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Reader panel



This month sees the introduction of a reader panel providing their own views on the issues of the day.

Each week on the Comms Business Magazine web site we run a reader survey on issues that affect the channel and until now we have only reported the voting patterns each month. Whilst we continue to do that (see page 56) we are now expanding upon the individual views that sit behind those anonymous voting numbers to give voice to our readers on these pages. Here's what readers had to say.

Do your principal suppliers offer value for money when it comes to accreditation courses?



Chris Jagusz, Eurotel: "An element of start-up cost to a new relationship is inevitable, whether or not you're having to pay for training. Some of the network providers are very exacting in this respect, and they're right to be so. Poorly-trained resellers playing with IP solutions that they don't understand give the industry a bad reputation and create costs for reseller and supplier that far exceed the cost of the training."

"We would have an issue when there's no effective differentiation between accreditation levels, or even accredited and non-accredited resellers. We invest heavily in maintaining a level of training for our people. When we see non-accredited resellers getting much the same terms through distribution that we get direct from the supplier it makes you wonder whether it's worth it. At least for the simpler solutions, customers look at price and supplier credibility: I doubt they're much bothered if you're gold, silver or bronze-accredited."

Andrew Gilbert, Node4: Yes, I believe so; the training we receive from our suppliers as we move up the ladder of accreditations is hugely beneficial to our business, and individual employees. Without these accreditations and training from vendors such as Cisco, VMWare etc we would not be able to provide the quality of consultation to our customers and partners that we do now.

In the first half of 2009 are you planning to take on more staff or likely to let people go?

Rob Sims, daisy: "Our expansion plans have never slowed down or been put on hold, and the company looks set to continue growing to the same levels we have seen since it was established."

For daisy, 2009 will begin with a focus on the expansion of our product management team, following on from recent additions to our product and marketing department. We are looking to further bolster this area as it is important we have an in-house team with the right skill set to develop our progressive data suite.

In addition, we are also looking to fill customer service and sales

roles needed to support daisy's continued growth."

Rob Pickering, IP Cortex: We are currently recruiting and see this trend continuing through 2009. Obviously the current climate is affecting some vendors but we are seeing a growth in business as a result and expanding our staff to match. Recruiting recklessly in the current climate would be a mistake, but proportionate growth in our headcount in-line with business growth is imperative to maintain momentum. It helps that we are seeing some fantastic candidates out there at the moment.

Dan Hazell, Freshtel: We're looking to take on sales staff as Freshtel is planning new products to suit the reseller market in early 2009. Adoption of VoIP is strong as people are looking to take advantage of lower cost commitments and avoid contracts that may tie them in during a period of uncertainty. However, we do see the demand for technical development staff slowing while businesses make more out of their already available products and services.



Peter Titmus, Networks First: "We have found the current economic climate has actually provided us with a greater opportunity to recruit highly skilled people. In the past, a booming market tended to present a challenge when recruiting the level of expertise we needed, but this has not been the case during these tougher times."

"We continue to come across a lot of available engineers with good qualifications. Luckily, we have the resources to be opportunistic. If someone has the skills and expertise, we have the capacity to hire them. Come the New Year, we will continue investing in new staff, training and development."

Andrew Gilbert, Node4: Node4 are already on an active recruitment drive for 2009, ready for our business expansion with our new data centre to be opened in the spring. Over the last four months we have taken on four technical staff, expanding both our 1st and 2nd line support.





Interference on the Line? With Brussels' set to end the UK opt out of the 48 hour maximum working week how many hours a week do you work now?

Rob Pickering, IP Cortex: I do agree in principle with removal of the opt-out as it was always a bit of a fudge.

We have never had an opt-out situation as a company and employees work a maximum 48hr working week. For me it's a moral and quality of life issue, it is pretty unreasonable to expect employees to consistently work excessive hours and in any case personal effectiveness tails off after too much time on the job.

Removal of the opt-out is therefore probably a good thing, even if it causes some companies to sharpen up their management in the short term. Me? I'm working about 60 hrs a week at the moment!



Andrew Gilbert, Node4. I would say on average I work 60 hours per week, it is very hard to switch off when emails are so accessible! I'm not sure if this will change for me once the maximum working hours are set.



Lesley Hansen, TeleWare: The length of the typical working week at TeleWare varies greatly depending on the job role. Helpdesk, support and development staff is fairly consistently working a 40 hour week. Sales, Pre-Sales and Marketing personnel are much more likely to work flexible hours depending on travel requirements and the fluctuating demands of our customers. A typical week for me in the marketing area would be around 50 hours. Some of the sales team will do considerably more that this when you take into account the travel involved. When you

offer support to resellers it is more difficult to plan coverage on a logical regional basis and they can spend large amounts of time travelling for a single meeting. The team with the greatest demands on their time is probably our pre-sales department who provide demonstrations, site visits and help with proposals and tenders and so have to work in a very timely fashion.

In the current economic climate will the 'Green Agenda' be taking more of back seat in lieu of financial imperatives?

Rob Sims, daisy: "We see it as our social responsibility to ensure that the 'Green Agenda' doesn't slip in light of the recent economic downturn. At daisy, we remain committed to reducing our impact on the environment and we are starting the year with a push on our e-billing campaign.

Our aim is to get 90% of our 30,000 customers on to e-billing by the end of the financial year, and we have a team of staff dedicated to making this happen. Internally, we are training all new customer service staff to fully utilise the company's CRM system and not to rely on the use of paper-based resources."



Rob Pickering, IP Cortex: The question implies that this is an "either/or" issue which I don't believe is always the case.

Everything we do individually and as a Company has an environmental impact and the important thing is to keep the big picture in mind and minimise this wherever possible without necessarily having to compromise on other key stakeholder imperatives.

The key in my mind is to avoid distracting "fad-ism", keep an open mind, and look for innovative long term solutions that are positive for both the planet and the balance sheet.

Dan Hazell, Freshtel: Green is here to stay, if only because it's now in part aligned with financial benefit. The recent hike in energy prices created nightmare data centre power fees for telecoms carriers, and customers are mindful of their own consumption in the medium term. End-customers are now demanding companies present their green credentials and although the immediate outlook is for lower power bills, the wider sustainability agenda forms part of the comparative assessment people are making in an increasingly gloomy and competitive environment. People are looking for reasons to feel good!

Andrew Gilbert, Node4: The Green Agenda is still a major issue for us and will be throughout this economic crisis. In the data centre world which is something that Node4 are heavily involved in, it is essential that as a business, we do as much as possible to counteract the amount of power we use. Our green initiatives are an upfront expense but will always save us money in the long run, allowing our business as a whole to become more efficient.