being forced to provide alternative finance options," he says.

Like White, Maynard also concedes that more education is needed if channel players are to get into a position to deliver sound financial advice to their customers.

"There is still room for more awareness of the different financial options available. The most proactive business partners in this area benefit by enabling organisations to invest in new technologies, which in turn drives growth for them and their customers. A contributing factor to the

increased take-up of leasing is a change taking place in the channel. As traditional resellers, systems integrators, independent software vendors and other service providers transform their business models to remain relevant and exploit new opportunities, many are building next-generation datacentres," he says.

"Progress is being made but there is still more that could be done to educate and enable the channel in terms of what finance options are available and to compare the terms and sources of the deals on offer. Certainly at Avnet we now include finance proposals to support configurations and quotes prepared for business partners. With initiatives such as these, channel partners will become more aware of finance options available and pass them on to customers to help close the deal."

Finance in a changing industry
The view from the coalface is that the education needs to focus not so much on guiding partners through the basics of finance, but giving them the latest advice on living in a cloud world.

"I am not convinced that the channel has ever struggled to offer finance to customers. I've been working in

the IT and communications industry for 20 years and finance for technology solutions has always been available," says Nick Beardsley, sales director – new business and converged solutions, Olive Communications.

"What's different in today's business communication solutions marketplace is that traditional finance packages are now not so relevant. Today's customers are looking to deploy cloud-based technology solutions, Olive is seeing a huge shift away from on-premise solutions and is helping businesses of all sizes across all sectors migrate to the cloud. This is leading to a different commercial model, with customers paying for their technology solutions on a monthly, almost 'subscription', basis," he adds.

"Customers today want to consume the technology their users need from the cloud and consumption is based on the individual role of each employee. One size no longer fits all. Customers want a flexible service contract that meets the technology needs of each of their users and which is able to scale up or down depending on their business requirements. They want to pay for the technology on a pay-as-you-go basis. The days are long gone when customers with on-premise 'tin' paid for technology they weren't actually using."

For Beardsley, the finance debate is happening against the backdrop of more fundamental changes in the industry – and it needs to form part of that wider conversation, he says.

Perhaps the question of providing finance is more of an issue for those in the channel who have not grasped

that customers are now demanding cloud-based communications: "They could well be finding it difficult to transition their own business models to accommodate the recurring revenue which cloud-based solutions deliver," says Beardsley.

Jon Davies, director at 3 Step IT (UK), is keen to get partners to think of finance as something more than just providing the funds to facilitate a purchase order. "The channel has struggled to offer finance because often they see it as just another obstacle to closing the deal – especially if the prospect has cash in the bank that is not yielding a return. I don't think the recovery will change that, unless resellers start to take a more strategic view of finance," he says.

"For example, offering finance can be the best way to take control of your client's refresh cycle. And for larger opportunities, you can offer finance as part of a complete asset management solution that takes the acquisition, asset management and disposal headaches away from the business. Including finance as part of your asset management proposition makes perfect sense," he adds.

With the current buzzword being "business transformation" the opportunities for resellers to talk to their customers about the direction things are heading in should be fairly ample. Not only should those discussions include talking about infrastructure, applications, storage and security – but how things will be paid for. A smart pitch including finance is more likely to provide the strategic support that so many customers are looking for right now. ■

Offering your customers finance options may be one route to guide them in realising their ambitions to transform their business with disruptive technology



Recover debts without losing valued customers

Jonathan Chadwick outlines the steps resellers can take to bring in late payments while avoiding the hazards of isolating – or even losing – long-standing clientele



ZIMMY/TWISTOCK

Every reseller will encounter problems with late payments – it is inevitable. Despite the prevalence of overdue debt, many in the channel feel uncomfortable about confronting the issue head-on, particularly when dealing with a long-standing customer who has previously been a prompt payer.

If the approach is too firm, businesses risk losing a valuable client. Too soft, and it's possible the debt won't be taken seriously and the situation will remain unresolved.

It's a fine line to tread, but resellers can help minimise the problems late payments cause by following a few basic principles in recovering outstanding debts – but maintaining a positive relationship with loyal and lucrative customers.

Keep your own house in order
Often, overdue payments can be avoided completely if a business

follows a clear set of procedures. Billing for services promptly and efficiently – using pre-agreed reference numbers and sending requests for payment to the correct contact – means your business is more likely to be paid in the same manner. Billing for services late could lead to questions and slow payment.

Asking for payment in advance can, of course, negate all late payment problems – but this is not always possible and some regular customers may refuse to pay up front.

Furthermore, having a clear set of terms and conditions of business for your customer to agree will avoid misunderstandings and disagreements in future. Make sure these are clearly communicated to your customer before the start of the contract. It is a good idea to put the terms and conditions on your quotations.

Lastly, remain measured and consistent in your approach to late payment. Draw up a set of credit control

The costs of debt recovery

The law can help resellers cover some of the costs of debt recovery. The Late Payment of Commercial Debts Interest Act allows businesses to claim interest, compensation and – with orders placed after 16 March 2013 – the costs of collecting a debt that exceed the compensation itself.

The act only applies to the commercial supply of goods and services and where there is no provision of interest in your own terms of business.

According to the government, you can claim statutory interest for a recent debt at 8% over base, along with compensation of £40-£100 per invoice, depending on the invoice value. Up to £999.99 you can claim £40 per invoice; between £1,000 and £9,999.99, £70 per invoice; and for amounts over £10,000 it's £100 per invoice.

You can also claim interest on invoices that were not paid within the agreed period, but have since been paid. For example, if your invoice takes two months before it is paid, you can claim interest on the two months you have had to wait for the invoice payment. Interest can be claimed for up to six years from when the invoice was supposed to have been paid.

No matter what your collection costs are, you can claim compensation. In addition, in cases where the costs of recovering the debt from an unpaid invoice are greater than the compensation itself, you can claim those costs involved also.

You do not have to tell customers you will pursue any of the above – but it may be a good idea to state it in a contract, to deter late payments.

Many solicitors specialise in mediation, negotiating between the two parties

procedures, so your customers know what to expect and how they will be notified – whether it's by telephone, letter or email – and how the process will escalate if necessary.

When does a payment officially become late?

Unless you have already agreed when an invoice is to be paid, the law states that a payment is classed as late after 30 days for business transactions and public authorities once the customer receives the invoice, or you have delivered the goods or services if this is later.

Maintain an open dialogue

Although well-established processes can be invaluable in informing your customers how you work, resellers must take care not to allow process to stifle dialogue with customers.

If a usually friendly relationship between business and customer is suddenly replaced by severe written notices – or even warnings – simply because of a late payment, the customer might feel disenfranchised and less inclined to co-operate.

Without downplaying the situation, try to maintain the spirit in which you and your customer have done business in the past. They are likely to appreciate a consistent approach, rather than a sudden change in tone which can be seen as heavy handed or rash.

Be prepared to listen and compromise

Show willing to communicate. Listen to your customer and understand their situation. Talk about why payment has not been made. For example, they might be waiting for payment from clients of their own, which prevents them from paying.

Knowing all the circumstances around late payment means you can respond appropriately and arrange a suitable method of repayment. This could mean accepting the debt in pre-agreed instalments, or payment plans. You can then amend your cash flow projections where necessary.

Remember, there is nothing to be gained from demanding payment if your customer simply cannot afford to do so. Taking a more flexible stance will allow you to recover some of the money you are owed, while resolving any other issues. It will also help maintain a positive relationship with your customer.

If you won't ever get paid then it is better that you confirm this quickly, so to take steps to prevent the debt from increasing – whether that be by stopping future work, or stopping an existing order going out.

Where necessary, accept some responsibility

One reason a customer might be late in paying is because they are dissatisfied with the product or service provided to them. It is often difficult to recover any debt while such concerns are outstanding, so you should be prepared to listen to any grievances where they are reasonable, and address them.

A dispute resolution process, covered in your terms of business, can provide an appropriate outlet for any grievances – and may avoid a late payment situation arising at all.

Consider measures to address any dissatisfaction, such as cutting the amount owed or waiving late payment penalties (such as interest and costs) entirely. This is likely to be well received and will maintain a positive relationship with the customer for future business.

Take stock before pursuing overdue debts

If all of the above fails and you are still unable to recover the debt or arrange a compromise, then it is worthwhile considering the validity of your next steps.

You may want to simply write off small debts where the cost of pursuing the client – or the damage it might cause to a longstanding customer relationship – is too great to justify the action.

But beware that writing off debts may set a precedent which might persuade the client – or indeed other

The Small Business Commissioner

Following the general election in May 2015, the government launched a consultation that ran from 26 July to 21 August, which outlined a proposal for a Small Business Commissioner.

Official figures reckon small businesses are responsible for 48% of UK private sector employment while accounting for around a third of private sector turnover. It's an understatement when the government notes that small business owners "can struggle in their commercial dealings with larger firms. These businesses can feel they are treated unfairly where they have weaker bargaining power".

The government says it recognises the impact on cashflow of late payment and proposes to set up a Small Business Commissioner, with the aim of changing how businesses deal with each other. The plan is that the commissioner will help small businesses settle disputes quickly and inexpensively, while still preserving their commercial relationships.

The commissioner will have three duties:

- Providing information, general advice and signposting: In other words, providing the first point of contact for small businesses, offering guidance on ways to resolve disputes themselves or via a relevant external dispute resolution service (for example, an ombudsman), mediation or the commissioner's own complaint handling service.
- Resolving disputes through mediation: Where the two sides can't agree on a contractual issue, the commissioner will offer a voluntary mediation process without having to take legal action.
- Dealing with complaints: Where one of the sides refuses to take part in mediation, the commissioner will be able to step in and look into complaints and declare its findings.

While the outcome of the consultation is awaited, [click here](#) to read the background and more detail on the proposal. And as to the commissioner's long-term effectiveness? Only time will tell.

customers with small debts to your company – not to pay in future.

In cases where a channel customer has become insolvent, the chances of recovering debts of any substantial amount are likely to be poor – and it might be better to cut your losses.

Be prepared to walk away

Before you decide to pursue your customer for overdue payment, you must ultimately be prepared to walk away from any business that customer could provide in future.

Although some debts can be resolved without completely undermining the existing relationship between the company and customer, some organisations may take exception to such processes and choose to

take their business elsewhere. It is up to you to decide if the risk is worth the reward.

However, in cases where the customer has no intention of paying at all, consider whether it is a customer that you want to keep.

Consult a solicitor

If existing channels of communication break down, or the customer refuses to resolve the issue, you may want to consult a solicitor with specialist knowledge of debt recovery.

Intervention by a solicitor – or even just a letter stating your intention – can be a strong signal to the late payer of your determination to recover the amount you are owed.

The customer may settle the amount straight away, once they are notified of a solicitor's involvement. Furthermore, rather than simply being a step along the road to court action, many solicitors specialise in mediation, negotiating between the two parties in a formal setting.

At the end of the day, you need to weigh up the options against the rewards and losses you may be handed. Equally, there's no point winning a battle only to lose the war; you might get paid but could lose your customer needlessly. ■

Jonathan Chadwick is head of commercial at Stephensons Solicitors LLP.



GOSPHTODESIGN/STOCK

MANAGING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Do you speak business?

As technology exerts greater influence on business, resellers must talk to the board, says ExactTrak's **Simon Cuthbert**

Nowadays, it's increasingly the line of business taking up emerging technologies, not the traditional IT department – and this has huge ramifications for the channel.

Of course, enterprises still need technology systems, but buying patterns have shifted such that resellers need to take a more business-focused, consultative approach to selling technology. And they need to do this while keeping up to date with all the latest technology and maintaining relationships with their existing technology department contacts, as well as building new relationships with business departments.

Today, it's all about understanding the business and deploying the right technology for your customer, regardless of your preferred suppliers.

Data security is becoming a board-level priority

When you think about it, it's not surprising that technology is being driven by the business – it's usually their heads on the block if and when things go wrong. A perfect example of this is the data security market – the combination of fines from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and the damage to an organisation's reputation means this is now a business issue and, quite often, a board-level business issue.

EU data protection regulation

With the European Union (EU) data protection regulation on the way, the security and protection of data is already becoming a board-level priority – and a great opportunity for consultant-focused channel partners with security expertise. Organisations with a large, remote workforce will need appropriate mobile data security that will allow them to track and manage their data, but even companies with high-level executives travelling with sensitive data will need a mobile data policy.

Issues-first approach needed

But it's not technology kit these people will be looking for. No, the channel's pitch to these decision makers needs to be business-focused. The expectation here is that you come to the table with a good understanding of their business requirements and



Senior management are not interested in the technology – they're interested in the business conversation

work backwards from there to find the right technology for their exact security need. There's no one-size-fits-all technology system; it will completely depend on their business requirements. To that end, an issues-first approach is best and channel partners which are technology-agnostic have a substantial advantage.

Consultant partners

Being supplier-agnostic is the new game in town. Partners still need to have great knowledge of and relationships with suppliers, but those which aren't as committed to specific vendors will be well-placed to advise their customers on the best technology system for their business problem. Here, it's the true consultative

partners which can speak in business terms that will win the contract.

While having a supplier-agnostic approach can affect margins, ultimately it builds trust and loyalty with the customer, which should lead to repeat business. As most supplier-agnostic resellers focus on managed services, rather than shifting boxes, there will likely be recurring revenue streams with each new deal.

Everyone's friend

It won't have escaped anyone's notice that, for many resellers, this shift in buying patterns means they're selling to a new audience – the senior management teams and sometimes board executives. This is why resellers need to have more business-focused

knowledge and need to be able to clearly explain how they can help solve business problems. Senior management and the board won't, for the most part, be interested in the technology and its bells and whistles – it's the business conversation they're interested in. They want to know that their data – and with it the company's bottom line, and their own jobs – are protected.

But this doesn't mean resellers should ditch the IT contact they've had for years. Quite the contrary, it will still be up to these guys to deploy whatever system the business decides to go with – so these relationships remain as vital as ever.

But even more than that, if resellers can help their IT contacts by continuing those close relationships, and bringing them to the decision-making table, resellers can help elevate the IT department to the boardroom and really cement those relationships – and revenues – for life. ■

While having a supplier-agnostic approach can affect margins, ultimately it builds trust and loyalty

Simon Cuthbert is sales and marketing director at mobile data security firm ExactTrak.

READERS' LETTERS**Self-service claims handling has potential, but consider carefully**

Mark Colonnese, director, Aquarium Software

I was very interested to read recent comments from Axa's property and lifestyle claims director, [Martin Ashfield](#). Should his prediction that there will be more self-service claims in the future come true, we could see an exponential increase in the number of customers engaging with their insurer in this way.

But that is only half the story. Insurers would need to quickly acquire the same level of e-fluency as their more digital-savvy customers, with mobile phone interaction a key element – given that over 50% of access to the internet is via smartphone devices and mobile web use is only going in one direction.

This is something Aquarium has already successfully implemented for its forward-thinking clients, with claims submitted via smartphone with supporting image and invoice evidence attached. We also use business logic captured in the claims workflow to decide in which scenarios claims can be effectively self-serviced.

Get self-service right and the benefits are huge. Customer satisfaction levels could soar. The usual caveats apply however; make sure it's the right product or it will be two steps forward and three back. Introducing the latest technology just for the sake of it without due process is doomed to failure. Self-service should only be offered where a customer wants it, rather than forcing what could be perceived as all the legwork onto them.

Taking a smart approach to this technology offers huge operational savings and reduced customer effort, but data security, fraud prevention and identity protection must be factored into the thinking. Recent cases here and in the US have shown the perils of sites being hacked and client data compromised as a consequence. Less tech-savvy customers will continue to deal with the traditional

Public sector needs expert help to prevent damaging data breaches

Tony Pepper, CEO, Egress Software Technologies

The public sector has recently been hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons again – this time in the shape of a report from civil liberties and privacy pressure group, Big Brother Watch. The report showed that there have been 4,236 data breaches in local authorities over the past three years, including at least 401 instances of data loss or theft; 628 instances of incorrect or inappropriate data being shared on emails, letters and faxes; and 159 instances of data being shared with a third party.

Most of these have been caused by staff mistakes, which is supported by Egress Software's freedom of information findings last year showing that 93% of breaches are down to human error. Consequently, anyone selling into the public sector should be talking to their customers about how they can mitigate the risk of human error, otherwise they risk damaged reputations and fines. Stories like this illustrate that risk perfectly.

It is clear that the public sector is struggling to protect data, so the channel has the perfect opportunity to step in to advise and help. While many organisations already have top-down policies and procedures in place, it is clear that staff are not following these rules. Matching policy with smart information security technology is the best way to protect against human error – so channel businesses should be reviewing their product portfolios to ensure they have the right technologies at hand to recommend. For example, the classic "autofill" email blunder, where emails are sent to the wrong recipient, can be mitigated by deploying software that allows users to revoke access after the fact so the wrong recipient isn't able to read it.

Now is the time to be speaking to public sector customers about their data protection strategies. By offering this advice, channel players can explore new revenues in data security, as well as fulfil their role as trusted data protection advisers.

"Match policy with smart information security tech to protect against human error"

Tony Pepper, Egress Software Technologies

paper and people method because that's what they want, whereas those who want a fast response will do it themselves with self-service.

The future of Hosted Exchange

Rocco Donnino,

Executive vice-president, AppRiver

Swisscom has confirmed its decision to exit the hosted Exchange market.

Does this mean others should follow suit? I don't think so, because there is opportunity for those who remain.

While some big carriers are changing the way they operate, and choosing not to invest in hosted Exchange 2013 in favour of Microsoft Office 365, I believe this is a golden opportunity for resellers to jump in and support thousands of small to mid-sized business customers that may not be ready or care to switch to alternative systems.

There are several reasons why customers choose and keep hosted Microsoft Exchange. They want high availability and expert support with five nines (99.999%) uptime and a commitment from a specialist in messaging and IT security. They desire a flexible solution with low monthly, per-mailbox fees where they can easily add and remove users or services. And they want to know exactly where their data is housed, how it is being handled and who is managing it.

"Get self-service right and the benefits are huge. Customer satisfaction levels could soar. The usual caveats apply however; make sure it's the right solution or it will be two steps forward and three back"

Mark Colonnese, Aquarium Software

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Organisations also face regulations that govern precisely how and where data is stored because of growing compliance requirements. European and multinational customers need to be reassured that compliance is not only achievable today, but also if or when a carrier exits the market.

Offering the ability to specify which datacentre (for example US or Switzerland) a specific mailbox is located helps companies meet data protection compliance and further reduces mail latency.

The opportunity to support hosted Exchange customers as well as those looking for increased collaboration with Office 365 is ripe, but resellers must find a solution provider with the appropriate knowledge and infrastructure to give prospective customers choice and peace of mind. ■



Send your letters and comments
[to squicke@techtarget.com](mailto:squicke@techtarget.com)

FIVE-MINUTE INTERVIEW

Mark Banfield Autotask

MicroScope puts its questions to Mark Banfield, international vice-president of Autotask

**Tell us what you do for a living.**

I am the vice-president of international for Autotask.

Why are you the right person for this job?

I have 15 years of experience in technology and sales and sales management. Experience of building and managing teams across multiple geographies. I'm passionate for technology. I am highly driven and have a strong focus on success.

What gets you up in the morning?

CrossFit gets me up in the morning. I like to start the day working out. I find it stimulates me and prepares me to confront the day ahead. I also find that I am more focused after a workout.

Who helped you get to where you are today?

Family. My dad had a strong focus on work ethic that he passed down to me. I was a competitive swimmer and it provided me with real discipline.

Also, at the age of 22, Mark Cattini gave me my first job when we both worked for MapInfo. Fast-forward to 2015 and he remains a huge support system and mentor.

What is the best or worst business advice you have received and from whom?

The best business advice I have been given was from the CEO of Autotask, Mark Cattini. He told me: "Opportunity comes in three stages; recognise, accept and maximise." I am always looking for new opportunities and always maximising the opportunity in front of me.

What advice would you give to someone starting out today in IT?

Be ruthless in your pursuit of knowledge and understanding with regards to IT. Knowledge is power.

What does the next five years hold for the channel?

The channel will be even more important than it was before. The cloud and companies having more access to technology will make this space very exciting. The implementation and integration of all technologies is increasingly complex. The channel will

have the expertise to keep up with an ever-changing industry.

Tell us something most people do not know about you?

I ran seven marathons and was a competitive national swimmer.

What goal do you have to achieve before you die, and why?

My biggest goal is to give my children as much happiness and success as I can.

What temptation can you not resist?

A good red wine.

What was your first car and how does it compare with what you drive now?

My first car was a Mini. My brother and I could literally pick it up. I'm currently driving an Audi. My brother and I are no longer picking up cars.

If you could be any animal for a day, what would you be and why?

A dolphin. They are the greatest animal in the sea and very smart.

"My first car was a Mini. My brother and I could literally pick it up. I'm currently driving an Audi. My brother and I are no longer picking up cars"

**What is the best book you've ever read?**

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho.

What would be your Desert Island MP3s?

John Mayer, Jack Johnson and the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

If you were facing awesome peril and impossible odds, which real or fictional person would you most want on your side and why?

I would want my good friend and right-hand man in the Richmond office Fooming Hoh (director of sales) by my side. He is a great friend to chat with and extremely smart so he could help overcome any situation.

And finally, a grizzly bear and a silverback gorilla are getting ready for a no-holds-barred rumble. Who is your money on and why?

The gorilla. It's a lot more nimble than the bear. ■



Click here to read more five-minute interviews online