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Channelwise

THE MAGAZINE FOR IT RESELLERS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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'Tis a wicked Web ...

The traditional winter chill that hits the Highveld as soon as the sun starts to dip was starting to bite as Ray-Ban Ray reached behind him for the faux-suede, fleece-lined designer jacket draped over his chair. I sipped on my glass of amber nectar and smiled. He noticed it.

"I know you're going to write some sarcastic comment about my jacket," he snarled. "But for the record – and the reader – this is a genuine kid leather, lamb's wool-lined, designer-labelled bomber jacket imported from Italy. The guy who sold it to me guaranteed it."

"And what else did he have on his stall," I smiled back and, spotting the curling interior label, grinned. "And since when is 'Dior' spelt with an 'e'?"

He almost choked as he huffed into the sleeves and hugged the jacket tightly around his chest.

"Bollocks!" he spat.

I was about to wind him up tighter than a cheap Timex when Dave the Frame stepped ... well ... into the frame. It had been some months since we'd seen him as he recovers from his stroke but, dressed in his familiar uniform of khaki shorts, olive green, sleeveless photographers' jacket (every pocket filled) and scuffed brown boots, he looked the same old Frameman as he scooped out a chair, slumped into it, and flicked a piece of an earlier lunch from his paunch.

"Dressed for success as always, David," Ray-Ban greeted him – there's a definite pecking order at The Local when it comes to the wind-up game.

"I am indeed," The Frame ignored the insult, slapped and rubbed his hands together and signalled to P, formerly Prince, who scurried over to the table, brow and upper lip beaded with sweat and almost grey in pallor. There were more than three tables occupied, so the normal panic had settled over the waitrons. P took the order for a round and scuttled back to the bowels of The Local where the bar fridge loomed.

"I've just been finalising the details of our new website," The Frame continued, "and it should be all systems go in the next couple of days."

"Jeez," Ray-Ban seemed genuinely impressed at the news. "Where did you get the millions for that?" He'd obviously been reading about the Free State government's fiasco around the millions squandered on its websites and the figures had stuck in his head like an annoying song.

"Ray-Ban," The Frame gave him a fatherly pat on the hand. "It cost a couple of thousand – not millions – from start to finish; from the concept, to the template, to the actual design, and to get it up and running with an ISP. You should know governments by now ..."

We nodded sagely in sync.

"That's a smart move, Frameman," I said. "Every company – especially smaller ones like yourself – should have

some form of online purchasing available to help with sales. We've lagged a bit behind the rest of the world, but all the indicators are that online shopping is about to take off in South Africa. Internet penetration is rising steadily as access becomes a lot easier, mobile devices are available and affordable, and there's a lot less worry about security than there used to be. In fact, something like two-thirds of 18-year-old to 30-year-olds in South Africa – Generation Y as they call it – are buying goods online on a regular basis."

Dave the Frame nodded as Ray-Ban looked like he was going to nod off. He does that when I start quoting statistics.

"I know," The Frame said. "That's why I'm pushing so hard on getting our website live."

"The important thing to remember, though, is that it is just a tool," I continued. "It is not the be-all and end-all of your business, and you can't let it be. You can't just sit back and expect the orders to roll in. You've still got to be proactive in all aspects of your sales, but use the website to supplement the model you've already got in place."

The Frame nodded again, he'd obviously heard this all before as his reputation for research still precedes him.

Ray-Ban suddenly lurched, fish caught.

"Speaking of webs and websites," he almost snorted, "remind me to buy one of those long feather dusters for Mahalia. I noticed some spider webs in one of the corners of the shop earlier today."

The Frame patted his hand again as we smiled at each other. He could pick up tonight's tab, the smiles said.



By Mark Davison

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SCENE AROUND



Riverbed recently honoured its best partners in 2012. The best-run proof of concept award was shared by Kobus Raath of Dimension Data and Antonie Henning of Orange, while the technical personal of the year was Gawie Basson. Salesperson of the year was Vaughn Christie from Orange. Best new partner of the year was Cybervine, while Networks Unlimited was named as distributor of the year. RASP (Riverbed associate service provider) partner of the year was Datacentrix; and partner of the year was Dimension Data. In addition, Riverbed also acknowledge two resellers that have moved up the partner programme levels: First Technology has become a Platinum partner, and Datacentrix has become a Diamond partner – the first on the African continent.



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SCENE AROUND



Tarsus honoured its top resellers at its recent Dealer Bash - this year with a back-to-school theme. Headmaster Pierre Spies and guest sportsmaster Bob Skinstad handed out top-of-the-class prizes to the following: SMB Reseller of the Year - Ecotech (Cecil Eybers); Africa Reseller of the Year - Modi Investments (Nonnie Modise); Outstanding Achievement Gauteng - Apronics (Anil Pema); Outstanding Achievement Gauteng - Digital Planet (Michelle Teixeira); Outstanding Achievement Gauteng - Sysdba (Chris Bamber); Outstanding Achievement National - First Technologies (Tony Santos); Outstanding Achievement National - T-Systems (Johan Gouws); Outstanding Achievement National - Gijima (Richard Blewitt); Best Business Partner - Incredible Connection (Stefan Marnewick); and Reseller of the Year - EOH Bromide (Delfim Alves).

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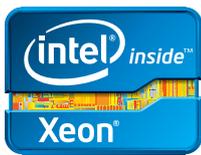
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The Customer Service Manager – the distribution differentiator

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a white sticky note. The hand is positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers gripping the edges of the note. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface, possibly a desk or a wall. The sticky note is tilted slightly to the right.

Our customer
is king!



By Paul Conradie,
Managing Director of Comztek

Oftentimes distribution companies fall into the “move product at all costs” trap without paying attention to the value they can provide their customers beyond the box.

Yes distribution is without a doubt a tricky business. It is a business where your success is underpinned by a watertight supply chain, excellent cross border relationships, and a keen knowledge of vendor supply mechanisms. It involves warehousing, transportation, logistics, and it also entails product knowledge, and customer relationship management.

When all thrown into the same melting pot there can be a disparity as to where a business needs to place its main emphasis. Placing too much weight on one element may lead to the demise of another – hence it becomes a balancing act.

At Comztek we have acknowledged that the one area that the majority of local distributors don't place enough emphasis on is that of the “Customer Service” environment. Admittedly all distributors try and engage regularly with their resellers, they send out promotions, offer discounts on stock, endeavour to meet in the middle when it comes to tight tender processes – but the disconnect comes with the follow up.

It is with this that we have started a new process internally with the establishment of a dedicated customer service department and manager, who's entire focus is to ensure that customers remain engaged, during the acquisitive phase and even

after the order has been processed. The introduction of the customer contact centre in addition to our service desk will ensure that customer calls and emails are monitored and measured at all times, this enables us to create a view of each customer that we can then use as means to scrutinise and evaluate our levels of service, as well as services tailored to the exacting needs of every unique reseller.

The point here is that we want our customers to be serviced at all times without feeling that they need to demand service. Although at Comztek we pride ourselves in always having delivered a superior value-added service, we believe that through the consolidation of our customer service efforts we will be able to keep a better handle on our service levels, without being bogged down in merely the logistics of running a distribution company.

That said the goal of the customer service department is to ensure a consistent customer experience at all times. Where a customer knows they can escalate queries and they will be viewed instantly, where they can make urgent requests and they will be dealt with immediately as opposed to being viewed as simply another service desk call.

When one manages a business that is made up of multiple brands and is complex in its make up – it can be difficult to ensure consistency. We believe that through our customer service arm we will be able to create the “wow” factor for customers that is sometimes lacking in the distribution game.

The customer service strategy fits in perfectly with our overall value-added distribution promise, where it is all about going the extra mile. In distribution you need to be innovative, attentive and ahead of the game in order to survive. It isn't just about ensuring your box arrives here on time, it extends right through the entire customer value chain where customer experience lies at the heart of the process.

We know full well that customer service is by no means a new concept, but what we have acknowledged is that it needs to be a formalised one. In a world where instant fulfilment is the new nature of the consumer, we need to adapt our own business to be able to deliver services that meet the requirement, the desire, and the nature of the client.

Business is without a doubt a numbers game, but one's success shouldn't be hinged around this. Instead success should be measured on how many of your

Local distributor puts customers first with appointment of Customer Service Manager

- *Comztek Appointment: Chandra Cimardi, Customer Service Manager*

Comztek has announced the appointment of Chandra Cimardi, effective 12 March 2013, to the position: Customer Service Manager, reporting to Sales Director, Uwe Brandkamp.

The appointment of a dedicated Customer Service Manager is a landmark event in the value-added distributor's continued efforts to innovate and improve the total Comztek client experience for its reseller clients.

Explains Brandkamp: “As Customer Service Manager, Chandra will lead her team to provide a single point of contact for our clients, managing the entire client engagement process from first contact, through to quote and then finally the delivery of the order.”

“Her extensive and well-rounded experience, particularly in the areas of customer relationship management, sales and personnel management, means she is well equipped to manage this new endeavour to simplify and streamline the sales process for our resellers. She is a valuable addition to our team and we welcome her to Comztek and look forward to breaking new ground together.”

Cimardi has a diploma in Customer Service Management from Damelin and 18 years experience in the IT environment, which includes extensive experience in customer relations, support and service; human capital management; operations; call centre management; and sales.

Comztek is a leading distributor of high-value, high-demand, consumer and business technology products and solutions throughout South Africa and the African continent.



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At the recent VMware Partner Exchange 2013, VMware's annual partner event, held in Las Vegas, South African company Apronics was named the Global recipient of a VMware Partner Network Award in the Emerging Markets category. The picture shows Chris Norton, regional director, southern Africa at VMware, with Ken Marsden, chief technology officer at Apronics, and Mark Reynolds, senior partner manager, southern Africa at VMware.



For the first time ever, South Africa will have an annual fundraising event where users can choose what welfare sector will benefit from their donations: animals; basic community welfare; children; disability; or education.

Tekkie Tax will be an annual fundraising campaign for a large mix of carefully selected welfare organisations, schools and institutions in South Africa. NGOs which are accountable, reliable and have a history of good service will be chosen as beneficiaries of this campaign.

The first Tekkie Tax campaign will take place on 31 May 2013. During April and May, members of the public will be asked to get a Tekkie Tax sticker for a R10 donation from any participating outlets or welfare organisations. There will be five different kinds of stickers, each representing a beneficiary sector.



Eastern Province Child and Youth Care Centre is set to benefit from free records management services from Metrofile Records Management Eastern Cape – a group company of JSE-listed Metrofile Holdings – allowing the non-profit organisation to securely store and access all children's records.

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SCENE AROUND



Bidvest company Konica Minolta South Africa has been supporting South Africa's national greening and food gardening social enterprise, Food & Trees for Africa (FTFA), for five years and has most recently planted 2 013 trees at impoverished schools in the Polokwane and Kimberley regions - bringing the total of trees donated by the company to 17 678.



Consulting, training and software provider IndigoCube has donated R47 000 to the Lerato Education Centre in Eikenhof, south of Johannesburg. The centre was established in 1999 as a development project for women and children by Sister Mary, of the teaching order the Salesian Sisters, at the request of the community's Women's Committee, and is a registered non-profit organisation.

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SMEs: a great opportunity for the channel in 2013

By Craig Greene, channel manager at Bytes Document Solutions

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are important contributors to South Africa's economic development, with some researchers estimating the total economic output of SMEs at 50% of GDP.

However, SMEs face several hurdles in South Africa's business environment; among them is the challenge of appropriate technology. With this in mind, the SME market presents one of the biggest opportunities for channel partners this year.

In order for the channel to successfully sell into this almost untapped market, it is important to know what they are looking for to make it easier for them to tap into new, disruptive technologies. For SMEs security, bring your own device (BYOD), cloud computing and big data are topping the IT wish lists in 2013.

Although they may be interested in revamping their IT solutions with the newest technology offerings available to the market, budget constraints will dictate what they are able to incorporate. Therefore, it is necessary that the channel help these SMEs prioritise their IT needs to deliver the best value for their business.

To achieve this, VARs should focus on the following hot technology offerings for SMEs:

- * Managed services - small businesses are unable to make major capital investments, but they still want to use IT to work faster and more efficiently. This presents an opportunity to offer services and solutions that provide cost predictability and the flexibility to adapt to the ever-changing needs of the SME workforce. One such service that can add particular value to the SME is managed print services (MPS).

In today's tough economic climate, all businesses, including SMEs, are looking for new ways to cut costs and boost efficiency. Since the majority of these businesses have printers, much of their costs are being spent on printing.

This presents an opportunity for VARs to introduce a cost effective way of printing. By offering this service to customers right now, they are adding value to their business as a trusted advisor, since the unmanaged print environment has a negative impact on their bottom line.

- * Security - all businesses are continually concerned about the security of their IT systems and SMEs are no different. The latest technology offerings, such as tablets, are bringing these concerns to the surface as companies aim to protect their systems.

Solution providers can help SMEs keep their security simple by recommending embedded and remote management solutions tailored according to their business needs.

- * BYOD - cloud and mobile technologies offer SMEs a lot of promise, but many of these companies need help getting started. The channel has an opportunity to help customers provision services without middleware or formal set up.

With all the latest technology developments attracting much attention from companies large and small, now is the time to go in and add value to the customer's bottom line by offering the best solutions to meet their business needs.

Double It's easy

Resellers could be doubling their profit margins – with very little extra effort.

That's the word from Gary Pickford, MD at ACT, who explains that adding accessories to hardware sales is a simple way to increase gross profit.

"We've found that there is a large number of IT and office product resellers that focus on selling IT hardware. Unfortunately this is not generating the profit level that it used to, and the channel is now under pressure to increase hardware volume if they want to stay ahead in this game."

The problem with straight hardware sales, he explains, is the very low profit margins these products now offer.

ACT built its business on supplying product sold as a result of a hardware sale, having distributed ink, toner and paper to resellers to service their installed base of printer hardware over the past 11 years .

"So we have always been in the game of selling supplies and accessories and understand how it works," Pickford says.

It's no secret that printer supplies carry a far more attractive margin than the printer hardware does, and the same model, Pickford says, holds true for the accessories market.

"The average notebook or tablet user needs three accessories in order to use the hardware product effectively, so there is a willing market ready and able to buy accessories.

"Selling accessories won't increase a reseller's revenue by much – but the focus will lead to an increase in their gross profit," Pickford explains. "And they can do this by adding just two or three accessories to the hardware at the point of sale.

"It would be logical for resellers and retailers to incentivise their sales staff to add accessories to the hardware sale as a way of improving profit and not to look only at turnover."

your margin with accessories

The rewards are compelling. Pickford says European studies indicate that a user buys four accessories for each device – and at least two of these are bought at the point of purchase.

Looking at the figures makes such a compelling argument for attaching accessories to a hardware sale that it's difficult to understand why resellers and retailers are not embracing this model more enthusiastically?

The big problem, says Pickford, is that there is such a diverse range of hardware and, consequently, so many accessories available that resellers battle to understand which accessories are suited to which product, and where to source them.

"The ACT sales force want to work with resellers and retailers to help them to understand and source the right accessories for the hardware their customers are buying.

"There is currently very little information available, and the potential for selling the user something that doesn't fit or isn't suitable is very high – so resellers would rather steer clear of the situation. However, we ensure that the product we recommend for a particular hardware device fits, and will assist our partners with the correct accessories." ACT is in the process of segmenting the accessories market according to the suitability of the end users requirements.

Since resellers tend to specialise in particular

brands, Pickford believes it won't be too complicated for them to familiarise themselves with the relevant add-ons.

"Our staff will sit with you and help you to build a menu of products that are suitable for the hardware devices you typically handle.

"There is no reason why every reseller shouldn't be doubling their margin in each hardware sale."

Pickford explains that there are more than 5 000 hardware accessory products out there, so it makes good business sense to align with a partner like ACT to bring manageability and continuity to a resellers accessories strategy.

ACT has segmented its accessories offering into 6 defined segments: business, gaming, audio, mobility, storage and lifestyle. This makes it extremely simple for resellers to recommend the appropriate product for the relevant hardware.

This approach will be welcomed by the end user customer as well. With every user purchasing at least three accessories for their device, users are currently left on their own when it comes to selecting the appropriate accessories. By offering relevant add-ons at the point where the hardware device is purchased, the user is ensured of getting the appropriate accessories for their needs.

Most hardware vendors recognise the significance of accessories and the "after-



Gary Pickford, MD of ACT.

market" to add to their own profitability, but Pickford points out that the complexities involved have made it difficult for most of them to capitalise on it effectively.

"Unless you focus on the accessories, you can't possibly succeed in this market," he says. "And that's what ACT brings to the party. We not only specialise in the products we offer but have full-time resources devoted to making sure our reseller partners are supplied with a premium quality accessory that is suitable to the requirements of the end users.

"We are here to make it easy for our resellers to add accessories to the hardware sale, so that they can improve their customers experience."

"It's simple. By selling two attachments at the point of sale – and these are accessories that the user will probably buy anyway – the reseller can double his gross profit."

Hardware product	Category	Selling price*	Profit	Accessories	Selling price	Profit	Total value	Total profit **
Acer Travelmate	Notebook	R 7 990	R 659	Mouse, headset, hub	R 858	R 280	R 8 848	R 939
HP Desktop PC	Desktop	R 5 500	R 455	Wireless keyboard, speakers, webcam	R 1 797	R 590	R 7 297	R 1 045
Samsung Galaxy 10.1"	Tablet	R 8 500	R 662	Cover, charger, stylus	R 899	R 288	R 9 399	R 950
Apple Tablet 10.1"	Tablet	R 6 900	R 350	Cover, charger, wireless keyboard	R 1 529	R 483	R 8 429	R 833
Onyx Tablet 10.1"	Tablet	R 2 500	R 250	Cover, charger, stylus	R 686	R 250	R 3 186	R 500

* Please note that the hardware pricing used is an estimate and is used for illustrative purposes only

** Estimation only for illustrative purposes only

To find out more about how to increase your margin, contact ACT:

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Web: www.act3.co.za

Follow the money ...

Like Ayrton Senna, the much mourned Formula One champion who lost his life in a devastating crash in 1994, young Luiz Razia (23) is a Brazilian. As a consequence, he grew up with a reverence for the great man, a national hero who was buried with full state honours when Razia was just five years old. From as far back as he can remember, Razia was determined to follow in the wheel tracks of his idol.

His rise through the motor sport ranks was not as meteoric as his famous compatriot's, but nevertheless, after winning the South American Formula Three championship, Razia's future looked promising.

With financial support from his family, friends and Brazilian businesses he found himself racing in Europe in F1's acknowledged feeder series - GP2. In his fourth season he finished runner up and was delighted to be announced as a member of the Marussia F1 team for 2013.

"I've finally got something that I've worked towards for 11 years," he said. "It really is the fulfilment of a dream for me, worth more than anything else."

Just a few weeks after the joy of this announcement came the distressing news: seemingly without warning, Razia was replaced by Jules Bianchi. It transpired that Razia had agreed to pay Marussia for the privilege of racing in F1 and apparently, as a result of failed promises from potential backers and "conflicting contracts", was no longer able to fund his place on the team.

There was an immediate outcry from race fans around the globe, condemning the "pay-driver" practice that's increasingly prevalent today as cash-strapped teams - many hard hit by the European financial crisis - battle to remain afloat.

Drivers should gain their place on the F1 grid on merit, they say, bemoaning the fact that pay-drivers have sidelined acknowledged masters like Heikki

Kovalainen and Timo Glock this year.

Perhaps surprisingly, pay-drivers are not a new phenomenon. The idea that drivers should bring money with them to a race team, in the form of personal funding, sponsorship or via patronage, has been widely accepted in motorsport from even before the dawn of the F1 era in 1950.

The great Argentinean driver, Juan Manuel Fangio, who won five world championship titles in the '50s, was funded throughout his career by the Argentine government of president Juan Peron. Consequently, Fangio was able to make his own choices about when to change teams, in order to drive for those who might afford him the best chance of winning.

An impoverished Niki Lauda bought his way into F1 in the early '70s after taking out a hefty bank loan, secured by a life insurance policy. This drove a wedge between the young racer and his family which resulted in an enduring feud. He went on to win three world championships and became one of the sport's wealthiest drivers, owning two airlines at one stage. He is currently non-executive chairman of the Mercedes F1 team.

The tough "Brummie", Nigel Mansell, champion in 1992 and the only man to hold F1 and US single-seater championships concurrently, funded his early career by selling his house and most of his personal belongings. He also resigned from his job as an aerospace engineer to devote himself fulltime to racing. He remains Britain's best F1 driver, with 31 victories.

The most successful driver of all time, Michael Schumacher, with seven world championship titles to his name, came from a poor family. His early career was backed financially by Willi Weber, who was later to become his manager. In return, he demanded 20% of all Michael's future earnings.



Graham Duxbury is the MD of Duxbury Networking, Formula 1 commentator, South African champion and Daytona Speedway USA Hall of Fame inductee.

It was the astute and financially-savvy Weber who suggested a tie up with Mercedes-Benz in sport car racing for the young German, rather than adopting the more conventional single-seater route to F1.

His astonishing achievements at this level prompted the giant automaker to fund a start for the 22-year-old Schumacher in the 1991 Belgian Grand Prix with the Jordan team. He made an immediate and lasting impression, going on to dominate F1 like no other driver before him, commanding nearly \$2-million dollars per race - win or lose - at the height of his career.

While pay-drivers may bring an important infusion of much needed funding to an impecunious team, dependence on it can sometimes have negative repercussions.

Take, for example, the case of the Italian Forti Corse team, which existed briefly in the 1990s. It placed too much reliance on the money it received from the wealthy Brazilian driver Pedro Diniz and when he left for greener pastures, Forti folded without ever scoring a championship point.

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HP says Moonshot redefines servers

HP has launched its Moonshot server, the first software-defined server that uses 89% less energy, 80% less space and saves up to 77% of the costs.

The company believes the server is more than an update to the traditional server world, but calls it the first in a new class of data centre solutions.

The need for such a server has been driven by a number of mega-trends that are driving business and computing, says president and CEO Meg Whitman.

"We are living in a period of huge change," she says. "There are very powerful mega-trends that are changing the way technology is bought, consumed and paid for."

The new trends, she points out, are a new style of IT driven by social, mobile, cloud and big data.

"Think Internet scale, with billions of users and devices all around the world," Whitman says. "And it's not just about the phones and tablets that are connected to the Internet, but literally millions of devices, all contributing brontobytes of data that need to be delivered anywhere any time, and personalised."

Project Moonshot has been in R&D for the last 10 years, Whitman says, and will power the next step in creating the foundation for the next 10-billion connected devices.

Dave Donatelli, executive vice-president and GM: enterprise group at HP, says that, with this launch, the company is redefining the server market.

With the massive increase in processing power that the new world of cloud, big data and mobility requires, data centres have to move from general to highly customised servers. "This is where software-defined servers come in, and why we have made the investment in Moonshot," he says.

Social marketing a game-changer

By Anton Vujik, channel manager at Phoenix Software

Marketing successfully is the foundation of successful sales. When it comes to doing business in the channel, marketing is one of the many areas where effective partnerships can take users' sales to the next level, because these days the product alone will no longer make users successful.

Events, incentives and online advertising are the three most popular forms of co-marketing activities employed by partners today. But the contemporary marketing mix is expanding, with the adoption of emerging technologies (social media, Webinars, video and online events). Innovative vendors and distributors are incentivising partners to blog, tweet, produce video and participate in communities.

Social media has become a game-changing, anytime/anywhere phenomenon, available on computers and on a full range of mobile devices.

Being "social" now includes the user in realtime marketing, realtime customer service and realtime user analytics – all of which can produce essential information for businesses trying to understand their customers' actual behaviour, likes and dislikes. This is why social media is increasingly important for marketing, and businesses are turning to social media as an essential part of their marketing outlook and strategy. The traditional model of blasting messages to customers and potential customers is fading and a new model is emerging. The same customers who are tuning out the old, formulaic advertiser messages they've been subjected to for years are tuning in to their own personal world of social media for product and marketing advice.

This is especially true in Africa and the Middle East, where reaching prospective customers has traditionally been more challenging. The reach of social media in these regions was proven by the Arab Spring movement.

Not only does social media provide access to these traditionally closed markets, but content can be customised to include messaging that is unique for each country.

The fact that mobile is the primary communication channel in many African countries can also be leveraged by marketers. According to Nielsen, time spent on mobile apps and the mobile Web account for 63% of the year-over-year growth in overall time spent using social media, and mobile can enable better content consumption across all marketing channels and markets.

A lead's interactions with the company in social media have as much to do with their purchasing decision as their behaviour on users' Web sites or their interactions with users' e-mails. So whether it is by tagging each social share with a tracking code or through more advanced integrated software, more and more companies are finding ways to pull data from social media and use it effectively.

In the beginning, "engagement" was all the rage. Other channels couldn't attain the level of engagement social media could, and in the absence of any other metrics, engagement became the primary way marketers evaluated social success.

Today, technology has caught up with marketers' need for a sharper way to gauge ROI, and users are beginning to evolve from measuring superficial social media metrics like clicks, retweets and likes to tracking metrics that are tied to the bottom line. Many have been able to refocus strategy on leads generated via social media. In addition, by mining conversations across multiple social channels, sentiment analysis can help create strategies and engage new customers, while revealing insight into a company's products.

Gartner predicts that by 2014, organisations that refuse to communicate with customers using social media will face the same level of wrath from customers as those that choose to ignore e-mails today. And responding to inquiries via social media channels will be the new minimum level of response expected by customers. Social media has always enjoyed firm footing as a marketing and communications tool. But more and more, sales teams are finding ways to incorporate it into their sales processes; and those that do are seeing some pretty impressive results.



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DEEP THROAT

New face to head HP?

Our reliable little bird twittered in our ear the other day that the search is once again on for a new head at HP South Africa and that CVs are already being narrowed down to a tidy little stack. Incumbent head, the more than likeable Frank van Rees' short-term contract in the position expired over a year ago and it's believed that some partners have been querying when a local executive will be appointed in a more permanent capacity. We can only hope (along with many HPer, we think) that the company has learnt its lessons well from past experiences - both here and internationally - and will opt for someone who not only has extensive industry experience, but perhaps also knowledge around the company itself. Deep Throat will keep you posted on future developments.

Ex-HPer heads to Samsung

Speaking of HP ... we were more than a little surprised to learn that Manoj Bhoola has joined quite a few other ex-HPer at Korean electronics giant Samsung, heading up its newly-formed B to B division in southern and South Africa. Now, you didn't hear it here, but Bhoola was once tipped as the heir-apparent at HP to take over from Frank van Rees when he headed up its ESSN (now Enterprise Group) division - reportedly a prerequisite for any local MD. Those in the know say he eventually tired of waiting for the HP suits overseas to make a decision on his future and therefore took up the position of country manager at Avanade. And, as we said, while his latest move to Samsung may surprise, it can only mean that Samsung is preparing to spread its wings further up the food chain and into the enterprise space. A development to watch with interest, we'd hazard.

Wise old head puts up his feet

Word only just reached us that one of our all-time favourite channel people, Alf Isaacs, has finally announced that he's ready to put his feet up and has retired from the Pinnacle group. Alf was quite literally one of the first channel managers in South Africa (even though they weren't called that back then) in the late 1980s and was key in setting the standard for IBM in the day, and also the bar for future generations. We first met Alf around that time and can honestly say that some of the best memories we have of the channel were in his company. Legendary for organising and hosting some of the most extraordinary channel incentive trips ever conceived, few who were on them - Key West and Duval Street spring to mind - will ever forget the experiences. One of the true gentlemen in the industry, we only ever saw Alf lose his cool once in over 30 years - with a so-called German "tourist" in the middle of Bangkok. Needless to say, he quickly sorted the problem out. Alf, it only remains for us here at Deep Throat to say: we swallow ... big gulps of beer ... and wish you everything of the best in your retirement.

PR Prick(le) of the Month:

In the ... um ... bag

Below is an example of just one of the trials and tribulations we face on an almost weekly basis:

Hi,
Trust you well (sic).
I hope that you enjoyed the time you had with the XXXXXX bag.
Please note we will be sending someone between this week and next week. please advise on a suitable time and day for the pickup. (sic)
Thanks for accepting it.

Firstly, we are curious about how you actually review a computer bag? "The nylon handles fit my hand like the soothing interior of calfskin gloves ...", or "My notebook fit snug as the proverbial bug between the sponge filled separators in the pristine interior ...". We dunno. Secondly, what is said company going to do with a second-hand bag after it's been picked up following the review?



Pic of the Month:

Pretty Princess

It's a bit of an open secret that one of our favourite channel personalities, Acer's Damien Durrant, has a bit of a passion for, believe it or not, fridge magnets. He's apparently been collecting them on his travels for years, so it was no surprise when he asked us to pick up one for him when we went to Las Vegas recently (A lot easier than picking a baby up out of the bath, we believe - Ed). And we thought this one pictured would be just perfect! Not that the Incredible Bulk, as we endearingly call him, has any predilection towards being a princess, but more because he's had another recent addition to his family in the form of a second beautiful baby girl. Mind you, there is the slight chance that he might pass the fridge magnet on to a very good friend and ex-colleague he made famous following a certain "Brokeback Fishing" trip. The decision's all yours, Damien, but in the meantime Deep Throat swallows ... vast quantities of beer ... in wetting your new baby's head!

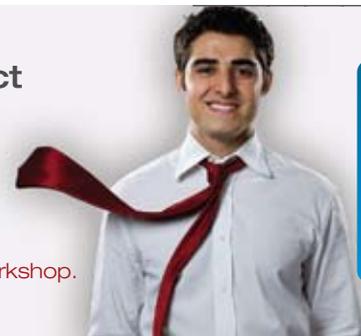


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Online retail -

The Internet, as we all know, has radically changed the way we do business and even go about our daily lives. E-mail, for example, has so revolutionised the way people communicate that there are few of us left who remember the sheer ingenuity and joy that was the fax machine. And the Internet is again on the cusp of forcing another dramatic change in our business habits - online shopping. South Africans may be a little behind the international curve

when it comes to online purchasing but, as local consumers become more tech-savvy, and security on these platforms more reliable, many are opting to do their shopping via their screens rather than via the trolley. The swing to online purchasing will undoubtedly affect the traditional channel as we know it, but should resellers and distributors view it as a threat to their existing business, or should they be embracing it to enable them to do more business?



friend or foe?

South Africa has probably lagged behind more than most other countries when it comes to online shopping, and there are numerous reasons for this. The low penetration of Internet connectivity due to its high cost for a start; the by-now notorious number of scams perpetrated by the most innovative conmen in the world, for another; and, quite simply, the inherent distrust that is almost inbred in South Africans when dealing with someone you can't see face-to-face.

But, and I know it's the oldest of Bob Dylan clichés, the times they are a-changin'.

All indications from local analysts are that online purchases in the local market will literally soar in the next couple of years as millions of new consumers hook into the 'Net via a multitude of devices, and realise the ease and reliability online stores offer them when it comes to buying the products, applications and services that they want – and which they want as quickly as they've ordered them: with a couple of clicks.

Many companies – particularly in the traditional channel – are struggling to come to terms with this new way of ordering and buying products, many of them losing historical customers to online retail stores. But many others have already got their ducks in a row and are starting to reap benefits from their investment.

One such company is LivDigital, which has been around for the past few years in various formats and with varied offerings, but which is now poised to take full advantage of the online boom local analysts are so eagerly predicting.

Rory Green, MD of LivDigital and no stranger in the local channel after stints at major vendors such as Compaq, HP and Cisco, says the company has been laying the groundwork for its online offerings for more than two years now.

"We had been monitoring the trends in Europe and the US, and it was just over two years ago when one of our directors, Dave Drummond, was in the UK that the big flip happened from traditional retailers to online," Green says. "Everyone had been talking about it and how it would transition within about 18 months, but it all happened quite suddenly. So suddenly, in fact, that the share prices of many well-known High Street retailers started tanking within months.

"I think you just have to look around at some of the casualties ... some of the household names that have disappeared ... to realise the impact that online has had there," he adds.

Green says that the circumstances leading up to this evolution in the UK are now becoming apparent in South Africa.

"When you look at the drivers, the obvious one is access – high-speed access to the Internet – and the number of people that have that access," he explains. "It also takes users about five years from the time they are online to the time they are comfortable doing an actual transaction. It takes that amount of time to build up the trust to where users are quite happy to buy online.

"If you look at it from a South African perspective, it's about four years or so since events like Seacom, all the big fibre links being put in, so Internet penetration is rising rapidly," he says. "So, if our theory holds, this year we can expect a big swing towards online.

"It's one of those things where if you're too early, you won't make any money; and if you're too late, it takes huge investment," he adds. "We believe we've got the timing right."

And he could be right considering a number of big name IT brands, as well as some

distributors and resellers, are already collaborating with LivDigital in terms of their own online offerings. He does stress, however, that much of what customers are doing online is around commodity business – large volume, small margin items.

"Our customers trade under their own brand," Green says. "LivDigital is almost like the shopping mall and we provide stores for others. So we'll run the shop for them – the logistics, the call centre – where all the business is geared towards high volume, small value transactions as opposed to their traditional reseller deals around big projects and installations. Our operations are geared more towards the consumer rather than the more complex deals resellers may get involved with."

Having said that, Green adds that the company is in discussions with some distributors and resellers regarding the more commoditised side of the business.

"A reseller may have a corporate customer who needs a few monitors or a couple of mice, for example – small value, high volume products – where, by the time the customer actually phones them, they're losing money," he says. "So we offer resellers a way to do this online – to have online capabilities – without having to make a massive investment in infrastructure. It's almost a different channel in some ways – we can streamline the processes and give them an additional channel to cost-effectively deliver their run-rate business."

Green says that resellers shouldn't view online as a threat to their traditional business, but rather as a means to enhance their service to their customers.

"If you look at the number of value-add services that resellers provide their customers – high-end storage, for example, consulting services, bespoke solutions – online is never going to interfere with this," he says.

>>>



Rory Green, MD
of LivDigital.

cost down as much as possible.”

And what would his best advice be to resellers considering taking the online route?

“Resellers need to consider why they want to be online,” Green says. “Is it something that their customer base is expecting from them? To take your business online is not just about some software and Google Adwords; it’s another fulfilment strategy with people and processes behind it. In some ways it’s like a separate company, and to have these competencies can be expensive and take time.

“That’s where we feel we can give companies the advantage and add value,” Green adds. “We can provide them with a tool, the technology and the processes to deliver an online experience with minimum risk to themselves.”

The growing trend among shoppers to circumvent the usual channels by simply buying a product online is placing IT channels in South Africa under tremendous pressure to better their services, says Simon Campbell-Young, CEO of Phoenix Distribution. However, progressive local distributors are not seeing this as a threat, but rather as an opportunity.

“The way that digital content and goods are consumed is undergoing vast and rapid changes,” says Campbell-Young. “Gone are the days of purchasing a disc, installing and then using software or other digital goods on your PC. Estimates suggest that 30% of all software is now bought and delivered online or as SaaS (reaching 70% in 2014), and the continued advent of smartphones and tablets means that today’s consumers require a convenient way to access digital goods any time, any place, on any device.

“It is highly possible, and almost expected, that one consumer could have three different ways to find, purchase, and consume the same software: one for their computer, another for a tablet and a third for a phone,” he adds. “It would be very short-sighted for the channel not to recognise this market trend and meet the needs of its customers.”

To rise to the task, he says, the channel clearly has to adapt to handle the evolving nuances and growing complexities of selling and distributing software, as well as other digital goods. The goal is to find a frictionless way to fulfil orders across multiple consumer touch points.

“How you deliver software to the end customer is one aspect of the story,” Campbell-Young says. “How you actually reach the end customer is a different one. The impact of this means that channels, from traditional resellers through to the burgeoning number of app stores, will increasingly play a different, and possibly an even more important role in the way software companies meet the demand of today’s consumers.”

He explains that distribution channels, like software companies, need to adapt to the changes in the market and implement the technology that will be necessary to reduce the complexity of selling and distributing software online (not to mention shift from delivering boxes to retailers), including supporting a model that supports affiliate marketers and app stores.

>>> “But when it comes to more commoditised areas, then it can certainly be an advantage. It’s really around those areas of the business where there’s little value that can be added, commodity products, where resellers have to look at ways to bring the

Online retail on the up and up

While there are no comparable figures specifically for South Africa, online retail sales in the US will reach \$370-billion by 2017, up from \$231-billion in 2013 - a 10% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) over the next five years, according to Forrester

In comparison, European online retail sales will hit €191-billion by 2017, up from €128-billion in 2013 (a 10,5% CAGR).

In the US, factors such as significant investment in multichannel capabilities (such as endless-aisle capabilities and in-store pickup) by large retailers and the rapid adoption of smartphones and tablets are key drivers of the continued growth in the online retail sector. Additionally, notes analyst Sucharita Mulpuru, a very positive byproduct of this rapid growth is the total number of employment opportunities that the Web retailing sector has created since its inception. Forrester and Shop.org estimate that more than 400 000 individuals are employed by ecommerce companies in the US and that figure will reach 500 000+ by 2017. The European forecast includes a breakdown by country of online retail spend, as well as market factors leading to continued growth. For instance, notes analyst Martin Gill, the UK - one of the most mature markets in Europe - will see online retail sales increase to €64-billion in 2017, up from €45-billion in 2013.

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>>> “We identified these changes years ago, and moved into the e-commerce space with great success,” he says. “In addition to supporting our retail partners through the establishment of white label e-commerce sites for them, we have built our base using our specialised portals for resellers and end users.”

Campbell-Young adds that as the company that created the first multi-vendor software download store in South Africa, Phoenix Distribution has effectively used its expertise to provide a unique white label solution for all of its customers looking to harness the power of e-commerce.

“The benefits of e-commerce solutions are obvious: cost savings; services diversification; and quick market penetration,” he says. “Agility, transparency, diversity, speed of information routing,

dynamic pricing, widening of audience reach, full accessibility through online technologies - these are the words that get everyone's hearts racing faster, and these are the benefits of moving into 21st century distribution online.

“Meeting the ever-changing demands of the market are endless and, if executed properly, will benefit all stakeholders involved,” Campbell-Young says.

Asgar Mahomed, MD of Esquire Technologies, says that online business - including online retail sales - is a development that will grow inexorably and rapidly, ultimately becoming the de facto way of doing business.

“It is a sobering thought to realise that mobile computing will account for 57% of worldwide IT growth in 2103,” Mahomed



Asgar Mahomed, MD of Esquire Technologies.

says. “With this massive growth in mobile computing, you can be sure that people will be increasingly accessing their mobile devices to buy products. This will give you an idea of how important online sales - and >>>

Credit card fears laid to rest

Arguably one of the biggest issues deterring would-be online resellers is one that has almost become endemic in today's society - fraud, and more specifically, credit card fraud. It's a legitimate fear as many an early pioneer in the online trading environment can attest to, but one that is rapidly being addressed not only by financial institutions themselves, but by independent security experts.

One of the better testimonials to cross our desks for a long time is that of John Guthrie, owner of outdoor products retailer iWarehouse.

Guthrie says it took him nearly three years to come round to the idea of accepting credit cards on the Web site but that since he has, he has nearly doubled his turnover.

The decision, he says, “turned my business around. I should have done it from the beginning.”

Guthrie was wary of accepting credit cards for several reasons when iWarehouse.co.za opened its virtual doors in 2008.

“We operate on very tight margins and we were afraid the credit card fees would eat too heavily into our margins,” he says.

“We were also very afraid of fraudulent transactions and bank clawbacks.”

For three years iWarehouse.co.za operated purely on an EFT basis, until increasing customer pressure forced Guthrie to find a credit card solution.

His homework eventually led him to PayGate.

“They were the most cost-effective payment service provider, but what sealed the deal for me was their service by way of their responsiveness and the ease of dealing with their support staff,” Guthrie says. “Their technical support and backup systems are great.”

The effect on his business was almost instantaneous, says Guthrie.

“We just about doubled our turnover within a month or two,” he says. “I hadn't realised how many sales I was losing - customers feel much more secure paying with their credit cards, and it's much easier for them.”

Guthrie says that his initial fears about fraud and clawbacks proved unfounded. “We thought we would be at the mercy of the banks, but to this day we haven't had one clawback due to fraud,” he says. “Partly that's because we've been very vigilant, but PayGate also has great systems in place. Our guys are well trained and pick up most fraud attempts, but PayGate's Pay Protector service catches what we miss.”

This is despite the fact that many of the products on sale at iWarehouse are high-value, high-demand items - tempting targets for fraudsters as they are easily resellable.

“With GPS and other high value goods we receive several fraudulent orders daily,” says Guthrie. “But with good systems in place it's not a problem.”

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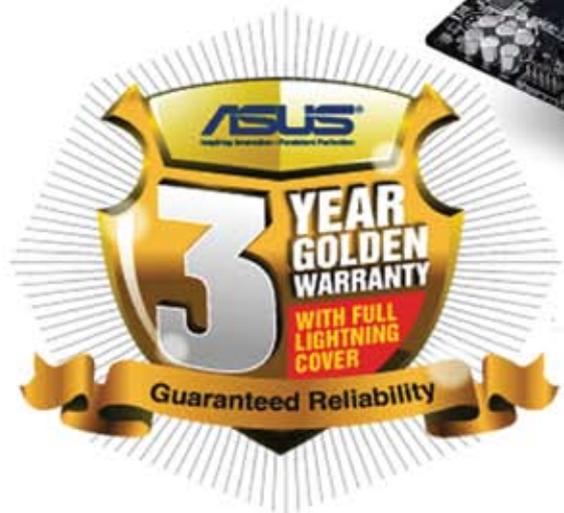
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>>> online retail – is going to be. People will want to buy items, including retail items, from their mobile devices. This trend will grow, not diminish.”

Mahomed points to IDC figures which predict that worldwide IT spending this year will exceed \$2,1-trillion, up 5,7% from 2012, and that mobility would be the biggest driver of this.

Sales of smart mobile devices, including smartphones and tablets, would grow by 20% - and will contribute a significant 57% of all IT growth. Excluding smart mobile devices, IT industry growth will clock in at only 2,9%.

“With sales of mobile devices such as smartphones growing by as much as 20%, the entire platform of how we live and work

is going to shift,” he says. “More and more of our daily chores, including buying things like retail items, will be conducted online.”

Mahomed says that in Europe, for example, mall owners are having to offer shoppers more services - services which are not replicated on the Internet - as more consumers turn to online shopping. According to shopping experts at the annual MIPIM trade fair in Cannes, he adds, malls must become more like full-service community centres, offering things like hospital services and government offices as a way of maintaining business in the face of the shift to online.

Esquire has been one of the pioneers of online distribution in South Africa and Mahomed reveals that it notched up 10

000 online sales from June last year to February 2013. He says one of the reasons for the company’s success in this arena is that it actively encourages resellers to place orders online, rather than through the traditional sales model.

Mahomed says Esquire launched online sales four years ago as a “cyber salesman function”.

“Sales started slowly, but we are now witnessing a sharper increase,” he says. “We have more than 10 000 resellers and, for resellers in a hurry and who cannot get through to us via normal sales channels, buying online is a logical solution. It may well, with time, become the preferred way of conducting business.

“Our resellers can see our entire product range online, including all product specs and features. This makes purchasing that much easier.”

Late last year, Mahomed explains, the distributor took its online sales model a step further with the introduction of its Virtual Reseller Network (VRN). Mahomed believes that the VRN is a world first in the “technology market space”, adding that it provides any participating reseller with immediate access to the company’s entire stockholding.

“More and more resellers are signing on as VRN users,” he says. “It makes their lives that much easier – and that of their clients. When a client orders from a reseller, the order is placed with us online and the goods are automatically sorted by the VRN system, invoiced and picked up by a courier – to be dispatched to the reseller, or to the end user himself.

“This methodology gives participants a definite edge in the marketplace,” Mahomed adds. “And while it does not yet account for the majority of our sales, I believe the next five years will see a dramatic shift towards online sales – whether we like it or not.

“Companies who do not gear themselves up for online trading are going to lose a big slice of the business cake in the future, that’s for sure,” Mahomed says.

Gen Y leads way in online shopping

The older generation may still be leery about online shopping, but South Africa’s Generation Y has taken to it like the proverbial ducks to water, according to the 2012 Cisco Connected World Technology Report.

The study reveals that more than two-thirds of the surveyed South African 18-year-old to 30-year-old respondents rely on Internet retail sites to do their shopping, with 63% purchasing up to 24% of their goods online

“Online shopping has become increasingly popular in South Africa; however, the country is only now catching up with the rest of the world and the findings of this research demonstrate this,” says Alpheus Mangale, MD of Cisco South Africa.

“This shopping trend is set to grow from strength to strength given the increased convenience and flexibility it offers consumers. In order for South Africans retailers to be able to benefit even more, Cisco believes that the right network and technology infrastructure needs to be in place in order for them to fully take advantage of online shopping.”

The results for South Africa are based on a survey commissioned by Cisco of 1 800 Generation Y (Gen Y) university students and young professionals, aged 18 to 30, across 18 countries.

The report examines how this generation uses the Internet to connect with the world around them, and reveals their behaviours, attitudes, issues, and concerns about the creation, access, management, and privacy of the enormous amounts of data being generated daily by smartphones, sensors, video cameras, monitors, and other connected devices.

Other key facts that emerged from the South African survey include:

- 59% will share their e-mail address to get discounts and sales notices;
- 65% rely on customer reviews for online shopping; and
- But 82% do not trust most Internet sites to keep data secure.

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The company understands that no two customers are the same, and it is against this backdrop that its sector specific focus is designed to meet your client's needs, whether they're in retail, transport and logistics, hospitality or healthcare. Weston already boasts an extensive, highly successful portfolio and have plans to further grow and extend this base into the future.

The premise of the mobile enterprise

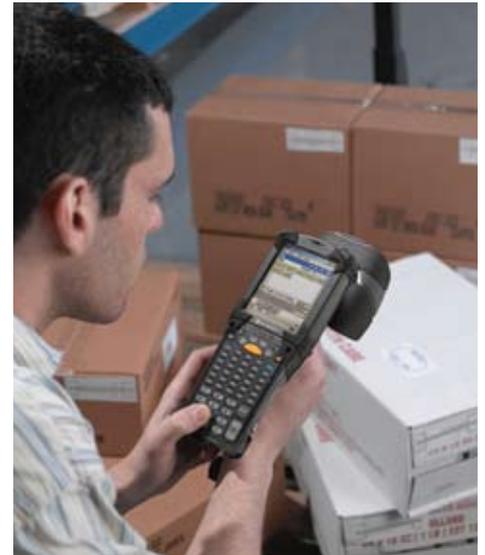
"Mobility is a broad term and means different things to different organisations," states Kevin Norton, manager Mobility at Westcon SA. "Generically it simply applies to a person who works in the field, outside the four walls of the business. These field workers are the face of their organisation, and their professionalism impacts the customer's perception of the company. However it can also be relevant to on-premise workers who simply need to be able to move around the office but also need the same access to the systems wherever they are.

"With our offerings in this area of business we provide and enable solutions that target the line of business and application for the mobile worker. No matter if these are mobile computers, tablets, wireless routers, mobile printers and barcode scanners."

Norton adds that the mobility market is growing rapidly, with new technologies, applications and opportunities emerging constantly. He believes that in order to take advantage of this growth resellers need a mobility partner, someone who can give them all the technical and logistical expertise they need to meet their customer's needs and grow a mobile-solutions business.

"For partners in, or considering the mobility market, we do all the heavy lifting; provide device activation assistance, training, technical support, just about everything. You simply sell, whether it's creating new sales or growing your existing business, when you partner with Westcon for your mobility needs, you will enjoy a better return," adds Norton.

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The Motorola DS9208.



Above and right: Using the Motorola L14278.



Left: A Motorola Micro Kiosk.



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Challenges to cloud adoption

By Christo Briedenhann, country manager of Riverbed Technology, Africa

In Africa, an emerging information technology industry is betting its future on serving customers and businesses through cloud-based applications.

At the same time, governments and non-governmental organisations are betting that cloud-based technology can help transform their economies and societies, spurring improvements in education, public health and the environment.

The mobile-centric nature of Africa's future, its current infrastructure, and the scattered nature of much of its IT industry all make the continent a prime candidate for cloud computing.

It sounds great, but making the cloud work in Africa remains a complex problem. There are challenges unique to Africa, notably the last mile, the remoteness of many areas and the fact that not all regions have access to high speed Internet yet.

In general, when employees are accessing company applications and data from remote locations, they are likely to experience performance problems.

One possible option that many organisations have considered is to install servers and networking equipment in each branch office.

However, this can be expensive in terms of licensing and management; requires skilled staff on site to manage server and storage systems; can cause issues of data integrity, especially if employees need to collaborate on files and documents; and does not necessarily overcome the performance issues experienced by those attempting to access data via a wide area network (WAN).

For those organisations that have embarked on a consolidation project and removed servers from the branch office, or intend to, there are further hurdles to overcome. When data has to be accessed over long distances, many CIFS applications are affected by latency.

Increasing bandwidth won't necessarily overcome poor performance, as adding more bandwidth will not address latency - but a WAN optimisation solution will.

WAN optimisation overcomes latency through specific TCP and application protocols.

African organisations require technology that optimises bandwidth and accelerates applications to offer both financial and performance improvements. These technologies, brought to market by Riverbed Technology, can improve bandwidth utilisation at remote locations by between 60% and 95%, and improve application performance by five- to 50 times.

In addition, organisations can avoid expensive bandwidth upgrades and free up bandwidth for other applications such as VoIP.

In African business, as with anywhere in the world, there's a driving need to cut costs and do more with less. When application performance is as good at a remote location as it is in the head office, remote workers use the applications more effectively, are able to work more productively, and can deliver the service customers expect.

This benefits the company's efficiencies, reputation and bottom line, and reduces operating costs.

Cloud

Users have heard it all: there are private clouds and public clouds; users talk about hybrid clouds and community clouds; people have personal clouds and then there are corporate clouds.

For the last two years, South African resellers have largely ignored the cloud. Perhaps hoping it would go away; perhaps hoping that a way of leveraging it would present itself.

As the channel comes into the second quarter of 2013, however, it's becoming obvious that neither scenario is going to play out: the cloud isn't going to go away; and there is no easy way to get in on it.

However, the overriding message from the market is that resellers are in a unique position right now to help their customers realise the benefits of cloud computing, and so become a valued partner and member of the cloud delivery eco-system.

Most users - and their customers - have already dabbled in the cloud; whether through DropBox or using an application like Google Mail or Office 365. On a personal level, users have not hesitated to take advantage of the many benefits conferred by cloud computing.

In the corporate space, it's a different story: issues like connectivity, device and user management and - most importantly - security have all played a role in slowing the decision-making cycle for many companies.

And this is where resellers have an opportunity to insert themselves into the process. They can either set up their own managed infrastructure and offer cloud services out of a secure data centre, or they can resell the services set up by other, bigger, players.

Richard Vester, director of the cloud business at EOH, explains that end-users are rapidly turning to cloud technologies. While only 2% of organisations had adopted cloud computing in 2010, with 16% on the

comes of age

Cloud computing has been the buzzword in the IT industry for the last two years – but many channel players have failed to see the relevance to their own businesses. With more and more end-user companies wanting to investigate a move to the cloud, local resellers need to get up to speed on the technology quickly, and figure out how to be involved in the cloud computing ecosystem.

road to virtualisation and 82% till deploying their traditional physical infrastructures, this picture is set to change quickly.

Vester points out that companies using a purely physical set-up will have shrunk to 35% by 2015, with 45% virtualised and 20% using cloud computing.

But cloud is not one thing, he adds, and it's not a product in the traditional sense of the word.

“Cloud is a business model and it is made up of different things: infrastructure as a service; software as a service; and platform as a service.”

He explains that the characteristics that allow identify cloud computing - as opposed to managed services - include the following:

- * On-demand self-service - the service must provide the end-user with the ability to request and provision resources without human intervention;
- * Standards-based access - cloud computing promotes heterogeneous access via either thin or thick clients;
- * Pooled resources - multi-tenancy is a feature of cloud computing;
- * Rapid elasticity - cloud gives users the ability to scale up and down, quickly and easily; and
- * Metered use - it is generally offered on a pay-per-use model.

Driving the move to cloud computing, he adds, is a need for increased agility, increased flexibility, increased efficiency and increased security.

Vester says, in the South African market, companies are looking to keep their information in a combination of private clouds, hosted private clouds and the public cloud – although there is not generalised availability of public cloud infrastructures as yet.

However, CIOs still have some very valid concerns when it comes to the cloud, and especially the public cloud. The most pressing is concern over data: where it is; who has access to it; is it safe? The other is around performance: will the cloud infrastructure meet the demands of the application; and what control will the IT department have over performance issues?

Vester proposes a relatively simple business model for companies that embrace cloud computing: request; release; run; and retire.

“We believe this is a business model that companies can use to provide cloud computing,” he says. “Request refers to a self-service catalogue, template offerings, defined service levels, cost visibility, approval, service desk integration and identity integration.

“Release lets users access services in a way that is template driven, automated, with minimal human interventions and is secure, has a management layer, awareness and integrated identity.

“Run is about dynamic workload management, portability and metered billing that is secure, compliant, risk managed, has service level reporting and integrated identity.

“Retire allows applications of services to be removed from service. It is automated and on schedule.”

EOH recently launched a new cloud computing service that focusses on helping businesses to securely provision, manage and monitor IT infrastructure and applications as they move across private, hybrid and public cloud environments in a flexible and cost-controlled way.

The EOH Cloud Marketplace includes EOH Enterprise Cloud, a complete infrastructure as a service (IaaS) experience, which meets the pressures and demands inherent in enterprises to rapidly scale and provision cloud resources in a quick and transparent manner.

It takes the guesswork out of complex server consolidation and capacity planning initiatives, giving customers the comprehensive information they need on-demand about their physical and virtual server workloads.

To meet today's regulatory compliance, security and audit demands, the EOH Cloud Marketplace includes proper controls and a complete audit trail across private and public cloud environments.

The EOH Cloud Marketplace offers a comprehensive set of cloud services to assess customer infrastructure for workload migration and disaster recovery, mine analytics, execute the dynamics of cloud and ensure business continuity.

Dimension Data was one of the first South African companies to offer cloud services, with its offering launched two years ago.

As a global player it is perhaps fitting that Dimension Data opted for a global cloud infrastructure instead of country-by-country offerings.

Steve Nola, CEO: group cloud solutions, says that – although the group operates most of the business units in regional theatres – it was decided that the cloud



Focus on CLOUD COMPUTING

>>> services would be built across the whole group.

Nola runs the cloud services out of Australia, but data centres are located around the world: two in the US and one each in Amsterdam, Johannesburg, Sydney and Hong Kong. In addition, it partners with companies in India and Indonesia.

The offering is strictly public cloud services, Nola says, although Dimension Data does make its management and orchestration tools – the managed cloud platform (MCP) - available for private cloud customers.

Of course, the service is mainly pitched to the group's own enterprise customers, but it also has a number of partnerships with ISPs whereby they can "white box" the services for their own customers.

This OneCloud offering is gaining increasing traction among telco and service provider partners, Nola says.

"A lot of service providers are struggling to offer these services. The OneCloud programme lets them white-label our services on their own networks. It's a model that's resonating worldwide."

By bundling the OneCloud services that include enablement, segmentation, sales training, collateral, templating and billing on their own networks, service providers can roll out a service that is guaranteed to be successful, Nola says.

Dimension data currently partners with Internet Solutions (IS) on the OneCloud platform.

As the trend towards cloud computing grows, Dimension Data is looking to offer additional services – what it terms "over the top" services. Initially, these include cloud services for Microsoft offerings like Exchange, Lync and SharePoint. The first South African client is set to come on board in mid-April with 2 500 mailboxes.

Because the MCP management and orchestration layer of Dimension Data's cloud offering is automated, Nola explains

that it will be relatively easy to roll out additional over-the-top services down the line.

Nola explains that there are several reasons that Dimension Data was able to launch its cloud computing offerings ahead of other market players – and why they have been a global success.

"The success is in the model," he says. "We built the network first and then the system was built on top of that – this gave us the ability to do it properly as a data centre. This is a very different approach and different architecture from many offerings and by definition it has given us a robust and enterprise-level offering."

Nola also cautions customers to be wary of service providers offering managed services that they have simply relabelled cloud computing – what he calls "cloud-washing".

"It must be elastic, customisable and flexible. If it doesn't have those characteristics, it could be a virtualised or hosted service."

Why should companies consider cloud computing? Nola says it's not so much a question of technology any more but whether the business model demands it.

"Nowadays, it's about taking the complexity and cost out of IT, and focussing on the business and on innovation. With cloud computing, companies can create services and products in a different way."

A flexible and elastic infrastructure also allows companies to compete in new ways.

"The competitive threat used to have geographic boundaries, but now it could come from anywhere and everywhere. This is because today delivery mechanisms are so cheap and it is so easy to set up operations in another country literally in a matter of hours. It's changing the way we do business and opening up a market that is global."

South Africa has been slow to take up the cloud computing challenge, possibly because of bandwidth and security issues.

However, Nola says there is definite traction in the market now.

"We are seeing a lot of activity, and a number of people moving workloads to the public cloud environment. Today, about 50% of organisations are saying they will do some kind of cloud computing."

The issue of cloud has been disruptive for the industry as a whole, Nola adds.

"In fact, it's the most disruptive thing I've seen in the industry in the last 30 years," he says. "For software, hardware and telecommunications providers it has changed the way we think about IT. However, it has been a real enabler for business."

Business Connexion (BCX) recently launched a public cloud services, specifically targeting SMEs, which it is offering as a "white box" service to resellers.

Business Connexion SME Cloud Services, which will be delivered via the reseller channel, lets SMEs make use of standardised resources and applications over the Internet.

BCX intends to offer these services to the market through a channel partner programme as a way of building an ecosystem all the way down the value chain (ISV, telcos, banks, distributors, OEMs and emerging business). This will also play a role in the development and regular release of applications for specific vertical markets.

Jacques Loubser, GM: cloud infrastructure services at BCX, says the company has a pedigree in the South African data centre market, where it holds a 27% share. In addition, BCX is one of the only partners in South Africa certified to host SAP applications.

The company runs seven of its own data centres, and also manages 52 data centres for its customers. "We have two of the three Tier IV data centres in Africa, and currently manage over 5 000Tb of storage and about 17 500 servers," Loubser adds.

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>>> BCX is also a major network provider, with an MPLS cloud – a fully-meshed national backbone – that lets it provide a high-speed national service.

It runs metro Ethernet rings in the main centre of South Africa and has two links to London, on both the east and west side of South Africa.

Loubser says BCX has seen the cloud maturing, and has recognised that SMEs are seeing a growing need to have a presence and be on the network.

“In 2012, there were 775 000 SMEs in South Africa, and this number will grow to 833 000 by 2015,” he says. “This is where the market is. The SME services market will be worth about R440-million by 2015 – or about 58% of the market. So it’s important for resellers to start managing their systems.”

He says SME customers have shown an appetite to consume applications in the cloud, and they are steadily growing the number of applications they are accessing.

“In 2009, SMEs started with Web hosting.

They are now buying an average of four services in the cloud; by 2017, they will be using seven. So we need to be ready to deliver them.”

To this end, BCX is launching its channel programme as a white label service. BCX has made all the infrastructure and management tools; resellers will do selling as well as first and second-level support,

As well as reselling BCX’s cloud applications, in future resellers will also be able to become cloud service providers themselves and offer their applications through the BCX cloud service brokerage.

By offering these services in a hosted environment, Business Connexion will enable business the flexibility to adapt to challenges such as unpredictable and rapid changes in the business environment, shorter provisioning cycles and improved self-service, as well as de-risk IT investments and increase efficiencies.

Business Connexion will initially have hosted infrastructure, and the following software as a service (SaaS) offerings:

business e-mail (corporate-class e-mail and shared calendaring, task, and contact capabilities); business instant messaging (instant messaging and presence, voice and video conferencing, and mobile applications); and business portal (a flexible, customisable platform that enables document sharing, workflows, discussion forums, and more).

Like the cloud services the company currently offers to large enterprises, the new service offering will also be hosted in its Tier IV data centre facility which has full redundancy and failover capabilities, and electrical power storage and distribution facilities with expected availability of 99,995%.

“We are excited to launch these offerings in the South African market. The demand for hosted services in Africa and South Africa continues to grow at an impressive rate and because the majority of businesses in South Africa require these core IT services at reduced cost, we foresee exponential growth with this offering,” concludes Loubser.

Cloud computing: how can the channel get involved?

Antoinette de Waal, hosting programme manager at First Distribution, believes that the channel needs to embrace cloud computing wholeheartedly.

“With the number of vendors moving at least a portion (if not the majority) of their business to the cloud, the change is inevitable.

“Not embracing it will make your business irrelevant in a very short time. There are two main ways of moving your business into the cloud: build your own; or start reselling someone else’s.

“The quickest route to start the change, however, is to find a cloud provider that allows you to resell their solution as your own, as well as maintaining the customer relationship and ownership.

“This way you provide your customer with the solutions they want without having to invest in the implementation or ongoing maintenance of the solution itself. You also don’t need the highly expensive and rare expertise required to build your own solution.”

When asked how it’s forcing the channel to change its strategy, De Waal replies: “With its low barrier to entry and flexible scalability (both up and down), customers are drawn

to the cloud, in turn forcing the channel to provide solutions in that manner – customer demand is driving the change as much as vendor offerings.

“With customers preferring not to spend huge upfront capital for IT solutions, the cloud is the perfect solution.”

She also adds that multiple options and offerings are available to resellers, including:

- * Vendor hosted solutions, such as Office 365, McAfee Security as a Service and Symantec ExSP;
- * Reselling local service providers’ hosted solutions; and
- * Building their own data centre and hosted solutions.

When quizzed on how resellers can make money from cloud computing, De Waal says that “although the initial fees associated with cloud are low and exclude the bulk capital investment of traditional sales, shifting a customer from a product to a service provides a lifetime income that will be higher in the long run – provided that you keep delivering good service.”

She goes on to add that “customer retention can also be higher and easier when you provide a service which the customer must subscribe to - again provided that your service levels are up to scratch”.

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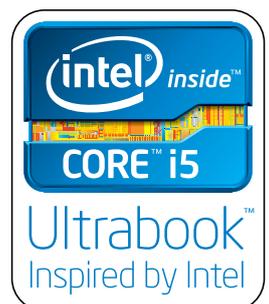


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By Deon Scheepers, regional business development manager, Interactive Intelligence Africa

Risks of moving to the cloud

The financial downturn has forced companies to re-assess their operations and examine where efficiencies can be made without reducing productivity. The advent of cloud computing has been seen by many to offer the answer for reducing IT costs and associated outlay.

While on the face of it the cloud might offer savings, if users pick the wrong service, it could cost more than expected. Therefore it is wise to look at all aspects of a cloud service to see if it offers the best return on investment and efficiencies for the business.

It's not all or nothing

One of the first areas that companies need to examine before moving into the cloud is how much of the IT infrastructure they should actually transfer. Some might think that basing all their telephony systems in the cloud would save money, with services being accessed through a public network or a VoIP, meaning that there is no carrier relationship onsite.

This would eliminate capital expenditure costs for their phone system, requiring only a monthly rental or per-use payment. While this appears to offer better long-term budgeting, it is worth noting that if the VoIP connection is lost then so is all access to data or calls, which can be very costly indeed.

This is particularly true for those businesses that rely on telephony for purchases or financial transactions, such as a retailer or a bank. Every minute that a customer can't be contacted is time lost for selling. Research from CA Technologies estimates that the global amount of revenue lost to IT downtime is \$26,5-billion and among those departments most affected are sales and finance.

The safest option is to create a private cloud by purchasing and installing an infrastructure on the premises. However, this can be very costly, both in terms of installation and continuing maintenance, making it only suitable for the largest organisations.

The most cost effective option is a hosted hybrid model that offers the best of both public and private cloud networks: infrastructure operated by the vendor is deployed on a company's local network with voice and data kept on the premises ensuring continued access and security, while the logic and routing is in the public cloud and offers the public cloud price model.

Important things companies need to look out for is the onsite equipment – who owns it and what does it cost? Some vendors might just rent out the equipment for a monthly tariff which could be supplementary to the service charge while others will offer the opportunity to buy the equipment for a lump sum or a payment plan spread out over a certain period. Again, it is worth checking how these are priced.

Data and users

Businesses are producing increasing amounts of data that needs to be kept. This includes financial institutions that need to record and store an ever-growing number of calls under compliance regulations.

As large amounts of data can be expensive to store in-house, many believe that storing this information in the cloud is a more cost effective solution.

Indeed, with the right provider it is, but what organisations must be aware of is that even though cloud providers can mitigate some of the expense of providing storage through economies of scale, they will encounter

similar overhead constraints and data costs as an in-house solution.

Telecoms and ISPs

Finally, it is worth considering how a business is going to connect to the cloud. Some cloud providers will want customers to use a partner ISP, with the cost incorporated into the monthly bill for the cloud service. While this sounds like a great deal, many companies are tied into existing ISP contracts that they will either have to keep paying until the contract expires or be liable for a hefty get-out fee.

There are also some cloud providers that will allow their customers to bring along their own third-party ISP, but will charge them a monthly interconnect fee per service per line.

In relation to telephony, in a true cloud-based scenario all that comes into the building are the broadband circuits. The phone lines are connected into the cloud provider's data centre, for which a customer will be charged a premium.

For example, the great rates a business has negotiated with its existing telco for making calls to certain codes may not be offered by the cloud provider, particularly with calls to mobile numbers.

A bright outlook

Undoubtedly there are risks that businesses need to be aware of to avoid any nasty surprises, but looking carefully through a contract will reveal several of these. The most important piece of advice for anyone looking to move to the cloud is to do the research.

Moving to the cloud can create significant efficiency savings for companies, but only if they are aware of all the concealed costs.

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The cloud: a new avenue for revenue

The cloud computing phenomenon has tipped the technology industry on its head and brought a lot of change to the channel – which has been disconcerting for many people.

But, says Microsoft SA's Johannes Kanis, cloud computing is also "a huge opportunity" for agile partners to make money by tweaking their business models and expanding into other services.

One particularly significant opportunity that Kanis sees is for partners to actually become the de facto CIO for their small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) customers.

"You can now start doing everything from Windows Intune, with remote services and remote management, all the way up to being able to offer small businesses Office 365. Basically, local small businesses can now run what is essentially the same enterprise-quality IT infrastructure that large companies use. That's one of the biggest leaps the cloud has brought us."

Kanis acknowledges the concern that many partners

have about making less money in the cloud. His answer is simple: "We've had technology shifts before, and the channel found ways to adapt. Now we're moving up the value chain again, and we need our partners to move with us and find ways to add more value to our mutual customers. It's all about encouraging differentiation and moving up the stack."

He points to a host of new competencies like digital marketing and business intelligence, where partners can add significantly more business value to their customers.

The million-dollar question, of course, is whether partners can make money in the cloud space.

Absolutely, says Kanis. He encourages partners to use the Practice Accelerator and calculator tools available on the Microsoft Partner Network Web site to explore ways of using the cloud to make them more money.

And while there is an annuity revenue stream from cloud services, partners should focus on combining their own services with this to round out their model.

Cloud is an opportunity for the channel

By Alain Schram, chief operating officer
at Kathea

A depressed economic climate, coupled with the ever-present challenges of shrinking IT budgets, reduced spend and lower margins, are issues which have plagued the channel for many years.

More recently, the traditional channel has come under threat from the growth of cloud computing, which enables users to gain access to services from service providers rather than purchasing product from resellers.

However, the cloud does not necessarily spell the end for the channel. A slight adjustment to the business model can see channel partners take advantage of the opportunities offered by the cloud, accessing new markets and enabling more businesses of all sizes to gain access to advanced enterprise-grade technology.

As bandwidth has become increasingly available, stable and affordable in South

Africa, cloud computing has become more of a viable option, leading more and more technologies to be offered as services.

This benefits businesses of all sizes, particularly the burgeoning small medium enterprise (SME) market in South Africa, by enabling them to access technologies they could not before due to the cost of infrastructure required.

However, the growth of cloud services is seen as infringing upon the traditional channel of vendor-distributor-reseller, as many service providers now act as a middleman and cut the reseller out of the chain.

In order to keep the channel alive, business models need to adapt and both distributors and resellers need to change their offerings slightly, catering for demand for services while maintaining traditional distribution channels.

The key to the survival of the channel is a change of mind-set. Currently, distributors

take their products to market through the channel. The distributor distributes products, which are then resold by the reseller.

As products become services, this does not mean that the channel needs to collapse, because effectively the model remains the same. Distributors are still buying products from vendors, but instead of moving boxes, the cloud model means that the distributor then takes these products and builds solutions, which can still be resold to the end customer.

In this model, it does not pay the distributor to take services directly to the market, as this will require a sales force and greater focus on customer service. Nor does it pay for the reseller to attempt to buy products and resell services straight from the vendor, as this will require the building of substantial infrastructure at a high cost.

With the expected growth of cloud and hosted services, the channel needs to



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Focus on CLOUD COMPUTING



change to more of a service model if it is to remain competitive, which opens up multiple opportunities and allows for access to a far broader market than previously.

Many technologies, including video conferencing and video collaboration, have typically been the exclusive domain of the large enterprise.

The channel has a large market base that falls outside of the large enterprise space. By offering technology such as video as a service, distributors can effectively create a new market for resellers, enabling them to offer enterprise-grade services to SMEs and small corporates.

The shift of the channel is not just about new markets and selling services instead of products. In the new channel, resellers will focus on offering on-site customer services

focussed on optimising the functions and capabilities of the solutions offered, user training and adoption services as well as the traditional repair services for on-site equipment, rather than physical product sales.

The emphasis on system integration will fall away in favour of end-user and customer support. Integration will happen at vendor level however, as much as end-users are able to purchase products directly from vendors in many instances, customer service and after-sales support remains an issue.

When things go wrong, the end-user wants to be able to talk to a person for support, not a faceless Web site.

This means that the role of the channel will become more people- and support oriented,

focussing on configuration and user support, amongst other roles.

The year 2013 is set to be the year of services, as the cloud gains popularity and more service providers deliver their offerings into the market.

Moving towards a hosted model can create opportunities for the channel bringing in a new portfolio of services for them to resell.

The key to keeping the channel alive is for distributors and vendors to work with channel partners rather than undermining them or cutting them out.

If this can be successfully achieved, the cloud will not erode the channel's business but rather change the business model, offering opportunities and new markets to be explored.

Channel can get in on the cloud

While cloud computing has been touted as the next-generation architecture for enterprises, some channel players perceive it as a threat, cutting them out of the channel supply chain and eroding their traditional product and value-added service margins, says Anamika Budree, Western Digital Branded products manager – South Africa.

However, one segment of the cloud computing market that has remained untapped is the small office home office (SoHo) market. This market presents an opportunity for the channel to access new customers, grow their market share and expand their business with offerings aimed directly at this fast-growing market niche.

Typically, the SoHo market feels more comfortable with their existing relationships with resellers for their computing needs and this creates an opportunity for resellers to sell tailored cloud computing solutions.

SoHo cloud offerings are often available on a per user basis or a subscription basis, or have the solution built directly into hardware. With the growth of connectivity and always-on devices, there is an increased requirement for content storage, sharing and access to files from anywhere in the world.

While public cloud solutions address these requirements, they only allow limited storage space for free and are simply not enough to

store all personal or business content.

Additionally, security around private content being held in a public server in an undisclosed location is a major concern. In the enterprise space, organisations get around this by utilising private cloud infrastructure. However, building a data centre is simply not a viable option for the home or small business user.

As a result, solutions incorporating technology known as the "personal cloud" are a growing segment of the market. These are typically desktop hard drives with cloud technology built into the hardware, which enables users to securely store their content in a known location while giving them the ability to access and share this content from anywhere.

Personal cloud storage also extends the storage ability of mobile devices. A range of apps allow users to access the stored content on a variety of devices and platforms, including tablets, smartphones and PCs.

This content can then be accessed and shared via the cloud, regardless of where the user is situated.

In closing, Budree believes personal cloud storage is one area of cloud computing where resellers can embrace the phenomenon without fear that it is eroding their markets or their business. As with all hardware, the channel is still a vital and necessary route to market for the vendors of these solutions.

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Toshiba introduces new convertible ultrabook

Toshiba Gulf FZE has announced the launch of its new 12,5-inch convertible ultrabook, the Satellite U920t - a compact mobile computer that merges convenience and usability, offering an alternative for users who require a versatile machine in a compact form.

The Satellite U920t offers the best of both worlds: for content consumption, the convertible ultrabook can be operated in tablet mode to take advantage of touch support with Windows 8; and for additional tasks which involve typing, the laptop mode is a welcome option. Toshiba's new convertible ultrabook will be available in South Africa in late March 2013.

"The Satellite U920t is designed to take advantage of the Windows 8 enhanced user interface, providing an intuitive and engaging computing experience," says Linsay Narayanan, product specialist at the South Africa Division of Toshiba Gulf FZE.

"Consumption of digital media has evolved, and the Windows 8 launch came in time to leverage on this revolution through its modern, intuitive touch gestures and Windows applications."

Enjoy the best of both worlds with the performance of an ultrabook and the ease of use of a tablet. Simply convert from ultrabook mode to tablet mode instantly with the slide-and-tilt design. This laptop allows for ultimate versatility and flexibility to adapt to any environment quickly and easily, while enjoying the perks of today's most popular technologies.

Achieve new levels of productivity with the ultrabook purpose-built for the Windows 8 experience. The new Windows 8 user interface is optimised for touchscreen input and enables users to increase

everyday efficiency.

Tap into greater comfort and convenience with a five-finger capacitive touch panel, and gain the freedom to work and play well into the night, thanks to the large ClickPad with Windows 8 gesture support, full-size, LED-backlit keyboard option and fingerprint-resistant 12,5-inch diagonal Corning Gorilla Glass IPS touchscreen display.

Speed through every task with the ultra-responsive performance of a third generation Intel Core processor and fast solid state drive (SSD). The system's quick start-up and resume functions, compliments of Windows 8, combine with performance components like SSD and Intel Rapid Start Technology. The Satellite U920t stays productive while on the go with a solid battery life of up to four hours.

There is plenty of room to expand, synch and share with the U920t.

It has two integrated USB 3.0 ports and a full-size HDMI port that allows digital content sharing on a big screen TV - in up to 1080p full HD resolution.

The Satellite U920t also allows for transferring of data to the ultrabook quickly and securely with the near-field communication (NFC) option. It has tablet sensors, like the built-in ambient light sensor (ALS) that automatically adjusts to lighting conditions, as well as an accelerometer, magnetometer, gyroscope and GPS.

The ultra-thin design and light weight won't compromise on style. This ultrabook features a height of approximately 19,9mm and a weight of 1,52kg. The convertible design comes with a durable magnesium cover.

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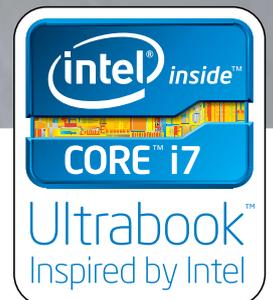
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Omega Africa, Pioneer launch new Blu-ray disc writer

The BDR-S07XLT Blu-ray disc writer can read and write to BD discs (both single-layer 25Gb and dual-layer 50Gb media). In addition, the writer boasts writing speeds up to 12x on BD discs.

PureRead is a unique function that minimises the data compensation process by diagnosing the disc condition and adjusting the reading method. It will attempt to reread obscured data to extract the original music when audio CD read errors occur.

Such errors are caused by scratches or fingerprints on the disc surface and cannot be corrected by the CD-specific error correction system (CIRC).

The BDR-S07XLT features the latest technology, called PureRead3+, which is an advanced version of PureRead.

The new PureRead3+ algorithm starts up and attempts rereading when the initial reading fails to extract data. With increased reading accuracy and the BDXL-compatible pick-up unit to enhance CD reading performance, audio CDs can be read with a high degree of accuracy.



Monster releases new DNA headphones

From the same sound engineers that created Beats by Dr. Dre come the new Monster DNA headphones.

DNA headphones have a smart design with a remixable body. Personalise a pair with one of the many designs on offer, and remix the colours to create a distinct, customised look.

With DNA headphones, listeners don't have to choose between deep bass or crystal clear details. Sounds are distinct and separate, making music rich and clear.

The comfortable, advanced noise-isolating cushions are designed to lock in sound, so users can listen for hours without distraction.

Whether stuffed in a bag or worn constantly, DNA's durable materials will help them to withstand whatever life throws at them.

DNA's dual-port inputs allow up to five headphones to connect, so that users can share audio with their friends.

Microsoft

8:34AM LEBO, KIM, PETER and MARIA all open the PowerPoint presentation + LEBO edits the opening slide while waiting for her plane + KIM changes the charts to the client's new colours + PETER gets everyone on IM to sign off on the edits + MARIA rehearses with the team via video-conference + LEBO uploads the final doc to the cloud for the 9AM call **8:42AM**

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LG launches ULTRA HD TV

LG Electronics (LG), the first TV manufacturer to globally launch an ULTRA HD TV commercially, took a clear lead in the ULTRA HD TV segment when it released its 84-inch model (84LM9600). Since then, this extraordinary product has been drawing rave reviews from some of the world's most reputable home entertainment authorities, including Germany's Heimkino and Sweden's Hemmabio.

LG's 84LM9600 has also collected a CES 2013 Innovations Award, T3's TV of the Year Award, AVForums.com's Recommended Award, and the Best of AV MAX 2012 Award in the 60-inch and above category. Additionally, it is the recipient of Home Cinema Choice's Reference Status award and Hi Tech. Mail.ru's "Innovation" award.

"The positive feedback from industry experts is testament to the hard work and experience which enabled us to be the first to globally launch a large-screen ULTRA HD TV," says Michael Bruchhausen, senior sales director of LG Electronics South Africa.

"LG's 84LM9600 stands at the forefront of engineering and design, offering consumers an unparalleled viewing experience. I think the incredible reviews speak for themselves."

LG's remarkable 84-inch ULTRA HD TV has breathtaking scale and picture quality – a direct response to growing consumer demand for larger screens with higher resolution.

LG also incorporated its acclaimed Smart TV platform, offering the updated Magic Remote and Smart Home for easier content search and discovery. Delivering the sharpest images available and an excellent overall user experience, LG's incredible 84-inch ULTRA HD TV has raised the bar for home entertainment products.

"LG's 84-inch ULTRA HD TV truly sets a new yardstick for next generation TVs," says HB Lim, TV marketing manager of LG Electronics South Africa. "It is a champion of picture quality with its superb ULTRA HD resolution, and it makes for an unbeatable user experience with LG's simple, user-friendly Smart TV platform."



The 84-inch ULTRA HD TV boasts an incredible 8-million pixels per frame. Thanks to LG's advanced Triple XD Engine, the TV displays visually stunning images in ULTRA HD resolution (3 840 x 2 160), which is four times greater than that of Full HD TV panels.

Additionally, the inbuilt Resolution Upscaler Plus renders non-ULTRA HD content in sharper detail and clarity; a much-needed solution to the problem of images appearing grainy when viewed on the large, high-resolution display.

LG's 84LM9600 produces the most spectacular level of detail ever seen on a TV, despite its expansive screen, which is the equivalent in size to four 42-inch TVs.

The LG 84-inch ULTRA HD TV also employs in-plane switching (IPS) display technology to further enhance picture quality. The implementation of an IPS panel offers consumers the benefit of a wide 178 degree viewing angle, making it possible to watch the ULTRA HD TV from almost anywhere, without distracting colour distortion.

This superior picture technology expresses vibrant colours that are true to life and therefore more comfortable for the viewer. This year, LG will be incorporating IPS display technology in a greater number of its new TVs.

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Zoro headphones from Noontec

Omega Africa, together with Noontec, are bringing the Zoro headphones to the local market. The Noontec Zoro is an on-ear, semi-isolated headphone available in three glossy finishes: black; white; and red.

The headphones come with a 24-carat gold-plated connector to boost audio quality.

Zoro headphones have a 3,5mm jack fitted to both ends of a 120cm-long flat cable; these connectors are compatible with most smartphones, so users can listen to music on the go.

The hinged steel headband allows the headphones to fold up and fit inside their soft carry case, and the user-replaceable headphone cable is tangle-free and plugs into the left ear cup.

One disadvantage of the Zoro headphones is that they lack an in-line remote and a microphone.

While the headband and ear cups are nicely padded, and comfort levels are good, the cushions put a bit more pressure against the tops of the ears than the bottoms. This is mostly due to the limited pivot angle of the headphones.

Despite this, the headphones provide adequate isolation from external noise, which enables tones to be reproduced accurately.



Lenovo showcases ThinkPad X1 Carbon ultrabook

The Lenovo team has showcased the latest "Think" innovations, designed to empower small and medium businesses (SMBs), enterprises and consumers in Africa, and introduced Lenovo's range of award-winning devices.

The ThinkPad X1 Carbon is Lenovo's premier ultrabook, weighing less than 1,4kg and packing a high resolution 14-inch display into a 13-inch laptop design.

The device is incredibly light, thanks to its carbon fibre construction, but it retains ThinkPad's renowned durability for use in practically any environment.

The X1 Carbon provides eight hours of battery life and industry-best charge times with Lenovo RapidCharge technology.

Equipped with optional 3G mobile broadband and hotspot technology, users can stay connected virtually anywhere, at any time. The X1 Carbon also includes a multi-gesture glass surface touchpad, HD face-tracking camera, dual-array microphones and Dolby-tuned audio for crisp and clear sound.



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Kindle releases Paperwhite 3G e-reader

The new Kindle Paperwhite 3G is set to revolutionise the future of e-readers, featuring a new matte white screen which reflects light evenly to ensure easy reading, and 62% more pixels for unsurpassed resolution.

The download time via 3G wireless has been reduced dramatically, allowing books to be ready to read in less than 60 seconds.

"This new Kindle Paperwhite 3G is the most incredible piece of technology. Kindle just keep getting better at their game," says Steve Nossel, MD of Circuit City, sole retail distributors of Kindle products in South Africa.

The improvements to Kindle while designing the Paperwhite have been largely focussed on 3G technologies, with the goal being a decrease in download time and a main focus on global connectivity - allowing free 3G wireless connection to millions of books at any time, anywhere.

This brilliant, high resolution black and white touchscreen Kindle is the perfect device for those who love technology coupled with convenience and efficiency.

Kindle makes available for download exclusive titles that cannot be found anywhere else, written by best-selling authors.

The new "time to read" feature calculates reading speed and lets users know when they should be finishing that specific chapter. The improved battery life, of up to eight weeks with the light feature on, is highly beneficial for users who are travelling and who do not have access to a charging point.

The Kindle Paperwhite 3G allows users to read in bright light with no glare. The matte white screen has been designed to look like ordinary paper, which allows users to read in any kind of lighting, whether indoors or outdoors, at night or during the day.

Unlike backlit tablets, the Kindle Paperwhite 3G guides light towards the surface of the screen from above, so that the light never shines in users' eyes and makes reading uncomfortable because it is too bright.

Kindle Paperwhite 3G supports children's books with Kindle Text Pop-up and comic books with Kindle View. It also features a parental guidance control panel.

Kindle Paperwhite is available at numerous retail outlets.



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Epson introduces LabelWorks label makers



Building on its success in the business printing and labelling markets, Epson has introduced its range of portable, easy-to-use label makers – known as LabelWorks.

The new range includes:

- * The compact LabelWorks LW-300, ideal for office labelling;
- * The lightweight LW-400 with backlit screen, designed for mobile labelling in almost any environment; and
- * The LW-700, ideal for the maintenance industry.

The product has the following benefits:

- * Save time, money and effort;
- * An integrated keyboard for standalone operation, and dedicated buttons for quick access to cutting and printing functions;
- * A storage function that allows users to store favourite label designs in the machine's internal memory; and
- * Durable labels that are water resistant and can withstand hot and cold conditions.

Livescribe's WiFi smartpen now available in SA

South African distributor Circuit City has announced the local availability of the Livescribe WiFi smartpen, the first digital pen to integrate WiFi technology and cloud services. The pen digitises everything consumers write and hear and automatically sends it to their personal Evernote accounts, where it is securely stored and readily available to search, play back, organise and share.

Perfect for today's on-the-go world, everyone from busy executives to students can conveniently access their written notes and recorded audio directly from paper, as well as on all the tablets, smartphones and computers they use.

"We are delighted to be one of the local distributors for this amazing product," says Steve Nossel, CEO of Circuit City. "With the global increase in demand for business-friendly tablet applications and devices, the Livescribe WiFi smartpen offers an efficient way to transfer thoughts, ideas and notes from pen to digital – effortlessly."

With the WiFi smartpen people don't have to choose between writing on paper and writing on a tablet – they can have the best of both worlds. The WiFi smartpen is an ideal companion to an iPad or Android tablet. Together they offer the ease, flexibility and precision of writing on paper with the benefits of saving, searching, replaying and sharing on a tablet.

With more than 40-million subscribers, Evernote is dedicated to

helping people remember everything important, making it an ideal complement to the WiFi smartpen. Evernote gives people a secure place to instantly store and organise their most important ideas.

Any content created and captured with the WiFi smartpen wirelessly synchs with Evernote as a new searchable and shareable note. Once in Evernote, customers can easily play back their synchronised notes and audio, called pencasts, with the new Web-based Livescribe Player, which requires no installation.

The Livescribe Player not only allows them to start at the beginning of an audio recording, but it also allows them to jump directly to a specific point in time just by tapping or clicking on a handwritten word or drawing.

The WiFi smartpen works with both Evernote (free) and Evernote Premium and can be linked to new or existing Evernote accounts. It includes an additional 500Mb of monthly upload capacity (up to 70 hours of recording time) for content created with the smartpen.

"The WiFi smartpen is designed to be the perfect companion for smartphones and tablets. Our mobile SDK will benefit developers by helping them significantly enhance applications that use a stylus or fingers for input," says Brett Halle, senior VP, Engineering, Livescribe.

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Designed to add flexibility to classroom and business presentations, the VPL-S500 Series projectors achieve large-screen projection from very short distances thanks to an ultra-powerful short throw lens (No more on screen shadows or projection light, improves visibility enhancing teaching quality)

The VPL-SW535C WXGA (widescreen) projector with easy installation, multiple media connectivity and dual pen (teacher-student) interactivity - is an ideal choice for ultra-close projection applications in educational markets.

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Canon's new PowerShot SX280 HS

Canon has launched the PowerShot SX280 HS, combining new DIGIC 6 image processing technology with a 20x optical zoom. Shooting and sharing high-quality images on the move is also easy with the camera's integrated WiFi function, allowing instant connectivity with other devices such as tablets, PCs or smartphones.

The PowerShot SX 280 HS features Canon's next generation DIGIC 6 image processor, enabling the capture of outstanding images in even the lowest of light conditions, as well as realistically smooth, full HD movies at up to 60fps.

The PowerShot SX280 HS has a 25mm wide-angle 20x optical zoom Canon lens with a four-stop optical image stabiliser (IS). ZoomPlus technology even digitally extends the reach of the zoom to 40x whilst maintaining crisp, detailed, high-quality resolution, allowing users to get even closer to the action whilst maintaining a discrete distance.

The PowerShot SX280 HS' WiFi function allows users to share their most memorable moments with friends and family by transmitting their images to social networks, connected devices, or the Internet for online backup.

Ideal for travellers who wish to track their route effortlessly, or remember the exact location of a perfect shot, the PowerShot SX280 HS' inbuilt GPS automatically tags each picture or movie with the local time and pinpoints the location in which it was taken.

The integrated GPS logger function tracks the location of the camera at regular intervals on a journey, while A-GPS functionality uses WiFi to quickly download additional Assisted GPS data, which greatly decreases the time to acquire a satellite signal.

Users can quickly switch from still images to movies to record action in full HD quality (1 920 x 1 080p) with stereo sound. Advanced 60p recording allows a new level of movie performance, with the ability to capture fast paced action with improved smoothness across the whole scene.

Fine Detail Movie Processing technology (30fps) offers incredible detail, while DIGIC 6 offers enhanced noise processing in full HD movies (30fps), allowing users to capture every moment.

The 20x optical zoom can also be used whilst filming. Movies shot on the move are kept crisp and blur-free thanks to the latest version of Intelligent IS, which features an enhanced Dynamic IS mode.

The improved mode employs a five-axis IS, correcting a range of additional types of camera shake, including rotational and parallel shake – a typical occurrence when filming whilst walking - for even smoother footage.

The PowerShot SX280 HS offers Canon's Smart Auto mode which detects up to 58 different scenes to determine the most appropriate settings to achieve the best result. It also features a Hybrid Auto mode which records the four seconds before every shot in 720p resolution, before using Smart Auto to determine the best settings to capture the shot. At the end of each day, the four-second clips are merged into one to tell the "behind-the-scenes" story of the day's images.



Epson reveals Moverio multimedia glasses

Epson's latest venture in personal technology has resulted in the launch of the first generation Moverio BT-100 (Moverio) multimedia glasses.

Moverio offers a high resolution see-through display, WiFi connectivity and smart navigation capabilities to create an innovative visual experience.

Like other first-generation products, Moverio exposes a whole new world of technological possibilities. Running on an Android 2.2 platform with Adobe Flash 11 support, streaming content from flash-based Web sites via a WiFi connection is simple.

Users can access content from a variety of sources, including the built-in gallery and music apps. The system can be constantly updated with new apps and content.

Imagine playing an online flight simulation game one minute and the next minute flying a drone plane while simultaneously viewing the live video feed from the drone's cameras projected as an 80-inch perceived image. With Moverio, it's not only possible, it's feasible.

Developed with the traveller in mind, Moverio draws from Epson's expertise in imaging technologies and delivers a QHD (Quad HD) display resolution, which equals a quarter of full HD, to ensure that the experience is similar to watching a big-screen projection - even in confined environments such as aeroplanes, buses and cars.

Moverio offers a hands-free, big screen experience alternative to small smartphone and tablet PC screens and is very easy to use. It comes with a control unit, detachable headphones, a 4Gb SD card, 1Gb internal memory and a carry case.

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Online retail - no worries for professional resellers

Online retail is rapidly being adopted as a business platform by an ever-increasing spectrum of industry sectors, and is also evolving as an accepted “norm” in society.

The IT sector is no exception, and in many respects was a pioneer in adopting “e-commerce” as the key to the future.

The impact this trend has on the traditional IT channel (this month’s cover story) is really a very simple issue to decide – the straight-forward answer is that online retail should have no impact whatsoever on any self-respecting player in the channel, from vendor, through distributor and into the reseller community.

As discussed previously in this forum, the traditional “three-tier” route to market that has characterised the IT industry since the dawn of commercial computing is a business model that is virtually guaranteed to succeed – provided that the principles of honesty and trust are not undermined by key stakeholders in the supply chain.

“Channel integrity” - a golden rule that describes and defines the mutual understanding and respect that each player in the channel should have for the roles and responsibilities played by others – has been the bedrock of the industry for more than four decades.

Retail, in the form of bricks and mortar stores, has played and continues to play a critical role in the IT supply chain. For almost as long as the IT channel has been established, retailers have been classified as “resellers”.

Their ability to address the high volume consumer market based on the ever-increasing pace of commoditisation of technology distinguishes them from other resellers in the channel.

Their ability to leverage skills, such as merchandising, promotions and credit financing, has enabled the retail reseller channel to develop a business model that no other category of reseller would dare to even attempt to emulate – the ability to offer suppliers, including vendors or distributors, commitments in the form of bulk buying, firm forecasts and so on.

This ability is usually rewarded with additional rebates, discounts or other incentives to enable the retailer to sell products into the consumer market at prices that no other reseller can hope to compete with.

In complete contrast to the retail sector, traditional resellers should

and generally do offer their customers at lot more than “best price” and the convenience of “off-the-shelf” availability of products.

Successful resellers – from large IT groups to even the smallest of micro enterprises – differentiate themselves in the channel by focussing on the delivery of “value”.

This value (sometimes euphemistically) is usually described by a range of well-worn clichés, such as “IT business solutions that deliver a measurable return on investment and lower total cost of ownership”.

Delivery of these and other promises is more usually highly dependent on technical skill – the ability to design, develop, implement, maintain and support a solution that meets the business requirements of the customer.

The retail sector is generally not interested in or capable of building or retaining a highly skilled and experienced technical workforce. They need do no more than offer a slick warranty service on behalf respective vendors.

So, if the measure of value in the retail sector is price and convenience and the benchmark for other sectors of the reseller channel is skill and expertise, there is no conflict and “channel integrity” remains intact.

Online retail does not undermine or threaten the integrity of the channel to any greater or lesser extent than bricks and mortar retail has done in the past, and should therefore be regarded by the traditional reseller as nothing more than a minor irritation among those that pin their hopes on “box-dropping”.

The question of cloud computing and its impact on the reseller channel (this month’s feature story) is an entirely different problem. Taken to its ultimate level of, albeit largely theoretical, implementation the “cloud” poses a far more serious threat to the traditional reseller than online retail.

However, even in the face of this threat, any professional reseller capable of creating competitive advantage based on skills and expertise will survive.

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