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Perhaps it's the grey skies or because at this time of year one's thoughts inevitably turn towards self-improvement, or because in a time of uncertainty and confusion, it is comforting to focus on areas within one's control. Or maybe it's simply down to coincidence. Whatever the reason, this issue has a very wholesome thread running through it, from using the workplace as an ersatz gymnasium to building your own desk – out of cardboard, to importing elements from nature to boost productivity.

I don't know about the cardboard desks, but doing some exercise (or exercises) where and when you can seems like a very sensible idea (and a perfect excuse for a screenbreak). Similarly, bringing elements of the outside world into the office can only be a good thing. One knows instinctively that plants are good to have around, even the ugly, dark, shiny ones that office managers seem to favour.

Now, businesses are being invited to participate in a research study to find out, amongst other things, whether just a picture of a field or forest or mountain stream can boost employee productivity (see page 12). This and other studies, like research into the benefits of green-certified buildings by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and SUNY Upstate Medical University (see page 8), are giving useful ammunition to those interested in creating a softer, more welcoming office environment.

The office as a refuge might become an increasingly attractive proposition as the fall-out from the extraordinary events of 2016 and, no doubt, 2017 create further uncertainty. And on that cheerful note, it just remains for me to wish all our readers a Happy New Year!

James Goulding, *Editor*, jamesg@binfo.co.uk

Business world being shaped by 12 'megashifts'

Gerd Leonhard

The world is being shaped by a dozen 'megashifts' that business leaders will need to get to grips with if their organisations are to survive and prosper in the future. So claims futurologist Gerd Leonhard ranked by *Wired* magazine as one of the top 100 most influential people in Europe (2015).

Unlike paradigm shifts, which usually affect only one sphere of human activity, Leonhard says Megashifts arrive suddenly and transform the basis and framework of entire industries and societies.

In his new book *Technology vs. Humanity*, he identifies 12 megashifts that are rapidly changing business, society and culture. These include:

Digitisation: everything that can will become digital. Digitisation means much lower costs for consumers yet also a mad scramble for new business models because distribution or access is no longer an issue.

Mobilisation: everything is becoming mobile and, soon, wearable or 'hearable'. Computing is becoming invisible and omnipresent.

Screenification: everything that used to be physical or printed is now available on screens.

Disintermediation: middlemen are suffering because technology increasingly makes it feasible to go direct. Examples include record labels (musicians now launch their careers via YouTube) and consumer banking, where millennials increasingly use mobile platforms and apps to make payments and organise their finances.

Datafication: much of what used to happen face-to-face is now being turned into data, e.g. electronic medical records vs. talking to the doctor, or the grocery delivery service that tracks all its products.

Intelligisation: everything that used to be dumb is now becoming connected and intelligent, such as gas pipelines, farms, cars, shipping containers, traffic lights etc.. This flood of data will give us a vastly different way of seeing and directing the world.

Automation: the result of smart machines will be widespread technological unemployment. Everything that can be automated will be.

Virtualisation: we no longer rely only on physical things in a room but on an instance in the cloud, e.g. software defined networking instead of local routers.

Augmentation: humans can increasingly use technology to augment themselves. Examples include a smart watch, Augmented and Virtual Reality, Intelligent Digital Assistants and (sooner or later) Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs) and implants.

Anticipation: software (IA/AI) can now anticipate and predict our behaviour, changing the way maps, email and online collaboration work.

Robotisation: many white-collar jobs will soon be done by robots. Robots are entering our daily lives and homes.

Dehumanisation: taking humans out of the equation by cutting a complex task to its bare bones and giving it to machines.

Technology vs. Humanity is part the FutureScapes series of books from Fast Future Publishing.

fastfuturepublishing.com
www.megashifts.com

Free WiFi not free after all

Mobile connectivity costs North American and European businesses at least £2.19 billion per year, when direct and indirect costs relating to mobile connectivity through cellular roaming, pay-on-demand WiFi and free WiFi are taken into account, claims iPass.

In its new report, *Mobile Connectivity Cost Index 2016*, the global mobile connectivity provider argues that even 'free WiFi' has a cost. It calculates that the combined loss in productivity from slow free WiFi and the time mobile professionals spend seeking out and signing up to free WiFi services can cost anywhere between £578 and £874 per mobile professional, per month.

Patricia Hume, chief commercial officer at iPass, said: "The direct and indirect costs of keeping mobile professionals connected are more than many businesses realise, highlighting the need for businesses to have greater visibility into their employees' data usage. Cost-effective and secure connectivity is paramount, yet free WiFi does not provide the simplicity and convenience that today's mobile professionals require."

www.ipass.com

Patricia Hume

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Panasonic comes out on top

Panasonic has won a blind shootout of laser projectors organised by UK Systems Integrator Pure AV. A number of 6,000 lumens laser projectors from Canon, Christie, Digital Projection, Epson, Panasonic and Sony were judgged by industry professionals at the Victoria Warehouse, Manchester.

The shootout assessed uniformity, brightness, contrast, colour reproduction and greyscale. The 1-chip DLP Panasonic PT-RZ660 took first place with a score of 41.2 out of 50.

Designed for intensive usage and long lasting brightness in education, museums, exhibitions and digital signage applications, the RZ660 delivers high resolution and a brightness of up to 6,000 lm (ANSI). Equipped with dual laser modules, a dust-resistant optical block and a long lasting laser engine, the projector is designed to be maintenance free for up to 20,000 hours.
http://business.panasonic.co.uk

Digital skills increase turnover

Lloyds Bank is encouraging small businesses to improve their digital skills, following a survey which found that highly 'digital' small firms and charities are twice as likely to report an increase in turnover as the least digital.

Based on a survey of 2,000 small businesses and charities, the third annual *Lloyds Bank Business Digital Index* claims that almost two in five UK small businesses (38%) and nearly half of UK charities (49%) lack basic digital skills.

The report identifies five key skills needed to get the most out of being online – managing information, communicating, transacting, creating and problem solving. A lack of digital skills was seen as the main barrier to doing more business online by 15% of businesses, more than double the 2015 figure. www.lloydsbank.com/businessdigitalindex

Tipping point for cloud

UK businesses are taking a cloud-first approach to business software, with 57% now choosing the cloud over on-premises solutions for new business applications.

The 2016 Cloud Computing Tipping Point report by ServiceNow reveals that 76% of mid to senior level managers expect to complete the shift to cloud computing within two years.

It adds that IT departments will have to adapt to this new reality, as 97% of UK companies that have already moved to a cloud-first model report that their existing IT staff lacked the skillsets required to make the transition.

Bob Moore, ServiceNow's UK area vice president, said: "The cloud-first enterprise is at the heart of enabling the agility, speed and scalability to break new ground in today's competitive business landscape. There is a clear shift from traditional data center computing to cloud computing, but it's one with far-reaching implications - a shift away from focusing resources, skills and budgets on the back-end infrastructure to creating a truly service-oriented enterprise," www.servicenow.com

The next generation for NEC

NEC Display Solutions introduced its new series of intelligent large format displays with Raspberry Pi connectivity at a Bond-themed event at the London Film Museum alongside *Bond in Motion*, the official exhibition of James Bond vehicles featured in the iconic film series.

Low-cost, high performance Raspberry Pi computers, originally developed to promote the teaching of basic computer science in schools and developing countries, now boast significant performance and networking capabilities.

Used in NEC's professional P and V Series large format displays, Pi 3 modules provide embedded intelligence and advanced technology for digital signage, streaming and presentations.

In addition, NEC unveiled a video-conferencing and collaboration product for meeting rooms. Called InfinityBoard, it has InGlass touch technology, an ultra-wide angle lens and utilises the company's new MultiPresenter wireless presenting stick.
www.nec-display-solutions.com

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Green-certified buildings best for health

Green buildings do more than just help the environment. According to a new study from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and SUNY Upstate Medical University, they also improve the health and cognitive function of the people within them.

A United Technologies-supported study of 109 workers in 10 buildings in five US cities found that people working in green-certified buildings had 26% higher cognitive function scores, 30% fewer sick building symptoms and 6% higher sleep quality scores than workers in similarly high-performing buildings that were not green-certified.

Participants in green buildings also had 73% higher crisis response scores; 44% higher applied activity level scores, reflecting their greater ability to gear decision-making towards overall goals; and 38% higher focused activity level scores, indicating a greater capacity to concentrate on specific tasks.

This study builds on a 2015 COGfx Study – COGfx is shorthand for your brain's cognitive function – which found significantly higher cognitive function test scores for office workers in a simulated green building environment with better ventilation than a conventional building.

l to r: Dr Joseph Allen, Dr Usha Satish, Dr Piers MacNaughton, Dr Jack Spengler

John Mandyck, chief sustainability officer at United Technologies, said: "Certified green buildings not only deliver environmental benefits, they can have positive impacts on the productivity and thinking of the people in those buildings. That's a powerful combination that can accelerate the green building movement globally."

The full report *The Impact of Working in a Green Certified Building on Cognitive Function and Health* is available at **www.thecogfxstudy.com**

IoT sensors to transform working environment in Microsoft offices

As part of a programme to use the Internet of Things (IoT) to improve the working environment in its offices, Microsoft is deploying sensors that monitor CO2, lighting, noise and temperature levels.

The first offices to be kitted out with the sensors are the Luxembourg premises of Microsoft's Global Sales, Marketing and Operations (GSMO) and Skype.

Microsoft hopes that the provision of real-time data on their working environment will enable staff to be more comfortable and productive. For example, sensors in meeting and collaboration rooms that change colour when the air quality deteriorates will enable staff to see at a glance when they should open the door and/or take a break to avoid loss of concentration.

Candi Carrera, Microsoft country manager, said: "We wanted to create the best place to work for our employees and guarantee their well-being. This is the first phase in the company's campaign to improve its working environment through the Internet of Things (IoT). Ultimately, Microsoft wants to inspire others with this project to initiate their own digital transformations."

Global professional services consultancy Turner & Townsend, which since 2006 has completed 54 projects worldwide for Microsoft, provided project and cost management services for the digital transformation of the tech giant's Luxembourg offices.

www.turnerandtownsend.com

Spaces to launch Liverpool site

Dutch creative workspace pioneer Spaces is opening a 10,300 ft2 creative, co-working hub in Liverpool. Occupying the second and third floors of the Tea Factory, Spaces Liverpool will provide local professionals with more than 120 open plan workstations, as well as a selection of offices and meeting rooms for private meetings and quieter work. The company already has hubs in London (just off Oxford Street), Glasgow and Gerrards Cross, as well as premises in the Netherlands, USA, Australia, Mexico, Japan and Singapore. **www.spacesworks.com**

Drop-in workspace membership

Addressing growing demand from freelancers for flexible, drop-in workspace, The Office Group (TOG) has launched a lounge membership offering access to 22 lounges (including The Shard) and 15 roof gardens for up to 32 hours a month. Membership costs £50 per month. TOG provides growing businesses with flexible office space, co-working memberships, virtual business addresses, meeting rooms and event spaces. It has 33 locations, of which 31 are in central London. **www.theofficegroup.co.uk**

Co-working space

Studio RHE has completed a healthy and uplifting co-working space for Huckletree in the Alphabeta building in London. The shared workspace provides a wide variety of spaces, atmospheres and functions, including a kitchen, auditorium, break out space, presentation space and social space.

www.studiorhe.com

Paper cup recycling solution trialled in Manchester

This autumn, environment charity Hubbub teamed up with Manchester City Council, high street coffee retailers and designers to encourage people to recycle used coffee cups. Currently, less than 1% of the 2.5 billion paper coffee cups that are thrown away each year in the UK are recycled.

The #1MoreShot campaign started on 12th October and runs for three months. As part of the initiative, 11 bins in the shape of giant coffee cups have been placed along Oxford Road in Manchester to collect 20,000 used paper cups. The intention is to turn these into 15,000 plastic flower pot holders for use in community gardens around the city. www.hubbub.org.uk

Soft launch for innovation centre

In October, Plexal hosted an inaugural Live Connected forum at its premises in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London. More than 1,000 technology advocates gathered at the space to explore how technology can improve lives through connected products. The largest innovation centre of its kind in Europe, it is due to open in spring 2017.

VitalityHealth introduces workplace wellness for SMEs

VitalityHealth is launching Vitality Healthy Workplace, an affordable workplace wellness programme for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME).

Designed to inspire, motivate and incentivise employees to lead healthier lives, Vitality Healthy Workplace covers an SME's entire workforce, including those who don't have private medical insurance.

Greg Levine, director of corporate and intermediated business at VitalityHealth, said: "The programme doesn't require any investment by an employer in onsite facilities, nor does it incur the ongoing running costs of a bespoke wellness programme. Instead, businesses can leverage VitalityHealth's existing wellness assets that have been carefully developed over many years.". www.vitalityhealth.co.uk

Employee benefits scheme to expand overseas

Perkbox, the employee benefits and perks platform, has launched its first equity crowdfunding round on the Seedrs platform to fund expansion in the US and Europe.

Launched in January 2015, Perkbox has grown 50% every quarter since launch and already has over 300,000 paying members, ranging from SMEs to large corporations such as British Gas and BUPA.

The platform empowers managers to reward teams or individuals on their performance with a range of perks from a bottle of champagne to a mini break for two.

Co-founder and CEO Saurav Chopra said: "The UK market has embraced our mantra that a happy team equals a more productive team and our first equity raise on Seedrs offers investors and customers an opportunity to be part of Perkbox's future success." www.seedrs.com/perkbox

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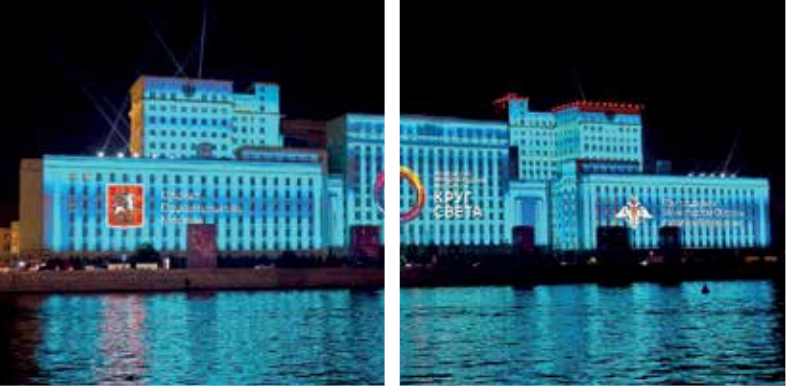

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Flower power

New research project investigates link between nature and well-being and productivity

Instinctively, most of us understand that getting outside or experiencing nature in some way is good for us – we just feel better afterwards. A number of studies have attempted to prove a connection between health and nature, for example by providing hospital patients with plants to care for or by encouraging people to spend more time outside.

In April, the University of Derby and The Wildlife Trust published the results of a month-long nature challenge, *30 Days Wild*, which found that people who did something 'wild' every day for a month, such as eating lunch outside or growing plants, experienced improvements in their physical and mental well-being.

Now, a new project is seeking to prove a link between workplace absenteeism and office workers' access to the natural environment. *The Good Life Project*, endorsed by the Soil Association, is being spearheaded by behaviour expert and author Jez Rose supported by a team of psychologists and neuro-scientists.

Rose said: "Latest figures show that the average level of workplace absence in the UK is 6.9 days per employee, with minor illness remaining the most common cause of short term absence and creating a cost to the employer of £554 per employee.

"Too many organisations are moving backwards towards hot desks and banning personalisation of working spaces and even plants in the workplace. This flies in the face of years of evidence-based research proving that a connection to our natural environment is not only important but also makes a huge difference to individual performance and well-being."

He added: "Happy people are more productive and take fewer sick days. If we can create environments which promote that, organisations will be more profitable too."

The Good Life Project, due to take place over a period of six to twelve months, aims to find out what effect a range of workplace initiatives based around the natural environment have on employees' well-being.

The project team is inviting businesses to get involved, by nominating colleagues to become 'Good Life Ambassadors'. The first cohort, which includes employees of a number of large, well-known organisations, started in October and will be conducting a series of 'interventions' in their workplace, reporting the results back to The Good Life Project.

Interventions include displaying different depictions of the natural environment on office walls to gauge the effect art has on workplace stress levels; an indoor herb garden for employees to tend and enjoy during downtime; and encouraging outdoor activity at lunchtimes and after work.

Rose hopes the research will prove that having contact with, or sight of, nature improves workplace wellbeing, efficiency and workplace profitability through reductions in stress and absenteeism.

www.thegoodlifeproject.info

Jez Rose, *Behaviour Expert and Author*

Happy people are more productive and take fewer sick days

Plants for profit

A separate study looking into the effect of office plants on productivity is being undertaken by Craig Knight of the University of Exeter, with sponsorship from Waterford Plants and employee engagement specialist Engage4Success (E4S).

This follows on from a 2010 study by Dr Knight which found that people working in 'enriched spaces' decorated with plants and pictures were 17% more productive than those in 'lean' or bare and functional workspaces. Those in an 'empowered' space designed by the occupants were 32% more productive than 'lean' counterparts.E4S and Waterford Plants are currently recruiting participants for this study and there are a range of sponsorship options on offer.

www.waterfordplants.co.uk
engageforsuccess.org

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Step to it

For 2017, why not aim to be more active? You can start gently and gradually introduce more demanding goals. You don't even have to leave the office to start making a difference

More than 3,500 workers from businesses across England took part in this year's Shake Up September, a sporting challenge set up to encourage employees to take more exercise.

The programme, run by Workplace Challenge, urged employees to try as many sports as they could, taking inspiration from the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio. The top performer in England was Diane Stokes from Hinckley and Rugby Building Society in the East Midlands who logged 31 unique activities in 30 days.

Commenting on Shake Up September, Lee Mason, chief executive of the County Sports Partnership Network, which runs Workplace Challenge, said: "It's been a lot of fun, but there is also a serious message behind all of this. Campaigns like Shake Up September and our Lunchbreak Manifesto, which encourages people to get active on their lunch break, are designed to help people introduce physical activity in and around the working day. Not enough people are exercising and it is having a serious effect on our health, which is why we want businesses to encourage their employees to get active."

Sport is one way to do this, but there are plenty of other ways in which office workers can be more active. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

1. Take public transport instead of your car. Using public transport rather than driving to work is better for you and the environment. Standing while waiting for a bus/train, walking to and from the bus stop/station, and opting to stand while on the bus/train will really increase your activity levels. If you do need to drive to work, park further away from the office and walk the difference.

2. Sit-stand desks. Instead of sitting down all day, alternate between sitting and standing with a sit-stand desk or retro-fit desktop solution. Just make sure you don't spend too long on your feet, as that produces problems of its own. Find out more by downloading Osmond Ergonomics' sit-stand best practice guide at www.osmondgroup.co.uk/files/Sit_Stand_Tips.pdf

3. Take the stairs not the lift. Taking the stairs is a simple way to introduce movement into your daily routine. A smart watch or fitness tracker like the Philips health watch and companion app could give you the encouragement you need. Use it to count steps, measure your daily activity, set goals and programme alerts to stop you from spending too long sitting down.

4. Deskercise. Even if a busy schedule makes it hard to set aside a fixed time for exercise every day, you can always perform discreet exercises while working at your desk. Try leg or heel raises, simple stretches and shoulder rolls to dissipate tension.

5. Speak to colleagues face-to-face. Don't email or phone colleagues in the same office; walk over to them instead. Doing so will improve your circulation and give your eyes a screen break.

6. Use a headset. Boost your step count with a wireless headset that lets you make and take calls while moving around. Standing up to make a call will make you sound more confident and assertive as well.

7. Re-design your workspace. Arrange your office in a way that encourages movement, for example by locating your printer, scanner, rubbish bin etc. away from your desk. Yes, it's fun to try and lob things into the bin, but walking over to put them in might be better for you.

8. Go for a walk at lunchtime. Avoid eating al desko and go outside at lunchtime.

9. Introduce walking meetings. Enjoy the health benefits of walking by suggesting a walking meeting. A pilot study by the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine found that changing just one sit-down meeting per week into a walking meeting increased the work-related physical activity levels of white-collar workers by 10 minutes (source: *Opportunities for Increased Physical Activity in the Workplace: the Walking Meeting*, published by *Preventing Chronic Disease*).

10. Increase unconscious movement. As well as increasing conscious movement through 'deskercise' and walking more, office workers can improve their health by increasing unconscious movement. Try Hovr, a new solution that allows you to unconsciously swing and twist your legs while sitting, or the Fellowes Foot Rocker, a foot rest with a rocking motion that improves circulation and reduces fatigue.

www.workplacechallenge.org.uk

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Email fraud is on the rise

Someone is stealing your money. Well trained, highly motivated cyber-criminals are targeting businesses like yours and helping themselves to millions of pounds via spoofed email messages.

These highly focused messages target finance staff encouraging them to expedite payments to suppliers that the Managing Director or Chief Executive cannot due to being away from the office.

This new phenomenon has been dubbed "Whaling" as the target is one large target as opposed to "Phishing" which looks to de-fraud a larger number of smaller targets.

The consequences of inaction

Many medium and large size companies have been targeted by these attackers, losing over £520m between them since 2013.

Snapchat is the latest high-profile victim, revealing employee payroll information to an unknown attacker.

As with any scam of this type, the goal of whaling is to trick someone in to disclosing personal or corporate information through various methods, most typically email correspondence.

'Whaling' has already cost businesses over £500m
Attackers can imitate your staff and redirect payments

How is it done?

The attacker is able to intercept emails between companies and freely read their content. Over many weeks or even months the attacker learns how to impersonate the style and language of those sending and receiving the emails.

The attacker is then able to send a bogus request for money including new bank account details for the transfer. As the attacker has lots of information about the target the request will appear to be genuine and money is very often transferred to the attackers account.

An attacker is able to successfully infiltrate a target as standard email has no way to verify the email address of a sender or recipient. This means that the displayed "to" or "from" name actually has no relation to the email address behind it.

How can I protect my business?

The Frama RMail platform provides a secure environment for sending and receiving encrypted business critical communication, providing a strong defence against whaling attacks.

Easy to install and even easier to use, the RMail platform is added to your current email client and provides the option to send any email message with 256-bit encryption.

In addition, all email sent in this way provide legal verifiable proof of content and delivery and full audit trail of who said what to whom and when.

As whaling becomes a part of everyday business life, can your business afford not to take action to protect your business from this new threat?

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APP UPDATE

New apps for business and leisure

Spire

Monitor your state of mind

Spire, the first wearable that tracks physical movement and the wearer's state of mind, is now available for both iOS and Android. As well as tracking the wearer's physical activity and step goals, the small clip-on device monitors breathing patterns and vibrates when it detects persistent tension. This breaks the cycle of anxiety and reminds users to breathe deeply. The connected app provides a library of meditative exercises for relaxation and detailed reporting on the wearer's state of mind throughout the day, steps taken and calories burned. It costs £119.95.
www.spire.io

Customer controlled deliveries

HubBox is a new service that enables online retailers of all sizes to compete with High Street giants with their own Click & Collect solution. The nationwide network of more than 1,200 collection points in local shops gives online customers a secure, reliable alternatiove to home deliveries. Customers can choose a pick-up point close to their home, work, gym or other location and pick up parcels when it is convenient for them to do so. Find out more at **www.hub-box.com**

Simple image editing

Shutterstock, a provider of commercial imagery and music, has re-launched its Editor tool as a web-based app and creative suite for those who need to produce high-quality visual content. Users can now select an image, edit it and publish it to a website, blog or social media without leaving the Shutterstock website. **www.shutterstock.com**

Medelinked

Lexikin

HubBox

Free asset management

Bulb Software Ltd has developed a sophisticated aset management solution for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). Bulb Things provides a range of features through a free app, which, for a fee, can be customised to access advanced features and additional services, such as connectivity to IoT sensors. Bulb Software claims the multi-asset solution provides operational savings by automating the collection and analysis of asset data (e.g. financing, usage, service invoices) from various sources; by automating administrative tasks (e.g. orders, contracts renewals, returns); by maximising uptime of assets and preventing damages/losses; and by helping users to control the costs of assets through smart alerts, benchmarking and better engagement with asset users. **www.bulbthings.com**

Mood tracking

Happy by Medelinked is a free app that records a user's happiness levels throughout the day and tracks their mental wellbeing and progress over time. Users can record when they are 'happy', 'content' or 'unhappy', using simple tick boxes, and build a photographic Happy Wall to remind them of their happiest moments. Medelinked claims greater awareness or 'mindfulness' can positively change the way individuals feel about life and how they approach challenges. The app is offered as part of Medelinked, a way for people to manage their personal health, locate healthcare specialists and share their health records.
www.medelinked.com

Digital will

Lexikin is a new online platform that creates a digital record of all your assets and wishes, acting as a digital executor. It can be used for estate planning, creating and storing Wills and leaving a complete digital legacy for your family. Lexikin is free to use; you only pay if you require additional legal services.
www.lexikin.com

Rent a bike

Cycle.land, the UK's first peer-to-peer bike-sharing company, enables members to borrow bikes from local cyclists, families and vendors for as little as £1 per day. Users simply sign in online, find a bike they wish to borrow and hire it directly from the owner with a couple of clicks. Bikes are secured and unlocked using a lock and key, combination lock or new keyless Noke lock, which can be unlocked with a smartphone.
http://www.cycle.land/

Privacy in danger

A number of popular instant messaging services are failing to provide an adequate level of encryption, putting users' human rights at risk, warns Amnesty International.

Its *Message Privacy Ranking* assesses the 11 most popular messaging apps for data privacy and freedom of expression. Chinese firm Tencent came bottom, scoring zero out of 100, followed by Blackberry, Snapchat and Microsoft (Skype), with respective scores of 20, 26 and 40. None of these companies provide end-to-end encryption of users' communications.

Facebook's apps, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, scored highest, with 73 out of 100. WhatsApp uses end-to-end encryption by default and provides clear information about encryption within the app. Facebook Messenger's default mode uses a weaker form of encryption, but has a new 'secret conversation' feature that includes end-to-end encryption.

Apple (67 out of 100) provides full end-to-end encryption for all communications on its iMessage and Facetime apps but, according to Amnesty, needs to do more to make users aware that SMS messages are less secure than iMessages.

Amnesty's Message Privacy Ranking, from best to worst:

1. Facebook – Messenger and Whatsapp
2. Apple
3. Telegram
4. Google
5. Line
6. Viber media
7. Kakao Inc
8. Microsoft - Skype
9. Snapchat
10. Blackberry
11. Tencent

www.amnesty.org.uk

The best productivity boosting apps

Gary Turner, co-founder and UK managing director of accounting solution Xero, chooses four apps that he uses to be more productive.

1. RescueTime

Available on PC, Mac or Android, RescueTime provides an accurate snapshot of how I spend my time each day. It provides goal setting tools, detailed reports about which websites and applications I spend time on and productivity scores. This helps me spot inefficiencies in my day and become better at managing my time. It even lets you block distracting sites and set an alarm to tell you when you have spent more than two hours on a particular website.

2. Inbox by Google

Google's inbox app helps manage emails, maintain a cleaner inbox and get closer to achieving inbox zero. Features I find helpful are 'snoozing' non-urgent emails to revisit later in the day or the week, and goal setting tools that ensure I make time in my working day for important things like exercising, doing expenses or grabbing that regular coffee with a colleague. Gmail recently added a new 'save to inbox' option for sending yourself links. If you spot an article or website you want to look at properly later, you can just tap on the share button and save it to your inbox – letting you revisit all of those things you intend to read later but never get back to.

3. Freedom

Exercising self control can be near impossible, and the beauty of the Freedom app is that it does all of the hard work for you. The aim of the app is to make it easier for you to switch off from online distractions and get tasks done. It does this by letiing you schedule periods when websites and emails are blocked on your phone, tablet or computer.

4. Coffitivity

Getting out of the office for an hour or two to work from a coffee shop can be one of the best ways to escape distractions and motivate yourself to power through your work. Getting away from your desk isn't always an option, but the Coffitivity app and a pair of headphones can be almost as good! Coffitivity recreates the sounds of a café to boost your creativity and help you work more productively. Available on web browser and an app, Coffitivity has a library of different tracks such as 'morning murmur', 'Paris paradise' and 'university undertones'.

We'd love to hear what you do to stay focused. Please email your top tips to tayla@binfo.co.uk

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As commuters on Southern Rail face continued disruption to services, Andy Nolan, Lifesize vice president for UK, Ireland and Northern Europe, considers the benefits and pitfalls of cloud-based video conferencing

Video conferencing without the tricky bits

The changing nature of work today, characterised by dispersed workforces, mobile workers, telecommuting and constantly evolving technology, is causing many organisations to re-evaluate how they support employee communication and collaboration. Throw in greater travel disruption and the need to control costs and it is easy to see why videoconferencing is now seen as an essential tool in any company's IT offering.

The need for seamless collaboration with colleagues, customers and partners who may be located outside a company's main office, country or time zone has produced an explosion in demand for integrated Software as a Service (SaaS) conferencing solutions that are able to deliver easy to use consumer-like services.

Organisations that make use of this technology benefit immediately from an instant 'on service', minimal internal IT costs and quick adoption, resulting in increased productivity and competitiveness and improved employee recruitment and retention.

As with any new technology, a successful transition to cloud-based video communication technology requires some thought and groundwork:

Review Cloud Advantages

First, ensure your decisions and choices are aligned with the needs of your organisation. Most businesses move to a cloud solution to gain the following benefits:

- **Reduced Cost.** IT departments are under pressure to reduce expenditure. Investing in an on-premises video conferencing infrastructure and hardware requires up-front investment and can cost hundreds of thousands of pounds. IT budgets go much further with a cloud-based video conferencing service.
- **Increased Flexibility.** It is difficult to deliver and support video conferencing sessions if they are scheduled with little or no notice, but this kind of flexibility and agility is necessary in a dynamic business environment. An intuitive, cloud-based application enables users to be more self-sufficient, saving time for IT administrators. Enterprise-class, cloud-based video communication platforms generally offer more flexibility to scale up and down in line with business requirements than services that have grown out of consumer applications.
- **Simplified Automation.** A cloud-based video conferencing solution simplifies management for IT administrators, freeing up valuable time, money and effort. A web-based admin console gives IT administrators easy access to dashboards to check usage statistics and to customise settings.
- **Increased Device Diversity.** Video conferencing software needs to support and stay up to date with a wide range of 'bring your own device' (BYOD) technology. This can be challenging for IT support staff, so organisations often prefer to give the task to a cloud provider. Professional cloud-based video conferencing solutions bring collaboration to the devices employees use every day, from browser- and desktop-based applications for laptops and tablets to mobile applications for smartphones, with no need to worry about software versions or complicated updates.
- **Interoperability.** On-premises video conferencing products usually lack interoperability and still live in a proprietary software world that requires users to purchase an expensive gateway appliance to call third-party video communication devices. Moving video conferencing to the cloud makes interoperability the vendor's responsibility and avoids the risk of being saddled with incompatible equipment.

Choose the Right Vendor

Once you've established that a cloud-based video conferencing solution is right for your organisation, it's time to vet the vendors. Decision-makers should pay close attention to the vendor service level agreement (SLA) and support, ask about outage levels and discuss vendor availability. Video conferencing is a business-critical tool that must have the highest levels of support and service levels.

Decision-makers should pay close attention to the vendor service level agreement (SLA) and support, ask about outage levels and discuss vendor availability

Those who want to give employees the benefits of traditional meetings in a conference room, along with the ability for remote parties to dial-in and communicate face-to-face, should look at a hybrid model featuring cloud-based video conferencing and a conference room-based hardware component to offer employees the best of both worlds.

Implement Effectively

Lastly, effective implementation is key; even if the software is a perfect fit for your organisation, it won't work if it isn't implemented correctly, and that means:

- **Choosing a Point Person.** Selecting the right team and establishing who does what and when reduces the likelihood of a stalled implementation.
- **Establishing a Timeline.** Imposing a clearly defined timeline provides clarity and stops drift.
- **Maintaining Focus.** Resist the temptation to think about every detail rather than focusing on the big picture. Take care of the high-level issues first and enjoy the additional features after implementation.
- **Listening to the Experts.** Remembering who the expert is – the vendor when it comes to the new software and the organisation when it comes to business operations – is vital to implementation success.
- **Gaining User Buy-in.** After a long vetting process, it's common to assume the internal sales process is over. Nothing could be further from the truth. Employees who will be using the new software most may not have been involved in the approval process and it is vital to gain their trust and buy-in and even give them a say in the implementation. Ensuring that they value, and champion, use of the new software will increase the likelihood of a timely implementation.

As businesses continue to employ distributed workforces around the world, demand for an enterprise-ready video communication solution that can provide a seamless, connected experience will continue to rise. Organisations that go 'all in' and commit to improving employee communication and collaboration stand to benefit from a workforce that returns the favour with increased productivity, less staff churn and great employer-employee relationships.

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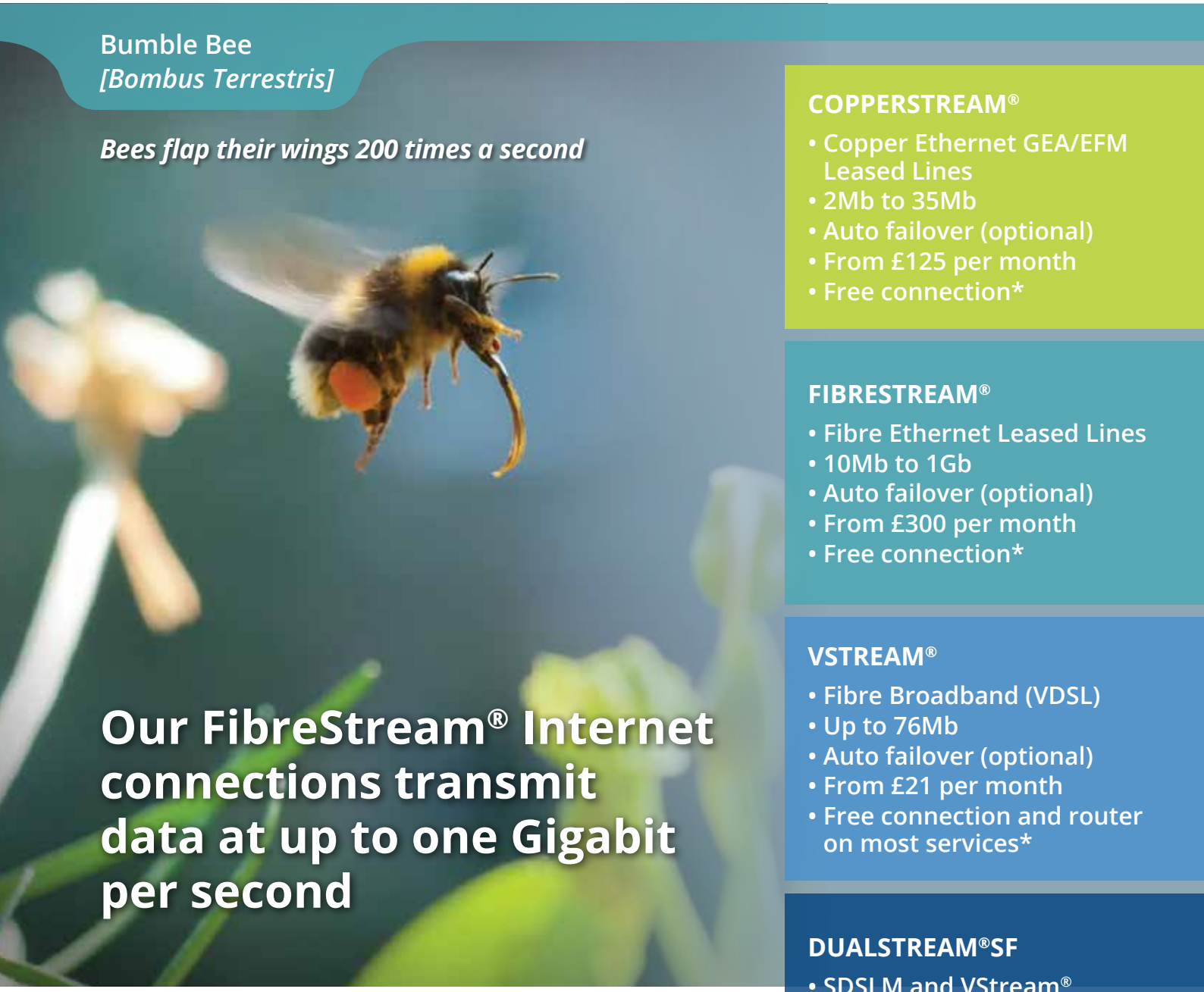

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Why we keep printing

Popularity of paper amongst younger workers slows decline of office print, new study shows

Infotrends has produced a new report exploring developments in office printing through the lens of required versus optional printing i.e. between documents that are printed for storage or as part of a business process (forms, documents that need signatures, contracts and invoices etc.) and documents that are printed not because they have to be, but because people prefer to work with them in hard copy form (email, travel documents, magazine articles, photos, maps, presentations etc.).

Based on a web-based survey of 750 office workers in the US, UK, Brazil and Spain, the report provides further evidence of the decline in office printing (-4.4% over the next 3 years in Europe and -3.6% in the US), whilst also highlighting the enduring popularity of paper as a medium for recording, processing and sharing data.

Infotrends Associate Director Andrew Carroll said: "The office print market in developed economies is entering a phase of on-going gradual erosion. We believe that print volume in the office has peaked and that in the future it is going to shrink, albeit at a relatively low level. This survey very much reflects our existing beliefs about where print volumes are going to decline at the greatest rate, and that is in larger organisations. Smaller companies, we think, will continue to see the most persistent print. That is where the job growth is and where print will continue to be persistent."

Required printing

Carroll says that the decline in print volumes in larger organisations will come principally from a reduction in 'required' printing, as organisations adopt electronic workflows to increase efficiency, reduce paper usage and decrease costs.

"Very large organisations expect to see their print volumes decline at the greatest rate, and we think that aligns quite well with initiatives like managed print and document management solutions that are having an impact at that end of the market far more than in smaller companies," he said.

Infotrends Senior Consultant Barbara Richards added: "As companies continue to invest in electronic content management and workflow efficiencies, paper-based documents will continue to erode in the workplace. In fact, 67% of our survey respondents said that their company had taken steps to simplify, remove or automate their document-related business operations or processes. This number was a bit higher in companies with 500+ employees."

Across all respondents, the Top 5 reasons for a reduction in required printing are: the introduction of electronic workflows (40+%); the use of electronic forms (30+%); a decrease in hard copies needed for record keeping (30+%); the introduction of electronic document management solutions (25+%); and because clients prefer to receive information digitally (25+%).

By far the biggest reason people still print is for reviewing and editing

Interestingly, in light of the debate over distributed vs. centralised printing, only a handful of respondents expect print volumes to fall due to printers being removed or placed further away from users.

No millennial effect

Nor is there any evidence of a generation gap in attitudes to paper. Andrew Carroll points out that consistent responses across all age-groups, including 18-29 year olds, challenge the received wisdom that millennials will naturally default to digital and accelerate the decline in paper use.

"One of the most interesting conclusions we've brought out of this survey, which reinforces learnings we've had from previous studies, is that younger people seem to have an equal if not slightly higher preference for using paper. By far the biggest reason people still print is for reviewing and editing – people still prefer to do things on paper. It's reassuring for the industry to know that a younger workforce doesn't necessarily equate to a lower preference for paper. When we talk about persistent print, the assumption shouldn't necessarily be that print is only going to be persistent amongst the older age group," he said.

Resilient and stable

Optional print volumes, which might be expected to decline more quickly as companies control and monitor printing, show surprising resilience and stability. This suggests that people will continue to print when a hard copy adds something to the experience, such as greater legibility, easy editing, improved understanding or ease of sharing.

In Europe, the ratio between required and optional printing is currently 57:43. Infotrends' findings suggest it likely to stay at this level. When asked whether they thought optional print was becoming a larger or smaller share, 22% of European respondents said larger, 22% said smaller and 57% said no change.

www.keypointintelligence.com

Other findings

- The top three reasons to reduce paper usage are to increase efficiency, reduce paper consumption and decrease costs. Increasing productivity was in fourth place, followed by environmental factors in fifth and security in sixth.
- Two-thirds (67%) of respondents say their company has taken steps to remove, simplify or automate document-related business processes.
- On average, survey respondents spend 36 minutes retrieving digital documents compared to 20 minutes for paper documents.
- Almost 40% of respondents say less than one quarter of their business content remains on paper.
- Workers spend 11% of their time travelling for business, visiting customers or working in the field. Yet, just 4% of printing occurs in a mobile environment. This suggests that vendors could do more to enable on-the-go printing, especially as many workers will not print a document if they can't print it immediately.

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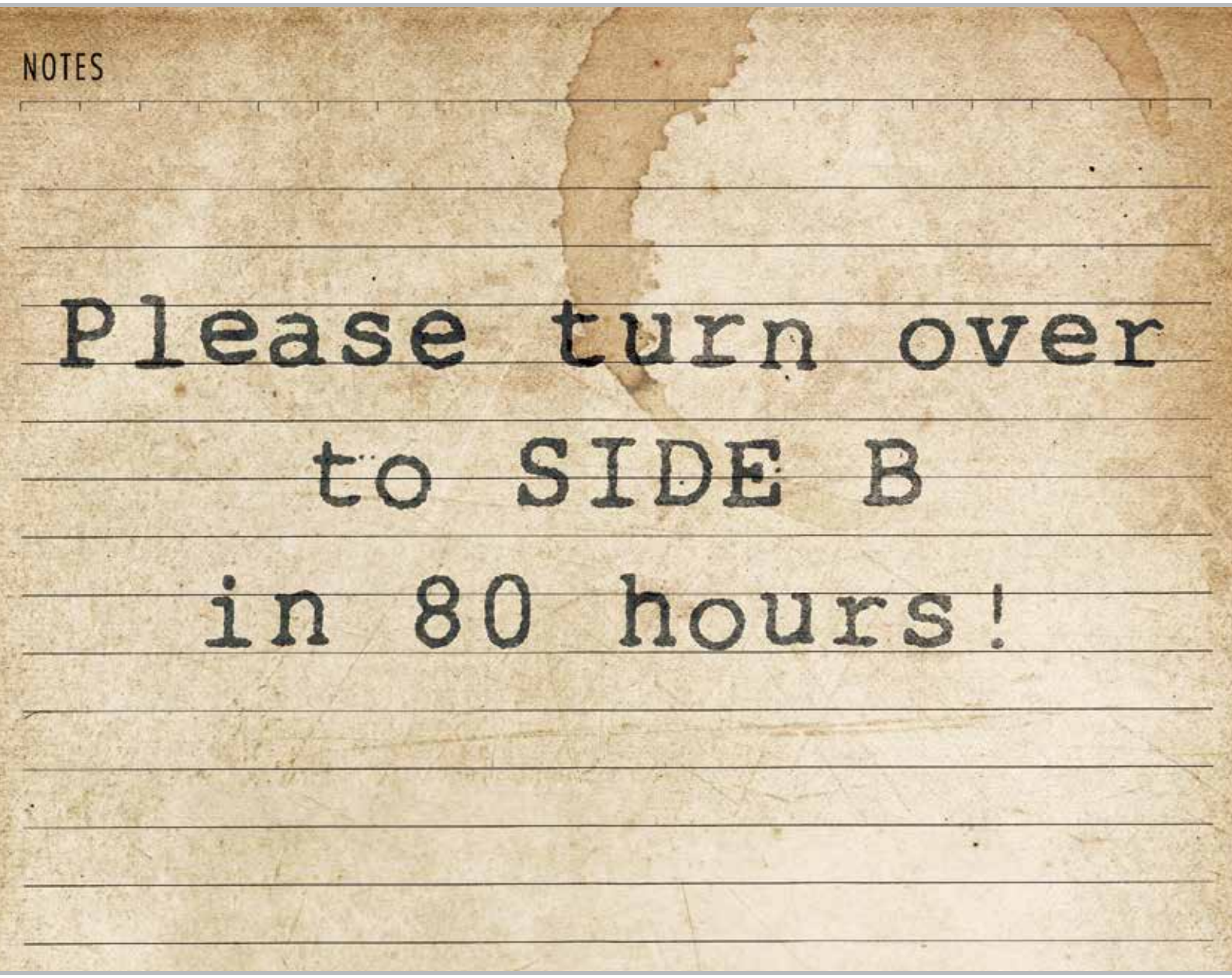

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Back to business

Why more and more businesses are trusting Cartridge World to manage their office printing requirements

If you're not already a customer of Cartridge World, now might be the time to take another look at the long-standing franchise operation. Since CEO Paul Callow took over in April 2016 he's been repositioning the printer specialist as a business-to-business (B2B) supplier and has brought in a number of new products and services to deliver more options and ways to save money for business customers.

Callow's re-boot is still in its early stages, but already Cartridge World is very different to the image that many people have in their mind's eye of a small, off-High Street shop specialising in compatible inkjet cartridges.

What may come as a surprise to business customers, says Callow, is the wide range of products on offer. This includes a growing number of printers and MFPs and both Cartridge World and original manufacturer (OEM) branded consumables and supplies.

What may may come as a surprise to business customers is the wide range of products on offer

"Most business customers don't know that we're one of the largest suppliers of OEM consumables. Most people think that we only sell cartridge brands and cartridge components but we sell thousands of OEM printer consumables and supplies. This scale means we are incredibly competitive and very flexible on pricing," he said.

Callow has been working hard to strengthen relationships with key vendors, including Canon, Samsung, UTAX and HP, leading to greater customer choice, competitive pricing, eye-catching end user promotions, plus an expanding portfolio of printer services that can save businesses time and money.

As an example, Callow cites a deal with HP that allows business customers to purchase supplies from HP on a pay monthly agreement with savings of up to 50%. Open to business customers who print in excess of 1,000 pages per month, this special arrangement includes full service and maintenance of devices and the delivery of printer supplies directly from HP on a 'Just-in-Time' basis.

In addition, Cartridge World has partnered with UTAX to provide a managed print service (MPS) for customers' copier fleets, with special pricing and terms.

Printer management

This month, Cartridge World is launching a new print management solution so that customers who don't want an MPS can still improve the efficiency of their printer fleet and lower running costs.

Cartridge World Sonar enables businesses to manage all printers, multi-function devices and copiers on their network and monitor how much each one is printing; it identifies devices that

Good for business

Richard Bruce, Managing Director of Cartridge World Peterborough, highlights two local businesses that are benefiting from a Cartridge World MPS

Firmin Clark

Located in the village of Werrington, near Peterborough, Firmin Clark is one of the region's leading independent estate agents. It was set up by managing directors Matthew Clark and Daniel Firmin in 2014.

Not long afterwards they came into our Peterborough store to buy a printer cartridge. Based on the cartridge requested, which was for a low-cost, low-end printer, I assumed that they would only be printing the odd document.

In fact, further discussion revealed that they were using this printer because they had just opened a new office and wanted to keep initial costs down. This is a common thought process that can end up costing hundreds or thousands of pounds more over the life of the device.

I told them about our managed print solution, which would enable them to reduce their costs without having to purchase a new printer outright, with all costs blended into a fixed monthly fee. We put together a free 'no-obligation' quote and they were stunned by the incredible savings we could deliver through the CWPS methodology.

After our presentation, they set up a 24-month contract, which has been in place for almost two years now. Clark and Firmin are so happy with the service and savings delivered that they have already agreed an extension to cover a second office they have opened in Peterborough.

The combined savings are more than 50% of what Firmin Clark was paying before, but the peace of mind and support we give are just as valuable.

Bellview Products Yaxley

Operating from a state-of-the-art 30,000 sq ft manufacturing facility in Peterborough, Bellview Products T/A British Security Windows (BSW) is a major Liniar PVC-U and Smart's aluminium fabricator.

BSW initially contacted Cartridge World in Peterborough when they needed a toner cartridge for same-day delivery that they were unable to source anywhere else. We offered them a remanufactured Cartridge World cartridge with 100% money back guarantee and free delivery within the hour, and they agreed to trial the product as an alternative to the OEM cartridge.

They found that our cartridge delivered equal performance to the OEM version, with no quality issues. One big difference, however, was the cost, which was 56% lower than the price of an OEM cartridge from their normal supplier. Over the coming months, we built up a good and trusting relationship with BSW, supplying them with a range of other products.

During one visit, I spoke to the accounts department about a 'managed print' package including hardware, unlimited toner and on-site service for a fixed monthly fee. As the business was growing and they already had five printers, they recognised that this would be an efficient way to manage their devices.

We are now 12 months into the agreement and as part of our developing relationship we have provided additional devices to support BSW's growth. I am delighted with the savings and support we have been able to provide and, as we move forward, hope to push those savings closer to 60%!

are being overworked or under-used, so that businesses can make better use of their equipment and minimise servicing and repair bills; it can help identify bad printing habits, such as unnecessary colour printing; and it advises when printer supplies are running low, so customers can order supplies as and when they are needed, avoiding printer downtime and simplifying supplies management.

Sonar is available from £10 per month but will be offered free of charge for three months with no obligation to continue when you register before 31st March 2017.

Print specialist

An expanded product range and business-friendly options like a 30-day business account are not Cartridge World's only strengths. Just as important, and central to its appeal, is the knowledge and experience of its franchisees and store managers.

Unlike PC World, Staples and other competitors, Cartridge World is a print specialist – that's all it does. This, and the fact that the average length of service for a franchisee or store manager is 11 years, mean that customers can be confident of speaking to someone with in-depth understanding of printers, supplies and the needs of business customers.

"They're experts on actually understanding how printers and consumables work and they can offer a lot more insight and a lot more support for customers," said Callow.

He adds that because stores are independent franchises, they have more freedom to negotiate with customers. "Our franchisees and store managers can make their own decisions about the deals they do with businesses. If a business walks in and says 'I've got five printers and we print 20,000 pages a month. If you give me a printer for free, I'll promise to buy all of my toner from you', they could negotiate a deal. We're very, very flexible and open to deals – if the customer is saving money and we can cover our bases then what's to lose," he said.

Our franchisees and store managers can make their own decisions about the deals they do with businesses

Paul Callow has achieved an enormous amount since taking the reins, helping to revitalise the Cartridge World brand in the UK and address the changing needs of consumers and business customers. And this is just the start. In 2017, he plans to introduce additional products and services, making Cartridge World even more attractive as a business supplier.

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The only headset you'll ever need

Sennheiser MB 660 Bluetooth headphones

The problem of noisy offices just won't go away. Steelcase research shows that distractions cost workers 86 minutes every day and, according to the *Leesman Index 2014*, only 28% of workers are satisfied with acoustic conditions at work.

Larger organisations with deep pockets can address the problem by installing sound-masking/blocking solutions and by creating a greater diversity of work environments, including areas for collaboration, concentration, team-work and relaxation. But what about smaller organisations that don't have the resources to spend on an office re-design? What can they do to overcome the problem of noise and distractions?

One option might be to invest in noise-cancelling headphones like the new Sennheriser MB 660. This premium Bluetooth headset is so packed with technology that it is the only headset a knowledge worker will need, however varied and diverse their workload or the environments they choose to work in.

Perfect for collaboration via unified communications, for blocking out noise, for making calls from a noisy café or for playing music, the MB 660 combines the features of a business-grade UC headset and consumer headphones in one device.

Through smart technology and clever product design, it satisfies the three key demands of knowledge workers:

- The ability to block out distractions for focus and concentration;
- Business-grade communications with clear sound in all environments, reliable talk-time and compatibility with UC systems; and
- Good quality audio for listening to music or movies.

An office chair for your head

The first thing to note about the MB 660 is its design, which, uniquely in Sennheiser's contact centre & office (CC&O) range, has more in common with music headphones than office headsets. This and the use of soft black leather, brushed metals and generous padding on the headband and ear cups give an impression of luxury and comfort.

Closer inspection reveals clever design details, like the rotating ear cups that turn the headset on and off and allow the MB 660 to be folded for easy storage; the flat-sided 'cans' incorporating a touchpad for call, volume and music control; and switches offering a choice of noise cancellation settings and pre-set audio effect modes.

In this respect, the MB 660 is like a luxurious ergonomic chair – you first notice its great design and then the little buttons and levers that let you customise the seating experience to suit your personal preferences.

Adaptive ANC

The MB 660's most notable feature in this context is adaptive Active Noise Cancellation (ANC) technology – an industry first.

An established feature of many headsets, ANC is successful at blocking out background noise, but is not to everyone's taste – it can be isolating and some find the sensation of complete silence claustrophobic. As one Sennheiser sound engineer put it, "people think they want silence when what they really want is comfort".

The MB 660 improves wearer comfort by offering a choice of ANC modes: off; on; and adaptive ANC. 'On' provides exceptional noise cancellation though Sennheiser's Hybrid ANC technology, which removes both high and low

Business info reader offer

We have a special offer for all *Business info* readers. Try out Sennheiser's Headsets and Speakerphones for 30 days. If you would like to take advantage of this very generous offer from Sennheiser simply follow the link below. T&Cs apply.

GET A FREE TRIAL
Take a FREE 30 day trial of Sennheiser premium headsets and speakerphones and experience the benefits of having the right headset solution for your business. Simply complete the trial form at: **www.sennheiser.com/BusinessInfo**

OFFER
Following the 30 day trial, if you wish to purchase we are offering a FREE headset for every 10th product purchased.

TERMS: Offer valid until 31 January 2017. One use per business. Minimum business headset requirement applies

frequency noise.

For those who prefer a low level of background noise, Adaptive ANC allows users to specify the sound level at which ANC kicks in. This is done by moving a slider along a bar in Sennheiser's Captune app, which can also be used to customise music settings.

Another interesting feature of the MB 660, TalkThrough, aids communication and stops headset wearers from unnecessarily raising their voices by opening a clear communication channel between the headset wearer and their surrounding environment. Instead of having to take off your headset when a colleague comes up to ask a question, just double-tap the touchpad to hear clearly what they are saying, then double-tap again to close down the communication channel.

TalkThrough is also useful when travelling, as it makes it possible to listen to announcements or communicate with cabin staff without removing one's headset.

Other features that contribute to a more natural user experience include Room Experience, which creates the impression that the person you are communicating with is in the same room – this also reduces listener fatigue when using the headset for long periods; the SpeakFocus array of three digital microphones for filtering out surrounding noise; and Advanced Own Voice Detection, which detects when a person is speaking and reduces microphone sensitivity when they are not so that the sound of typing or paper-shuffling is not picked up.

The latter is particularly interesting in light of warnings from the University of California, Irvine (UIC) about the dangers of 'typing and Skyping', following research showing that it is possible to record background typing noise and then convert that sound into text.

UC headset

Despite its attractive consumer qualities, the MB 660 is at heart a business-grade UC headset. It works easily across and between multiple devices and platforms; it is supplied in two versions optimised for Microsoft and for other UC systems; it comes with a choice of connectivity – Bluetooth, NFC and USB, for charging and wired back-up when the battery runs low; and it can receive UC system updates and be managed by the IT department remotely.

The MB 660 costs £385 (ex VAT).

Flexibility and choice

Business Info asks Sennheiser Communications Director of Product Management Brian Brorsbøl what he likes most about the MB 660

Brian Brorsbøl, *Director of Product Management,* Sennheiser Communications

***Business Info (BI):* You have crammed a lot of technology into the MB 660. In your view, what is the one feature that really stands out?**

Brian Brorsbol (BB): For me, it's the MB 660's adaptability. This increases user comfort, which is really important for people in business – if you are going to be wearing a headset for a long time you need it to be comfortable.

The three main elements of the Sennheiser experience are leading sound quality – for communication in both directions and for listening to music; the user focus, which is where adaptability and flexibility come in; and design quality. Achieving the right mix of these qualities is what gives you the Sennheiser experience.

Adaptive ANC brings a new dimension to the user experience. Some people can get a little dizzy with ANC – they appreciate its benefits but might not want it on all the time. The ability to adjust the noise level at which you want ANC to kick in gives real flexibility and lets the MB 660 accommodate users' different preferences and different needs in a really flexible way.

***BI:* Do you think 'cans' are an appropriate feature for an office headset?**

BB: The younger generation coming into the workplace is technology-driven and expects to use these kinds of device at work. Ultimately, the design of any product has to meet the expectations of the user. There is also the question of video collaboration; people don't want solutions that make them look silly; they want to look good. So it is important for us to have these kinds of versatile, stylish options in our CC&O (Contact Centre & Office) portfolio.

Organisations today have different user types with different needs, which is why we have a full line-up of products. They will not choose one or two models of headset; they will choose a whole range to suit different user profiles. It is really important for customers to find out what their needs are and we will help them do this. It's not just about selling headsets; it's about selling the right headset to the right person, so that everyone in the organisation gets that Sennheiser experience.

***BI:* Do you think employers will want to spend £400 or so on what could be perceived as an entertainment solution?**

BB: Unified communications are being deployed in more and more organisations, from large enterprises to SMEs. If they can choose a product that meets user needs in their entirety, so they don't have to buy one headset for music and another for communication, so much the better.

If your employees complain about noise, about getting interrupted, about finding it hard to concentrate, consider what you pay them and compare that to the cost of an MB 660. I don't believe this device, which addresses so many of the challenges of work today, is an expensive solution. I believe it is very good value for the flexibility it offers.

In brief

Hearing aid compatible

Also new from Sennheiser is the SC 660 TC premium double-sided wired headset developed specially for people who use hearing aids. In addition to a high-quality neodymium speaker, the SC 660 TC has a hearing aid-compatible telecoil transmitter on each side of the headset. These send a magnetic field that can be picked up by any standard, telecoil-equipped hearing aid.

www.sennheiser.com

Teamwork and creativity transformed

Microsoft is introducing new software and hardware designed to improve collaboration and creativity

Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams enhances the collaboration capabilities of Microsoft Office 365 by providing a chat-based workspace where team members can have real-time conversations and work on content together. It has four main elements:

- **Chat.** Threaded chat helps ideas flow freely and ensures team members stay engaged and informed. Team conversations are visible to the entire team by default, but there is also the option of private chat.

A library of emojis, GIFs, custom stickers and memes enables users to express their personality.

- **A hub for teamwork.** In addition to collaboration by chat, people can start voice and video meetings and work on Microsoft Office documents from within the Microsoft Teams workspace.
- **Easy customisation.** Each team can personalise the Microsoft Teams experience to suit its specific needs. Users can create channels to organise conversations by topic, with Tabs to frequently used documents and applications, such as OneNote, SharePoint or third-party solutions like Zendesk.
- **Security.** As part of Office 365, Microsoft Teams has the all the security and compliance capabilities of the Microsoft Cloud. Data is encrypted at all times and covered by a transparent operational model with no standing access to customer data. Multi-factor authentication provides enhanced identity protection to help ensure data stays safe within the team.

The preview of Microsoft Teams is available to Office 365 commercial customers with Office 365 Enterprise or Business plans. Office 365 IT administrators can enable Microsoft Teams for their organisation from the Office 365 admin center.

We have designed this product very, very carefully to give teachers exactly what they want

Surface Studio & Surface Dial

The latest addition to the Surface family, Surface Studio provides a more natural and immersive way to create and interact with digital content.

Featuring the thinnest ever LCD monitor and a 28-inch ultra HD 4.5K screen, Surface Studio delivers 63% more pixels than a 4K TV. A Zero Gravity Hinge lets you quickly and easily switch from Desktop Mode to Studio Mode angled at 20 degrees – the same as a standard drafting board – for comfortable sketching, writing and designing.

Users can create and interact with content using a pen, touch and Surface Dial, a new input device that lets you use two hands on the screen. Specially designed for the creative process, Surface Dial integrated with Windows 10 provides a faster and more intuitive way to scroll, zoom and navigate, as well as unique experiences exclusive to Surface Studio. For example, an artist using Surface Dial could change the colour or size of their brush tip as they paint, without moving the pen from the screen.

HoloLens

Microsoft has announced the UK availability of Microsoft HoloLens, the world's first self-contained holographic computer to bring together the virtual and physical worlds. Microsoft says this will enable UK businesses and developers to explore the possibilities of mixed reality computing.

In 2017, Microsoft is updating Windows 10 to include Windows Holographic, the platform that powers mixed-reality experiences. IDC expects revenues from the worldwide augmented reality and virtual reality markets to grow from $5.2 billion in 2016 to more than $162 billion in 2020. www.microsoft.com

Justin Orde, Joint Managing Director, Spitfire

Spitfire partners with Virgin Media Business

Spitfire, the multi-award winning Internet telephony service provider and ISP, is partnering with Virgin Media Business to offer customers even greater choice of network and pricing options, including access to the latter's nationwide fibre optic network.

Virgin Media Business has the largest privately built fibre-optic network in the UK, supporting real-time IP services such as VoIP telephony and HD-quality video conferencing.

The partnership with Virgin Media Business enables Spitfire to give customers a choice of carrier and pricing for its Ethernet solutions and services, including delivery by Fibre, EFM and GEA.

Justin Orde, Joint Managing Director of Spitfire Technology Group, said: "Our new partner agreement with Virgin Media Business is great news for our customers, because we aim to provide them with the right network connectivity solution for their business needs and not a 'one size fits all' product. Increasing demand for high speed bandwidth means we need to offer customers prompt implementation and flexible pricing options. Our partnership with Virgin Media Business gives our customers access to a substantial fibre-optic network."

Spitfire says greater customer demand for high-speed Ethernet connectivity is being driven by the migration of applications and data storage to the cloud. This accelerating trend is being powered by Google Apps, Microsoft Office 365 and other cloud-based services.

Spitfire Technology Group, established in 1988, is now one of the largest independent voice and data solution suppliers in the South East. It provides carrier network services and Internet connections, as well as voice and data networks and phone systems from leading manufacturers.
www.spitfire.co.uk

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Complete control

Trevor Davis explains the benefits of implementing a call accounting or call logging solution

A call accounting (or call logging) system is a hardware or software application that captures, records and prices telephone usage. Frequently implemented as a cost optimisation application, call accounting has multiple benefits for organisations of all sizes. These include:

- The insight it gives into telephone usage and expenditure can help define and drive a new business strategy. For example, call accounting is frequently used to cost-justify migration from TDM to voice over IP (VoIP).
- If a business is operating a unified communications platform, like Skype for Business, call accounting can help it keep tabs on communications in their entirety, measuring everything from audio and video conferencing to instant messaging, file transfers and peer-to-peer calls. This is a great way to identify trends that may have a significant cost impact on the business and require contingency plans to be drawn up.
- The best call accounting systems enable specific functionality to be developed to optimise reporting for a particular type of environment, whether that be traditional audio or PSTN data, Skype for Business solutions or more general unified communications technology. Alternatively, a business might want to look more closely at the network, focusing on areas like quality of service, packet loss, latency jitter and overall network performance to ensure optimal efficiency for voice.

Call accounting delivers benefits to all parts of the organisation, from the contact centre and customer-facing business units to back office administrators. That said, there are clearly functional areas of any business to which call accounting software is especially relevant.

Cost Optimisation

The primary benefit of call accounting, and the area where businesses typically see the fastest return on investment, is the ability to optimise costs, starting with an analysis of call costs across the organisation. The most functionally rich systems support multiple carrier tariff rates within the application. For example, our call accounting system, Proteus, allows businesses with multiple service providers to load up rate plans for each one and run cost comparisons to ensure they are on the right plan for their type of usage.

Also important for the purposes of cost management is the ability to identify assets that are being under-utilised (or not being used at all), which could be shared across different areas of the business.

A third key aspect of cost optimisation is the way costs are applied within a business, specifically the ability to break a bill down by department or even by employee. Cost reporting within a call accounting application can allocate costs across departments, cost centres, account codes etc., enabling an organisation to allocate costs and account for them appropriately. This is generally done on a scheduled basis.

The final cost area that call accounting systems assist with is service billing and the ability to produce monthly billing reports for individual clients. A legal firm that charges clients for time and materials used would typically assign an individual account code to every client. This would be used to collate all calls relating to that client, and associated costs (including mark-ups).

Trevor Davis, *Head of Product Management and Call Accounting,* Enghouse Interactive

Network Optimisation

The role that call accounting systems can play in optimising the network is perhaps most relevant to medium and large enterprises with sophisticated telephony infrastructures incorporating multiple sites, multiple PBXs and large volumes of SIP or ISDN trunks that terminate in different buildings.

Leading edge call accounting systems can help organisations with network optimisation by enabling them to assess average peak utilisation across the network and to ensure that least cost routing is used to route calls across the internal network before breaking out onto the PSTN network.

Call accounting can also help with capacity planning. The best systems can see how capacity is trending on the network and are very good at predicting when a business is likely to reach capacity, managing growth accordingly. Alternatively, they can project a likely decline over time, which might help the business identify where it can reduce the number of assets and achieve cost savings as a result.

Security and Compliance

A call accounting system can monitor telephone interactions for unexpected activity, such as out-of-hours breakout calls, which could indicate some sort of toll fraud (a method of obtaining unlawful access to business phone systems to make money). Toll fraud is rife in the UK, yet is something most businesses don't truly understand or defend against.

If something unusual happens a business would need to be notified immediately. Our Proteus call accounting system has a real time monitor, which can be configured for when the office is closed down – over the Christmas holidays, for example, which ensures that if there are any out of hours outbound calls over a certain amount, the management team is notified by email or SNMP.

Call accounting systems can also be used to detect internal fraud, including unnecessary use of long distance or toll-based services by someone inside the organisation, such as an employee

or contractor (premium rate number companies have been known to pay cleaners to dial a number, leave it off the hook and only hang up when they leave the building).

Compliance might also mean using the software to manage business and personal calls more effectively. This could involve something as simple as building a set of business numbers in order to differentiate between business and personal usage and so discourage employees from making personal calls. If added inducement is needed, the system could charge employees for personal calls.

Applications of this sort are particularly useful in vertical markets subject to tight regulation, such as finance and banking. Proteus can be used to verify trader activity and pinpoint who a trader is calling, how frequently, for how long and for how much.

Staff Activity Monitoring

Most modern call accounting applications have the ability to monitor metrics like inbound call times or call wait times and display activity on a wallboard or dashboard. Users can set thresholds, e.g. a maximum 20-second wait time for customers. If these are exceeded, the wallboard can change colour, from green to amber to red.

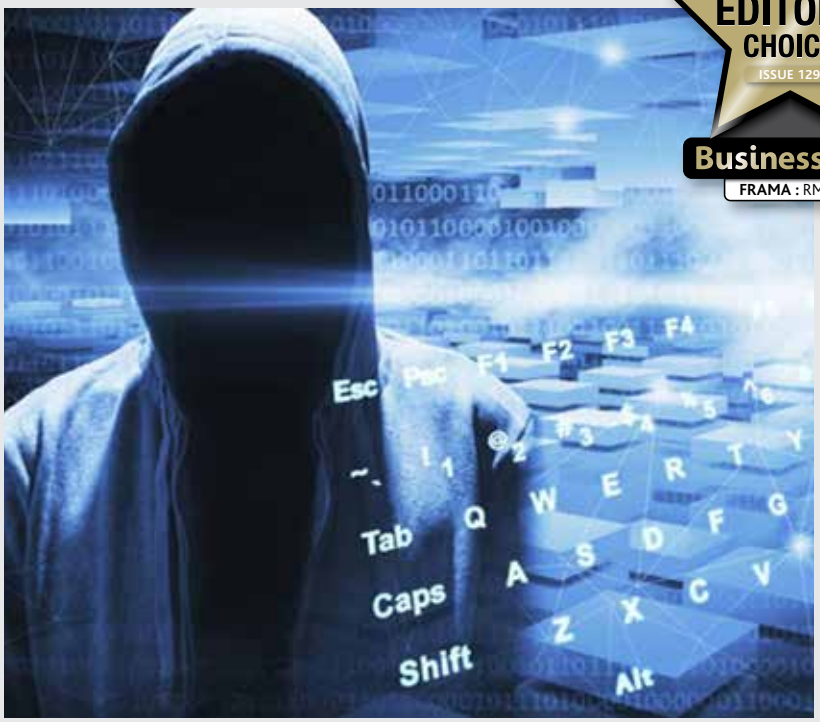
In contact centres, call accounting systems can be used to monitor staff productivity, helping drive SLAs and meet key performance indicators (KPIs). They can show a huge range of statistics including which agents make the most calls a day or are on the phone for longest; who regularly exceeds call times; who makes the most expensive calls etc..

Ultimately, the best call accounting systems give businesses control over their telephony infrastructure, helping them with capacity planning, cost-cutting, staff productivity and fraud prevention, and ensuring a rapid return on investment in new solutions.

Trevor Davis is head of product management and call accounting at Enghouse Interactive, a provider of customer interaction management solutions. Core technologies include contact center, attendant console, predictive outbound dialler, knowledge management, IVR and call recording. Enghouse Interactive has thousands of customers worldwide.
www.enghouseinteractive.co.uk

A whale of a scam

Frama is warning businesses of a new scam – and offering a solution.



Highly trained cyber-criminals are targeting businesses and helping themselves to millions of pounds via a new scam known as 'whaling', so called because fraudsters focus on one large target, rather the many smaller targets associated with 'phishing'.

Whaling scams take the form of messages to finance staff encouraging them to expedite a payment to a supplier that the Managing Director or Chief Executive can't complete as they are away from the office.

It is estimated that since 2013, 'whaling' has cost medium and large UK businesses a total of more than £520m. As with any scam of this type, the goal of whaling is to trick someone into disclosing personal or corporate information through email correspondence.

The attacker does this by intercepting emails between companies and reading their contents. Over weeks or months, the attacker learns how to impersonate the style and language of the emails before sending a bogus request for money to be transferred to a new bank account.

These attacks are often successful because the attacker successfully mimics the style of the sender/receiver and because the email messages they use to infiltrate the target display the usual 'to' and 'from' details, rather than the actual email address of the attacker.

Solution

One way to counter this problem, says Frama, is to use the secure Frama RMail platform for sending and receiving encrypted, business-critical communications.

Once installed and added to an existing email client, RMail gives you the option to send any email message with 256-bit encryption; legally verifiable proof of delivery and opening; and a full audit trail of who said what to whom and when.The solution can also be used to send files up to 1GB in size and to e-sign documents and forms.
www.frama.co.uk
www.rmail.com/frama

FRAMA
mail. message. managed.

Wireless charging keyring

The Keyring from wireless charging leader Aircharge enables wireless recharging of any Apple lightning or Micro USB-enabled device. Just plug the integrated Micro USB or Apple Lightning connector into your device and place the Keyring on any Qi wireless charger. It's that easy. An accompanying Aircharge Qi locator app provides details of more than 4,000 Qi charging locations worldwide, including restaurants, cafés, shops and airports. Keyring can also be used with corporate installations and personal accessories like the Aircharge Travel Pad and Executive Charger. **www.air-charge.com**

Voice-controlled mouse

The world's first Bluetooth mouse with voice command, the Gyration Air Mouse Voice combines the functions of a voice-enabled presentation remote control, a motion-sensitive handheld mouse and a high-precision desktop mouse. For presenters, it not only offers wireless control of a computer from anywhere in the room, but also the ability to launch tools through spoken commands. For example, to launch a web browser, you just need to press the microphone key and say 'web browser'. Air Mouse Voice is available now for £99. **www.gyration.com**

Hybrid power systems

CCL Components, a distributor of renewable energy systems and solutions, has developed a portable hybrid power system for use alongside, or in place of, existing power generators. Developed for remote locations and grid-restricted areas, the Powerplus portable battery system has big advantages over conventional power generators, including cost savings of 30-50%, reduced noise and air pollution and lower maintenance requirements. With the ability to accept solar input, it can even be used as a fuel-free generator. **www.cclpowerplus.com**

Health-conscious displays

New from NEC Display Solutions Europe, the MultiSync EA245WMi and EX241UN 24-inch ultra-narrow bezel desktop displays feature built-in Low Blue Light Plus technology, which protects users' eyes without compromising the colour quality of the displays. Both models are TCO Certified and environmentally designed with minimal hazardous material content.
www.nec-display-solution.co.uk

Pop up webcam

MMD, the brand license partner for Philips Monitors, has responded to rising concern over the security of webcams by incorporating a pop-up camera in its new line of 22, 24 and 27in monitors. The camera can be popped up when it's needed, then pushed down into the display frame when it's not, effectively blocking off a potential spyhole for hackers. This new feature is available on Philips 272B7QPTKEB/241B7QPJKEB/221B7QPJKEB displays. **www.mmd-p.com**

Mood boosting desk

The Aerodesk sit-stand desk is a tech lover's dream. In addition to smooth height adjustability between 695 and 1,365mm, it incorporates a LightBar to boost energy levels, a plug socket, a USB port, a Bluetooth speaker and a Qi charger for the wireless charging of smartphones and other devices. The top-of-the-range model has a stylish DuPont Corian top.
www.aerodesk.co.uk

Stylus with a twist

Bamboo Omni is a fine-tip stylus that works instantly on most iOS and Android touchscreens, with no app pairing required. Just twist the stylus to turn it on and you're ready to work. The 1.9mm tip uses Reflective Electro Static (RES) technology and is charged via USB.
www.wacom.com

Small office scanning

Fujitsu subsidiary PFU (EMEA) Limited has introduced a new scanner that combines the productivity of an ADF with the flexibility of a flatbed. Designed for entry-level document capture, the SP-1425 has scan speeds of 25 pages per minute (A4 colour, duplex 200/300dpi). **www.pfu.fujitsu.com/en/**

Compostable coffee pod

Percol Coffee Co is helping to tackle the environmental impact of coffee pod waste with the launch of a compostable coffee capsule. The Nespresso-compatible capsule is made from natural plant-based materials and can take as few as 12 weeks to break down completely, compared to 500 years for ones made from aluminium, plastic or both. **www.percol.co.uk**

Smartphone stylus

Stylus maker Adonit has released Snap, a fine point stylus specially designed for taking selfies, editing photos and creating drawings on smartphones. When paired with an iOS or Android phone via Bluetooth, Snap can be used as a remote photo clicker. Snap is charged via USB and features a small 1.9mm Pixelpoint tip. Its thin 4.3mm body magnetically attaches to the phone's rear for easy storage. **www.adonit.net**

Get in the picture

The new Lifesize Icon 450 HD camera and phone system addresses the challenges of bringing video collaboration to huddle rooms. The dimensions of huddle rooms often make it difficult for a video conferencing camera to capture everyone in the room. The Icon 450's smart-framing sensor intelligently adjusts its wide-angle camera lens to automatically capture and include everyone in the picture. Paired with the Lifesize cloud-based video communication platform, it creates an effortless meeting experience that's simple for end users.
www.lifesize.com

Easy WiFi upgrade

Networking equipment provider NETGEAR has launched a plug-and-play solution for small offices that require just one or two WiFi access points. The standalone NETGEAR Dual Band 802.11ac Wireless Access Point (WAC104) is a quick and easy way to improve WiFi coverage and upgrade an existing router or ISP box to the latest 802.11ac WiFi technology. It supports dual band concurrent operation with combined throughput of up to 1.2Gbps, up to four times the speed of previous-generation 802.11n networks. It can be wall- or desk-mounted and is interoperable with new and legacy laptops, smartphones, tablets, VoIP phones and surveillance cameras. With four Ethernet ports, a single access point can also connect up to four wired devices.
www.star-emea.com

Ergonomic mesh chairs

Sculpture from Century Office is a range of ergonomic mesh chairs offering excellent lumbar and back support. Chairs can be locked in five positions, with optional lumbar height adjustment. A forward seat tilt with active tension control helps promote blood flow and reduce muscle fatigue during prolonged periods of working. **www.century-office.co.uk**

Integrated privacy screen

HP Sure View, a new option on the HP EliteBook 1040 and HP EliteBook 840 notebooks, helps protect against visual hacking with the press of a single button. The integrated 3M privacy screen reduces visible light by up to 95% when viewed at an angle, making it difficult for others to read the screen. **www.hp.com**

Speech recognition technology is transforming how we interact with technology in the home and at work

All talk

The launch in the summer of Amazon Echo and Google Home represents an important stage in the evolution of speech as a user interface. Most people are already familiar with voice-activated personal assistants like Apple's Siri, but the thousands of applications and devices these voice-activated wireless speakers work with mean that using speech as a machine interface will soon become second nature.

Futuresource Consulting estimates that in 2016 6.3 million 'voice assistant' speakers capable of communicating with other smart home applications were shipped worldwide, pointing out that people are already using Echo to turn lights on and off, to control heating and to order pizza.

Rasika D'Souza, senior market analyst, audio devices at Futuresource Consulting, said: "Over the next two to three years we're going to see the voice interface flourish. Where visual and touch have dominated to date, voice and speakers will become more relevant for certain environments. Longer term, we're going to see integration with TVs, appliances, light bulbs and furniture."

Futuresource's confidence is shared by Nuance Communications. Its speech recognition and artificial intelligence (AI) technology is used not only in solutions for the smart home, notably Dragon TV, which enables users to search for films and TV shows by voice, but also in a huge variety of business and industrial applications.

Nuance recently held an open day in London, where it highlighted some of these key applications, including:

Where visual and touch have dominated to date, voice and speakers will become more relevant

Swedbank uses the Nina virtual assistant to answer customer calls

Amazon Echo

Keyboard replacement: The company's Dragon speech recognition software is used by more than 22 million individuals to work smarter in the office and on the road. As well as enabling more efficient document creation, through fast, accurate dictation and the ability to control a PC using spoken commands, Dragon improves accessibility by enabling workers with disabilities, wrist injuries, dyslexia or RSI to use speech instead of a keyboard.

Healthcare: Nuance produces versions of its software with industry-specific vocabularies, such as Dragon Medical, currently used by 500,000 clinicians and 10,000 healthcare organisations worldwide. Within 12 months of implementing the solution to capture patient information and create clinical documents, Waterloo Medical Group had achieved cost savings of £15,000, reduced turnaround times, enhanced staff well-being and improved the quality of its documentation. In the UK, Dragon Medical is used by Great Ormond Street Hospital, NHS Plymouth, Alder Hey and Macmillan Cancer Nurses.

Customer service bots: Nina, Nuance's multichannel intelligent virtual assistant for enterprise, offers personalised self-service over the web and through mobile apps. Research commissioned by Nuance shows that 89% of consumers want to engage in conversation with virtual assistants to find information more quickly. Consumers can ask Nina questions by typing or speaking into their device, saving them the trouble of searching for the answer on a company website. This also allows businesses to cut costs by reducing customer service staffing levels. Nina is currently being used by ING, Santander and Swedbank, where after three months it was able to answer just over 80% of customer queries. Since Nina is intelligent and learns from each interaction, this success rate will only improve.

Voice biometrics: Because each individual has a unique voice print, speech can be used for authentication, replacing the need to remember passwords and PINs with a more reliable, secure alternative.

Connected car: More than 160 million cars are powered by Nuance technology, including models from Ford, Audi, Mercedes, Toyota and BMW. The Dragon Drive platform, Nuance's in-car virtual assistant, enables drivers to access apps and services by voice, including navigation, music, message dictation and the calendar. Nuance claims that a speech interface can improve safety as users are able to keep their eyes on the road as they change radio station, get directions or send a text message. Nuance's Contextual Reasoning Framework, a cloud-based service within Dragon Drive, leverages AI to deliver personalised recommendations, based on a driver's preferences, location and situation. For example, it could direct you to undercover parking when it's raining or to the nearest petrol station when you are low on fuel.

As these examples show, Nuance is using its expertise in speech recognition technology to reinvent the relationship between people and technology. With new entrants like Amazon and Google also transforming how we interact with consumer electronics, it seems clear that speech interfaces will play an increasingly prominent role in our lives.

www.nuance.co.uk
www.futuresource-consulting.com

On test

Tayla Ansell tries out this month's selection of new office products

KeepCup

KeepCup reusable cups are promoted as a sustainable alternative to single-use paper cups. The range includes KeepCup Original, available in 8oz, 12oz and 16oz sizes, and KeepCup Longplay in 12oz and 16oz sizes. All sizes are compatible with barista-style coffee machines.

A new addition to the range, the Longplay glass cup has a removable triton outer layer that works like a thermos to maintain the temperature of hot and cold drinks and protect hands from heat and condensation.

Business Info tested a medium-sized (12oz) Keep Cup Original and a large (160oz) Longplay. Almost everyone who saw the KeepCup Original likened it to a child's drinking cup because of its shape and bright colours.

One useful feature is the wide silicone grip – I would have made it even wider – as the cup can be hot to hold when filled with coffee or tea. This isn't so much of a problem with Longplay thanks to its insulating outer layer.

The cups are made up of four parts, five in the case of Longplay, which you will need to take apart for proper cleaning. This requires more effort than throwing a paper cup in the bin, but it's worth it if it helps to reduce the billions of disposable cups that end up in landfill.

KeepCups are clearly a sustainable alternative to paper cups, but they do have one or two of the same drawbacks. For example, you can't throw one in your bag to take back to the office and be confident that it won't leak.

The cups are available in a range of colours, standard editions and special editions, including a new Star Wars collection.

www.keepcup.com

KeepCups

iStorage dat Ashur PRO

iStorage datAshur PRO

iStorage PIN-authenticated, hardware-encrypted storage devices secure sensitive information with military-grade XTS-AES 256-bit full disk hardware encryption and an optional Brute Force Self Destruct feature that automatically wipes all files after 10 unsuccessful PIN attempts.

The range includes USB Flash, Hard Disk and Solid State Drives. *Business Info* tested the datAshur Pro USB 3.0 Flash Drive. Considering its many features (super-fast USB 3.0, read/write speeds up to 116/43 Mbps, a keypad and rechargeable battery), this USB device is surprisingly slim and compact. It's longer than many standard USB sticks but still fits comfortably into a pocket – any smaller and the keypad would be difficult to use. A metallic blue aluminium sleeve protects against dust, water and accidental keypad use.

A handy Quick Start Guide explains how to unlock the drive and how to change your PIN from the default code. It's vital to choose a PIN you can remember as without it you won't be able to access the device or the files saved on it, including the full User Guide.

This you will definitely need, as changing settings can be complicated. For example, configuring a User and Admin PIN, which enables the boss to retrieve data if an employee leaves the company, is done through the device itself with only coloured LED indicators as a guide (e.g. solid green LED means it's unlocked). However, with three different colours, used individually or simultaneously, and a distinction between 'blinking' and 'flickering' lights, this system is complicated and hard to remember.

For people who carry highly sensitive information, the optional Brute Force Self Destruct Feature provides reassurance that even if a device is lost or stolen data will be protected. Moreover, because the datAshur Pro USB 3.0 Flash Drive is unlocked via the on-board keypad, it is not vulnerable to software/hardware-based keyloggers.

Drives with these security features cost more than standard flash drives (from £69 for 8GB), but we can see how valuable they would be for a business with sensitive data, such as a government or healthcare organisation.

https://istorage-uk.com/

Rexel ActiVita Pod+ Daylight lamp

When the clocks went back, the chance to review a desk lamp that simulates daylight to improve energy and concentration levels was too good to pass up. The model we tested was the Rexel ActiVita Pod+ Daylight lamp.

Featuring a minimalist, white design that would suit any modern office, the lamp has a flexible neck that lets you shine light exactly where you want it and a battery-operated LCD panel that displays the temperature, time and date. This can also be used as an alarm. Rexel's Strip+ model includes a USB port for charging mobile devices.

The long-lasting (40,000 hours) energy-saving Blue LED lamp has a warm light mode for relaxation and reading and a whiter, daylight mode that mimics natural sunlight to "lighten your mood, enhance concentration and increase productivity". Each mode has five brightness settings so that you can get the light exactly as you want it.

I don't know what effect, if any, the lamp has had on my mood, but the control it gives me over my working environment makes it a very useful supplement to overhead office lighting, especially when reading or note-taking. Because I have a largeish working area, I would prefer the lamp to be taller and cast light over a wider area, but for standard desk sizes (or bedside tables) the Rexel ActiVita Pod+ Daylight lamp is hard to fault.

www.rexeleurope.com

Second hand not second rate

Tayla Ansell finds out how Recycled Business Furniture (RBF) is preventing unwanted office furniture from ending up in landfill

Approximately 1.4 million desks and 1.9 million office chairs are thrown away in the UK every year, according to estimates by WRAP (The Waste and Resources Action Programme). Some items end up in landfill, but many are given a second life by companies like Recycled Business Furniture (RBF).

RBF stocks a wide range of used furniture, including around 1,000 desks, 1,200, chairs and 200 storage items, that it sells to businesses on the look out for an economical and/or environmentally friendly alternative to buying new. For businesses with old furniture to get rid of, RBF provides a green method of disposal.

Director Mike Cawthra has seen demand grow consistently since RBF was set up in 2003. He points out that the recession was a particularly good time for the business, not because there was a glut of furniture from bankrupt companies, but because companies became "more aware of what they were spending so needed to find a different way to buy".

He added: "Companies are now also much more aware of their Corporate Social Responsibilities when disposing of furniture. Whereas in the past they would just look to throw the furniture away, they now look to recycle."

Cawthra says the two main benefits of equipping an office with recycled furniture are lower prices and reduced environmental impact. "The price is typically around one third that of buying the furniture new and you are helping reduce landfill," he explained.

Using a supplier like RBF to buy good quality office furniture that's built to last and still in good condition has much to recommend it, but there are still a few things you need to take into consideration when buying second-hand.

Whereas in the past companies would just look to throw the furniture away, they now look to recycle

Quality check

The product you are buying isn't brand new, so you will need to check for wear and tear. That said, if you're expecting to find rubbish, you might need to change the way you think about used goods. High quality furniture is sometimes recycled simply because a business is downsizing and no longer has the space for it or because a big corporate company with money to spare fancies a change – one man's trash is another man's treasure after all.

Cawthra says some of the furniture RBF now receives is of such good quality that customers are surprised to learn that it's second-hand. "One of the most common things people say when they come into the showroom is 'I can see the new stuff, where is the second-hand?'," he said.

Warranty worries

New products come with warranties that give buyers peace of mind that if something goes wrong, the furniture will be fixed or replaced. These typically range from 12 months to a lifetime guarantee. Often, there will be different warranties for different parts (e.g. the frame and upholstery).

If buying from a supplier of used furniture, check whether they offer a warranty. If they do, it is likely to be much shorter than those offered with new products but should still reassure you that the chair you have just bought won't collapse as soon as you get it back to the office and sit on it – or if it does, that you can return it. RBF offers a 6-month warranty against failure from wear and tear, but expects its furniture to last a lot longer.

Be flexible

When buying used furniture, it is best not to have a very specific checklist in mind. Prepare to be flexible and remind yourself why you chose to buy second-hand in the first place.

"You may need to be flexible about what you want depending on what is available," explained Cawthra. "If you want a precise colour, size, leg etc., you may have to compromise. But then you aren't paying the same amount either."

Meet your match

Linked to this is the question of uniformity. Will buying second-hand leave you with random pieces of furniture and a somewhat eclectic office? It could do, but then again many second-hand office furniture stores stock a large amount of furniture and, because they tend also to provide office clearance and removals services, much of what they have will be matching anyway.

Cawthra said: "The largest matching amount of desks we have currently is around 250 of one series. Generally we look to take in furniture in reasonable quantities so that we have a good range for people to choose from almost no matter how big their need is."

Ultimately, used office furniture is a great, sustainable choice for those who want to improve their business's green credentials, save money and have a professional looking office. Even if you'd rather buy new, you can still make a difference by donating or selling your old furniture to ensure it doesn't end up in landfill.

www.recycledbusinessfurniture.co.uk

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Here's one I made earlier...

Flexible DIY furniture made from sustainable materials offers new options in office design

Flexibility is a key attribute of today's offices – and not just in terms of office design and space planning. Office furniture itself is having to become more versatile to accommodate ergonomic sit-stand working, for example, or mobility for the quick and easy re-purposing of office space.

Tapping into this trend is a new generation of adjustable, modular DIY furniture that enables businesses to provide temporary workstations on demand or quickly create a flexible working environment for individuals and teams.

Typically, these solutions are portable, lightweight, flat-packed for easy storage and environmentally responsible, being made from recycled or sustainable materials.

Thinking outside the box

One recent introduction is PIXEL from Bene, a collection of pine plywood boxes that can be put together and embellished with different accessories to create a variety of furniture pieces. For example, placing a PIXEL Pad on top of a box makes a comfortable seat, while adding Bene's Frame_S Boards creates a vertical workspace or room divider.

Michael Fried, Bene managing director for sales, marketing and innovation, says the ability to reconfigure and rearrange space to suit changing requirements is particularly useful for fostering creativity.

"In the case of workshops that deal with everything from the analysis and development of ideas to the presentation of solution models, spatial settings often have to be changed several times a day in order to encourage thoughts to flow," he said.

"With PIXEL, we have developed a comprehensive workshop system that can do a lot – in a flexible and unpretentious manner. In combination with the product lines we presented in the spring (FRAME_S, NOOXS, Think Tanks and SETTLE), this furniture facilitates teamwork, making an important contribution to internal company communication, and thus to the success of a company."

Typically, these solutions are portable, lightweight, flat-packed for easy storage and environmentally responsible

Cardboard desk

Other solutions on the market are made from another lightweight, portable material – cardboard. This has a significantly smaller impact on the environment than conventional office furniture, as it is 100% recyclable. It also produces surprisingly sturdy desks.

New market entrant aiBox offers a range of cardboard furniture including a standing desk (see box). Nathan Edwards, the 26-year old founder of the company, said he developed the cardboard standing desk as an alternative

ON TEST

The latest addition to the *Business Info* editorial offices, the aiBox Standing Desk is available in two sizes. We tested the smaller of the two, for people shorter than 165cm. The company says its products can be assembled in less than 5 minutes. It took us longer, but still only 15 minutes – not bad for a first try and no doubt we would have been quicker if we had had enough floor space to lay out all the pieces before assembly. When the desk was almost complete, one of the first pieces to be attached came off, which meant we had to take it apart and start again.

Once built, the aiBox Standing Desk looks like what it is – a cardboard construction – though the company does say it can be customised with paint, pen, chalks or wraps. It's very big and takes up a fair bit of room. Perhaps if it were half the size it would be better suited to our small office.

A company with spare space could keep a few of these in a store cupboard to give to people who required a standing desk on a temporary basis while waiting for a more professional looking solution to be delivered. It might also work for those who want to make a green/environmental statement through their furniture choices.

to the expensive corporate models on the market.

The flat-pack, portable workstation weighs just 6.5kg and doesn't require any tools, screws or glue for assembly. The pieces simply slot together and, when the desk's not needed, fold down and convert into a sizeable carry case for storage or transportation.

Considering what it is made from, the desk has a non-budget price tag of £129, which Edwards says reflects the price of other desks on the market. "We're not trying to compete with every cheap desk that's on Amazon and eBay; we're looking to compete with the standing desk market and bring a unique solution to people's work lifestyle," he said.

Edwards adds that thanks to the use of 3-ply virgin corrugated cardboard, the desk is stronger than you might think. "We've done a lot of user testing. Cardboard's not the strongest material in the world – it's certainly not as strong as wood or steel – but the way we've designed it and with its corrugated structure the desk can hold 85kg if spread evenly across the top. We calculated it can hold something like 110 Apple Macbooks."

Cardboard in disguise

A more elegant option is the FlutePRO workstation from FluteOffice. Flute began life as Cardboard Future in 2009 and launched the FlutePRO workstation in 2011.

Walk into an office kitted out with FlutePRO workstations and chances are you won't realise they are made out of cardboard thanks to the fine finish and choice of colours (white, light blue and stone grey). Flute can also produce bespoke versions and add logos or graphics.

The workstation is supplied in parts for the customer to assemble, with patented connectors that slot into place. Flute says the average assembly time for one person is five minutes and, because it weighs just 15kg, FlutePRO is easy to move around. It can hold 1700kg.

The company takes sustainable design seriously, utilising waste cardboard and virgin fibre from managed sustainable sources and boasting 100% cradle-to-cradle sustainability. CEO Rod Fountain said: "We now position ourselves as an up-cycler of waste fibre. We have a centre of excellence in West Sussex and an assembly plant in Kent and currently upcycle about 10,000 tonnes of waste per annum into high value products for M&S, the NHS, Imperial College, Thames Tideway and the Dutch Postal Service."

He added: "We are a front runner in the circular economy and our mission is the elimination of waste and the enhancement of life for all. And it's great fun!"

And he's right. DIY solutions do bring an element of fun to office furniture and can even encourage teamwork as employees band together to build the ideal workspace for their needs.

www.bene.com
www.aibox.co.uk
www.fluteoffice.com

We're not trying to compete with every cheap desk that's on Amazon and eBay; we're looking to compete with the standing desk market

The most common tech thrown away by offices

Over the past year, waste clearance company EnviroWaste has been keeping a record of tech found in waste collected from London offices. The Top 20 most discarded tech items are:

1. Samsung laptops (240)
2. HP fax machines (211)
3. Toshiba laptops (198)
4. Logitech webcams (153)
5. Acer laptops (144)
6. HP scanners (142)
7. Binatone telephones (98)
8. Proaction paper shredders (79)
9. Canon printers (53)
10. Assorted franking machines (51)
11. Philips projectors (51)
12. Sony video cameras (47)
13. Microsoft webcams (44)
14. Epson scanners (43)
15. Goodmans radios (32)
16. Samsung smartphones (30)
17. Acer Chromebooks (27)
18. Seagate hard drives (19)
19. Blackberry mobile phones (11)
20. Canon digital cameras (5)

Any items that could be refurbished or were still in working order were sold on to second hand retailers, with profits donated to the Wildlife Conservation Network.
www.envirowaste.co.uk

Is technology a help or a hindrance when presenting? Here, we highlight key presentation bugbears with suggestions on how to overcome them

The message vs. the medium

Meetings that start late are a major bugbear for office professionals. And with good reason. Barco has calculated that, on average, meetings in the UK, US, France and Germany start six minutes late. For a typical office worker attending four meetings a week, this adds up to more than 20 hours wasted every year.

And the number one reason for delayed starts? Technology. Almost one third (31%) of respondents complained that delays were due to struggles with technology, with an additional 16% citing problems with adapters.

Not surprisingly, technology has been identified as a big contributor to 'meeting stress'. In fact, Barco claims that almost all the main causes of stress in meetings are technology-related, including connectivity problems, compatibility issues and technology failure.

Analysis by Barco and Vanson Bourne shows that when office workers struggle with issues like sharing screens or finding the right cable their heart rate reaches an unsettling 179 beats per minute, from a resting rate of 60-100 bpm .

Presenters are right to be anxious at such times, as 70% of those surveyed by Barco said that technical problems cause speakers to lose credibility. When asked to identify what makes a presentation successful, 38% said an absence of technical problems.

Thomas Walter, *Product Marketing Manager,* NEC Display Solutions

Nick Price, *Territory Manager,* Optoma

Barco Boardroom Projection

NEC MultiPresent Stick MP10RX

What, then, are the most common problems encountered by presenters and what can be done to avoid them?

Connectivity chaos

The difficulty in connecting devices and getting them to work together seamlessly is a common frustration for office workers.

Thomas Walter, product marketing manager at NEC Display Solutions Europe, said: "When you're focused on business, working to impress your client and participate in a productive meeting, the last thing you need is to worry and fuss over technology which should be there to support you. A tangle of wires and constant plugging and unplugging as presenters swap over does little to facilitate an efficient meeting."

He added: "Another issue is different cable standards, such as HDMI, VGA or DP. As the majority of laptops don't support all connector types and the business infrastructure might not provide all connections to the screen either, this can cause further difficulties and frustration."

Optoma territory manager Nick Price points out that this problem is exacerbated by the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) trend. "It is common for people to bring their laptops and devices into meeting rooms and they expect connectivity with the display equipment. When selecting a projector for your meeting rooms and boardrooms ensure it has a wide selection of inputs to cater for a range of source devices," he said.

He also advises businesses to make sure the installer leaves a set of instructions for equipment set-up.

Not surprisingly, wireless solutions that remove the complication of having to find the right wire or cable and make it easier for multiple users to share content from their devices are a major focus for manufacturers.

A good example is Barco's ClickShare, a wireless presentation and collaboration system compatible with a range of devices and operating systems that allows users to display what's on their laptop or mobile device on the presentation screen.

Last year saw the introduction of numerous other wireless presentation solutions that enable users to display content from personal mobile devices on a main display in Full HD, including the Optoma WPS Pro, the Vivitek NovoPRO and the NRC MultiPresenter MP10RX, a small HDMI stick that adds wireless collaboration to projectors and display screens.

As useful as these solutions are,

Optoma WPS Pro

Price warns that even wireless solutions present difficulties. "There are so many wireless conference technologies on the market, it can be a bit of a minefield to get the equipment to talk to each other," he said.

Booked up and broken

Another common complaint is not being able to find a free meeting room with technology that actually works. This is where pico projectors like the pocket-sized Philips PicoPix series come into their own.

Mark Ivens, marketing manager at XGEM, which distributes the projectors in the UK, said: "Many presenters have walked into a room and expected a projector or monitor to be there only

Philips PicoPix PPX4935

to find that it's broken, missing or not compatible with their laptop. With a PicoPix pocket projector, presenters, trainers, sales executives, directors and HR managers can truly become self-sufficient, at least in the projector sense."

He added: "One of the ways Philips PicoPix immediately makes life simpler is our products are easy to have with you and ready to present at all times. Our largest, heaviest model measures only 11.5 by 11.5cm and weighs a very handy 351g."

The Philips PicoPix PPX4935 has an internal memory for storing presentations and an integrated battery, so you don't even need to connect a laptop, smartphone or other device. Nor do you need to worry about there being a power socket within easy reach.

Another way in which manufacturers are addressing customer's frustrations is to make their devices more reliable so that office workers have one less thing to worry about when going into a presentation.

"Presenters need to know the equipment is going to work," explained Optoma's Price. "The dust-sealed design of Optoma's DLP projectors prevents dust and dirt from affecting the system, ensuring optimal image quality with ultimate reliability and minimal maintenance."

Lieven Bertier, *Head of Product Management for ClickShare,* Barco

Lucy Meredith, *UK Product Marketing Specialist,* Panasonic Visual System Solutions

Complex controls

Lieven Bertier, head of product management for ClickShare at Barco, raises another pet hate – complicated instructions. "Meeting room technology has to be intuitive and easy to use because there is no time available to familiarise yourself with the ins and outs of the tech before the meeting, especially if you're a guest," he said.

Unfortunately, presentation technology isn't always as easy to use as it should be. Lucy Meredith, UK product marketing specialist for Panasonic Visual System Solutions, believes that many presenters are failing to achieve their potential due to poorly designed and excessively difficult to use software and hardware.

"Some display and presentation software is overly complex to use, with hidden menus obscuring regularly used features, making things difficult to find, interrupting the flow of the presentation and leaving an audience distracted. Displays and interactive whiteboards are often too reliant on remotes to perform key functions and have complex and cumbersome menu and navigation systems that provide a barrier to getting things done quickly," she said.

Panasonic has attempted to address this issue with the BF1 series of displays, which, according to Meredith, have "intuitive software and an easy-access menu bar offering one-touch input switching and instant writing, as well as easy access to the most commonly used features".

Intuitive controls are also one of the key selling points of Sharp BIG PAD displays. Chris Wood, visual solutions business unit director, Sharp Business Systems UK, said: "Simplicity is at the heart of our BIG PAD interactive displays, and they are designed with an easy to use, intuitive interface that can be easily picked by any employee

Panasonic Visual System Solutions

without the need for additional training, and software which guides users step-by-step."

Static and boring

Presenters are not the only ones to find fault with modern presentation technology. Audiences are just as likely to be dissatisfied, especially if the person standing before them has failed to make the most of the tools available and delivers a static presentation, simply clicking and reading slides.

Optoma's Price recommends making use of interactive technology to make presentations more engaging. He said: "People have higher expectations now in terms of the interactivity of presentations. It is no longer acceptable to deliver 'death by Powerpoint'.

The goal of greater collaboration in meeting rooms is driving the growth of interactive projectors, such as Optoma's super bright, interactive 320 range of ultra short throw projectors. Available in Full HD, these project a 100'' image from just 30cm away and allow ten point finger touch for multiple people

Continued...

Sharp Big Pad

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...continued

to annotate plans and documents for the whole meeting to see."

Price points out that the proliferation of laptops in meetings can make it hard for presenters to hold the attention of the audience, adding that an Eco AV mute function on the EH320USTi projector can be helpful in this regard by blanking the screen and making the presenter the focus of attention.

Sharp's Wood also sees interactivity as the key to more engaging presentations. "With our BIG PAD range of interactive flat panel displays we're helping to make presentations more collaborative and engaging, with a selection of easy to use displays that give users the reliability, support and flexibility they need to give a stand-out presentation," he said.

Chris Wood, *Visual Solutions Business Unit Director,* Sharp Business Systems UK

What's stopping you?

The problems outlined above will be familiar to all presenters and their audiences. So what's stopping businesses from upgrading their equipment?

Cost is an obvious barrier. However, as modern technologies, such as LED and laser, are built to last longer, Ivens points out that you could benefit in the long run. "Many presenters will have been hit with the cost of an expensive replacement bulb for their projector. PicoPix projectors all use LED technology so don't need replacement bulbs and the light source should last 30,000 hours," he said.

Wood says that Sharp tries to make cost less of an obstacle for decision-makers by offering leasing options that remove the need for a large up-front sum. He added: "All of the BIG PADs also have a good cost of ownership, with efficient energy usage and less maintenance requirements."

Sharp also provides units on loan for trial periods so that potential customers can familiarise themselves with the technology. This approach could be successful in combating another potential barrier identified by David Zrihen, Vivitek sales director, EMEA, viz. people's preference for the status quo.

"Some people prefer using the same things because that's the way they've always done it and they're comfortable with it. For example, people are more inclined to trust a cable-based product than a wireless solution and the many efficiency benefits that offers. We need to ensure we have a solution that's simple to use out of the box, as sometimes typing in a server name or an IP address could be seen as difficult," he said.

Panasonic's Meredith adds that some businesses simply fear change. "They feel investing in new technology is going to mean they have to change the way they work, or there are going to be issues switching over to or installing new equipment."

Changing this mindset is not easy, but it might be what's required if you are to present your business in the best light.

Panasonic Visual System Solutions

The smart choice

Philips PicoPix ticks all the boxes for Smart Works Reading

Smart Works helps women on low incomes to re-enter the job market by providing them with interview coaching, styling advice and smart clothes for interviews.

The charity has five centres, in London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham and Reading. Set up in October 2015, Smart Works Reading has already helped more than 200 people look for work, with a success rate of 73%.

A big part of its working day is taken up with training, both of volunteers and of the women it assists, so the ability to display and share visual material quickly and easily is essential.

Sarah Burns, Co-chair & Founder of Smart Works Reading, found what she was looking for in the diminutive form of a Philips PicoPix PPX4010 projector.

"What we needed was a small, portable, efficient projector that we could use in the office and out and about. We have little storage at Smart Works, so it had to be small and portable. We also wanted to ensure we presented ourselves in a professional light. The Philips PicoPix projector ticked all the boxes," she said.

About the size of a computer mouse and weighing just 83g, the PPX4010 slips easily into a laptop bag, handbag or coat pocket, yet can still deliver bright 100 lumens images up to 120 inches in size.

Set-up is quick and easy, using an HDMI cable to connect to a range of devices from laptops and notebooks to DVD players, TVs and games consoles. Using different HDMI adapters, Smart Works can also connect the projector to tablets and smartphones.

"We've just had our Volunteer training day

when we managed to use both a laptop and an iPad to project different presentations easily and effectively onto our limited wall space," explained Burns. "There was great excitement at the mini size of projector and how easy it was to set up and use."

The nation's favourite

Smart Works Reading is not the only fan of PicoPix projectors. According to GFK Reports 2016, four out of five pico projectors purchased in the UK are Philips PicoPix models. Its analysis shows that in Q2 2016, Philips' market share within the pico projector market rose to an all-time high of 81%, with the Philips PicoPix PPX3414 a clear best seller.

In 2016, XGEM strengthened its range with three new models, the PPX3417W, PPX4835 and PPX4935, offering higher resolution (720HD), brighter images and wireless connectivity with smartphones or tablets.

www.smartworks.org.uk
www.project-your-life.com

The Month in Numbers

6

Men are given twice as much flexible working time as women, working an average of six hours flexibly each week, compared to just three hours for women. A study by conference call service provider Powwownow reveals that in an average week less than half (47%) of female employees are given the opportunity to work flexibly, compared to two thirds (66%) of men.

34

One third (34%) of UK SMEs lack insurance against the biggest risks they face, according to a survey by business insurance provider SME Insurance (SMEi). Of those with insufficient insurance cover, 34% cite cyber-attacks as the biggest threat to their business, followed by public liability (28%) and crime (19%).

42.2

iPhone users are twice as likely to drop their handsets as owners of Samsung phones, claims mobile phone insurance provider loveit coverit. Its analysis of 1,000 claims made in Q1 2016 shows that four in 10 iPhone users (42%) cite accidental damage in their insurance claims compared to just two in 10 Samsung owners (21%). At 7.9%, iPhone users are also more likely that Samsung owners (4.6%) to claim for theft.

50

The younger you are, the more likely you are to complain about workplace stress, or so says Willis Towers Watson. In its *2015/2016 Global Benefits Attitudes Survey*, 50% of Generation Y workers reported experiencing heightened levels of stress, compared to 44% of Generation X workers and 35% of baby boomers.

70

Seven out of 10 (70%) IT decision-makers view data protection as a priority, yet only a quarter (26%) are confident about complying with current EU legislation. In the survey by cloud services provider Node4, 46% of IT decision-makers said they were concerned about the lack of security for their IT infrastructures; 41% admitted they don't know how many intrusions or security breaches their organisation had suffered in the last 12 months.

74

Almost three quarters (74%) of small businesses surveyed by start-ups specialist Company Formations MadeSimple operate from home. When asked why they started their business, 28% cited lifestyle choice as the driving force. Other factors include the chance to earn more money (24%) and a reluctance to work for someone else (19%).

83

More than four out of five office workers (83%) have a promotional item on their desks, claims the British Promotional Merchandise Association (BPMA). According to its research, 96% of people believe that promotional products help to improve brand awareness. More than half (56%) said they viewed a brand more favourably after receiving a personal promotional product.

90

Presenteeism is a persistent problem in the UK workforce, with 90% of employees admitting to coming to work when feeling ill. This is almost identical to last year's figure of 89%. More than one in four workers (28%) surveyed by Canada Life Group Insurance said their workload was too great to call in sick.

Paul Avis, *Marketing Director,* Canada Life Group

Doing it for themselves

83

Despite the many challenges and long working hours, 83% of female micro-business owners would recommend starting their own business to other women, according to Vistaprint's *Women-owned Micro Businesses Trend Report*. More than half (59%) believe they have equal or more opportunities than men to run a successful company.

427,000

Almost half a million (427,000) more women have taken up self-employment since the financial crisis, claims the Women's Business Council. In addition, analysis of more than 2,000 policies by specialist insurance broker Towergate reveals that over a quarter (28%) of SME insurance policyholders are now women.

95

In the last 12 months, 95% of IT decision-makers have experienced an IT problem resulting in an outage or data loss. Problems identified by the iland report *The State of IT Disaster Recovery Amongst UK Businesses* include system failure (53%), human error (52%), corrupted data (37%), cyber-attack (32%) and unexplained downtime (30%).

5,394

Freelancers working in the creative industries lose an average of £5,394 a year by not billing for work. Research by the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self Employed (IPSE) and The Freelancer Club found that in the last two years freelancers have spent an average of 31 days undertaking assignments without pay.

1.007 million

More than 1 million incidents of financial fraud, one every 15 seconds, occurred in the first six months of 2016, according to figures released by Financial Fraud Action UK (FFA UK). This is 53% more than in the same period last year.

5.5 million

There are now a record 5.5 million private sector businesses in the UK, 23% more than in 2010. The Business Population Estimates show that at the start of 2016 the UK had a million more small businesses, 4,000 more medium-sized businesses and 900 more large businesses than in 2010.

129.6 million

UK SMEs collectively endured 129.6 million hours of power cuts last year. In a survey of 1,017 business owners by Gocompare.com Energy, just 5% of respondents experienced no interruptions to their power supply.

871 billion

Higher rents helped push up the value of the UK's commercial property stock by 11% to an all-time high of £871 billion in 2015. The Property Industry Alliance (PIA) says this represents 10% of the UK's net wealth.

Businessinfo

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