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Channelwise

THE MAGAZINE FOR IT RESELLERS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Comparing Apples and fake grapes



By Mark Davison

As I approached my regular table at The Local – they sometimes slip a reserved sign on to it if they've spotted me soon enough - I could just make out a garishly pink figure through the haze of the heat wave that had suddenly hit the Highveld and the stinging sweat trickling into my baby blues.

Unconsciously swiping my forearm across my eyes I focused and realised it was Ray-Ban Ray in all his metrosexual finery – the rose-petal pink shirt was stylishly matched by his designer label black jeans, black leather belt with a crafted silver buckle the size of one of Raffles' regular pizzas (I worry he's going to do himself some internal damage with that, G) and his faux Italian ankle boots with elasticised uppers. He laconically stretched, arms above his head, as I scraped out an adjoining chair and I was dismayed to notice not even a smidgen of a damp spot under his armpits. I've really got to find out what deodorant he uses, I thought, as I looked down at the moist tramline beneath my man boobs which was slowly advancing like a tributary towards the spreading patch from my own hollows.

"How's it hanging ... not that anything can hang under that chastity belt," I greeted, jutting my chin at the buckle.

He made a dramatic show of adjusting it as he caustically replied, "It's a belt buckle, not knee guards."

Touche, I nodded. I've taught him well.

So well, in fact, that Cynical Cynthia was already placing my preferred tippie of the moment – faux grape juice – in front of me, her sparkling smile failing to raise my spirits at the prospect. Yes, dear readers, I am once again on the wagon and, unfortunately, it is not the same wagon that my good mucker Mike Magee rides. His wagon, he informs me, is the one that delivers the beer.

Anyway, I digress ...

Ray-Ban took a long, lingering gulp from his beaded glass of Holland's finest, his pleasure obvious at my venomous stare. "I can't believe how long it's taken the year to get started," he said as he replaced his glass. "It's the end of the month and it's almost like everyone is still on holiday."

I raised my glass and made a show of deliberately savouring my first gulp of sugar-laden, carbonated water. "Tell me," I agreed. "I can't remember the IT industry being so quiet. There are some rumblings, but not much else. The only current highlights, sad to say, are quarterly financials coming out – and most of them are nothing to write home about."

"I guess that's okay for the financial journalists," Ray-Ban ventured.

"And the analysts, I suppose," as I gulped again at the fake grape.

"Mind you ... it does seem to be open season on your favourite company – Apple."

"Whaddaya mean!?" the aging fanboi suddenly bristled and instinctively reached for his iPhone and reassuringly patted the folder encasing his iPad.

"Well," I explained. "They posted record quarterly revenue, but profits were down and they didn't meet analysts' 'expectations'. That, dear fanboi, resulted in 6% being wiped off their shares – billions of dollars - and them losing their crown as the world's most valuable company."

If I had punched him in his solar plexus, I couldn't have expected a better reaction.

"But that's insane," he mumbled defiantly. "Great company ... great products ..."

"Insane it may be ... well, that analysts who couldn't even predict the recession with all the data in front of them could still hold such sway ... but as I've said before, an improved screen and increased capacity doesn't exactly constitute innovation. The sad fact of the matter is that the manufacturers who were playing catch-up over the past two years have now caught up. And a few of them are about to overtake Apple – certainly in being more innovative, more creative and more aggressive. It seems that the only way Apple is prepared to compete nowadays is through patent lawsuits and even that's wearing a bit thin ... rounded corners! I ask you!"

"I'm still getting my iPhone 5!" Ray-Ban snapped. "It's going to be awesome!"

"Enjoy it," I smiled at his discomfort. "I hope the long wait was worth it."

I gestured to Cynical Cynthia and ordered Ray-Ban a double tot of his favourite Irish to cheer him up. After all, there was only room for one miserable so-and-so at our regular table. And for the present, that spot is strictly reserved for the poor sod supping on the purple plastic grape juice.

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SCENE AROUND



Celebrating SA's success in the 2013 Dakar Rally are the winning team of Dirk von Zitzewitz (left) and Giniel de Villiers (right). They flank Graham Duxbury, CEO of Duxbury Networking, one of the key sponsors of the team via his company's Netgear brand.



The Cisco South Africa team, working with Habitat for Humanity, built a house for Orange Farm resident Makhokoltso Limapo, a 76-year-old who will be enjoying her first home in 2013.



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SCENE AROUND



First Distribution held its annual company golf day at the Serengeti Golf and Wildlife Estate recently.



Miss South Africa 2012, Marilyn Ramos, who was crowned at a glittering star-studded event at Sun City in December, is now well and truly connected – thanks to Nashua Mobile and the iPhone 5. Nashua Mobile is the official Mobile Communications Service Provider to Miss South Africa and both her princesses for the duration of their reigns, providing all three with the latest handsets and tablets on the network of their choice. The sponsorship will also include access to free and unlimited G-Connect WiFi connectivity.



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Put an end to the Piracy scourge

By Paul Conradie,
Managing Director of Comztek



“In 2011 South Africa ranked 25th on the global index for most piracy in a country, a staggering figure for a country where the actual penetration and number of PC users remains small comparative to the size of the population.”

Software piracy is not only hurting the IT industry and the resellers of software, but it is hurting the end user as well. While it may be attractive to buy pirated software because of its price tag the reality is that the software itself could cripple your business when it decides to start misbehaving.

In a bid to stop software pirates vendors have long been touting the benefits of legal software versus counterfeits, however there still seems to be a lack of education amongst users – which is where the industry needs to come in and play a part.

But the responsibility for policing does not only fall on the shoulders of the user, rather it falls to the industry to ensure that software pirates are kept at bay, and that users are armed with the right information to be able to make the right choices when they purchase product. Pirated software is a huge security risk to the end user as it leaves them open to security breaches, data and information theft and in short can leave an entire business vulnerable.

According to the BSA (Business Software Alliance) pirated software costs the local economy a staggering \$513million that equates to around R4.2billion a year. The BSA also reports that the total value of the global pirated software industry currently tops \$59billion. While the figures themselves are staggering the total knock on costs, where job creation, productivity and security risks are concerned equate to a whole lot more.

In order to attempt to curb the market one needs to understand what motivates people to firstly buy pirated software and secondly to sell it. From the end users point of view ignorance is often the first reason piracy occurs. Buying a PC from a small reseller of which the price point is more attractive than say other competitive players in the market is often a primary factor. These PC's, while new, are cheaper because they are preloaded with non genuine software sourced from piracy consortiums that operate all over the world.

Another common error on the part of the end user is loading software on more computers than what the original software is intended for. A common problem and one that happens most prevalently amongst small and medium sized businesses. While this is a cheap out for the user the fact of the matter is that pirated software can end up costing them a whole lot more than what investing in legal software would. As previously

mentioned data loss and theft, system corruption and viruses could by all rights wipe out an entire system and land up costing a small business their entire intellectual property.

From an industry perspective there are millions of rogue dealers in the market that are taking advantage of the ignorance of users. Many of these sell computers under the guise that the software preloaded is in fact genuine, when in fact it is not. Others replicate the software and its packaging to such an extent that the end user wouldn't know the difference, unless they were in the industry themselves.

The biggest damaging factor to the industry at large is that the billions accrued by these rogue resellers goes directly into their pockets. None of this money is reinvested into the research and development the industry needs to ensure that the products that are being brought to market continue to innovate. What's more is that the more people pay for software the cheaper the software will get, instead piracy continues to hurt the prices of software, in some instances making the software more expensive than what it could be should the money lost to piracy be reinvested into the software market itself.

In 2011 South Africa ranked 25th on the global index for most piracy in a country, a staggering figure for a country where the actual penetration and number of PC users remains small comparative to the size of the population. While we cannot blame ignorance in its entirety and users should shoulder some of the blame, the real losers are the IT channel itself.

While the lost opportunities are one component, a study by IDC in 2011 revealed that for every \$1 lost by Microsoft to software piracy, the partner industry as a whole is impacted by a total of \$5.50, in both revenue and higher operating costs. Over time the figures become staggering and the impacts the losses have on the economy as a whole are downright criminal.

An area that is being devastatingly affected due to this revenue loss is that of skills development and retention. Without the revenue to pump into skills the industry is, while not entirely stagnating, isn't growing at the rate that it should. Many entry-level software engineers and support people remain unemployed, while higher skilled engineers are attracted by global companies that are willing to pay them top dollar for their services as well as provide them a roadmap for their future development.

The problem seems to be particularly prevalent in African countries and we have seen piracy steadily increase in areas where there is urban, industrial and as a result business development. The higher the demand for technology as a result of economic growth the more rife the piracy problem. While in many instances Africa is often seen as a dumping ground for counterfeit goods the real issue is education and know-how. Customers need to be able to differentiate between legal and illegal goods – but they need the education and ammunition to be able to make the distinction.

Many customers innocently fall prey to software piracy buying goods from what they think is a reputable source that then turns out to be an illegal source. It should be our goal as an industry to help these customers “come clean”, making it easy for them to become legal with as little hassle as possible and without treating them like criminals.

Each vendor has programmes to ensure that users can become legal; one of these ways is through Microsoft's Get Genuine Windows Agreement (GGWA). Through the GGWA Microsoft offers several solutions to help ensure your customers are using properly licensed, with genuine Windows software. The offering is made up of a number of solutions that are intended for use on PCs that your customers already own and that have previously installed counterfeit or otherwise unlicensed copies of Windows.

The process itself is relatively painless and can be done quickly and cost effectively. This will immediately ensure that your users are no longer vulnerable to the security and data threats they were exposed to while running counterfeit software.

The real travesty of using unlicensed or counterfeit software is that many companies don't even realise they are doing so until it is too late. Until a security breach has been exploited, a system has crashed, information, data or identities have been stolen and in many cases a company has been brought to its knees.

While we have for years been asking the industry to take a stand against illegal software and the authorities are helping where they can, the time to up step these efforts and ensure that the revenues lost to the channel are returned to the channel is now.

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SCENE AROUND



Staff and management at AxizWorkgroup opened their hearts and wallets to raise funds for the children of MES. The funds were used to purchase a special Christmas box for each child, based on their individual needs and wishes. The gifts were handed over at a Christmas Party that AxizWorkgroup organised.

A total of R21 000 was raised by AxizWorkgroup and the children were treated to a lunch donated by the AxizWorkgroup Canteen.

AxizWorkgroup also took this opportunity to hand over R3 000 from a previous Spray- and Shavathon fund raiser for breast cancer in October.



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Lenovo boosts MEA channel commitment

Lenovo has announced the launch of the Lenovo Partner Network Programme, designed to up-skill channel partners and strengthen relations across the Middle East and Africa (MEA).

Comprised of three membership levels – Member, Premium and Gold Partner – the programme is designed to educate partners and potential members on the benefits of working with Lenovo. The programme rewards loyal customers through an updated membership status (Premium or Gold) whereby they are entitled to additional resource, and benefits.

“Our channel partners are fundamental to the success of our business as we strive towards becoming the number one PC manufacturer globally,” says Graham Braum, country manager of Lenovo Africa.

“Our relationship with our partners is the crux of our success globally and in the region; we invest heavily in this relationship and ensure our product portfolio is designed to enable our partners succeed. We are excited about Lenovo Partner Network and look forward to the long term results that will be seen from the support and help of our channel partners.”

DiData joins Riverbed partner programme

Dimension Data has joined the Riverbed Authorised Support Partner Programme (RASP).

This allows Dimension Data to build closer relationships with its global clients and provide high-value services and support for Riverbed deployments.

Dimension Data will support the full portfolio of Riverbed performance solutions spanning WAN optimisation, edge virtual server infrastructure (edge-VSI), application-aware network performance management, application delivery controllers, Web content optimisation (WCO), and cloud data protection for backup and disaster recovery.

More than 20 000 organisations worldwide depend on Riverbed to understand, optimise and consolidate their IT infrastructure, through solutions that overcome performance issues caused by distance, distributed computing, and ever increasing amounts of data.

As IT organisations embark on strategic initiatives to virtualise, consolidate and migrate workloads into cloud environments, users are moved farther from their data. Slow applications and file transfers, as well as inefficient Web sites can negatively impact the performance and success of these initiatives.

Africa shifts to mobile

Customers have shifted their behaviour online, creating incentives for operators, legislators and the information communications technology (ICT) community as a whole to adapt their business and processes to keep pace.

This was the key message from Ahmad Abdulkarim Julfar, CEO at the Etisalat Group, who addressed world leaders in Davos.

“Mobile has become an integral part of our customer’s daily lives, shaping how they purchase, consume media, communicate with one another and even access public services and health care,” Julfar says.

“There is now a clear trend that ICT companies and governments are thinking differently about the Internet, and are launching new digital services and policies to better service the continuously connected customer.”

Julfar was speaking on a panel alongside leading ICT figures including Michael Fries, president and CEO of Liberty Global; Drew Houston, CEO of Dropbox; Frans van Houten, CEO and chairman of Royal Philips Electronics; and Paul Jacobs, chairman and CEO of Qualcomm.

Together, they debated the different issues created by pervasive connectivity and demand for ever faster Internet.

“Etisalat firmly believes in the power of the Internet to be a force for good. Last year we launched our Digital Services unit to help create new applications for health, education and machine-to-machine based sustainable development solutions and we will continue to innovate to help raise the standard of living and address critical national goals across our footprint,” Julfar says.

The panel then debated the role of government in incentivising the innovation and investment necessary for large-scale broadband infrastructure investments, as well as its role in protecting the new always-on environment.

“Governments have a key role to play in the new digital community,” says Julfar. “Not only can

they drive usage and increase the capabilities of their populations through effective ICT policy and a cohesive digital vision, but they can reduce the costs of providing critical public services such as healthcare and education, helping to create a positive future for all.”

The Etisalat Group has deployed 3G mobile broadband across Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Today Etisalat has two 4G (LTE) networks in the UAE and Saudi Arabia and has demonstrated the capability of offering up to 300Mbps in the mobile environment – the fastest in the world.

It has also deployed fibre optic cable in several of its markets, most famously in the UAE, where three million kilometres of cable has been deployed nationwide.



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Dr Helmut Marko: Seb's Svengali?

Labelled the puppet master behind the success of Sebastian Vettel and his recent haul of three consecutive world drivers' championship titles, Dr Helmut Marko (69) is a former LeMans 24-hour race winner and Formula One driver with the good fortune to find himself in a starring – but not necessarily popular – role in today's F1 paddock.

Viewed by some as racing's "one-eyed Dr Evil", he is also the motorsport director of Red Bull Racing and long-time consultant to his Austrian compatriot, Dietrich Mateschitz – the man who makes billions from Red Bull, the energy drinks company he founded.

Marko's F1 career was cut short at the French Grand Prix in 1972 when, driving a BRM, a stone thrown up by the car ahead pierced his visor. It cost him the sight of his left eye.

With his F1 future shattered, he turned to driver management and then ran his own team – RSM Marko – which became the Red Bull Junior Team, competing in Formula 3 and Formula 3000 races, with financial backing from Mateschitz.

With Marko (who has a doctorate in law from Graz University) and Mateschitz both being Austrian natives and motorsport enthusiasts, their partnership flourished. In 1999 Marko established the Red Bull Driver Development Programme with a quest to uncover new talent. It gave birth to the genius of an 11-year-old German kart racer.

Marko and Vettel's close relationship – so evident today – was formed in those early years, when the youngster's school activities were also included in his racing programme and his academic reports were scrutinised with as much zeal as his lap charts and telemetry print-outs by the ever-vigilant Dr Marko.

Since 2005 and his appointment as advisor to the F1 team, Marko has been increasingly surrounded by controversy. Not averse to launching scathing verbal assaults on competitors or even delivering cutting criticisms of Red Bull drivers, he has become known for his ruthlessness, orchestrating the firing of team drivers who, in his opinion, have underperformed.

He cemented his notoriety among race fans when, in 2010, he blamed his own driver, Mark Webber, for a crash with Vettel that cost the Red Bull cars a one-two finish in the Turkish GP – an incident that many insiders believe was caused by Vettel's rashness.

At the British GP, Webber was forced to give up his newly designed front wing to Vettel, after the German's similar component had broken in practice and there was no spare. After winning the race, Mark made a pointed remark after crossing the finishing line: "Not bad for a number two driver."

Then, a year later, Marko was instrumental in the callous sacking of both drivers from Toro Rosso, the feeder team to Red Bull, because Sebastien Buemi and Jaime Alguersuari "were not of the calibre required to race full time with the senior team", thus doing irreparable – and unnecessary – damage to their careers.

This year Marko started the season by criticising Ferrari's Fernando Alonso, saying he is too busy with politics to be effective as a driver. He also continued his criticism of Webber in Red Bulletin – the team's in-house publication.

"It seems to me that Webber has, on average, two races per year where he is unbeatable, but he can't maintain this form throughout the year. And as soon as his prospects start to look good in the world championship, he has a little trouble with the pressure this creates."

Quite why he has unleashed these attacks on Webber is unclear, but those close to F1 believe he is paving the way for the tough Australian – who seemingly has little time for Marko's machinations – to be dumped at the end of the 2013 season in favour of another Marko-indoctrinated youngster.

Comparing Vettel to other drivers, Marko says he is better because he doesn't read the newspapers or go online, and he shuts himself off from the rest of the world so that he can call on reserves that other drivers might not have.

Whether this is true or not is open to debate, but it seems a clear indication of the Svengali-like hold Marko believes he has over his former protégée.

Perhaps the rumours (later denied) that swirled around the F1 paddock last year of a signed deal between Vettel and Ferrari for a future drive were clues to the imminent emergence of Sebastian Vettel as his own man.

More interestingly, will Vettel, unlike George du Maurier's Trilby, be able to perform without the hypnotic effect of his Svengali?



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



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Taking the fear out of cloud computing

Cloud computing is still at the forefront of information technology trends. It's allowing organisations to free themselves from building and managing their own technology infrastructure and is changing how businesses operate.

The cloud has provided dramatic gains in efficiency and productivity with its promise of adaptability, cost benefits and agility. Despite its advantages, some are still hesitant to get onboard due to its inherent risks.

Those who simply aren't ready to take a leap of faith are putting themselves at risk of losing ground to competitors.

Making the cloud work for business

It's easy to see why business leaders view the cloud as the big thing in IT, document management and business process outsourcing. It enables companies to add IT capabilities, capacity and flexibility when they need it – without investing in a new infrastructure.

Benefits include:

- * Economies of scale - these are achieved by taking advantage of a centralised infrastructure that supports multiple clients. That's why cloud computing is the most cost-effective approach to enterprise computing.
- * Unlimited storage and processing power - the cloud is a bottomless source of storage and computational power, so businesses don't have to expand a data centre or add servers to a network.
- * Flexibility and scalability - because there is no infrastructure to manage and maintain, and businesses only pay for what they use, there is a huge advantage in flexibility.
- * Benchmark technology and best practices - leading providers of cloud services are able to provide innovative technology and current

best practices.

- * Streamlined implementations - the cloud is an efficient platform for service delivery, and provides great cost-effectiveness, better quality and faster cycle times for development and implementation process.

- * Improved access to information - as data and documents move to the cloud, the platform becomes a key resource for workers to share information, create and revise documents and collaborate in realtime.

- * A sensible solution for a mobile workforce - with cloud-enabled access to documents and data, it's easy for employees to work at home and on the road, improving productivity.

Roadblocks to cloud adoption

Despite all of these advantages, however, many organisations are delaying the decision to tap into the cloud.

One aspect of these cloud concerns centres on security. Putting confidential records in public clouds increases the risk that unauthorised people can gain access to sensitive information. This concern can often be resolved through private clouds.

Information security is an issue with any shared environment, but private clouds developed and maintained by a leading provider ensure that information may be more secure than if it's stored inside a firewall.

Cloud computing also gives rise to apprehension about being locked in by a vendor. Proprietary architectures or unique data models could potentially make it difficult to switch vendors.

Who can users trust?

Since cloud computing is a form of outsourcing, all of the key issues surrounding security,

By Craig Green, Bytes
Document Solutions
national channel manager

privacy and service quality come down to one thing: the choice of someone users trust.

Due to their scale, long history and extensive expertise, private cloud providers typically create security and disaster recovery systems that are substantially more effective and advanced than one a business could create on their own.

When looking for a provider, businesses should choose a provider whose offerings align with the following principles:

- * Security measures should be designed to support the business, not impede it;
- * The system should approach defence from a multiple-layer standpoint spread throughout the expanse of the IT infrastructure;
- * The security design should be flexible enough to adapt to changing business situations and evolving technology; and
- * The use of standards is essential to prevent misunderstandings and provide the agility needed to respond quickly to risks.

Risk management, particularly in the cloud, is never a simple, in-and-out process. A vigilant service provider has to constantly stay aware of what's going on, recognise and manage the risks, and adapt to the changes.

Communication with the provider is also imperative: reporting, continual risk assessment and honest discussions ease the fear of the unknown and build trust.

The shift to cloud computing requires new technology and new thinking about how trust, identity and access administration can work in this new realm.

Businesses can have great success with cloud computing by finding a provider that has a long track record of performance, a reputation for innovation, leading-edge technology and expertise, and a comprehensive portfolio of best practices.



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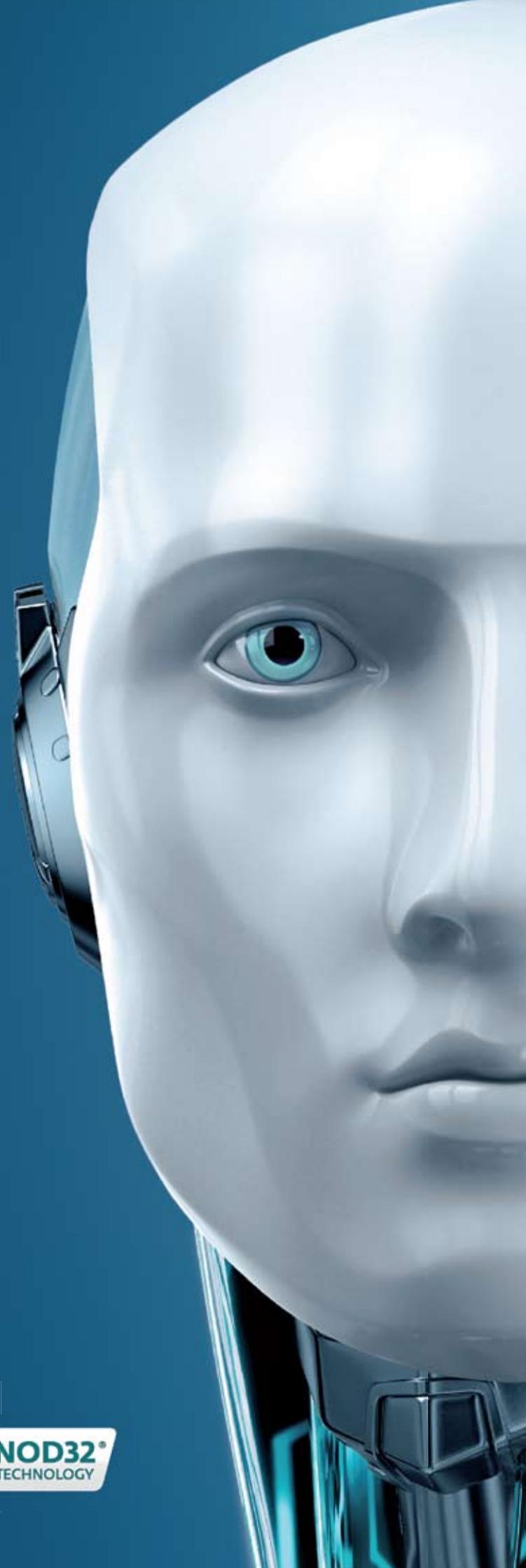
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Phoenix conquers distribution in Africa

The constant change that is a standard part of business in the dynamic African environment brings with it both challenges and opportunities. In the pursuit of growth, South African businesses that take their mandate seriously have invested into the continent, leveraging the growth and opportunity offered by African emerging economies.

The expansion of Phoenix Distribution into Africa has opened new doors not just for the specialist distributor and its vendors, but also for the resellers it has partnered with across the continent.

Unlike many distribution companies that have embarked on a conquest across Africa, eager to gobble up local businesses, Phoenix Distribution's approach is based much more on partnership, identifying long-term local partners who have a meaningful stake in the businesses they grow and are focused on the quality of the product.

"Our Africa expansion strategy is clear and simple. In each territory we look to partner with like-minded resellers, who share our values and our belief that innovative, integrated ideas can change the fortune of companies and brands," says Simon Campbell-Young, CEO of Phoenix Distribution.

"Our goal is to unlock the huge potential of African business and entrepreneurship across the African continent. By galvanising this talent and applying some of the lessons we've learned operating in South Africa for over a decade, we hope to create a new breed of distributor across Africa, combining world class quality and efficiency, creativity and effectiveness."

This approach is already seeing results, with the company's African operations growing month on month over the past six months. In addition to distributors, resellers and retailers, Phoenix Distribution is working with all of the telcos and banks in the territories it operates in, providing for a massive expansion of its business in Africa.

Bytes awarded Cisco certification

Bytes Systems Integration has achieved certification as an Advanced Cisco Borderless Network Architecture Specialised Partner. The new certification enables Bytes to sell and support solutions based on Cisco's next-generation network architecture.

"With the advent of the cloud computing model and the concept of anytime/anywhere computing – a trend fuelled by the BOYD phenomenon – corporate networks are truly becoming borderless," says Patrick Hastings, divisional MD: Advanced Technology Services at Bytes Systems Integration.

"Creating and securing such networks depends on a robust, advanced communications platform as well as a flexible, next-generation network architecture. That's exactly what Cisco Borderless Network Architecture provides."

Hastings notes that as a Cisco Gold Partner, Bytes was happy to make the investment in obtaining this specialised certification. He says that it will position Bytes to develop and deliver the borderless networking solutions required by their clients.

"The network truly is the business these days, and the business has to be able to connect with employees, partners and customers wherever they are and whatever devices they might be using," Hastings explains.

"In addition, the increasing use of video content means that data volumes are growing exponentially. This certification is a vital tool in enabling us to craft network solutions to help our clients thrive in this new, borderless business environment."

LTE to reach

Just three short years after the technology's original deployment, worldwide subscribers to the 4G wireless standard known as long term evolution (LTE) are projected to surpass the 100-million mark this year.

LTE subscribers worldwide will reach 198,1-million in 2013, up a remarkable 115% from 92,3-million last year, according to an IHS iSuppli Wireless Communications Special Report from information and analytics provider IHS.

Since being adopted in 2010 with just 612 000 users, the 4G next-generation wireless technology has grown by leaps and bounds, surging by an astounding factor of 22 to 13,2-million subscribers in 2011, and then jumping another 599% in 2012 to nearly 100-million subscribers.

By 2016, LTE will claim more than one billion users, as shown in the figure below, equivalent to a five-year compound annual growth rate of 139%.

"With LTE emerging as a true global technology standard, its ecosystem now faces both challenges and opportunities," says Wayne Lam, senior analyst for wireless communications at IHS.

"Rapid adoption will drive design innovations, particularly in smartphones, but issues like spectrum fragmentation will also remain an overhang for the LTE industry that requires attention.

"Overall, however, the LTE space will be less worried about rifts or divisions in technology, and more concerned with laying the foundation for sustained growth across the entire LTE landscape."

Globally, wireless network operators have been continually building the infrastructure for LTE technology, driven by increased appetite among consumers for faster content delivery, feature-rich applications and expansive mobile services such as social networking. >>>



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100m users

While the majority of early operator activity was concentrated in Europe and Asia, North America propelled new subscriber activity in 2011 and 2012.

The bulk of growth during the last two years also came from smartphone upgrades, especially as 4G LTE technology hit top-of-mind for data-savvy consumers. This is because more than any other type of phone, smartphones are able to take further advantage of the faster data connectivity provided by LTE, which leverages the kind of low-latency, always-on mobile broadband service that consumers now demand.

But even as LTE has become the de facto global standard for 4G over WiMAX, an early rival, interoperability across multiple carriers and spectrum holdings is far from consistent.

While the precursor 3G technology was deployed over a handful of spectrum bands globally, LTE so far has registered more than 40 different frequency spectrums, resulting in a complex landscape for equipment and component suppliers.

Even in the face of this difficulty, the advantages to be derived from LTE are nonetheless substantial.

Compared to previous cellular standards, LTE with its low-latency performance allows the handling of a wider range of applications, such as live video streaming, video conferencing, voice over IP and realtime multiplayer gaming. These new applications, in turn, create fresh market opportunities for component supplier and device manufacturers.

In particular, LTE is a force multiplier for innovation among smartphones. To take advantage of a more capable network, device manufacturers are accelerating the pace of innovation for applications processors, touch-screen displays, camera technology and ever-more sophisticated mobile operating systems and software.

Down in the mouth ...

It's a sad day when there are more rumours swirling around Justin Bieber than there are around the IT industry, but sadly that's the predicament we find ourselves in as the January Back-to-Work Blues well and truly kicked in this year! Hell, we even struggled with a PR Prick(le) for this month – and that's saying something. And despite being urged by certain ne'er-do-wells to make up some rumours of our own we'd rather our well-earned reputation for accuracy and integrity stay intact. Although ... there were some whispers on the international wires that Dell's leveraged buyout has temporarily stalled (Dell's local people claim they are being kept completely in the dark about the buyout) and that they could be considering the possibility of selling off their PC division. We promise to dig for more concrete facts on this – and on any local shenanigans – in time for next month's column. Aaargh, EE don't whip so hard ... you know we like it!

PR Prick(le) of the Month

Scraping the barrel's bottom ...

As mentioned, it has been a really dire month, even in the normally voluminous PR Prick(le) stakes. But just as we were tearing at the already thin thatch on our noggins, up popped this little gem – one of which we have not seen in many a year (since certain hacks started supplementing their income with lessons for PRs):

Hi guys

Please see the attached press release for publication in Channelwise and on IT Online.

Admittedly, it is short and sweet just the way we like them, T, but we think you meant the word "consideration" instead of "publication". Thanks for getting us out of a hole, though, before EE reaches for his sjambok again!

Pic of the Month: Super signage!



Contrary to strong speculation, this is not a picture of Esteemed Editor's infamous Local. Yup, we know that the sign could have been custom-made for him bearing in mind that the Luddite, to this day, still hasn't succumbed to the pressure to acquire a cell phone and that anyone looking for him would have to have the telephone number of the hostelry he happens to be imbibing in. There is also no truth in the rumour that he is solely responsible for the survival of pictured pub, neither through paying for the vast quantities of the amber liquid he claims nurtures him, nor for slipping the barman wads of notes every time the telephone rings.

We leave that honour to Retail Russell, whom we thank for this month's pic contribution – remind us to slip you a tenner so you can pay the barman for telling your wife that you're on your way.



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distribution

Throughout the decades, the IT distribution channel in South Africa has faced its fair share of challenges – from sanctions and recessionary economic conditions, through the post-Y2k backlash and the dot-com bubble, and even the dramatic collapse of the multi-billion SDD. But, as resilient as it has always been, it has always bounced back – often stronger for the trial and tribulation.

Having said that, many believe that 2013 could prove to be distribution's most daunting to date. A watershed year, some venture, as distributors are faced not only with a world economy teetering on the brink of a triple-dip recession, but also having to cope with major trends such as cloud computing and consumerisation which are forcing a rethink by vendors, resellers, retailers and end users alike on how they go about their business.

Then there is the added pressure of competition from unexpected quarters. If anyone in the channel had said 10 years ago that major banks and cell phone operators would be among the biggest resellers of IT in the country, they would have been laughed out of town. Standard Bank, with its various notebook, tablet and smartphone offers, plus payment terms has, in the space of little more than a year, proved this to be true. One of its major rivals, FNB, has just launched a similar customer offering – and it can't be long before the rest of the major banks climb on the bandwagon.

Cell phone operators continue to offer bundled product with their contracts and this has always provided a welcome boost to local players in IT. But whereas in the past local distribution would play a key role in these bundled deals, it is being cut out of the supply chain more and more nowadays.

The hybrid indirect/direct – or 'named accounts' – model adopted by many vendors has always been a bone of contention within the channel. But this could be taken to new levels in the very near future, and presents an almost insurmountable challenge to the channel as vendors allow access to their online portals to select corporate and business clients. Samsung, for example, has just launched what it calls an Employee Purchase Programme whereby companies have access to a portal which allows their employees to purchase certain items either directly or through a 'rewards' system put in place by the organisation. Payment terms can include a monthly deduction from salaries, and seven-day delivery is guaranteed, says Samsung.

With these additional obstacles facing distribution – and we daresay there will be others that haven't even been thought of yet - some would say that further consolidation is on the cards in the channel. Others feel that there's no more consolidation to be had. The debate will no doubt rage on between these two trains of thought as the year progresses.

One thing we can all be assured of, though, is that this year will yet again see some dramatic changes in the channel. And while we may not be able to pinpoint exactly how distribution will change, we have no doubt that the resilience it has shown through previous challenging times will once more come to the fore.

COVER STORY

When looking at some of the key features distributors feel will dominate the local distribution landscape in the near future, arguably the most repeated answer is: consolidation. And while many of them view this as a “natural progression” that is good for the channel and the industry, there are some that feel that there is little left to consolidate.

Neil Rex, CEO of Drive Control, is one of them.

“I think the main consolidation opportunities have been concluded within the distribution environment,” Rex says. “In general, mass distribution has reached a saturation point in terms of consolidation. We have seen a grouping of distributors through acquisitions whereby larger distributors have acquired smaller, niche ones that feature an offering or focus that is different to the acquirer’s, augmenting their business and allowing them to expand their market focus.

“These acquisitions need to move to the next level whereby brands and operations are consolidated,” he adds. “There are one or two other distributors that could be acquired, but their business would need to differ from the acquirer’s.”

Rex says that a bigger worry to distribution should be the go-to-market strategies of multinationals which, in turn, is affecting the buying patterns of users.

“What is changing [in the channel] is the product’s route to market,” he says.

“This is driven largely by vendors with a hybrid strategy to sell both direct to end-user customers and via the channel. Furthermore, products that used to be channelled through distributors and resellers are now circumventing these links in the chain.

“This is due to another changing route to market, evident with many consumers (and even small businesses) leveraging mobile operators’ bundles,” Rex says. “The bundles usually include a data or cellular air time contract coupled with a device such as a tablet or notebook. Previously,

these products’ route to market was from the vendor to the distributor and to the retailer. While some distributors still do supply products to the mobile operator, this changing route to market and bundled offerings from mobile operators is driving a change in buying habits.

“The shifting route to market is making distribution an increasingly tough environment, prompting distributors to find ways to reduce costs and streamline their operations,” Rex continues. “Going online is one option, but it has its own set of challenges and uptake has consequently been slow.

“Resellers often require knowledge on a wide variety of products and technology, as well as guidance on making purchases. They depend on the distributor to provide that knowledge. For the distributor, good customer relationship management (CRM) cannot be overemphasised – it creates opportunities to upsell and leverage further sales, and offer alternative products or a wider variety of solutions to the reseller.

“These opportunities are lost with online sales,” he says. “If the online route is to work, a really good external sales force is required.”

Rex feels that the recessionary economic conditions that have plagued the US and Europe for the past few years are now filtering through to South Africa – and are having a profound affect.

“The biggest challenge facing distributors is the decrease in growth rates,” he says. “Historically, the market’s growth would counter any inflationary forces, but end users are now extending the lifecycle of their product and are more conservative with their spend.

“As mentioned, pressure is also being created by mobile operators that offer ‘bundles’ that often include items and devices that were traditionally sold through resellers and retail,” he adds. “As the tablet business increases in popularity and demand, distributors need to look for

opportunities in this space.”

So should distributors be looking to uphold the age-old adage of: get big or get out? Rex doesn’t feel this is necessarily the case.

“The ‘credit factor’ must be considered when it comes to the issue of ‘get big or get out’,” he says. “If there are a number of distributors, credit is spread into the channel; if there are only a few large players in the market, credit is limited.

“Furthermore, the critical mass of distribution is ‘capped’ by vendors adopting a hybrid model of selling direct and through the channel,” Rex says. “This limits the size and growth opportunities of distributors.”

Another veteran of the local channel, Graham Duxbury, CEO of Duxbury Networking, does think that there will be further consolidation within distribution. He tempers this thought, though, with the opinion that there is still room in the channel for more skilled, niche and independent distributors.

“While 2013 will most likely see further consolidation in the distribution channel, it’s not necessarily an encouraging sign for the industry,” Duxbury says. “In fact, it’s often an indication that all is not well within the organisations seeking to merge or somehow amalgamate.

“Consolidation can be undertaken for any number of reasons, but the most probable are either personal or business related,” he explains. “Leaving aside the former, the motivations for the latter are most likely to centre on the need for immediate cost savings through a rationalisation of expenses – including staffing, transport/logistics, rent and other overheads.

“Contrary to those who see ‘change’ and ‘consolidation’ as channel necessities this year, however, there is a core of distributors who are successful – and will continue to trade successfully – without the need to form any co-operative or unifying arrangements with rival organisations. >>>



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COVER STORY

>>> We're of the belief that 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'.

"For most of the organisations that have merged - and for those contemplating mergers - similar business models, similar customers and similar product sets are the common denominators," Duxbury says. "Differentiation has always been achieved through (cheap) pricing underpinned by sizable stock holdings. The increasing commoditisation of many IT products has resulted in even lower prices and smaller profit margins. It has also driven up stock holdings, exacerbated by the inherent 'box-dropping' culture within the larger organisations which espouses a 'bigger is better' dogma - the bigger the turnover, the greater the profits.

"As we will see in the coming years, consolidation is not necessarily a 'cure-all'," he adds. "What is needed is a clear understanding of the changing needs of the marketplace and the evolving technologies that will drive them in the future."

Duxbury says that this understanding will stand any distributor in good stead.

"Consumer confidence is gained through the 'added value' this knowledge and expertise delivers," he says. "It's hard won, through a commitment to training, an emphasis on efficiency and, most significantly, a focus on in-house technical capabilities.

"In this light, consolidation seems necessary when these ingredients are missing and

when the success levels of either of the companies contemplating a merger are less than optimum," he says. "Will the hope that 'the sum of the new whole is better than the previous two halves' be enduring? Time will tell.

"Speaking for our company - Duxbury Networking - we have continued to be successful for many decades by remaining small, purposeful and determined, by adding value in the form of technical expertise and offering it free to our channel partners. Box dropping is certainly not in our DNA, and never will be.

"In my opinion, this gives lie the old distribution cliché of 'get big or get out'," Duxbury says.

Time for true value-add

Gone are the days when the channel simply focused on moving product and that would be the end of the transaction. A decade ago, the term value-add was not found in the channel dictionary - in those days, it was a case of efficient storage and supply, and perceived value-add was about being brilliant at holding stock or next-day delivery, and very little else.

However, times have changed, says Simon Campbell-Young, CEO of Phoenix Distribution, and with constantly evolving technologies and customer needs, the more progressive companies in the channel have started to truly add value.

"It's all about differentiation," Campbell-Young says. "Much of what is touted as adding value is merely a service offered by many, but true added value lies in identifying and meeting the needs of customers they didn't know they had. This applies not just to the entire IT industry, but specifically to the channel, because many companies compete on the same terms. There isn't a lot of differentiation out there."

Campbell-Young says Phoenix Distribution has effectively created and captured more value through an approach that encompasses traditional distribution to channel and retail partners, as well as providing unique solutions such as its Electronic Software Distribution (ESD) offering. This value is felt by the company's channel as well as its vendors, as regardless of the specific approach, each involves forging highly collaborative relationships with selected partners and customers, yielding beneficial results.

He explains that the actual logistical side of distribution - the moving boxes element - only forms about 25% of what the company does. "We stand out from the rest of the market because we operate differently to traditional distribution companies. We don't just sell products, we provide solutions." These, he adds, include high level integration solutions for banks, telcos and ISPs, as well as white label ESD store development.

"While every distributor wants to market to its existing customer base, thinking that there's some 'low-hanging fruit',

our approach not only adds value to the existing customer base, but opens doors to a previously unaddressed tier of customers," he says.

"The most important thing for distributors is to listen to their customers, keep an eye on the market, and never to accept the status quo as the thing that will take the business through the next 10 years," he says. "Understanding the needs of customers and the economic value those needs represent requires an analysis of more than just gross margins. We therefore constantly focus on ensuring that we don't 'drop boxes' and instead look at where we can meet our customers' needs and where we can offer that extra value that sets us apart."

Meanwhile, Rectron has spotted a trend towards consumers' need for more storage as their multimedia content grows. As such, the distributor has signed an exclusive partnership with Transcend to distribute its range of top quality storage devices, including memory sticks and hard disk drives (HDDs) featuring USB 3 transfer speeds.

"We are working closely with our channel partners to push these products into the market for consumers to reap the benefits of good quality and affordable solutions." Consumers are also requesting better performance from their computers to effectively and without frustration deal with process intensive tasks.

To this end, Rectron has partnered with Gigabyte to distribute its motherboards to channel partners and continuously exchange knowledge about the product and how it will impact customers.

Rectron's latest and exclusive distribution partnership with Everki, will also introduce sought after products which were previously only available internationally, to the South African market.

"We realised that the proliferation of mobile technology prompted the need for ways to safely and securely transport mobile devices," says Karen Loma, Everki product manager at Rectron.



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Craig Brunsten, director at AxizWorkgroup, says it is inevitable in the current market that further consolidation will take place in the channel. But while some of his counterparts are leery of it, Brunsten feels consolidation benefits the whole channel fraternity.

"It is certain there will be more consolidation in the distribution channel," Brunsten says. "This, in many instances, should turn out to be a good thing for the distributors involved as well as resellers and retailers alike. Certainly that has been our experience at AxizWorkgroup. One plus one has resulted in more than two and while the job of improving the business is far from over, we believe the strategy is heading in the right direction.

"The benefits of an expanded and complementary product portfolio, a breadth of skills, an expanded footprint and the ability to reduce costs across common functions provides the reseller with a compelling value proposition and a sustainable distribution partner," he says.

But while further consolidation may be a worry for some, Brunsten says there are a myriad other challenges facing the channel.

"Taking costs out of the supply chain while still offering value will be the key to distribution survival in the coming year and years," he says. "This has been the case for some time now, but the landscape is only getting tougher, and we expect 2013 to be no different.

"I think this year will be when cloud disruption really starts challenging the channel and it will be interesting to see how the various players respond with different models and brand offerings," he continues. "The whole data centre space is really exciting with new brands emerging as complementary technologies to the more established guard.

"There are loads of new niche and emerging brands that can provide the reseller distributor partnerships with some

exciting opportunities and we expect to see these taking a more prominent role in the distribution line-ups.

"As the pressure in traditional hardware like servers, storage and networking increases, there are opportunities in appliance/software products providing solutions to complex security, performance and management issues are the new cloud and big data world.

"On the client front, the woes of the PC market are well documented by analysts and we expect that trend to continue

with tablets and smartphones continuing to provide disruption and usage model alternatives to desktop and mobile PCs," he says. "However, this is where the 'big is better' distribution model will hold its own. Providing resellers with a breadth of choice and covering a range of technology alternatives will ensure that the customer is getting value.

"There is certainly nothing to suggest life will be easy in 2013, but then in the channel it seldom is," Brunsten says.

And never a truer word was said ...

Flexibility key to success

The constantly changing world of IT means that companies need to be able to adapt and change their strategies accordingly. Distribution is no different, and First Distribution embarked on a radical transformation strategy nearly five years ago to address the changes happening in the channel.

"We have been repositioning our business to better serve our partners with a broader range of products focused on enterprise computing and the data centre," says Debbie Abrahall, MD of First Distribution. "Technologies such as virtualisation, storage and data management, as well as security, are becoming increasingly important and are redefining our industry."

However, she adds, the game-changer is cloud computing, and while traditional computing will still remain important, a significantly larger spend is coming from cloud technologies. This will see an emergence of new products and services via new channel players.

"Satisfying the market is no longer as simple as box dropping," says Abrahall. "For First Distribution it involves solution selling with multiple vendors being used to implement a solution. This allows the channel to deliver better value by offering best-of-breed solutions, which uses the best elements of each vendor." Abrahall says that some of the obvious disrupters in the channel are the shift in end user computing models, vendors going direct, public cloud, BYOD, end users becoming resellers and telcos taking over from traditional resellers.

She believes the company's broad strategy has addressed these issues and it is well positioned to deliver higher value to its reseller and vendor partners. What has been evident, she adds, is that vendors who have remained 100% committed to the channel are seeing better market penetration and sustained growth. They have built a loyal following in the channel in which a channel player would rather invest in growing their business.

"Because the market in South Africa is fundamentally different to the rest of the world, public cloud in enterprise is still facing significant challenges," Abrahall says. "In the more commoditised segment of the market, public cloud will have large-scale adoption while being slow to gain traction in the enterprise sector. Enterprise will still look to private cloud, and we believe we are the first-choice distributor in this market segment.

"We are confident that we are well positioned to address the market changes and to provide the necessary support to our partners in the new cloud world," she adds.



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The lowdown on

If you haven't yet heard the term "big data" this year, you obviously haven't returned from your holiday. If you work in the IT industry, you're going to be hearing a lot more about big data during 2013, from vendors and end users alike, and you'd better make sure you're up to speed with this decade's hottest new buzzword.

Move over cloud computing, there's a new hot trend taking over this year. Big data is taking centre stage as the thing end user companies most want to get their heads around.

We're told that big data can improve a company's competitive edge while making it more agile and responsive to customer needs. In fact, the experts tell us, organisations that don't efficiently leverage big data run the risk of losing their relevance in this fast-moving and dynamic new world.

So what exactly is big data? Why is it important to our customers? And what products and services do we need to supply to help end users achieve their goals?

What is it?

Big data isn't a new concept by any means, but for the first time all the various arms of technology have come together to make it a reality.

Gartner's one-line definition reads thus: big data, in general, is defined as high-volume, velocity and variety information assets that demand cost-effective, innovative forms of information processing for enhanced insight and decision making.

It's probably much simpler – and just as true – to say that big data refers to the processing and analysing of lots of information, from many different sources, in various formats.

Wikipedia tells us that big data is a collection of data sets so large and complex that it becomes difficult to process using on-hand database management tools or traditional data processing applications.

Sebastian Isaac, business development manager at Rectron, comments: "There are many ways of defining big data. It differs when looking at it from a consumer and a commercial perspective.

"From a consumer perspective we are looking at the consumption of content and ever increasing emails, Web pages, documents and multimedia data files. As an example, per minute; YouTube users are uploading an average of 48 hours of video, Facebook users are sharing 700 000 pieces of content, Twitter users are generating more than 100 000 tweets and there are about 600 websites created.

"The transfer and storage of this increased content is key. The changing needs of consumers, requiring better quality multimedia content, especially with regard to videos and pictures, that needs to

be of good quality or high definition, is why data storage needs are increasing. What also should be taken into account is the estimated internet user population being more than 2-billion."

This necessitates storage technology, bandwidth and network capability to satisfy these needs, says Isaac.

"When looking at the commercial environment, big data concerns, especially with regards to e-commerce, email, large data storage solutions, especially for the millions of transactions that take place every day, become a necessity. Built-in intelligence in various IT systems these days, offering a multitude of services, such as collaboration and automated document management also requires an increase in data storage capabilities," he adds.

Commercial businesses are now handling petabytes of data daily and need to appropriately deal with record-keeping and storage. Data is continuously on the increase and this should be taken more seriously, Isaac adds.

But wait, there's more ...

Of course it's never that simple: turning piles of many-formatted data into information that can make a business more agile, productive and competitive takes more than simply processing.

Wikipedia tells us that some of the challenges around big data include capture, storage, search, sharing, analysis and visualisation.

The trend to larger data sets is due to the additional information derivable from analysis of a single large set of related data, as compared to separate smaller sets with the same total amount of data, allowing correlations to be found to "spot business trends, determine quality of research, prevent diseases, link legal citations, combat crime and determine realtime roadway traffic conditions".

As of 2012, limits on the size of data sets that are feasible to process in a reasonable amount of time were in the order of exabytes of data. The limitations, Wikipedia cautions, also affect Internet search, finance and business informatics. Data sets grow in size in part because they are increasingly being gathered by ubiquitous information-sensing mobile devices, aerial sensory technologies (remote sensing), software logs, cameras, microphones, radio-frequency identification readers and wireless sensor networks.

The world's technological per-capita capacity to store information has roughly doubled every 40 months since the 1980s; as of 2012, every day 2,5-quintillion (2,5 x 1 018) bytes of data were created.

The challenge for large enterprises is who should own big data initiatives that straddle the entire organisation.

Big data is difficult to work with using relational databases or desktop statistics and visualisation packages, requiring instead massively parallel software running on tens, hundreds, or even thousands of servers, Wikipedia says.

What is considered big data varies depending on the capabilities of the organisation managing the set, and on the capabilities of the applications used to process and analyse the data set in its domain.

big data

Gartner warns that some IT leaders are attempting to manage big data challenges by focusing on the high volumes of information, to the exclusion of the many other dimensions of information management, leaving massive challenges to be addressed later.

The very term "big data" puts an inordinate focus on the issue of information volume (in every aspect from storage through transform/transport to analysis). Big data is also heavily weighted toward current issues and can lead to short-sighted decisions that will hamper the enterprise's information architecture, as IT leaders try to expand and change it to meet changing business needs.

Information managers may be tempted to focus on volume alone when they are simultaneously losing control of the access and qualification aspects of data. Gartner analysts warn that too narrow a focus will force massive reinvestment in two to three years in order to address the other dimensions of big data.

"Today's information management disciplines and technologies are simply not up to the task of handling all these dynamics. Information managers must fundamentally rethink their approach to data by planning for all the dimensions of information management," says Mark Beyer, research vice-president at Gartner.

"The business' demand for access to the vast resources of big data gives information managers an opportunity to alter the way the enterprise uses information.

"IT leaders must educate their business counterparts on the challenges, while ensuring some degree of control and coordination so that the big data opportunity doesn't become big data chaos, which may raise compliance risks, increase costs and create yet more silos."

Worldwide information volume is growing annually at a minimum rate of 59%, and while volume is a significant challenge in managing big data, business and IT leaders must focus on information volume, variety and velocity.

* Volume - the increase in data volumes within enterprise systems is caused by transaction volumes and other traditional data types, as well as by new types of data. Too much volume is a storage issue, but too much data is also a massive analysis issue.

* Variety - IT leaders have always had an issue translating large volumes of transactional information into decisions. Now there are more types of information to analyse - mainly coming from social media and mobile (context-aware). Variety includes tabular data (databases), hierarchical data, documents, e-mail, metering data, video, still images, audio, stock ticker data and financial transactions.

* Velocity - this involves streams of data, structured record >>>



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Focus on BIG DATA

>>> creation, and availability for access and delivery. Velocity means both how fast data is being produced and how fast the data must be processed to meet demand.

While big data is a significant issue, Gartner analysts say the real issue is making sense of big data and finding patterns in it that help organisations make better business decisions.

"The ability to manage extreme data will be a core competency of enterprises that are increasingly using new forms of information - such as text, social and context - to look for patterns that support business decisions in what we call Pattern-Based Strategy," says Yvonne Genovese, VP and distinguished analyst at Gartner.

"Pattern-Based Strategy, as an engine of change, utilises all the dimensions in its pattern-seeking process. It then provides the basis of the modelling for new business solutions, which allows the business to adapt. The seek-model-and-adapt cycle can then be completed in various mediums, such as social computing analysis or context-aware computing engines."

An Avanade Research & Insights Global Survey, "Is Big Data Producing Big Returns?", concludes that most organisations are not currently using their data effectively.

For example, 70% of companies do not use their data to predict or assess staffing needs, it says. Meanwhile, 63% of stakeholders feel their company needs to develop new skills to turn data into business insights - hence the trend to big data.

But big data itself is not a solution, the Avanade research finds. Even with the value it creates, the rise of big data reveals shortcomings in technology, technique and talent to manage it. As executives see more potential value in big data, they report more work to be done.

The amount of structured and unstructured data to take advantage of is growing and, to derive the most value from big data, companies need to merge data from multiple sources, Avanade advises.

These sources include structured data (for example, the information currently managed by a relational database management system) and unstructured data (for instance

sentiment from social media).

The next step is to optimise data. Not all data is good data, says Avanade, so companies must identify, select and capture the optimal data set to make decisions. By framing the right questions and utilising the right tools and processes, companies will be able to better prioritise and optimise their data strategy.

The next step, says Avanade, is to respond, first by being aware of their data and then taking action based on realtime insights.

Empowerment is the important final step. A data management strategy can only be successful if employees are empowered to take action with the right training and tools, Avanade stresses.

Who uses big data?

There are many examples of who could be using big data, according to Wikipedia.

These include: big science; Web logs; RFID; sensor networks; social networks; social data (due to the social data revolution); Internet text and documents; Internet search indexing; call detail records; astronomy; atmospheric science; genomics; biogeochemical, biological and other complex and often interdisciplinary scientific research; military surveillance; medical records; photography archives; video archives; and large-scale e-commerce.

In reality, however, most organisations are probably considering using big data technologies or techniques to improve their own business processes.

What solutions are there for big data?

Many different technologies come together to make big data a reality: software in the form of in-memory databases; applications; servers to increase processing power; storage to manage the data itself; and powerful networks to exchange both raw and processed information.

Wikipedia reckons that companies like Software AG, Oracle, IBM, Microsoft, SAP, EMC and HP have spent more than \$25-billion on acquiring data management and analytics technology - worth \$100-billion and growing at about 10% a year.

Databases able to store and manage massive amounts of data are necessary

to big data, as is fast and efficient direct storage and massively parallel processing in servers.

The big data opportunity

The worldwide big data technology and services market is set to grow at a 31,7% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) - about seven times the rate of the overall information and communication technology (ICT) market - with revenues reaching \$23,8-billion in 2016.

According to a new IDC forecast, the big data market is emerging at a rapid pace and incorporating technology and services from a wide range of existing and new market segments. While there are multiple scenarios that could unfold, and many demand and supply variables remain in flux, IDC expects the market to exhibit strong growth over the 2012 to 2016 forecast period.

"The big data technology and services market represents a fast-growing, multi-billion-dollar worldwide opportunity," says Dan Vesset, VP for IDC's Business Analytics and Big Data research.

"It is an important topic on many executive agendas and presents some of the most attractive job opportunities for people with the right technology, analytics, communication and industry domain expertise."

Additional findings from IDC's research include the following:

* The growth of individual segments of the market varies from 21,1% for services to 53,4% for storage. The high CAGR for storage compared with other infrastructure components is attributable to the current dual use of storage in big data environments.

* A shortage of analytics and big data technology skills will drive a growing number of buyers toward cloud solutions and appliances. To address skills shortage, there will be greater focus on automation across the information management and analytic lifecycle, and more companies will look to outsource analytic services, not just technology.

* Big data solutions for machine-generated data will begin to gain greater mindshare in the outer years of the forecast.

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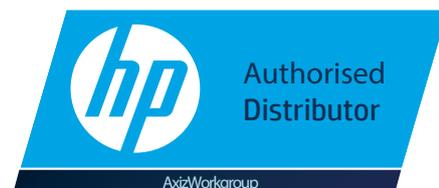
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By Raul Del Fabbro, manager: Storage Solutions Division at Drive Control Corporation

Storage and the data explosion

Data volumes have exploded over the last few years, with digital information being generated not only by computers but also a wide variety of other connected equipment, such as aeroplanes, medical equipment, factory floors, cars and even televisions.

This data explosion has made vital analysis and intelligence gathering from data a challenging task, and even storage and data processing have become more complex in light of the sheer amount of information that needs to be dealt with.

As a result, high speed Ethernet and InfiniBand networks, which have traditionally been the exclusive domain of high-performance computing environments, are fast gaining traction in mainstream enterprise grids, data centres, enterprise servers, storage and virtualisation environments, delivering the fast throughput and low latency needed to cope with big data challenges.

The pace of business has increased dramatically and the competitive edge of many organisations now relies on their ability to quickly analyse and gain intelligence from their data. However, this has become increasingly challenging as the volumes, variety and velocity of this data has increased.

The reality is that the typical 100Mbps network connection, and even faster 1Gbps connection, is simply no longer fast enough for data transfer and processing in many environments.

Although many enterprises still use a 1Gbps network backbone, the performance of these networks is increasingly coming under pressure as data volumes grow, the number of transactions increases and more and more data needs to be moved into the data centre. Data becomes bottlenecked, reducing performance, and the only solution is to move to a higher speed Ethernet connection.

The growth of cloud services and infrastructure too has highlighted the need for faster networks, as virtualised servers and applications which are delivered to multiple users require maximum performance.

Cloud providers looking to offer infrastructure as a service also need to take the performance and more importantly, latency of the network into account, and require the fastest possible speeds across the network backbone.

As a result of these and other factors, high speed Ethernet and InfiniBand, which have typically only been used in very specialist applications, are beginning to grow in the mainstream market.

High-speed Ethernet solutions offer 10Gbps and 40Gbps connections, while InfiniBand solutions offer 40Gbps and 56Gbps connectivity, greatly improving performance, and lowering network latency, thus reducing bottlenecks for extreme network performance.

High-speed Ethernet and InfiniBand solutions deliver high performance with low latency and efficient CPU utilisation. This enables enterprises to consolidate data environments, boost performance, improve manageability and even incorporate network virtualisation. This allows for fast response times and even realtime analytics, helping to boost the competitive edge of any business.

Fast throughput and data transfer capability, along with low latency, is critical in applications such as on stock exchange trading floors. These live environments rely on realtime, split second timing and data transfers as if there is a lag of even a few seconds, the financial implications can be significant.

Aside from this specialist application, high-speed Ethernet is also applicable in the data centre environments of many

organisations. By incorporating high-speed technology, current data centre performance can be vastly improved for today, and the data centre can be future proofed for the requirements of tomorrow.

This technology facilitates any standard networking, clustering, storage and management protocols to operate seamlessly over a converged network, and can provide lower cost, lower power consumption, better CPU utilisation and lower latency for Ethernet-based solutions in both blade and standard rack and tower data centre environments.

InfiniBand technology is of course also applicable in high-performance computing environments, including supercomputer environments. It is also useful in solid state-based appliance environments, ensuring that bottlenecks do not occur on the appliance access points into the data centre.

For embedded applications, InfiniBand also provides the ideal solution, providing the necessary reliability, availability and scalability, as well as for any high-performance computing clusters.

As data volumes continue to explode, and the need for ever faster networking grows, InfiniBand and high-speed Ethernet are growing in applications from specialised fields to more mainstream areas. Demand for high performance, reliable connectivity is also growing unabated, and the price of technology is continually on the decrease.

These factors combined will see the adoption of more and more high-speed networking solutions across a broader range of industries, from medical research to climate modelling, and even mission critical financial services data. This technology will eventually also filter down to enterprise data centres and businesses, delivering fast data transfer to keep pace with insatiable demand and explosive data growth.

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BEYOND ALL EXPECTATIONS

Choose approved channels for optimal value

When your business is dependent on information technology systems for its successful operation, doesn't it make sense to ensure proper procurement which comes with the backing of approved technical skills, support and warranty?

Most businesses will answer overwhelmingly 'yes', with the well-understood Afrikaans aphorism 'goedkoop is duurkoop' underpinning the perception of value. That concept, says HP MD Frank van Rees, is applicable to the difference between buying from authorized channels or opting to purchase through "unauthorized channels".

"The value that the approved channel adds comes as a result of the investments that vendors and resellers alike make in their technical skills certification, spares inventory and market reach. That combines with the quality of products which comes from principals like HP to deliver the systems that power business," he says.

Van Rees says HP judges its own success by the performance of the channel – and its reputation as a vendor is inextricably linked to the quality of the services and value added by partners and distributors. "Through these relationships, HP is able to take an active role in how our technologies are implemented; that does not extend to product procured through "unauthorized" channels as we have no way of ensuring skills and certification, for example, with organisations that are not partners."

He points out that while product sourced through "unauthorized" channels may have a lower sticker price, end users can be caught out as they may have been tampered with or lack valid warranty, after sales support and maintenance.

"These are integral components of the value-add of product sourced from authorised channels. Support is provided by trusted HP partners with industry recognised training and certifications in the maintenance – benefits which far outweigh the chance to save a few percent on the initial purchase price," van Rees says.

Approved resellers, he continues, tend to offer broader and deeper knowledge than those who seek to circumvent proper channels. "That knowledge requires investment, it requires qualified personnel who command higher salaries and it requires the backing of appropriate facilities for the configuration, design and delivery of information technology systems. There are no assurances of quality from unauthorized channels."

Van Rees therefore states it is mandatory HP resellers procure their goods from the HP authorised distributors, namely AxizWorkgroup, Tarsus Technologies, Comztek, Duxbury, Drive Control Corporation (DCC) and Pinnacle Africa.

With a choice of distributors, resellers can choose those which offer the best fit for their business; some are specialist; for example, Comztek and Duxbury focus on networking solutions, Drive Control Corporation (DCC) is a printer and personal systems specialist, and Pinnacle focuses on personal systems and printers. Meanwhile, AxizWorkgroup and Tarsus Technologies provide the entire HP portfolio. In turn, he says end-users are encouraged to assess the bona-fides of their resellers, who should be approved HP dealers.

HP Distribution Manager Trish Simpson advises resellers to invest in their relationships with their preferred distributor. "By maintaining and developing relationships with the authorised distributors, you can leverage HP's Partner



**Frank van Rees, MD, and Trish Simpson,
Distribution Manager, HP SA**

Photography by **Karolina Komendera**

One programme to the maximum, which includes access to rebates, marketing funds, tools, training and other HP resources," she notes.

With the two-tier channel model having stood the test of time, it is proven to add value, Simpson continues. "With vendor and distributor support, our partners are equipped to 'make it matter' to end-users. The channel structure is designed to deliver the full experience and value from investments in HP solutions through engagement with knowledgeable and capable partners able to deliver the full HP experience, up to and including support and maintenance."

Above all, van Rees says sticking to approved channels means avoiding business interruption, unanticipated costs and unsupported technology environments. But outside of 'Rands and cents' value, he says there is something else that cannot be matched by 'grey' goods. "That's peace of mind: difficult to price, but critically important to any business owner."



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Information is the oil of the future

From a partner perspective, information is the oil of the future – and that's largely because of big data, which is placing organisations under increasing pressure to escalate the speed and effectiveness of their decision-making.

In 2000, the world generated two exabytes (2 000 petabytes) of new information. In 2011, the world generated five exabytes of new information every day.

Although most people seem to have their own definition of big data, this working definition from Chuck Hollis, EMC's VP and Global Marketing CTO, is useful: "the act of creating new value through harnessing enormous amounts of information".

"The explosion of data has introduced massive opportunities for channel partners and business alike; however, organisations need to update the skills of their teams, foster an environment that enables analytic productivity, and develop a mindset towards data that values it as the new 'fuel' for organisational productivity," says Nick Christodoulou, regional partner manager of EMC Southern Africa.

"To accomplish this, they need to draw on the skills and competencies of their partners in the channel."

The good news about the world's incremental data growth is that companies are now able to make decisions based on realtime data analysis, while at the same time keeping these decisions in line with their long-term strategies.

However, Christodoulou points out that how organisations extract that data is going to be more important going forward.

"While there's no doubt that big data presents opportunities from a partner perspective, it also delivers challenges which need to be exploited profitably," he says. "A true value-added reseller will be able to play a pivotal role by helping customers extract meaningful value from big data.

"To achieve this, partners need to invest in skills and competencies to offer a full solution around big data to the customer. This frees the customer from having to invest in those skills and allows the business to focus on its core strategy.

"I believe customers and vendors alike are looking to channel partners to be the integrators and promoters of big data, as the execution of these long-term programmes is complex and challenging and requires commitment, proficiency and in-depth expertise," Christodoulou says.

Big data perception stays positive

Sentiment surrounding big data vendors remained positive last year, despite sceptics' suggestions that the subject had been "over-hyped", according to Ovum.

The big data buzzword even managed to transcend from the enterprise IT world to become a hot topic for business publications and journals in 2012, with MongoDB claiming considerable mindshare among Web developers who traditionally relied on MySQL.

In a new research note, Ovum analyses data gathered by DataSift, which ranks Twitter mentions and sentiment of vendors (and open source organisations) associated with the big data market in 2012.

The global analysts were surprised to find that while Hadoop garners much of the spotlight as a big data platform, the vendor 10gen, which develops MongoDB, came in

second in mentions to Apache, which hosts the Hadoop project.

"Given the level of build-up and suggested hype, it surprised us that sentiment expressed about big data vendors still remained so positive in 2012," says Tony Baer, principal analyst for Ovum.

"What's also interesting is the degree to which big data became a business, not just a technology story in 2012," he notes, stating that some business portals, such as Forbes and Harvard Business Review, edged out popular IT news portals, in terms of coverage of this traditionally "techy" subject.

While positive mentions of big data vendors outnumbered negative mentions by three to one, negative sentiment spiked in November with headlines over HP's troubled acquisition of Autonomy. Not

surprisingly, given that vendors accelerated the pace of product announcements during 2012, 60% of Twitter activity occurred in the second half of the year.

The Twitter data provided a good glimpse into vendor brand recognition with big data. 10gen, which develops the popular MongoDB document-oriented NoSQL database, scored high in mentions, trailing only the Apache Foundation.

Others such as IBM and Teradata were also well represented in the Twitter stream, trailing only behind Apache and 10gen in positive mentions. Splunk, which is associated with machine data and, like 10gen, is also popular among developers, also scored high, showing that there is growing awareness about harnessing "the Internet of things" to generate business insights.



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"While Twitter streams are not a scientific focus group for detecting brand awareness, they provide a valuable window on market thinking," says Baer.

"The data showed that while some players, such as IBM and Teradata, successfully scored high recognition in Twitter mentions, other enterprise players need to better focus their message to get big data recognition."

Ovum's big data research stream is tackling the emergence of the vendor ecosystem along with the issues pertinent to integrating big data with mainstream enterprises.

Encompassing issues such as technology selection, data stewardship, infrastructure management practices and skills, its research portfolio will help enterprises focus on managing the information assets of the business, and applying analytics to create business value and insight.

Big data is set to take the world by storm

By Martin Rennhackkamp, CIO of PBT Group

In 2012, the IDC predicted that big data will join the likes of mobile and the cloud as the next "must have" competency, as the volume of digital content continues to grow. In fact, IDC further predicted that the market for big data technology and services will reach \$16,9-billion by 2015, which is an increase from 2010's figure of \$3,2-billion and represents a 40% year-on-year growth rate.

Big data, which includes structured and unstructured data, internal and external to the organisation, will no doubt continue to grow in importance for businesses throughout 2013, due to intrinsic value that data holds for any company.

Yes, it is new and exciting. However, if this previously unseen volume of data is not managed correctly, through similar approaches often used for traditional BI, then it will add no real value to a business at all. Subsequently, correct big data management can actually result in businesses analysing and using data that previously they did not even consider using (due to storage costs).

This alone is creating a ripple effect whereby business decision-makers now have an opportunity to gain more critical insight into their business and, in turn, their customers. This provides them with the insight to make more accurate decisions.

Big data, conventional data and advanced analytics within the BI world are typically used



Some predictions for 2013

CA Southern Africa has released CA Technologies' top five IT predictions for 2013:

* **Big data grows up - there will be an emergence of big data administrators, who will play a critical role in using new technologies and processing power to take a cold, hard (and useful) look at data and its business application.**

In 2013, big data projects will begin to show a demonstrable return on investment. As with cloud, the definitions will mature, enabling better focus on delivering business value.

This infrastructure, which integrates with data from social media and open data sources, will dramatically increase the demand for management and security. Decisions taken using big data carry less risk, and the insights big data provides will increase IT's leadership on innovation.

* **Enterprises adopt public cloud - enterprises will adopt public cloud services, spurred by the expansion of offerings from service providers like established telcos, who have already earned their trust. In addition, as service providers franchise their business models and technologies, cloud services will surge outside the US.**

* **Identity is the new perimeter - enterprise users know no bounds of time and space. As they adopt cloud services and collaborate globally with external customers and partners from multiple devices, they erase the traditional IT perimeter. Security professionals today find themselves in a borderless war on multiple fronts with one common ally: identity. Strongly authenticated identity is the new perimeter.**

* **The seventh sense - there will be increased exploitation of the sensing technologies available in most modern mobile devices as the Internet of things takes hold.**

* **Mobile/social first in the enterprise - companies will start to build applications not just with mobile/social platforms in mind, but primarily for mobile/social platforms, with traditional platforms secondary or not supported at all.**

* **Runner up: the rise of DevOps is imminent - intelligent computing in every piece of equipment is driving the world towards environments so complex that operations need to be taken into consideration before the first line of code is written.**

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>>> together to offer an organisation insight into potential business risks as well as opportunities.

In fact, if big data is underpinned by realtime BI, it can identify and combat a number of organisational risks – anything from over-exposure; over-spend; excessive churn; and revenue assurance.

It has been said, according to research by MGI and McKinsey's Business Technology Office, that big data will become a key basis of competition, forming the foundation of new waves of productivity, growth, and innovation and consumer surplus.

The more data that is analysed, the more insight can be derived and thus, more informed business decisions can be made – this is a clear business benefit in itself.

In fact, a recently published report by the McKinsey Global Institute estimated that a retailer has the opportunity to increase their operating margin by more than 60% when they start embracing and utilising big data - an astounding figure.

It is evident from this that harnessing the wealth of available information through big data analysis can have a direct effect on increasing the bottom line – making it priceless.

Having said this, however, as the term "big data" is new to most companies, especially operating in South Africa, it is important for business decision-makers to fully investigate and understand that concept of big data, as not all organisations need or even have access to big data.

Rather, organisations must analyse what they need to do (that is, the actual business problem they need to address), determine whether big data is a solution in this regard, and if it is, which big data technology is most appropriate.

There is no denying that the term big data is here to stay, and if the investigation into big data proves positive (even through a pilot project) for a company, then the benefits can be attained.

More big data in 2013

As the year starts, the media is filled with analysts and experts from various sectors and industries and their predictions about what the most notable trends will be in the year ahead. Those who are gazing into the proverbial crystal ball on behalf of the IT industry are abuzz over data.

It looks like 2013 will continue to serve users data in various shapes and sizes (mostly herculean); big data, databases and data mining – which were all hot topics during 2012 – continue to feature heavily on this year's trend lists too.

One of these 2013 forecasters is market research, analysis and advisory firm International Data Corporation (IDC). In a newly published report, it predicts that big data will grow to nearly \$10-billion in 2013.

The more data expands – and it is growing exponentially, by a reported 35% to 40% per year and eightfold over the past seven years – the more difficult it will become to make sense of it, never mind accessing to quickly find information that users might be looking for.

Oracle's president, Mark Hurd, was recently quoted as saying that the number of devices that are supplying data back to businesses and enterprises will boom to a staggering 50-billion by the end of this decade.

There are already more than nine billion existing devices that are connected to the Internet and used to transmit and collect data. No wonder Hurd says the world is already "drowning" in data.

"Businesses are running out of space to store all this data they are collecting, including the information that is crucial to running their businesses, such as the data that are sourced from a range of client databases, e-mail and Web analytics," says Louise Robinson, MD of CG Consulting, a South African-based company that specialises in lead generation, database management and data mining throughout Africa and the Middle East, specifically for the ICT industry.

Data mining, which is also known as data or knowledge discovery, is – to describe it in very simple terms – the process of using technology to search through databases, to find relevant information, to analyse it from different angles, to place it into a correct category, and then to summarise it into bite-sized, easily digestible and useful pieces of information.

As one columnist cleverly puts it: "Data mining allows you to find the needles hidden in your haystacks of data."

And once those needles are located?

"That information can then be used by company owners to make important business decisions, such as determining how to increase revenue, or helping them to identify where they are hemorrhaging money and if and how they can cut costs," Robinson explains.

Data mining is one of the services that Robinson offers her clients.

"When it comes to data, quantity does not always equate quality. The more you possess, the more overwhelming it can become to store it. We know that having too much to wade through can be cumbersome and a waste of time, which is why we group this service with data cleansing. In the end, you will be left only with the information that is relevant to your company's operations," Robinson says.

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The digital archiving challenge

By Steve Lauter, sales manager at Jasco Broadcast Solutions

The digital data explosion is a well-documented phenomenon, and one that affects many different industries and areas of business, including the broadcasting sector.

Apart from increasing volumes of data, the increased quality of movies and broadcasts - including HD and 3D - means that the size of digital files has increased significantly. Added to this, there is a need to digitally archive legacy tape footage in order to ensure its integrity can be maintained.

The demand for digital storage and archiving continues to expand, and broadcasters need to ensure they have the right tools and solutions in place to keep historical footage and meet demand for the future, as well as intelligent management tools to ensure footage can be easily indexed and retrieved when necessary.

One of the major challenges facing broadcasters today is the volume of legacy tape footage, which needs to be archived in a manner which preserves the integrity of the video. Since tape is a physical medium, it degrades over time, which means that migrating this footage to digital archives is the best solution.

After all, this footage is a critical asset and is an important part of preserving history, particularly with regard to news footage of events over the years. This footage also needs to be managed and maintained in a way which allows for easy access, in the event that the video and audio is needed at some point in the future.

Alongside this challenge is the fact that the size of current digital assets and future assets is continuously growing with HD and 3D technology. The price of digital storage has decreased dramatically over the years, making digital storage of all of these assets a viable option, and there is a noticeable trend in the market towards investment in high-end digital archiving solutions. However, the sheer volumes of data increase the complexity of digital storage, so intelligent management is more important than ever before.

The speed of content generation also poses a challenge to broadcasters, as the sense of immediacy generated by an "always on, always aware" culture means news broadcasters in particular have to create more content under tighter deadlines and distribute that content to an ever-growing array of platforms, including television, live Internet streaming, YouTube and other social media.

To cater to this demand, it is vital to use the right tools, such as smart media management, which enables the driving of co-ordinated workflows.

Media asset management (MAM) solutions have evolved to meet

this need, providing comprehensive and intelligent solutions that enable broadcasters to organise media, make it broadly accessible, unify and co-ordinate every aspect of production, and link to business functions such as rights management and market data.

Using these intelligent tools, broadcasters can build workflows and central archives that interlink every contributor, facility, geographic location and application in the enterprise. This in turn allows them to work fluidly with all of a broadcaster's assets and associated metadata.

Today's MAM solutions also provide a highly scalable and flexible data model capable of handling any specific requirement and changes or additions needed. Using time-based metadata tracks, users can instantly locate the right video, audio, still image, graphics, and documents.

Workflows can also be automated and combined with Web services (application programming interface) APIs to integrate servers, storage, editing, graphics, or traffic systems. These solutions can also be provided as a hosted or cloud model, removing the need for investment into expensive archiving infrastructure and delivering a "pay as you use" model that allows for instant scalability.

Integration is an important aspect of any digital archiving solution, as MAM systems need to be able to work harmoniously with various other tools and systems if they are to function optimally. When looking to implement digital archiving and asset management, broadcasters need to choose their partner carefully.

A reputable system integrator will ensure interoperability and functionality, as well as provide training on the new solution to ensure it is used to its full capabilities. This is even more important when adopting the cloud model, as integration between cloud and premises-based equipment requires a thorough understanding of the environment and the tools and solutions that are in place that need to be integrated.

Moving broadcast archiving to digital makes sound business sense. Not only do tape storage solutions degrade over time, there is also the risk of these tapes being destroyed by fire, flooding and other natural disasters, and the physical space taken up by tape archives is enormous.

Migrating these archives to digital will free up a lot of storage space while ensuring the integrity of footage, and redundancy and offsite backup of digital solutions ensures that multiple copies of data are always maintained, reducing risk. Without a proper digital archiving strategy in place, broadcasters are at risk of losing audio-visual history and their most important business asset.

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PRODUCT Showcase

DCC delivers HP Envy X2 hybrid

Mobility is the key to success in today's world; the dilemma, however, lies in whether to carry a notebook or a tablet.

This challenge is solved with the HP Envy X2, an innovative hybrid that features the Intel Atom Z2760, specially made for mobility, and the freedom of a tablet in one stylish, lightweight device.

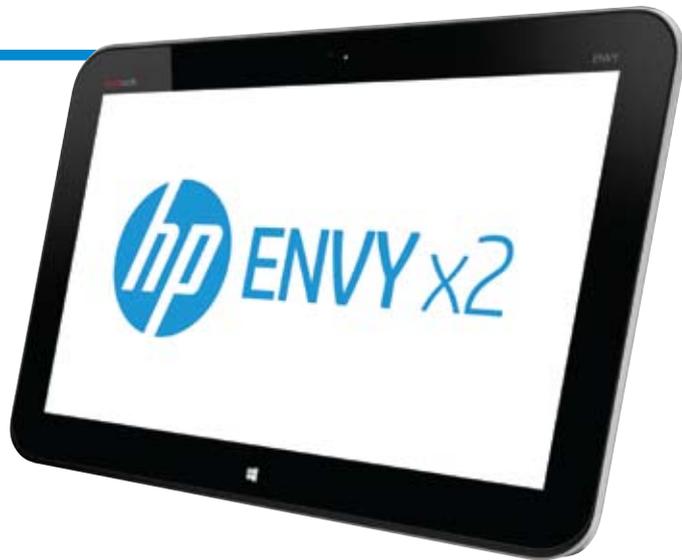
Available from distributor Drive Control Corporation (DCC), this powerful notebook converts seamlessly into a full tablet, separating from the keyboard using a magnetic latch.

Featuring a sleek aluminium finish, the hybrid weighs only 1,4kg.

A bright 11,60-inch HD touch display and the power of Windows 8 delivers the ultimate experience in both modes.

The HP Envy x2 features Beats Audio for a good quality audio experience. Innovative near field communication (NFC) technology lets users share content - including photos, contacts and URLs - with a simple tap on the touchscreen.

The HP Envy x2 incorporates a 64Gb SSD, delivering robustness, improving reliability and ensuring fast start up times.



The new NanoPC 7000 from Foxconn

The new Foxconn NanoPC 7000, available from Omega Africa, is just 600g in weight - ultra-slim and stylish. It supports a dual display with resolutions of up to 1080p, and has an LGA1155 socket designed for Intel Third Generation Core i7/Core i5/Core i3 processors.

The NanoPC is around 30 times smaller than a typical Micro-ATX PC. It is designed to fit on the back of a monitor or flatscreen television, by using the VESA mounting bracket included.

The size of an average book, the NanoPC 7000 brings unlimited possibilities to home and business activities. It is slim, elegant and doubles as a media centre to further digitise users' lives.

In all cases, the basic specifications are motherboards with a mobile Intel HM76 Express chipset and a mini-PCI Express expansion slot, allowing for the addition of a solid state drive (SSD).

To store large amounts of data, a second 2,5-inch SATA hard drive or SSD can be added. All NanoPC 7000 models support up to 16Gb of DDR3 memory, and are equipped with four USB 3.0 ports, an integrated WiFi 802.11b/g/n controller and a six format card reader.

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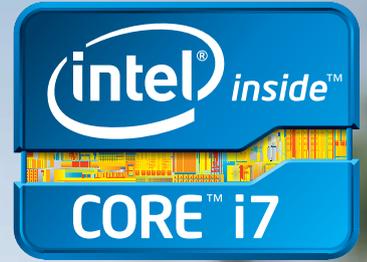


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PRODUCT Showcase

WD My Book Live

Centralise videos, music, photos and files on the home network with Western Digital's (WD's) My Book Live, which features up to 3Tb of storage.

By simply connecting the My Book Live to a wireless router, users can create a centralised repository of all digital content.

Furthermore, users can wirelessly backup all PC and Mac computers on their network to a reliable location using WD SmartWare.

Access and share files and multimedia content from anywhere with a tablet or smartphone, using the secure remote access and mobile apps - such as WD 2go cloud app and WD Photos, a photo viewing app - without monthly fees or security concerns.

The WD My Book Live also features iTunes server support, allowing users to centralise their music and video collections and stream them to a PC or Mac computer with iTunes.

The WD My Book Live is the perfect solution to the everyday challenge of storing and accessing digital content.



Rectron adds Everki brand

Rectron South Africa's aggressive growth plans have been further boosted with its recent appointment as sole local distributor for the renowned and stylish Everki brand.

Everki is a California-based manufacturer of high-quality, stylish and innovative lifestyle products that carry and protect digital equipment. Their products include laptop bags, laptop accessories, backpacks, briefcases, sleeves and camera bags.

Everki products package comfort, convenience and versatility in a functional and ergonomic form. The company distributes throughout North America, Australia, Asia, Africa and Europe, catering to customers from all walks of life.

"We are extremely excited that our innovative product offering is now available in South Africa. At Everki innovation is the result of challenging the mind to overcome the obstacles that others have sidestepped. The Everki Design Studio employs this same mentality to consistently implement new and unique ideas in the creation of our products," says Vryio Ngo, Everki's director of sales.

"The Everki deal forms part of our current growth strategy to provide customers and consumers with the most comprehensive range of innovative and leading-edge products from the industry's leading brands. We are proud to be associated with this world-class brand," says Spencer Chen, Rectron product director.

Rectron, which was established in 1995 with a staff compliment of four, has grown considerably over the past 17 years in both mind and market share, and currently employs more than 294 staff members.

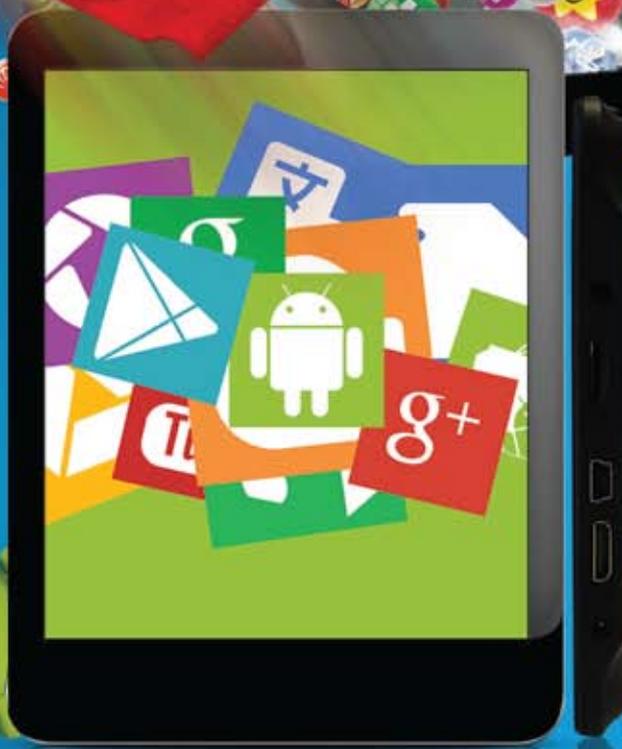
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Omega, Tenda debut dual-band router

The Tenda N6 is a concurrent dual-band router that delivers a combined wireless speed of 600Mbps on both 2,4GHz and 5GHz bands. It also provides superior coverage, designed to reduce dead spots for users who look for higher wireless performance.

Just connect the N6 router to a DSL modem and provide a high speed wireless network for multiple users in a big home or office.

Powered by dual-band technology, it enables users to do simple tasks like e-mailing and surfing on a 2,4GHz band.

It avoids interference on 5GHz band, maximising bandwidth - ideal for bandwidth-intensive applications like HD media streaming, big-file transfer and wireless gaming.

In addition, the N6 router supports a quality of service feature that prioritises time-sensitive online traffic.

This router enables smooth Internet phone calls (VoIP) and responsive gaming.

Western Digital offers Red NAS drives

Western Digital's Red hard drives are specifically designed for home and small office network attached storage (NAS) systems.

The recently introduced hard drive boasts optimal compatibility, remarkable efficiency and reliability, and has been designed and tested to meet the unique system requirements of NAS environments.

The hard drive is also energy efficient and reduces carbon footprint with innovative technology that lowers power consumption and the operating temperature. The hard drive delivers cool and quiet operation.

With WD's specialised firmware, NASWare, integration is seamless, data protection is robust and performance is optimal, while onboard technology controls error recovery in 24/7 NAS environments.

WD's Red hard drive is the perfect solution for the demanding system requirements of both home and small office NAS users.



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Adapt or die: the changing face of IT distribution

“The changing face of distribution” (this month’s cover story) is far more of a factual statement than a question being posed by my esteemed editor.

While the fundamentals of IT distribution have not changed since the advent of commercial computing almost 40 years ago, and have remained rooted in the business basics of stock, debtors and creditors, many of the characteristics of the industry have changed and will continue to evolve.

As alluded to in this month’s feature story, which provides insights into big data, the IT industry is moving through the age of “commoditisation” into an era of that can probably be best described as “consumerisation”.

The trend towards commoditisation can be traced back to the dawn of personal computing, and the advent of the so-called “IBM Compatible PC” that saw the emergence of the PC as a pervasive facilitator of activity in almost every sphere of life – from business, through education and into the home, including entertainment and communication.

Commoditisation in the IT industry embraced more than just the PC itself – it encompassed hardware peripherals such as printers and components, as well as software operating systems, software utilities and even software applications.

The trend towards commoditisation forced the IT industry as a whole - and the distribution sector in particular - out of a comfort zone that was characterised by high value, high margin business, and was based on a cliché coined in the preceding era that said: “Where there is mystery there is margin.”

The trend towards commoditisation that stripped the “mystery” out of computing spawned yet another cliché as the trend began to take grip: “Go big, go niche or go home.”

Like so many sayings that become clichés, this phrase contained some painful truths for the IT distribution industry.

“Go big” referred to high volume at low margin in order to stay in business.

“Go niche” referred to an option to stay out of the mainstream and to focus on areas where at least some barriers to entry were maintained.

“Go home”, of course, referred to businesses shutting their doors if they could not achieve one or the other.

Almost inevitably, commoditisation had a significant impact on the IT distribution sector, including rationalisation, consolidation and even the liquidation of several major companies.

While the cliché itself, and commoditisation in general, remain a reality of doing business in the IT industry today, “consumerisation” is just beginning to define new characteristics and dynamics that the IT distribution sector is going to be forced to face up to.

Consumerism not only embraces almost mind-boggling volume (more usually referred to in traditional IT terms as “box dropping”), but it also encompasses factors that have not necessarily been common characteristics in the IT supply chain.

These include issues such as the end user customer’s freedom of choice - not only based on the ease of comparative shopping when it comes to features and price, but also factors such as preferred points of service and purchase.

This means that traditional reseller channels are changing and have already swung dramatically towards the retail sector.

Product portfolios have also changed dramatically – from traditional hardware devices such as PCs and notebooks to netbooks, tablets and smartphones.

The software is also undergoing the same revolution – from the pervasiveness of the Windows operating system and Microsoft applications hosted on desktop PCs to mobile operating systems such as Apple, BlackBerry and Android, and the so-called “Web applications” environment.

Even the upper end of traditional corporate computing is being affected by consumerism or “consumerisation”, with the advent of “bring your own device” (BYOD) and an apparent growing aversion to traditional applications such as massive ERP systems.

To a growing degree, traditional applications are being replaced by highly flexible and customisable process application systems that are hosted in “the cloud” and more easily accessed via the Web using mobile devices.

While there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that my editor’s statement that the “face of distribution is changing” is true, the role of IT distribution remains as relevant as it has always been.

However, the “adapt or die” rule will apply - just as it did in the face of commoditisation.

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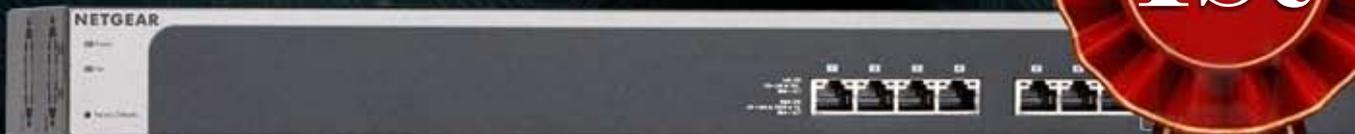
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