

PARTNER LEADERS 2026

What makes 75 channel
partner CEOs and MDs tick?



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CONTENTS

EDITOR'S WELCOME	4
SPONSOR'S NOTE	5
FEATURE: THE PSYCHE OF A PARTNER LEADER IN 2026	6
PARTNER LEADERS	10
PARTNER LEADER, PHONE HOME	12
HUANG WINS TECH TITAN RACE.....	22
WARNING SIGNS.....	27
ARTIFICIAL HYPE?	39
IN-HOUSE INTELLIGENCE	48
INDEX	63

WELCOME TO OXYGEN PARTNER LEADERS 2026

DOUG WOODBURN,
EDITOR, *IT*
CHANNEL OXYGEN

WHAT MAKES CHANNEL PARTNER CEOS TICK IN 2026?

That's the core question we seek to answer in this brand-new report, which is powered by Giacom.

The 75 leaders featured in the inaugural *Oxygen Partner Leaders* are the true power players when it comes to where UK end users place their technology bets.

What they think – and what they say – matters, particularly as they begin to form a new front line for AI adoption in the UK.

As you'd expect, AI emerges as the dominant theme throughout the report, with many seeking to reinvent their companies as 'frontier firms' or 'customer zero' for AI.

They're now rolling out AI at pace in areas such as service desk, tender response, sales intelligence and customer sentiment analysis.

Asked to nominate their most successful internal AI project to date, one leader in this report even highlighted how their team built an 'AI caddie' for their annual golf day complete with real-time scoring, course hints and club suggestions for each hole.

We also asked our leaders to gaze into the future by predicting how the channel might change in the next five years.

Accelerating consolidation and the need to shift from selling product to selling outcomes (or even accountability) emerged as recurring themes.

Others see a future where channel partners spend more on AI tokens than on staff, or where marketplaces, coupled with AI, become the only route to market for many vendors.

One said they are counting on the UK to develop a homegrown alternative to the big tech giants, meanwhile (wouldn't that be nice, eh!).

Oxygen Partner Leaders is designed to probe what it's really like to be the CEO, MD or executive leader of a UK channel partner in 2026 (we even asked them what keeps them awake at night).

But we also invited our 75 leaders to show their more playful sides by posing some more light-hearted questions.

Did you know, for instance, that Computacenter CEO Mike Norris' fantasy dinner party guests would be Margaret Thatcher, Jesus Christ and Donald Trump? Or that Bechtel UK MD James Napp's most indispensable gadget is his weed burner?

We also get to find out what their warning labels would say ("caution: active BS radar", read one), meaning you need never be tongue tied in their presence again.

With AI changing every facet of how the channel does business, and what it sells, there's arguably never been a more appropriate time for a stock take of the UK channel's top executive leaders.

Oxygen Partner Leaders reads like a who's who of the channel, with the CEOs of Computacenter, Softcat, Advania, Bytes Technology Group, SCC, Trustmarque Ultima, Focus Group, Air IT, Redcentric and Natilik among the 75 who bravely took on our fiendish questions.

But how well do you actually know this three-quarter century of channel power players?

To find out, simply read on...



WHAT THE CHANNEL'S LEADERS ARE HELPING US SEE

IT'S A GREAT PLEASURE for us to be sponsoring *Oxygen Partner Leaders* because the channel is, above all else, a people business.

Maybe that sounds obvious, but in a market so focused on technology, it's easy to forget that growth is still built on trust, relationships and ambitious leadership. That's what makes this report so compelling. It gives us a glimpse of what these leaders are focused on, where they think the market's heading, and the personalities behind the job titles.

The leaders featured here are among the people actively reshaping what it means to be an MSP. They're building thriving businesses in a crowded and competitive market, finding ways to differentiate, and helping customers find simplicity in increasingly complex technology.

The responses are also fascinating when viewed against a wider market context. Many SMBs that once would have viewed technology as an afterthought now rightly place it near the top of their priorities list, and they're also coming to recognise their limits.

They don't want to spend time managing a growing list of vendors, contracts and technical decisions. They just want someone to make it work. A trusted provider who will take the time to understand their business, bring the right services together, keep them secure and provide continuous support as their needs change.

It's encouraging that several leaders focus on outcomes and accountability, because that's undoubtedly where the market's heading. The shift is visible in market data, and it's echoed in several of the interviews. Research by Analysys Mason predicts that spending through MSPs and systems integrators will grow at more than twice that of resellers and VARs over the coming years, while cloud subscriptions and services are expected to account for 60% of UK SMB technology spend by 2030. For the channel, there's a clear opportunity to become the strategic partner SMBs increasingly need.

Many responses also discuss the role of AI, and I strongly believe its arrival will only accelerate this trend. Businesses are excited by its potential, but many are still working out how to make it useful, how to measure its impact and how to manage risks around security and workflows. This creates a major opportunity for MSPs to add value, especially those that have tested these tools inside their own businesses.

That makes it particularly interesting to see leaders in this report reference a 'customer zero' approach, which we've long advocated as the safest, most sensible and most productive way to bring AI into your portfolio. Use it, challenge it and understand its transformative impact from a place of experience and you'll quickly build credibility as well as confidence.

So, enjoy the report. It's a brilliant read, but it also signals an important message that can't be ignored. The channel's winners in the coming years will be those that can transform an increasingly complex mix of technologies into simple, secure. Everything as a Service models, built around trust, accountability and predictable outcomes.

NATHAN MARKE,
CHIEF STRATEGY
OFFICER, GIACOM



THE PSYCHE OF A PARTNER LEADER IN 2026

By Doug Woodburn

THE PREMISE BEHIND *Oxygen Partner Leaders* is simple: put ten quickfire questions to 75 CEOs/MDs to build a picture of what it's really like to be a channel partner leader in 2026.

In the last three years, they've had to tackle slowing market growth and mass tech layoffs, not to mention how to navigate the dawn of the new AI era.

What are their hopes, dreams and fears? What keeps them awake at night? And how do they think the industry will evolve over the next five years?

"PARTNERS WILL SPEND MORE ON AI TOKENS THAN EMPLOYEES"

It was this latter question that arguably generated the most intriguing responses, with many predicting either that the channel will move more towards selling outcomes, or that consolidation will accelerate.

Foiz Ahmed, CEO of **Constor Solutions**, predicted there will be "30-40%" fewer channel partners by 2031, with **Saepio Solutions'** CEO Amir Nooriala saying he believes "a lot of small partners will be absorbed into bigger players".

Others wondered how AI will reshape their businesses, with **Roc Technologies'** CEO Matt Franklin-Wilson predicting that successful partners "will spend more on AI tokens than they do on employees".

inTEC CEO Melissa Rambridge predicted a return of more face-to-face events, saying her hope is that AI "removes

administrative burden so people can spend more time building relationships".

NoBlue2 CEO Chris Bunch sees opportunity in the chaos AI will create, meanwhile.

"There will be significant money to be made in fixing botched AI-led implementations from practitioners who

didn't understand the basics well enough to steer and review the AI deployments," he said.

Data sovereignty will become "one of the biggest differentiators in the channel as AI forces customer to look more closely at where their data sits," according to **Flotek** CEO Jay Ball.

Butterfly Data Founding Director Sara Boltman went even further, predicting that "we will start to see a lot of home-grown alternatives to the big tech giants".

"We need a UKDB that is as scalable as Oracle...", she said.

Although analyst Omdia predicts that partners will drive 59% of hyperscaler marketplace spend by 2030, **Redcentric** CEO Michelle Senecal de Fonseca is convinced the channel will be on the losing end of this emerging route-to-market's lightning growth.

"Marketplaces, coupled with AI, will become the only route to market for many vendors, shrinking the channel further," she said.

As you might expect from the CEO of a dominant player that's continuing to enjoy double-digit

growth, **Softcat's** Graham Charlton played down suggestions that our industry is on the cusp of any great revolution.

"Not much will change," was his assessment.

"AI MAY ACTUALLY BE UNDER-HYPED"

Many partner leaders are determined to make their companies "customer zero" or a "frontier firm" when it comes to AI.

Asked about his firm's most successful internal AI project to date, **Transparency** CEO Paul Bolt said the Microsoft partner has three times more agents than employees running.

"The big win is not one project (though there are many great examples) but frontier-firm-thinking from all depts: that is the AI project," he said.

Others opened up on their success in letting AI loose on their service desks, tender responses, sales intelligence or – in the case of **Utilize** CEO Warren Davies – customer sentiment analysis.

"We're starting to see some results applying AI to support call data to pick up on customer sentiment in real time via voice and email," Davies said.

"Rather than waiting for feedback after the fact, we can identify when a customer is becoming frustrated during a call and get the right person involved straight away."

"We've seen quite an astonishing tender response assisted by AI, which has led to major wins," **SCC** CEO Robert Vassoyan added.

Asked about whether AI is being overhyped, the majority disagreed - at least when it comes to its longer-term potential for their customers.

"In the long term, AI may actually be under-hyped," read one fairly typical response, from **Advania** CEO Hege Støre.

"REMOVE IMMEDIATELY IF FOUND ON THE DANCE FLOOR"

Having been asked what keeps them awake at night (answers variously included cyber breaches, the memory drought and skills shortages), our partner leaders were given a chance to show their more playful sides.

Asked about the tech gizmo they couldn't live without,



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Computacenter's Mike Norris would relish political, business and religious interaction over dinner



our leaders variously picked fitness devices, LLMs and their iPhones.

"I'm a big fan of my new weed burner if that counts!? Neighbours not overly pleased mind you..." **Bechtle** UK MD James Napp revealed.

"I've been using Ultrahuman ring (similar to Oura) for my own personal health and sleep insights," **Bytes Technology Group** CEO Sam Mudd said.

"Health matters to me immensely, so I try and do my best to understand how my body is coping with the high demands of being a CEO, that works at pace."

Common fantasy dinner party guests included Sir David Attenborough, Barrack Obama and Jürgen Klopp, with **Computacenter** CEO Mike Norris nominating Margaret

Thatcher, Jesus Christ and Donald Trump as his favoured dining trio.

We also got to learn more about their personalities via a question about what their imaginary warning label might say.

Highgate IT Solutions' CEO Stuart Marginson said his would read, "Beware, unfiltered northerner", while Xalient CEO Sherry Vaswani warned that hers would bear the words: "Low tolerance for endless slides".

Natilik CEO Alastair Rudman said his warning label would instruct users to "remove immediately if found on the Natilik annual Kick Off party dance floor", meanwhile.

"Caution: active BS radar," **CDW UK** MD Penny Williams said of hers.

Finally, we asked our three-quarter-century of power players to reveal which tech leader has impressed them most in 2026.

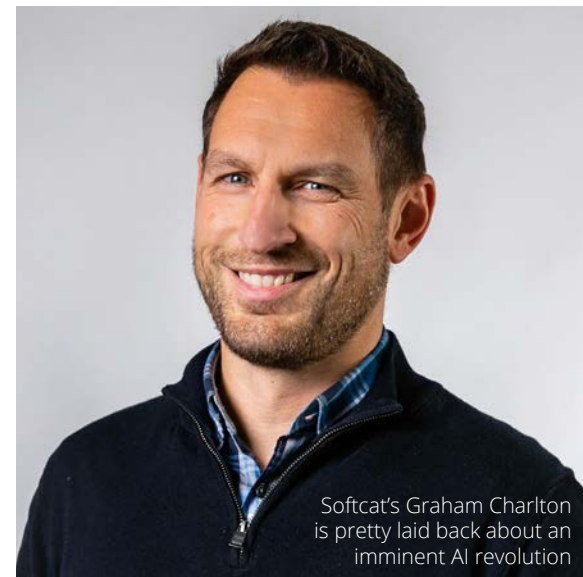
This question produced a three-horse race between Satya Nadella, Jensen Huang and the less obvious pick of Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei.

"I particularly like his view of AI not as a single superintelligence, but as a simulated 'country of geniuses in a data centre', acting like millions of Nobel Prize winners working in parallel to rapidly cure diseases, fight poverty, and double human lifespans," **Charterhouse** CEO Mike Wardell said of the latter.

Cobweb's Clare Satchwell, **Red Helix's** Marion Stewart and **Chorus Group's** Nicola Saner also all picked tech leaders known for their commitment to ethical and responsible AI (Fei-Fei Li, Demis Hassabis and Meredith Wittaker, respectively).

The leaders featured in this report are of course, tech figureheads themselves, with Mike Norris nominated by three of his peers in this final question.

What they think – and say – matters, and we hope you enjoy reading their responses as much as we did.



Softcat's Graham Charlton is pretty laid back about an imminent AI revolution

A



ANDREW HARMAN
Owner, Academia and Founder of Strive Capital

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Seeing the integration of Academia and Smartdesc coming together as one.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

Exceeding budget.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? What keeps me awake at night is making sure I'm continuing to add value to the business and to the management team. Even after nearly 40 years, I still question myself every day – am I providing the right guidance, mentoring effectively, and passing on the experience that helps the team execute and grow the business?

My focus is on empowering the management team, maintaining confidence in both the team and the plan, and ensuring we keep moving forward financially. The day I stop adding value or become stale is the day I should be asking myself some difficult questions.

Is AI being over-hyped? Yes, I think it is currently but there will be a recorection.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? I will tell you in three months. We are just about to deploy an AI project into the business. We're using an AI consultant to improve the processes within our business.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

More consolidation.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My iPad.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? David Beckham, George Michael and Nelson Mandela.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Don't assume anything in life or take anything for granted."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Palantir has been very impressive this year. It has moved from being viewed as a niche government contractor to being seen as one of the companies benefiting most directly from the AI boom. Its share price has experienced remarkable growth.



HEGE STØRE
Group CEO and acting UK CEO, Advania

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Externally I would like to highlight the record high Net Promoter Score across all geographers from our customers and the good traction we have on the group-wide AI offering. Internally we have just received the high engagement score (4.3) across our 5,000 employees.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Continue to stay true to our customer promise and achieve our financial targets based on that.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Honestly, it's talent. Having the best people on board, keeping them engaged, and ensuring we're continuously developing the skills we'll need for the future. Everything else becomes much easier when you have the best people. And of course, the geopolitical situation.

Is AI being over-hyped? In the short term, probably. In the long term, AI may actually be under-hyped.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our most successful internal AI initiative has been the deployment of AI-powered assistants embedded directly into our core business processes across service delivery, sales, and software development. We have also implemented AI-driven automations across support functions, reducing manual work and freeing up capacity across the organisation. The key to success has been integrating AI into everyday workflows rather than treating it as a standalone initiative. As a result, we are already seeing measurable efficiency gains, improved productivity, and scalable benefits across multiple business areas.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

By 2031, the most valuable UK channel partners won't primarily be selling technology; they'll be selling accountability. Customer intimacy will remain just as important as it is today, but it will be enhanced and scaled through the smart use of AI, enabling partners to deliver stronger business outcomes and greater value.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? ChatGPT, Claude and my iPhone.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Satya Nadella, Nicolai Tangen (CEO Norwegian Bank Investment Management) and Meryl Streep.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Direct and biased towards action. Expect things to move quickly."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Jensen Huang (Nvidia). He has become the critical infrastructure provider for the AI boom and he has managed to turn a HW-company into one of the most strategically important firms in the world.

PAUL ALLEN
Executive Vice President of Sales, EMEA, AHEAD

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Working with AHEAD clients to help define their AI strategy and ultimately building solutions that have real business impact. Our team is uniquely positioned to align with the leaders in industry, supported by leading consultants and implementation teams to earn the trust of the C-Suite in their AI journey.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Focusing on expanding our global presence by further building out our regional teams with a strong customer centric culture and top technical talent to differentiate ourselves in the market.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? External market and economic pressures, I would have to say. These are exciting times, but times where you have to stay on top of numerous factors outside of your control to support decision making.

Is AI being over-hyped? Speaking solely based on potential transformational impact to enterprises, we think not. We believe that we are still in the early innings, but the technology is improving at a faster rate than anything we've ever seen. Our outlook on AI is very favourable, but we expect enterprise adoption to move slower than the pace of innovation.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? AHEAD treats itself as client zero for AI, so we leverage our engineering depth to experiment constantly on ways to improve our own business. In our most ambitious project to date, we



have built our own agentic platform focused on business process reengineering rather than productivity. This is changing the way we work across systems and unlocking new operating leverage and revenue opportunities.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Successful UK partners will derive their business valuation almost entirely from their customers and their own intellectual property rather than the technology accreditations they carry from vendors. Vendors will therefore see strategic alignment with key partners more consequential than ever before and create stronger relationships for the benefit of customers.

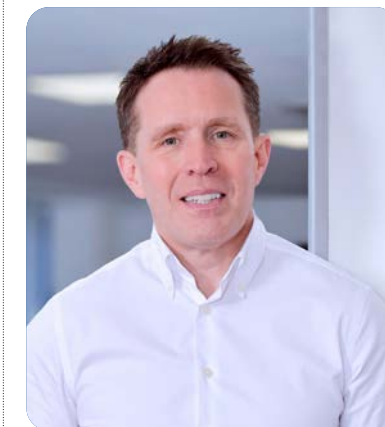
Which tech gizmo could you not function without? It's boring, but I would have to say my smartphone – work access, security authentication and keeping in touch with friends and family while on the move.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Trevor McDonald, Richard Harris and Oprah Winfrey.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Embrace feedback; I do!"

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? There are a number of figureheads out

there, but if I was to pick one I guess it would have to be Demis Hassabis at the moment with his breakthrough work – his teams continue to clearly push the boundaries.



BARNEY TAYLOR
CEO, Air IT

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? The total change in the culture and positive business outlook at Air. One of our stated goals was to create a place where people love to work. The change has been incredible and business results are now starting to follow. Culture is everything.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We want to re-imagine what a next-generation MSP looks like and be a market-leader in the pursuit of this new standard. I want our business to think differently,

use the technology we already have in place and confidently look ahead 3-5 years and know how we will maintain market leadership and service our customers in a way that we never thought was possible.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Standing still, falling behind, to stop making the effort to learn, to run out of energy, to not keep up with the sheer pace of change. To not have the imagination or drive to future-proof our business and prepare it for the next five years of AI-powered change. Every time I think we have taken a step forward, I am driven by the fact we might still be going too slowly.

Is AI being over-hyped? I think leaders that are debating hype are asking the wrong question. AI will have a profound impact in some areas and businesses, that it won't in others. The right question is what does AI make possible that wasn't possible before and how I can maximise its impact for my business and my customers? The answers are significant, but the path to get there requires a totally different way of thinking. New operating models, faster innovation, deeper customer understanding, better speed and efficiency, a future-state business that is way ahead of its competition. AI and automation won't necessarily do all the work for you, but it

will dramatically raise the ceiling of what your organisation can achieve.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We framed our entire AI and automation strategy around our customers and our people, rather than as a cost reduction project. We have now introduced AI that understands intent across self-service and human channels. This includes a contact centre with full visibility of every interaction, which means exceptional customer service where AI is informing our engineers with context and information they need before the pick-up the call. That means we can have faster, more informed conversations and offer intelligent solutions that make our people's day-to-day work easier and more efficient. Customer Service is one thing, but we are now wrapping Customer Experience around this service.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Not much of a surprise, but AI will reshape the channel faster than most people expect. Technical capability alone won't be enough; the winners will be the partners that can help customers adopt AI safely, simplify complexity and become trusted advisors at board

level. Whether through their own expertise or strategic partnerships, channel businesses will need to lead customers through this next wave of transformation. Traditional IT support will become expected; strategic value will be what customers will pay for. The MSP model and the way we interact with our customers is changing faster than anything I have ever seen before. I hope this will bring forward-thinking businesses and channel partners closer together to collaborate and share ideas. We are all in it together.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? I'm pretty straightforward with my personal use of technology. What I can't do without are my headphones and my smart watch. I listen to music and podcasts constantly and continually like to track movements, steps, and general health. There is not much that is more important than to keep moving.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Warren Buffett, Barack Obama and Seve Ballesteros. Business, leadership, and sporting greatness.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "When he wants something done, he wants something done. Please execute carefully and with urgency."

PARTNER LEADER, PHONE HOME

Undoubtedly, tech that helps our Partner Leaders 'get things done' featured heavily when asked for an indispensable gizmo. But the importance of health and wellbeing was not forgotten.

7 covet their health and fitness devices



5 want to block out the noise with noise-cancelling headphones

BEST OF THE REST

Coffee machines, digital note takers, weed burner, golf rangefinder and head shaver!



16 have embraced the assistance of AI

26 cannot function without their mobile phone



Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? None that I would highlight so far, but ask me again at Christmas. I am more likely to be impressed with a high-growth figurehead that is carving a new trail in a really different way, than pick one of the obvious top technology CEOs of the world.



MANNY PINON
CEO, Ampito Group

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Kickstarting our ten-year growth strategy for Ampito Group. Expanding our high-frequency trading networks and AI infrastructure globally alongside this has been exciting and challenging in equal measure – and a real learning curve for all of us.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Accelerating our US expansion and cementing our position as the go-to partner for complex AI infrastructure and SD-WAN solutions.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The UK economy, frankly. The technology rarely worries me – it's the wider economic picture and making sure we keep pushing Ampito forward through it that keeps me up.

Is AI being over-hyped? The consumer side is noisy, but the infrastructure side is very real. The enterprise networking and high-frequency trading solutions we deploy are proving their RoI every single day.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Automating our complex global logistics and proposal generation. It's successful because it delivers immediate operational efficiency – giving our teams more time to focus on strategic client relationships instead of admin.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think the channel will increasingly reward deep specialism. The partners who can deliver complex AI and networking infrastructure at global scale will pull ahead – but there will always be room for those who know exactly what they're brilliant at and stick to it.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My phone, hands down. It's the world's smallest, most demanding office – and it never closes.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Jürgen Klopp for the Liverpool FC stories, Ferry Porsche for the sheer engineering obsession and Jensen Huang to discuss the future of tech.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Caution: moves fast, asks 'why not?', and will turn your coffee break into a five-year plan."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Larry Ellison. Written off more times than I can count, and yet he's dragged Oracle right back into the centre of the AI gravity – proof that hunger beats age, and that the challenger mindset never really retires.

RICHARD THOMPSON
CEO, ANS

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? One of our proudest achievements over the past 12 months was being named Microsoft UK Partner of the Year 2025. It recognised not only the quality of our solutions and customer service, but also our commitment to

innovation, including becoming the first MSP to establish a dedicated Customer Success Unit.

Building on that momentum, we've continued to invest in our AI capabilities, becoming the first Microsoft partner to achieve both Frontier Firm accreditations as we evolve into a truly AI-enabled business.

We're equally proud of the impact we're having on the next generation of talent. In January of this year, our ANS Academy became the first apprenticeship provider to be awarded a 'strong standard' across all categories under Ofsted's new inspection framework – helping to build tomorrow's channel workforce.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We help businesses move from AI readiness to AI realisation, addressing a rapidly growing market need that supports our ambition for double-digit revenue growth in 2026.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Our 700+ employees are the heart of ANS, so maintaining and strengthening the inclusive culture that supports them is always top of mind. At the same time, our industry moves incredibly quickly, and ensuring we continue to lead the way in AI realisation requires constant focus and adaptability.

Is AI being over-hyped? It's difficult to overstate the transformative potential of AI. What is often underestimated,



however, is the importance of getting the foundations right – security, governance and data readiness are critical to realising those benefits.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date?

Becoming a Frontier firm – a human-led, AI-enabled business – is a core pillar of our strategy. As part of our journey to become this, we broke the service algorithm in Managed Services – which was a real highlight.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

The UK IT channel remains highly fragmented, and I expect consolidation to accelerate as partners seek greater scale, deeper expertise and stronger AI capabilities. At the same time, the economics of AI will evolve rapidly. As the cost and value of tokens continue to shift, we'll see significant changes in how organisations consume, price and govern AI services, creating new opportunities and business models across the channel.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? For me, it's the iPhone and the Oura Ring – they're at the top of their game.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Trump, Bowie and Ricky Gervais.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Persistently optimistic. May frequently say 'we'll get there', and then keep working until we do."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

While he's undoubtedly a divisive figure, it's hard not to be impressed by what Elon Musk has achieved with SpaceX's record-breaking IPO this year – astronomical!

But when it comes to creating a positive impact closer to home, Microsoft UK & Ireland CEO Darren Hardman stands out. His commitment to developing digital skills, creating opportunities and helping people from all backgrounds build careers in technology makes him one of the industry's most influential figureheads.



CIARAN RAFFERTY
CEO, ARO

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Being handed the CEO baton of ARO from Richard Burke. It's a great company with a great culture, great people and technology, and loyal customers. It's going to be game changing.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. 2026 is all about bringing a unified GTM across all areas of our business in managed services, our sovereign data centre facilities, expand our telecoms business and ensure our customers can navigate the challenging times with our energy consultants. All whilst streamlining our strategic partners to allow us to grow organically and cross-sell even better to help solve our customers' problems. Simultaneously, we are building out a Scotland regional focus and looking at strategic M&A if it makes sense.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Nothing really. I believe if you have a great team who you trust, you can navigate any challenge that comes your way and it's important to sleep well or you don't think with clarity.

Is AI being over-hyped? No, I don't think so – it's a paradigm shift and will change how everyone operates over the next decade except for possibly electricians and plumbers – though I believe it's not just as easy as everyone thinks to implement at scale. Your data needs significant work and any company that says their data is as

clean as a whistle is fooling themselves. We intend to take our AI strategy to improve efficiencies and speed of execution and have our valued staff focus on different things to make our customers even happier so we can enable even more profitable growth.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We have used Claude to build out a GTM Hub to publicise our services, train and enable our sales teams and specialists to create consistent messaging reinforced with a series of tests. It is something that would have taken six months previously but we achieved it in five days.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

I'm not going to say it's a surprising prediction, though I think there will be continued consolidation of telecoms and technology customers and cross-sell with less point solutions. Customers want outcomes not point solutions – insurance will start to form a bigger part of the telecoms/technology outcome story for customers in the future. AI evolution is going to be critical to this new world model.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Sadly, it's my two phones and AirPods for numerous Teams calls.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Nikolai Tesla, Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank, and the 14th Dalai Lama. That would be an interesting dinner to solve some very big world problems.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "The Enigma."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Jensen Huang for his perseverance at Nvidia and the fact his story has not been easy. He seems like a very balanced human who has high:

IE – Intelligence Quotient
EQ – Emotional Quotient
RQ – Resilience Quotient and
LQ – Likeability Quotient
A very rare quality combination.

B



ROB DAVIES
CEO, BCN

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Launching Pathfinder, our agentic client engagement platform, has probably been the standout moment. It has helped us move the AI conversation from theory into something much more practical, giving clients a clearer way to connect their ambition with real business outcomes.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. In 2026, we want BCN to become 'Customer Zero' for AI adoption. In simple terms, that means transforming our own business first, learning what really works, and then taking that experience to our clients so we can help them move faster and with more confidence.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The speed of change, without question. AI creates a massive opportunity, but the challenge is moving quickly enough while still making the right decisions. Building capability, culture and trust, rather than just chasing the next big headline, is key.

Is AI being over-hyped? It depends how you look at it. If AI is treated as a silver bullet, then yes, it is over-hyped. But if you see it as a genuine business transformation opportunity, built

on good data, strong governance, security, ethics and human-first thinking, then I actually think we are only just getting started.

What has been your most successful internal AI project to date? Pathfinder has been our most successful internal AI project because it has turned AI from a conversation into a practical way of working. It gives us a structured, repeatable way to help clients move from "where do we start?" to clearer priorities, stronger governance and measurable business value.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

I think the best partners will go deeper, not broader. Over the next five years, real domain expertise will matter much more, and the strongest channel businesses will be those that know their chosen markets properly, collaborate well and bring genuine insight rather than generic capability.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My mobile phone – no contest. It is my diary, inbox, notebook, news feed and connection point to the business, so I would struggle without it.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Rassie Erasmus would definitely be first on the list. I love rugby, and he is controversial, funny, brilliant and inspirational; but more than anything, I like the way he thinks differently and he likes a drink or two.

Joe Rogan would be fascinating because he has spoken to such a wide range of people and would bring curiosity, challenge and a few good stories to the table.

And I would invite Dr Joe Dispenza for a completely different perspective. His thinking around mindset, neuroscience, energy and human performance is really interesting.

WHAT KEEPS ME AWAKE? I'M A SALESPERSON AT HEART, AND ALL I WANT TO SEE IS BETTER CLOSE RATIOS WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES." MALEK RAHIMI, BDR GROUP

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Warning: defaults to outcomes." I really value effort and commitment, but in the end I am always drawn back to progress, impact and whether we have delivered what we said we would.

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Dario Amodei at Anthropic has really stood out for me. He has serious technical ambition, but also seems very thoughtful about AI safety, alignment and responsibility. And I think that balance is going to matter more and more.



MALEK RAHIMI
CEO, BDR Group

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? I'd usually say M&A, because I just love it, and nothing gives me a buzz like it. But I'm enjoying seeing the software model mature under the bonnet of the business. It's taken a lot of work – millions of pounds of investment.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We're looking to enrol every single one of our clients into our SOC, which we're about 90% through. We're building out our

own AI product portfolio. And there's a potential acquisition we could double in size off. Those are probably the three things I would love truly to see us deliver on.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Nothing. I'm 16 years at BDR, and you just become a bit hardened to it all. I'm a salesperson at heart, and all I want to see is better close ratios when I close my eyes.

Is AI being over-hyped? I think we need to break it down and take our customer base on an AI adoption readiness campaign – then let's see what they can truly do. Then we'll know what the hype is.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Overwatch. We've developed our own product, which is built in data sovereignty and governance, and is spinning off thousands of opportunities from our client base. It's essentially going in, doing full analysis, and making recommendations on what the customers need to do to get Cyber Essentials Plus and cybersecurity up to a high standard. We're using it to analyse our customer base to tell them what projects they should be adopting.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think customers aren't ready to deal with robots and AI bots. I think customer experience won't mature as fast as AI does.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? You're asking the wrong bloke. I'm the most basic user in the world, so I'm just going to go with my phone.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Genghis Khan, Darius the Great and Einstein.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Doesn't shut up."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Probably Dario Amodi from Anthropic. It's just quite a remarkable thing that's taken place.



JAMES NAPP
Regional Director UK&I & MD UK, Bechtle

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Continued strong growth validating the underlying strength of the business and maximising synergies from our acquisitions across Bechtle UK&I.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Maximise everything.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Ensuring we maintain our people-centric culture and having fun in the business as we grow.

Is AI being over-hyped? No – it's game changing. Governance will be key and implementing responsibly to ensure we all have a sustainable future.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We have several projects up and running which are equally successful with a common thread – reducing repetitive actions in high volume areas.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Perhaps not so surprising: consolidation will continue. Big and niche players will continue to thrive.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? I'm a big fan of my new weed burner if that counts! The neighbours are not overly pleased, mind you...

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Nick Kyrgios, Rafa Nadal and Timmy Trumpet.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Low tolerance for BS."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Ian Lankshear, CEO of Ensilica – cutting-edge innovator building and driving a world-class tech business.



ALAN PATON
CEO, Beyond

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Rebranding as Beyond [from Qodea] and proving we can operate at the scale that comes with it; we are now Europe's largest dedicated Google Cloud partner, with engineering talent spanning Europe, North America and the Philippines. The acquisitions that got us here have integrated cleanly, which is rarer than people think.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Move beyond pilots. We have seen thousands of AI proof-of-concepts across the industry and almost none go live. 2026 is about turning that into real, scaled, revenue-generating deployments for clients, not more PoCs.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Finding enough genuinely experienced AI engineers. Ask anyone how many engineers they have with three years of hands-on AI

experience and the honest answer is zero – we are all competing for a tiny, immature talent pool... and we are winning!

Is AI being over-hyped? The technology isn't overhyped, but the timelines are. People were promised transformation overnight; the reality is this is a multi-year unwind of decades of legacy complexity. The age of experimentation is ending; the market now wants material value and measurable outcomes, not more pilots.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Qody – an AI-powered scheduling and resourcing tool our own engineers built from scratch in three weeks to replace a long-standing SaaS licence. It's live, it runs our business, and it proved to our own sceptics what's now possible when you trust the technology and the people using it.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

One of the biggest shifts over the next five years will come from agentic AI – businesses moving beyond basic automation into systems that make decisions, take actions and reshape customer and operational journeys in real time. That raises the bar for the channel: clients will need partners with the engineering depth to deploy this safely, at scale, and with clear commercial value.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Gemini, hands down. I drop financial documents into it daily to summarise changes and flag what I need to worry about. I can move so much quicker with it by my side.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? William Wallace – Scottish leadership forged under impossible pressure.

Elsie Inglis – Scottish surgeon who built field hospitals across WWI Europe after being told to go home.

Tom Ford – for the style, the wit, and a completely different kind of conversation.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Impatient by design, moves fast, expects the same."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Sundar Pichai (CEO, Google and Alphabet). He's backing Google's AI bet with real capital – nearly \$185bn in 2026, up from \$31bn just four years ago – and his long-stated vision of an everyday AI assistant (first set out in 2016) is now close to reality. A useful example of a long-term bet paying off, which is exactly the kind of leadership I admire most in Google.



SARA BOLTMAN
Founding Director, Butterfly Data

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? We've won some interesting work and some huge contracts, but I think the real high point has been seeing our customers/stakeholders become our advocates, to the point where they have referred us to do work for other government departments.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We are growing rapidly so preserving our culture throughout that growth is the main thing we need to achieve.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? People. Thinking about problems with people, finding the right people, managing interactions between people. Building high performing teams is challenging!

Is AI being over-hyped? Yes definitely, but it's like the dot com boom all over

again. Fortunes will be won and lost and a lot of those companies will end up worthless, but I do think it will end up transforming our lives in the way the internet did, creating new business model and jobs that didn't exist before.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We are using it a lot to help with finding opportunities on the various government portals and refining our response to tenders – we can paste together our past successful responses and case studies and just use AI to get the word count down. I've also used a partnering tool that identifies people you can team with to form consortia.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think we will start to see a lot of homegrown alternatives to the big tech giants – or at least I hope we will! We need a UKDB that is as scalable as Oracle...

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My phone. I spend so much time on trains going to client sites or traveling between our offices in Cardiff and Manchester, if I wasn't able to deal with email and join calls on the move I'd be lost. I also have a reMarkable, which is great for turning handwritten notes into searchable files on my Google drive – I still prefer writing when in a meeting, rather than typing.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Richard Feynman, John Maynard Keynes and Kate Martin (wife of the Aston Martin founder – he was a racing driver and she was the brains behind naming the business after the Aston Hill Climb to attract the right clientele).

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Watch out, plates spinning overhead."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Dario Amodi for having the integrity to turn down work that didn't align with Anthropic's ethics. We've done similar (but smaller and less high-profile revenue losses).



SAM MUDD

CEO, Bytes Technology Group

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? The last 12 months have been about making a clear, deliberate choice about where we win.

We've moved from operating as a broad, generalist organisation to a more focused, sector-aligned model – with Bytes Software Services and Phoenix Software each serving distinct markets. That wasn't a cosmetic change; it was about sharpening accountability and aligning ourselves to how customers buy and adopt technology.

Doing that while maintaining strong commercial performance – and keeping both teams delivering for customers – is something I'm particularly proud of. It tells me the organisation can perform through change, not just around it.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

Consistency of execution at scale. We've proven the model works – where ownership is clear and activity is tied directly to pipeline and outcomes, performance follows. The focus now is

making that level of discipline universal across the business, not isolated to our top performers.

That's what turns strong periods into sustained growth.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The gap between technology investment and realised value.

Customers are spending more than ever – across cloud, SaaS and now AI – but many still struggle to connect that spend to real business outcomes. If we don't solve that, trust erodes quickly.

Our responsibility as a partner is to be the organisation that makes technology measurable, accountable, and genuinely valuable – not just deployed.

Is AI being over hyped? No – but it is being misunderstood.

The cycle is early, and the market is moving quickly, but the real risk isn't hype – it's shallow adoption.

AI will create enormous value, but only for organisations that apply discipline to it: governance, cost control, and a clear link to outcomes. Without that, it becomes just another layer of uncontrolled consumption.

What's been your most successful

internal AI project to date? The most meaningful work we've done has been around embedding AI into operational workflows – particularly automation and insight generation within the business.

The success isn't in the technology itself; it's in how it improves decision-making and efficiency. When AI is tied directly to performance – whether that's accelerating delivery, improving reporting clarity, or enhancing customer outcomes – adoption follows naturally.

That's been the consistent theme in what works.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? The channel will polarise – and generalists will struggle.

As buying groups expand and solutions become more complex, customers will increasingly choose partners who are deeply aligned to their sector and can prove outcomes, not just capability.

The future belongs to fewer, more focused partners who are embedded in their customers' commercial reality.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? It's less about a single device and more about connected systems.

I've been using an Ultrahuman ring (similar to Oura) for my own personal health and sleep insights. Health matters to me immensely, so I try and do my best to understand how my body is coping with the high demands of being a CEO that works at pace.

Which three famous people would you invite to a dinner party? A mix of perspective and challenge: Nelson Mandela, for leadership and compassion; Elon Musk, for speed of change and looking into the future; and Ada Lovelace for breaking convention.

The best discussions come from contrast, not consensus.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Will prioritise clarity and outcomes over comfort."

Because ultimately, that's what drives performance.

Which tech figurehead has impressed you most this year?

What stands out this year is the consistent message from leading voices in technology: AI doesn't reduce the need for software and services – it expands it. The idea that agents, automation and AI increase the demand for tools, platforms and governance resonates strongly with what we are seeing in the market – and reinforces the opportunity ahead for focused partners.

C



PENNY WILLIAMS

SVP & Managing Director, CDW UK and International

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? I have many highlights, but at the core we are transforming our business, driving impactful efficiencies to meet our customer's needs, while delivering double-digit growth.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Becoming AI-native, not as a buzzword but as an operating model. Aligned to our global strategy, delivering faster outcomes for our customers, underpinned by double-digit sustainable growth.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Time: there are not enough hours in the day! I've been four decades in technology with an ever-changing technology landscape, but now the pace is unprecedented.

Is AI being over-hyped? No. If anything, it's under-realised. The task-level gains are real and measurable: faster coding, sharper customer service, empowered workers leading to quicker more impactful decisions.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our gold-standard Logistics & Technology Centre in Rugby. AI-enhanced automation across our ASRS, AGV fleet and conveyor are embedded in daily operations, not just driving efficiency on the warehouse floor but forecasting bottlenecks across our global supply chain before they bite. The result is a logistics capability delivering at scale, speed a seamless experience for our customers.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

After this long in the channel, very little surprises me; it's a fast-moving landscape, and our job is simply to navigate it and meet customers where they need us. My prediction is that by 2031 the strongest players won't have stopped reselling or managing technology, they'll have evolved alongside it, increasingly valued for proving that AI-driven, autonomous work is safe, compliant, cost-controlled and reversible. That shift, from delivering technology to assuring it, won't be achieved alone; it will rely on even deeper partnerships across vendors, regulators and customers to deliver the outcomes that matter.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Still my mobile phone, and I'm utterly reliant on it. Everything on demand. Just don't touch the Wi-Fi.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? King Charles, Narendra Modi and Amal Clooney.

WHAT WOULD MY WARNING LABEL SAY? CAUTION: ACTIVE BS RADAR." PENNY WILLIAMS, CDW

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Caution: active BS radar."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Michael Dell and Jeff Clarke. They set out a deceptively simple plan: drive the business to sustainable growth and automate it. As Clarke puts it: "The AI wave is here and we're riding it." Simple on paper, but the results show just how powerful that clarity can be.



CRAIG ASTON

CEO, Celerity

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Winning an award for IBM's best Select Territory Partner in the UK. To win this award from our foundation vendor partner is both humbling and exciting for the future, plus being great recognition of the work my team have done with IBM in the past 12 months.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We are continuing our M&A journey, looking at more businesses that give Celerity further technical expertise or wider customer reach. It's always exciting bringing new skills and ideas into Celerity, and making Celerity a great place to work for our newly acquired people remains a key focus.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? I am sure this is a well-used answer, but AI. AI's impact on business overall and Celerity in particular is multi-dimensional, and my thoughts are a mix of how we ensure we are moving quickly enough to

transform, to not get left behind; how do we evolve our services to embed AI and how do I ensure that my teams are given the AI tools to remain relevant?

Is AI being over-hyped? I think over-hyped is the wrong word. AI is without doubt transformational, but I think some of the doom-laden predictions have been overstated. It is already changing the world, and will continue to do so, but humans have always shown remarkable resilience and flexibility in these times of fundamental change, and I believe this will happen again.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Celerity has embedded agentic employees in all our technical teams, and they are now being used to both increase efficiency and improve service for our customers. I see this as most successful as it is getting all of our technical staff using AI, and it is taking away the fear.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Distributors will transform into marketplace-based service providers delivering value-added services, and will continue to be essential for a fully functioning IT channel. This has been talked about for any number of years, and now has to be delivered.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My digital paper tablet. I am a copious note taker, and having used so many notebooks over the years, the ability now to be able to find notes from months/years ago is a game changer for me.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Andy Murray, Lou Gerstner and Sharleen Spiteri.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Don't bring problems here; bring ideas or else."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Arvind Krishna, Chief Executive of IBM, has managed to remain on the right side of the US, Trump-led, government, has led the conversation

around AI and quantum, and has continued to transform IBM into a software-led Hybrid Cloud data and AI company. To enable and increase IBM's relevance in these turbulent times is true leadership.



MIKE WARDELL
CEO, Charterhouse Group

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Driving significant change within the business to provide a foundation for future growth. It is a challenging time for many, but we now have a strong and settled team and the balance sheet for success.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

Using AI to get business benefits and transform the business and our customer experience. Moving from experimentation into a measurable, margin-driving capability.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The change in how people work and how we can harness this and get both the business and the personal benefits.

Is AI being over-hyped? In the short term you could say it is over-hyped, but over a longer time you could argue it is underestimated and misunderstood... but who knows?

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We've not seen enough benefits from internal AI projects; we are still playing with it. We have some bots that share information saving the time of our expensive resource, but after that progress is limited.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

I'm not sure it's surprising but I can see two types of partner: the scale partners or the specialists. Generalists without scale will struggle to compete and make the economics work.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Simple answer, my mobile. It allows me to work on the move and access whatever I need wherever I am as well as stay connected with my team and customers alike.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Tom Brady (an elite performer), Steve Jobs (a visionary) and Sean Lock (comedy genius).

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Relentless."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Dario Amodei, CEO and co-founder of Anthropic for delivering on his AI vision. I particularly like his view of AI not as a single superintelligence, but as a simulated "country of geniuses in a data centre", acting like millions of Nobel Prize winners working in parallel to rapidly cure diseases, fight poverty, and double human lifespans.



NICOLA SANER
CEO, Chorus

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Doubling our channel managed security services revenue in a single

year. That growth is a real testament to the team and the trust that our partners and customers place in us.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

Embedding AI meaningfully across our business so that it is a genuine enabler for our people and a differentiator for our customers.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Pace versus prudence with AI. The tension between moving fast enough to be leading from the front and being responsible enough to not create new risks. It's a constant balance that's hard to get it right.

Is AI being over-hyped? Not anymore. Early on, I think it was all noise and novelty, which gave AI a bit of a bad rep. Now I believe it's a genuine gamechanger.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Building a customer-facing portal. We pulled in data from different solutions, surfaced the useful content into a modern app and delivered a production-ready portal in days. That kind of pace would never have been possible without AI.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Five years might as well be a lifetime right now. I honestly couldn't predict it. I do think organisations that embrace AI early but retain their culture, personality and values will win overall.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Answering truthfully – Alexa Shopping Lists. It's not glamorous, but it's one of the things that helps keeps the chaos of daily life in check.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Queen Nefertiti, Johnny Depp and President Zelensky.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Zero comfort zones... not here for average, challenges everything."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Meredith Whittaker, president of

Signal. As an advocate of ethical AI, privacy and online safety I think she has done lots to show that innovation and ethical responsibility can go hand in hand.



RICHARD BURKE
Managing Director, Cisilion

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Seeing the rapid progress the business has made in terms of adopting AI applications and all the benefits they can bring, helping the business to enable AI acceleration for our customers.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

Accelerating its progress to provide an end-to-end AI ecosystem of solutions to our customers.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Cyber and particularly the increasing challenge of agentic AI and data governance security.

Is AI being over-hyped? No, I feel the hype is justified.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Business-wide rollout and acceleration of a number of automated processes and agents deployed to improve knowledge in key teams.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Get to a place where agentic employees are needing to be managed more like humans than we would ever have expected.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? CoWork.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Rory McIlroy, Kenny Dalglish and LeBron James.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Beware of journalists!"

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Dario Amodei for displaying an appropriate consciousness of what we should be wary of around AI.



STEVE HARRIS
CEO, CloudClevr

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Proving that progress doesn't have to come from adding more noise. We've grown by getting clearer about who we are, what we do well and where we can genuinely add value.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. To become the partner customers call first, and be known as the UK's trusted managed services partner.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Nothing. If something is important enough to keep me awake, I just focus to fix it. If I can't fix it, worrying about it at 3am isn't going to help.

Is AI being over-hyped? AI is simultaneously both over-hyped and under-estimated. The marketing is ahead of the reality, but the long-term impact is probably a lot bigger than most people realise.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? The projects that save people time are good. The projects that help people make better decisions are transformational and this has been our main focus to date. We have invested in our own data warehouse and through using AI we are seeing far more value from the second category. **Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?** The biggest threat to most channel partners won't be AI. It'll be irrelevance. Customers are running out of patience with partners who simply resell products and add another layer of management.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? I am still a bit old fashioned and it's my mobile – I use a lot of applications to support my work but picking up the phone to call someone is still the fastest way to communicate and get things done. **Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party?** Ricky Gervais, Patrick Vieira and Noel Gallagher. **If you had a warning label, what would it say?** "Answers may be shorter and more direct than expected."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Eric Yuan. The investments, launches and acquisitions by Zoom in emerging technologies in the last 12 months have been transformative and he clearly still finds the time to be highly focused on culture and his team.



CLARE SATCHWELL
Managing Director, Cobweb
What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Winning back a big Microsoft customer who left for a 40% Vodafone discount – then realised cheaper isn't always better. **Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.** Making more services simple, scalable and

predictable with per-user monthly pricing. **What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader?** The economy, but also how too many small businesses still underestimate cyber risk. Too often, it only feels real after an incident – when the damage is already done. **Is AI being over-hyped?** No – but the noise is louder than the reality. AI's real value is solving practical business problems.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our customer portal – combining live data with a progressive web app to give customers faster, clearer access to what they need.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? The most successful partners won't be the ones selling the most technology, but the ones simplifying it best. As AI, automation and security become embedded everywhere, customers will value partners who can cut through the noise and turn complexity into clear business outcomes.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My iPhone; it's permanently attached to my hand. **Which three famous people, dead**

or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Sir David Attenborough, for stories that would captivate and educate in equal measure; Steve Ballmer, for his Microsoft legacy and larger-than-life personality; Maya Angelou, for her wisdom, courage and unforgettable words.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Warning: Likely to make things happen faster."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Fei-Fei Li – for keeping AI ambitious, ethical and human-centred.



SIMONE HINDMARCH
Co-founder and MD, Commercial

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Opening our £1.6m Centre of Excellence has been very rewarding. We created it to show clients what's possible when workplace technology, sustainability and managed services are designed around people. Being recognised as one of the Sunday Times Best Places to Work in the same year feels like a strong validation of that vision.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. A core goal this year is to deepen relationships with existing customers

by bringing more of our expertise into each partnership. The biggest opportunities for customers and suppliers lie in integrated approaches that deliver measurable business value.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Global uncertainty can be distracting if you let it. But I've learned that difficult periods often create the biggest opportunities. So rather than batten down the hatches, we continue to invest in our people and the future of our business. **Is AI being over-hyped?** No. There is a lot of noise around AI – both positive and negative – but it is already helping businesses work smarter and more sustainably. The key is to focus on practical applications rather than the hype.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our biggest success has been using AI agents to improve quality and efficiency across multiple areas of the business. By automating routine tasks and supporting decision-making, we've enabled our people to focus more time and energy on higher-value work for clients.

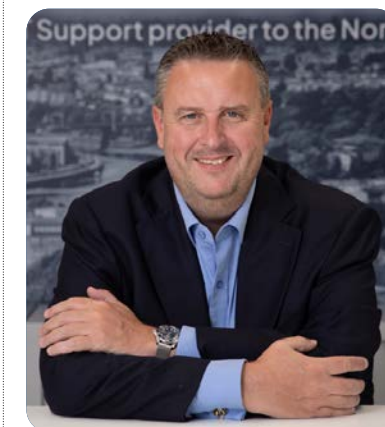
Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think we'll move from charging models based on devices or tickets towards outcome-based partnerships. As AI becomes embedded in the workplace, customers will increasingly expect providers to be accountable for productivity and business outcomes, not just technology performance. **Which tech gizmo could you not function without?** I'm not a gadget person, but online shopping apps have become dangerously convenient. The ability to buy something you didn't know you needed in seconds is probably something I should try to function without.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Beyoncé because she's my girl crush. David Attenborough for the stories and wisdom. And Jamie

Oliver because every dinner party needs a great chef.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Handle with care: passionate, determined and occasionally explosive."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Satya Nadella. Microsoft is one of the few companies that has been able to move beyond AI hype and demonstrate real business value at scale. Its focus on embedding AI into everyday tools rather than treating it as a standalone technology has been particularly impressive.



IAN HUDSON
Managing Director, committed
What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Acquiring another business and fundamentally repositioning our business to be more assertive to customer needs in a rapidly changing market.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. A newly affirmed growth trajectory.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? You have to feel for small businesses given local and macro-economic challenges. In particular, those that are unable to pass any additional operating costs on to the end customer, simply because it would hamper their competitive advantage. This is where efficiencies and growth opportunities delivered by IT can help, but it's about truly understanding this audience, where

HUANG WINS TECH TITAN RACE

Many names were put forward as tech figureheads, with Nvidia's Jensen Huang coming out on top by one vote. Mike Norris featured three times, putting him above the likes of Michael Dell (2) and Mark Zuckerberg (1).

12
Dario Amodei & Satya Nadella

11
Elon Musk

OTHER MENTIONS
Demis Hassabis (3), Larry Ellison, Meredith Whittaker, Matthew Riley, Alison Kirby, Linus Torvalds, Neil Sawyer, Fei-Fei Li (1)

and how MSPs like us can dynamically unlock value in a relevant manner.
Is AI being over-hyped? Yes and no. The opportunity of efficiencies and improvements in customer experience are undoubtable. However, human intervention is critical in appending the power of this technology to make it work in real life scenarios, internally and externally.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Work around streamlining ticket triage within the IT helpdesk.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Continued polarisation of the MSP market will see an increasing gap between PE-backed businesses and smaller/one-man-band operators.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My mobile phone.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Andy Burnham, Felix Boundgartner and Kurt Cobain.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Warning: moderately excitable."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Elon Musk, single-mindedly shooting for the stars.

MIKE NORRIS CEO, Computacenter

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Making the FTSE100.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. I'm not telling, it's confidential!

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Nothing.

Is AI being over-hyped? No more than any other major trend.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date?

Deployment of AI into our service desk operations due to the improvement in customer experience.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel



partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? No.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? A rangefinder.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Margaret Thatcher, Jesus Christ and Donald Trump.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Fragile."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Dario Amodi, CEO of Anthropic, because of the development of Claude.

ROY SHELTON CEO, Connectus Business Solutions

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? There are many high points to reflect upon, but the best (not biggest) was winning our first award. This was a team win and well deserved, as our whole team was there on a cold December to celebrate the win, which really has inspired them to strive for more.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

Overachieve and provide outstanding customer service for all of customers regardless of size, region and spend.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Not a great deal. I sleep well as I work and exercise hard

and always try to do the right thing. I have learnt over the years to stop

worrying about the things you can't control.

Is AI being over-hyped? Hype and reality aren't mutually exclusive. The internet was massively over-hyped in 1999 and also genuinely world changing. The dot-com crash didn't mean the internet wasn't real; it meant the timeline and the winners were misjudged. AI is likely in a similar position: the long-run impact is probably being under-estimated, while the short-run speed and smoothness of that impact is being over-estimated.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We have enabled our NOC and SOC with more AI-driven learning and workflow to service our 700-plus customers more effectively yet maintained that 'Human First', not just human in the loop approach. This success will now lead to more internal projects.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Partners will need to become more compliant to satisfy current and pending regulatory requirements along with the need for greater empathy and embedding with their partners and clients. There is already a movement from transactional driven to more outcome driven outcomes and relationships.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? I love Claude (AKA Claudia); she is amazing (but so is my wife just in case she reads this).



Claudia makes me look smarter than I am, saves me time so I can watch more rugby and spend time on fun things with our team and my family.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? My mother, who died when I was 24 but still shapes my moral compass and family values; Mohammed Ali, my sporting hero; and Elon Musk. I would love to know what fireworks go over in his head and how he pulls it all together.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Don't disappoint me, do what you say you are going to do and do it to the best of your ability as I will always do the same for you."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Elon Musk. He is an eccentric showman, and a true visionary who delivers. Starlink is growing into a globally accepted connectivity solution and Space X is now one of the world's largest brands. The downside is, I really don't like Teslas.



FOIZ AHMED Founder, Constor Solutions

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

A standout achievement has been retaining our Dell Titanium partnership, which validates the strength of our business. At the same time, we're in the process of moving into larger offices to accommodate our continued expansion.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. In

2026, we're focused on strengthening and scaling our managed services business, alongside driving greater adoption of AI solutions. Both represent significant growth opportunities and align closely with where customer demand is heading.
What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Apart from the usual 'waiting for the kids to get home' thoughts, it's the uncertainty around IT supply chains. The real challenge isn't just availability, it's understanding how those constraints shift customer buying cycles and making sure we stay ahead of that as a business.

Is AI being over-hyped? I wouldn't say AI is over-hyped. I'd say we're in a phase where value is clear in specific industries like fintech, VFX, manufacturing and retail but we haven't yet fully unlocked cross-sector use cases. The real step forward is scaling it into repeatable business outcomes across more industries.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our most successful internal AI deployment is the sales assistant, running locally on a Dell Pro Max GB10. It's a sovereign, on-premises AI persona with full knowledge of our vendor portfolio, customer context, and sales methodology no cloud dependency, no data leaving the building. We use it daily for proposal drafting, competitive positioning, and customer research.

The GB10 platform itself has become a live demo asset and we show prospects exactly what privacy-first, air-gapped AI looks like in practice, which resonates strongly with our regulated-sector customers.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? A bold prediction: 30-40% fewer channel partners, but larger ones as massive consolidation/mergers/acquisitions are expected.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My mobile phone.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Mohammed Ali,

Mahatma Ghandi and Mother Teresa.
If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Approachable and laid-back, but firm when it matters."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Michael Dell has impressed me for his vision, strong growth, and social impact. He's helped drive major share growth at Dell Technologies, especially as the company expanded into AI, cloud, and data infrastructure.

At the same time, his work through the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation supports children's education and health, showing impact beyond business.



KEITH ALI CEO, Creative ITC

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Winning and beginning delivery on some of the most complex global infrastructure programmes we have ever taken on, particularly our work with CB&I. This was not only a major commercial win; it proved that the investment we have made in our people, platform and international capability can stand up to a very demanding global customer environment.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Turning progress into performance. We have changed and grown a lot over the last

couple of years, from our platform and tooling to our international footprint. This year is about making that change feel more consistent for our customers and more scalable for our people.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Complacency. In managed services, you can build a great customer relationship over years and damage it very quickly if your service drops when it matters most. We have to keep challenging ourselves on resilience, communication, accountability, and the quality of the customer experience.

Is AI being over hyped? Yes and no. It is definitely being over sold in some places, where every tool suddenly has AI attached to it, whether it adds real value or not. But the underlying impact is not over-hyped at all. AI will fundamentally change how technology businesses operate, how services are delivered and how customers expect to engage with us. The key is moving beyond the demos and applying it to real problems.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our most successful internal AI project to date is NEO, which we have deployed as the pre- and post-ticket triage and classification engine within our service desk. It classifies tickets and routes them to the right resolver group far more quickly and consistently than a manual process alone. It has sped that part of our service desk operation up by around five times, which means customers get to the right technical team faster and our engineers spend less time moving tickets around or correcting routing mistakes.

What I like about NEO is that it is not AI for the sake of it. It solves a very real operational problem at scale, improves the customer experience, and gives our people more time to focus on resolving issues rather than administering them.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think a large part of the traditional MSP model will disappear. The

businesses that mainly resell licences, provide generic support, and make money from adding more people will struggle. The winners will be more specialised, more automated, and far more accountable for business outcomes. They will look less like outsourced IT helpdesks and more like technology operators for the sectors they serve.

Which tech gizmo, hardware or software, could you not function without? My iPhone. I use an iPhone Mini – which I still love, but my eyes are not quite what they used to be – and I effectively run a large part of the business from my phone. It is my office, communications hub, travel assistant, and second brain.

So, I am very eagerly awaiting the day Apple brings out an iPhone Fold. The idea of having a proper working screen in my pocket feels like it has been made for people like me.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Gordon Ramsay, Muhammad Ali and Jürgen Klopp.

Ramsay would make sure the food was incredible, although I would probably be nervous about offering an opinion on it. Muhammad Ali for the confidence, humour and stories. And Klopp because, as a Liverpool supporter, I would love to hear how he built belief, culture and togetherness in a team under huge pressure.

I think it would be a great night: good food, good stories, plenty of opinions, and no chance of an early finish.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Impatient with excuses. Very patient with effort."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Jensen Huang. It is easy to focus on Nvidia's commercial success, but what impresses me most is the long-term conviction behind it. He has spent years building towards a future that much of the market is only now properly understanding. He also has a rare ability to make an incredibly technical subject feel relevant to business leaders, not just engineers.



GLEN WILLIAMS
CEO, Cyberfort

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Without doubt, it's the progress we've made in harnessing the power of AI across the business. While we're still at a relatively early stage in that journey, what's already clear is the significant impact it can have – from streamlining operations to enhancing how we deliver for clients. The potential we're seeing gives us real confidence in where it can take us over the next few years and getting that foundation right has been a genuine highlight.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. One of our key goals for 2026 is to firmly establish ourselves as the 'Employer of Choice for Neurodiverse Employees' and it's something we're genuinely passionate about. We're actively working to build an environment where neurodivergent talent isn't just welcomed, but truly valued and supported. We've already made significant progress in this area, from the way we recruit through to how we structure roles and support our people day-to-day. For us, this isn't a box-ticking exercise – it's about building a stronger, more diverse business that benefits everyone.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Honestly, the question that sits with me most is: "How do you build an enduring company culture in a world of remote

working?" It's one of the defining challenges of modern leadership. Culture has always been the backbone of any successful business, but so much of it was built organically – through shared spaces, chance conversations, and the everyday moments that happen when people are actually together. When your team is apart, you have to be far more intentional about creating that. Getting it right means people feel genuinely connected to the mission and to each other, regardless of where they're logging in from. Get it wrong, and you risk ending up with a group of individuals rather than a team. It's something I think about a lot.

Is AI being over-hyped? In short, the answer is no. I genuinely believe AI is the most significant technology development of the past five years, and possibly much longer than that. Yes, there's a lot of noise around it and not every claim lives up to scrutiny, but the underlying capability is real and it's advancing fast. What we're seeing isn't a bubble – it's a fundamental shift in how businesses operate, how problems get solved, and how value gets created. The organisations that

treat it seriously now and invest in understanding how it applies to their world will be the ones with a real competitive edge. The hype may come and go, but the technology itself is here to stay.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our AI agent has genuinely been a game-changer this year. We've deployed it across several areas of the business and the results have been really encouraging. Where it's had the biggest impact is in reporting and data analysis – tasks that previously took considerable time and resource can now be done faster and with greater accuracy, which means our people can focus on the things that actually require human judgement. It's also accelerated how quickly we can identify and implement process improvements, which in a fast-moving environment like ours makes a real difference. What makes it our most successful internal project is simple: it's delivering tangible, visible results across the business, and we're only scratching the surface of what it can do.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel

partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

It may not be the most surprising prediction, but I think it's one of the most important ones to pay attention to is that consolidation in the channel is going to continue and accelerate, particularly in the cyber partner space. The market is still quite fragmented, and as customer expectations rise, the complexity of what's required to deliver genuine cyber security outcomes is increasing too. Smaller partners will find it harder to keep pace with the investment needed – in technology, in talent, and in compliance. That creates natural pressure toward consolidation, whether through acquisitions, mergers, or tighter partnerships. For those who get ahead of it and position themselves well, it represents a significant opportunity. For those who don't, the next five years could be quite challenging.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? It has to be my iPhone. I know it's probably the most common answer you'll hear, but there's a reason for that – it really has become indispensable. It's not just a phone anymore, it's essentially my

WARNING SIGNS

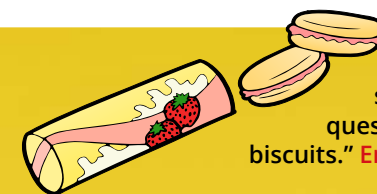
What to look out for if you see any of these Partner Leaders approaching...



"Low tolerance for endless slides. High expectation for action." **Sherry Vaswani**

"Watch out, plates spinning overhead." **Sara Boltman**

"Remove immediately if found on the Natilik annual Kick Off party dance floor. Side effects include an over reliance on the same terrible dance moves." **Alastair Rudman**



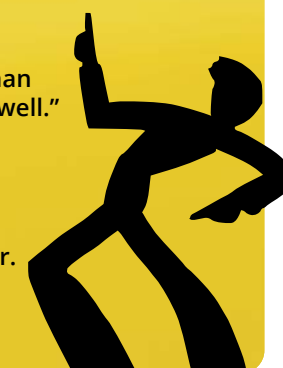
"May contain traces of strong opinions, sensible questions and emergency biscuits." **Emma Henry**



"Steak served anything other than rare will not end well." **Carl Henriksen**



"Will turn your coffee break into a five-year plan." **Manny Pinon**



mobile command centre. Whether I'm staying on top of emails on the move, jumping on a call, keeping across the news, or managing my day, it's always in my hand. I genuinely think it's changed the way we all work and not always in ways we notice until you imagine being without it. Take it away and I think most business leaders would feel the impact within the hour. **Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party?** Easy one for me – Ian Botham, Ben Stokes and Andrew Flintoff. Yes, I'm a cricket fan!

But beyond the sport, what those three have in common is that they're not just great cricketers – they're genuine characters and winners. Each of them has that rare ability to change the mood of a room, lead from the front under real pressure, and carry people with them. I think the conversation would be anything but dull. You'd have Botham's larger-than-life stories from a golden era, Flintoff's humour and heart, and Stokes bringing that quiet intensity and modern leadership perspective. I think we'd have an incredible night and I'd share a beer or two with them.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? Mine would probably read: "Warning: may deliver feedback with more directness than expected."

I've always believed that straight talking, done respectfully, is one of the most valuable things a leader can offer. People always know where they stand with me, and I think that builds trust over time even if it can catch people off guard initially.

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? For me it has to be Mike Norris at Computacenter. What he's achieved in building Computacenter into a FTSE 100 company is genuinely remarkable. This is a UK-founded, channel-focused technology business that has grown into one of the most respected names in the industry and that doesn't happen by accident or overnight. It takes vision, consistency, and the ability to execute over a very long period of time.

D



SIMON PICKERING
CEO, dbfb

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Completing our first acquisition has been a real milestone for the business. What made it particularly rewarding was seeing that growth happen while continuing our organic journey, bringing together great people, customers and cultures without losing what makes us different.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

We're rolling out a new operating platform across the group. The goal is simple: create a better experience for customers, give our teams better visibility, and provide a stronger foundation for the next stage of growth.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader?

Balancing growth with maintaining the culture and service standards that got us here in the first place. Organic growth is important, but finding the right acquisition opportunities that genuinely complement the business is equally important.

Is AI being over-hyped? Like most major technology shifts, there's

probably a bit of hype mixed in with a lot of genuine opportunity. We're all learning quickly what AI is capable of, but there's no doubt it will play a significant role in almost every business over the coming years. **What's been your most successful internal AI project to date?** The deployment of our new Bulk Text customer portal stands out. Using AI tools, we were able to go from concept to delivery in just two weeks and at a fraction of the cost and timescale of a traditional development project.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

I think AI could create challenges for some of the larger MSPs serving the SME market. As technology becomes more automated and accessible, businesses may place even greater value on agility, personal service and genuine customer relationships rather than sheer scale.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without?

My mobile phone. It keeps me connected to customers, colleagues, partners and family, and has probably replaced half a dozen devices I used to rely on.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party?

Shane Warne would definitely be one. Beyond cricket, he was a fascinating character with an incredible ability to bring people together. I'd also invite Winston Churchill for the stories and perspective, and Steve Jobs to understand how he thought differently about innovation and disruption.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Warning: open at your peril. You'll probably get an opinion, a challenge and a new idea, whether you asked for one or not."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Dario and Daniela Amodei have been hugely impressive. They've disrupted the established order in one of the fastest-moving technology markets we've ever seen and shown just how quickly innovation can reshape an industry.

STEPHEN RICHARDSON CEO, Digital Origin

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Our standout achievement has been launching our AI and automation product set and successfully embedding it into both our internal operations and client offerings. We've moved beyond theory into real-world impact, automating service desk workflows, improving response times, and enhancing customer experience at scale. Importantly, it's also opened up new higher-margin revenue streams, positioning us as more than a traditional MSP.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. In 2026, we want to fully commercialise AI and automation as a core pillar of our proposition, not just an add-on. That means standardising offerings, driving adoption across our entire client base, and making it a key growth and margin lever. The goal is to be seen by clients as an AI-enabled services partner, not just an infrastructure provider. This also focuses on becoming more outcomes led and driving partnership through these client successes.

What keeps you awake at night

as a partner leader? Execution risk as we scale is the biggest concern, particularly maintaining service quality while growing at pace. It only takes a handful of poor enterprise experiences to damage reputation and stall growth momentum. Alongside that, I'm constantly focused on ensuring we don't dilute margin chasing the wrong revenue.

Is AI being over-hyped? AI is over-hyped in terms of speed of adoption, but under-estimated in terms of long-term impact. Most businesses are still experimenting, whereas we're already seeing tangible efficiency gains and commercial opportunities through automation-led delivery. The real differentiator will be those who operationalise AI, not just talk about it.

AI is currently being over-hyped as vendors push adoption and usage, particularly into the SMB market where the narrative is often ahead of the commercial reality. In practice, few organisations are fully accounting for the medium-term cost implications, including tokenisation-based pricing models, the ongoing escalation in underlying compute and hardware costs, and the cumulative impact this has on total cost of ownership.



There is also an under-discussed flexibility risk: businesses are being encouraged to embed AI deeply into operations before fully understanding whether they retain the ability to revert to human-led delivery models if outcomes fall short or economics shift.

While there are genuine efficiency gains and opportunities emerging, the current market messaging tends to prioritise rapid adoption over measured, financially disciplined implementation. The real differentiator will not be who adopts AI fastest, but who does so with a clear view of cost, control, and long-term operational resilience.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our most successful project has been AI-driven service desk automation, particularly around ticket triage, knowledge surfacing, and first-line response generation. It's reduced resolution times, improved consistency, and allowed us to scale without linear headcount growth. The key success factor was aligning it tightly with our existing tooling and processes rather than treating it as a separate initiative.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? The mid-market MSP space will consolidate aggressively, but not everyone will benefit from it. Many smaller providers will struggle to remain relevant as clients demand broader capability across IT, cyber, and connectivity from a single partner. The surprising part is that valuation gaps between "platform MSPs" and traditional resellers will widen dramatically.

The mid-market MSP space should see consolidation over the next five years, but the benefits will be unevenly distributed. Many smaller providers will struggle to remain relevant as clients increasingly demand integrated capability across IT, cyber, and connectivity from a single partner. The more surprising outcome is that valuation gaps between "platform MSPs" and traditional resellers will widen significantly, reflecting the

premium placed on scalable, multi-service delivery models.

At the same time, the rise of AI-led service delivery is likely to create a structural skills gap across the industry. As level-one support and routine queries become increasingly automated, the traditional entry points into the sector will narrow. This risks widening the gap between junior and experienced engineers, as businesses shift their hiring focus towards more technically capable resources from the outset. Over time, this could constrain talent pipelines and increase wage inflation for skilled staff, creating a longer-term challenge for the channel that sits alongside consolidation.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Microsoft 365 is foundational – it underpins how we operate, collaborate, and serve clients. Beyond that, our PSA/RMM stack is the engine of the business; without it, we lose operational control overnight. Increasingly, AI-enabled tooling layered on top of both is becoming just as critical.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? I'd invite Satya Nadella for his perspective on platform transformation and culture; Steve Jobs, to challenge thinking around product simplicity and customer experience; and Winston Churchill, for leadership insight under pressure and long-term strategic thinking.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Relentlessly focused on outcomes, low tolerance for inefficiency." I'm very commercial in my thinking and will prioritise decisions that drive measurable impact. That can be uncomfortable, but it ensures the business moves forward at pace.

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Satya Nadella continues to stand out for how he's positioned Microsoft at the centre of the AI ecosystem. He's managed to combine innovation with commercial execution at global scale. From a channel perspective, that clarity of direction creates real opportunity for MSPs like us.



HOWARD HALL
Group Managing Director, DTP

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? When some of the pillars within our strategy to focus harder on business outcomes started to gain real traction within our client community.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. To accelerate the work we are doing in the area of social value with our clients, namely addressing digital poverty, where we use our position as a disrupter in the IT asset disposal market to generate funds to create pools of devices that clients use to support those individuals and families in need within the regions they operate in. Social Value as a Service.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Keeping up with the current pace of change, to make sure we continue to stay relevant to our clients and within the market, and accurately predict direction so we can jump ahead in some areas.

Is AI being over-hyped? It definitely feels like that, but having already successfully built and sold an AI business, and working on the next AI spin out, I would say no.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We spun out a higher education AI business in 2012, developed and grew it for 10 years, then exited it when someone came in with a silly offer.

The business was originally focused

on helping universities accurately identify potential student early leavers, using the power of big data, historical activity patterns, and some clever algorithms, allowing us to accurately predict 92% of leavers up to three months before they would have left. This allowed the university clients to deploy support resources to make an early intervention around student retention. We could also accurately predict what degree level a student would leave with, so tutoring resource could be focused more on the lower-level achievers and potential fails, and before we sold the business, we were accurately highlighting student disengagement that was due to a wellness issue, so they could be triaged into wellness support well before their personal wellness situation became critical.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? We will see some of the wealthiest leaders in the sector start to clone themselves. Joking of course, with maybe the exception of Jeff and Elon, although I would be surprised if they were not already on that journey.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? I'm not sure whether it passes as a tech gizmo, but it is my home coffee machine, having purchased the first one during the Covid lockdown, with my barista skills being better than most UK service stations' so-called baristas. You can probably read between the lines in that driving a lot of miles annually, service station coffee quality is a bit of a bugbear for me.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? First of all I would be looking for someone interesting to take care of the food, so thought about Gordon Ramsey, but in the end I have gone for Stanley Tucci to own that aspect.

Then it's all about stories, with someone from the world of business, and someone from the world of sport. My two picks would be Richard

Branson, who needs no introduction, and Billy Beane, who was an innovator in the world of sport, bringing the Moneyball, data-driven approach to the world of baseball, and who is acknowledged with this approach being adopted across the world of professional sport.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Nice guy, but boring as f***."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

I would pivot between Neil Sawyer at HP, and Matt Harris at HPE, both having worked their way up through the ranks at their respective orgs, although Neil did have a short sabbatical at Lenovo, and due to them starting on the HP shop floor, so to speak, both lead and drive the culture that fits HP/HPE perfectly, and which is clearly demonstrated by the results they are achieving.

E



GAVIN BELL
CEO, Econocom P&S UK

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Expanding Econocom's capability into Ireland from a solutions provider perspective with the acquisition of Image Supply Systems (ISS AV), based in Dublin. The acquisition gives us local presence in Ireland to build out our broader capability, while reinforcing Econocom as one of the largest AV systems integrators in Europe.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. To grow organically and through acquisition in the UK and Ireland to better serve our customers.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Where to place our bets. The nature of our business is it takes time between investing in new capability and seeing the results. Working out what's most relevant to our customers and what's hype is key to this to ensure we evolve our capability in line with the market and customer's requirements.

Is AI being over-hyped? No, I don't think so, although it's clearly at the top of the hype cycle currently. For me, the key is to help our customers to understand how it can benefit their business and their customers through gaining efficiencies, accelerating their go-to market propositions or growing share in the market they operate in.

We're seeing a lot of proof of concepts not progress to production at the minute, but there's also some really compelling use cases and significant return on investment opportunities.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We've developed an internal tool called AI Sales Coach. It gives the teams access to all relevant collateral across the entire group so that we can gain a better understanding of what we're doing for our customers and capability across the group. We invest a lot of time and effort in enabling and educating our teams through training, etc, but having this as a self-serve capability is incredibly useful, especially for our sales teams.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

I believe we'll see more customers moving workloads away from the cloud providers and bring it back on-premise over the next few years, especially around AI. I think most businesses will have a hybrid strategy to a greater or lesser extent, but from a security, control and cost perspective I can

see a higher percentage of workloads being on-premise.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My mobile phone – I couldn't do without it for work or personal life!

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Sir David Attenborough, Sir David Jason and Nelson Mandela.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "If you're speaking to me before I've had a cup of tea in the morning please proceed with caution!"

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Dario Amodei at Anthropic continues to impress, especially this year with the acceleration of Claude AI as a real competitor to ChatGPT. What I also like is how he's advocating for AI safety and, while embracing the capabilities of AI can be of huge benefit, we should be mindful of the risks and dangers associated with its use in certain scenarios.



YOLANTA GILL
CEO, European Electronique

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Winning several key enterprise clients while successfully shifting more of our revenue into managed services and recurring contracts.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

To accelerate our transition into a services-led business with strong recurring revenue and deeper strategic customer partnerships.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Maintaining margin and differentiation in an increasingly competitive market while keeping pace with rapid vendor and technology change.

Is AI being over-hyped? Yes and no – there's hype around the buzz, but the productivity and automation gains are very real when applied pragmatically.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date?

Deploying AI-driven quote and proposal automation, which has reduced turnaround time significantly and improved win rates through faster customer response.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

A major consolidation wave, which has already started, will reshape the UK IT channel over the next five years. Rising compliance costs, AI-driven automation, and growing technical complexity will favour fewer, larger partners with deep technical expertise, strong managed services, and vertical specialisation. Success will be driven not by product volume, but by the ability to combine IP, services and industry knowledge to solve business problems.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Although not be a traditional 'gizmo', I would choose an AI platform such as ChatGPT and Claude; these have become my researchers, editors, sounding boards and occasional devil's advocate. Running a technology business means navigating commercial, technical, legal and strategic challenges and these platforms help me analyse information, refine ideas and make better-informed decisions. They are one of the most useful tools I've ever used.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? I would invite Dario and Daniela Amodei of Anthropic, alongside Sam Altman of OpenAI, for a fascinating discussion on AI's future, national security, and control of powerful systems. Their contrasting

views on corporate responsibility, government oversight, and ethical AI would make for a lively, thought-provoking evening.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? This is the response from my PA; I think she's trying to be diplomatic! "High Performance – Zero Latency!"

Which tech figurehead has impressed you most this year? Jensen Huang, because he has shown that AI's progress depends as much on infrastructure as on models. His long-term vision and focus on innovation have helped transform Nvidia from a graphics specialist into a cornerstone of modern computing and the AI economy.

F



JAY BALL
CEO, Flotek

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Seeing the different businesses and people we have brought together increasingly operate as one Flotek. Growth matters but seeing a wider team genuinely buy into the same standards and ambition is the real high point.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Make AI and automation practical for more small and medium-sized businesses. There's plenty of noise around it, so our job is to turn that into simpler processes, better customer experiences and meaningful time saved.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Making sure growth never comes at the expense of the service, culture and accountability that got us here. It's easy to add scale; keeping things personal as you do it takes more work.

Is AI being over-hyped? Some of it is, definitely. AI is hugely important, but it only earns its place when it solves a real problem, removes friction or helps people do better work.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Building the AI-led call analytics and scoring platform that turns conversations into useful coaching and insight. It gives managers a far clearer picture of customer experience and performance than a handful of manually reviewed calls ever could.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Data sovereignty will become one of the biggest differentiators in the channel.

As AI becomes more embedded in everyday business, customers will look far more closely at where their data sits, who can access it and whether they truly remain in control of it.

Which tech gizmo, hardware or software, could you not function without? Strictly speaking, he's neither 'a gizmo', hardware or software, but

our new in-house developer Kevin James is a genius. Having someone who can turn a good idea into something real at pace is becoming pretty indispensable.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Sir Alex Ferguson, Steve Jobs and Anthony Bourdain. Leadership, obsession with excellence and a decent dinner conversation feels like a strong combination.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Straight talking. Minimal filter. Usually speaks with good intentions."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Matthew Riley. The scale he has built across the UK communications and

IT market is remarkable, but what impresses me most is his continued appetite to think bigger, move quickly and back the opportunities he sees in the channel.



NEIL HALL
CEO, Focus Group

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? The success of our AI GTM and how customers are gaining value.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. New AI-orientated operating platform.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Are we going fast enough?

Is AI being over-hyped? Under-hyped by the majority.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our conversational intelligence tool that tells us how we our people are delivering for customers and what their sentiment is of us (we were 'Customer Zero' and now part of our GTM).

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I was told very often by my mentor not to make predictions especially about the future!

AI IS BEING UNDER-HYPED BY THE MAJORITY." NEIL HALL, FOCUS GROUP

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Which tech gizmo, hardware or software, could you not function without? It has to be Claude but that's not to say I will always be faithful to him.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Elon Musk, Robin Williams and Freddie Mercury.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Warning, never give it caffeine."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Satya Nadella. He's the best example of using AI not just to optimise a business, but to fundamentally reinvent a large organisation, moving from catch-up to category leadership.



JASON OSMOND
CEO, Forge Technologies

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Closing out our year-end in March and hitting another milestone target of 70% year-on-year revenue growth. In a market where a lot of businesses are making layoffs and cuts, we are growing.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Getting more of our clients to move beyond AI as a concept and into agentic AI in practice with real, measurable RoI. We want to be the partner that turns the promise into proof.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Talent. Finding

people who are exceptional, not just technically strong but genuinely curious and client obsessed, in a market where everyone is competing for the same small pool. Growth is easy to plan; hiring the right people to deliver it isn't.

Is AI being over-hyped? If anything it's underplayed. The technology is advancing faster than most boardrooms are moving. The bottleneck isn't capability, it's people willing to embrace the change. The businesses that lean in now are going to have a compounding advantage that will be very difficult to close in five years' time.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? At our annual golf day at The Belfry, the team built an AI caddie with real-time scoring, course hints, and club suggestions for each hole. It meant my score was only appalling rather than shocking, which I'm counting as a win. More seriously, it showed how quickly a well-motivated team can go from idea to working product when the barriers to building with AI are this low.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Within five years, the channel partners who haven't embedded agentic AI into their own operations will struggle to survive, not because clients demand it, but because the efficiency gap versus those who have will, make them uncompetitive on price and speed.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My Garmin. I'm mildly obsessed with the data it gives me on my sleep, recovery, training and feeding that into LLMs for analysis.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Elon Musk as I'm fascinated to understand how his brain actually works; the way he thinks about things and what he thinks is really coming next. Travis Rice, because I'm a huge snowboarding fan. And the author David Eddings as I grew up reading his books so it would be really interesting to understand the back story and

where he got the ideas from.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? “Will challenge your assumptions. Repeatedly. And probably be direct about it.”

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Our own Director of Data and AI, Caleb Mahon. Watching him operate at the pace he does across the breadth of what he's building and the impact it's having for clients is impressive.

H



STUART MARGINSON
Managing Director, Highgate IT Solutions

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Moving up a company size category and still finishing 4th in the Best Place to Work rankings. It's particularly rewarding because it reassures us that we're preserving the culture we've cultivated as we grow.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Achieving ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 certification. We've always focused on quality and security, and formalising those standards is the next logical step in our growth.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Much less these days than in the past. As a self-funded business, cash flow and unpaid

invoices used to keep me awake at night. After 16 years, I've learned that some things take longer than you'd hope and experience has helped me rest easier as a result.

Is AI being over-hyped? No, as with many emerging technologies there's plenty of hype around the edges, yet the underlying impact is real. It will reshape how businesses operate over the next decade and beyond.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date?

Automating the processing of inbound invoices. The system now automatically matches around 95% of invoices, saving significant admin time and allowing our team to focus on higher-value work.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think (and hope) human relationships will become more important as technology becomes increasingly automated. As AI makes products and services more alike, trust, reputation and long-term relationships will matter even more in the channel.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Large language models. They've become a genuine productivity tool, helping me research, analyse and learn faster than ever before, both inside and outside the office.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Based on the last few books I've read, I'd choose Herodotus, Tim Specter and Flight Lieutenant Colin Bell. I suspect the conversation would be fascinating and unpredictable.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? “Beware, unfiltered northerner.”

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Jensen Huang. Nvidia's long-term vision and willingness to invest years ahead of demand have been extraordinary. Many of the advances we're seeing in AI today would have taken much longer without that foresight.

I



LISA HERBERT
Managing Director, Infinity Group

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

There have been many – from the introduction of the new AE regime who have made such an effort to service our clients, seeing our relationships with clients deepen to the point where we're trusted on outcomes, not just delivery specifically with the Pioneer Delivery Methodology – that's been a really proud shift for us. Winning Partner of the Year from Microsoft and hearing them champion Infinity Group has also been something that I am so proud of.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We are making AI part of how we deliver every day – practical, measurable, and genuinely useful for our clients, not just something we talk about. Every one of our roles contribute to Infinity Group's AI maturity and we have been loud and proud in sharing what we know with each other, partners and suppliers.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? How did you know? I constantly worry about growing at pace without losing what makes us good – the clarity, the standards, and the care we put into what we do.

Is AI being over-hyped? No, not in our world. There's definitely noise around it and some of it is superficial, but the real challenge is turning it into something meaningful. Most organisations are still finding their way but when we talk about what we are doing and how our roles and contributions have fundamentally been augmented by AI, this is as exciting as the cell phone revolution (yes, I am THAT age!).

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Definitely using AI to take the manual strain out of day-to-day operational work. It's not glamorous, but it's made a real difference to how our teams work, how we can do more and remember more by collating more and being more relevant without having to sift through the waffle.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

I think the shift to services and accountability will accelerate and partners will be judged far more on the outcomes they deliver than the technology they sell. That means moving beyond delivery into real ownership of adoption, impact, and long-term value.

The real divide will be between partners who can own outcomes and those who can't because selling technology will no longer be enough.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My cellphone and a properly integrated digital workspace – when everything connects seamlessly, you don't realise how much it matters until it doesn't. There is genuine outrage when systems and being able to collaborate optimally are not functioning.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Steve Jobs (he wasn't exactly likeable, but his clarity and conviction were exceptional. I'm curious how his thinking shifted towards the end), Mary Barra (for me, she represents real-world leadership, not just innovation hype) and David Attenborough (mainly

for the perspective. I think he'd be quite good at reminding us what actually matters beyond the day-to-day). Partly for what they've achieved, but mainly for the conversation. I'd be fascinated to hear how they think, how they lead under pressure, and how they make sense of the world.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? “Will ask the difficult questions, usually with good intent.”

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Satya Nadella. He's been very open about the fact that AI capability is outpacing real impact, which I think is an important reality check. The real leadership now is about making it work, not just talking about it.



EMMA HENRY
Co-founder and Director, Inform Team

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Seeing AI move from theory into serious client conversations, and into agentic solutions that change how work gets done. The mood has shifted from “what is this?” to “how do we make this useful, safe and valuable for our people?”

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We want to help more organisations understand what their AI-human workforce could look like, then turn that vision into practical, people-

focused change. That means confident adoption, clear governance and new ways of working that create value.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The pace of change. Clients feel pressure to move quickly, but real progress comes when people, process and governance move with the technology.

Is AI being over-hyped? A little. The headlines are loud, but value starts with context: the right problem, the right use case and the right human input around it. That's when AI becomes useful, trusted and worth the investment.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date?

Embedding Copilot into how we shape ideas, draft content and prepare client work. The time saving helps, but the bigger win is sharper thinking earlier in the process.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

The strongest channel partners will become change partners first and technology partners second. Clients will value the people who can understand their context, adapt solutions around it, and answer: “What should we do differently now?”

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Noise-cancelling headphones. The closest thing to a productivity strategy you can wear on your head.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Ada Lovelace, Billy Connolly and Michelle Obama. That gives you invention, chaos, leadership and a better evening than most panel events.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? “May contain traces of strong opinions, sensible questions and emergency biscuits.”

Which tech figurehead has impressed you most this year?

Satya Nadella. He talks about AI with ambition and pragmatism, but keeps bringing the conversation back to work, value and trust.



MELISSA RAMBRIDGE
CEO, inTEC Group

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Seeing our wonderful 15 businesses coming together as One Team, with one system and a central solution stack, "inTEC Verified". The innovation in the latter just led us to winning a Security Excellence Award – it's always great to see the team's hard work pay off!

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. More targeted, organic growth by deepening our expertise against a clearly defined customer profile – in particular within the education sector.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Maintaining pricing certainty for customers in an increasingly volatile supply chain, particularly as we deliver larger infrastructure projects.

Is AI being over-hyped? Not when it comes to the importance of adopting AI effectively. The bigger question is which organisations will build AI offerings that customers are willing to pay for sustainably.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Integrating AI into our helpdesk has

reduced repetitive tasks and improved triage, freeing our teams to focus on higher-value work while improving both retention and customer experience.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think we'll see a return to more face-to-face business. My hope is that AI removes administrative burden so people can spend more time building relationships, not less.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My coffee machine. With two boys aged four and five, it's less a luxury than critical business infrastructure.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Honestly? I'd invite my closest friends. My knowledge of celebrities is embarrassingly poor, and quality time with people I rarely get to see is far more valuable than a famous guest list.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Batteries always fully charged." (that one has been based on live feedback).

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? I've been impressed with the messaging from Rania Succa (Kaseya) so far this year. Her focus on the combination of customer experience and product quality resonates well with where we want to be ensuring we are honing in on.

JULIE BISHOP
Founder and CEO, IT Naturally

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Signing a new long-term contract with our longest-serving customer. More than anything, it's a sign that they still believe



in us, trust us, and want to continue growing together, and that's something I'm incredibly proud of.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We're focusing on our five core markets and building even stronger relationships within them. We'd rather be known for doing a brilliant job in the sectors we understand than trying to be everything to everyone.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Absolutely nothing. I have complete confidence in my team, and I know they'll always do the right thing for our customers and each other.

Is AI being over-hyped? Some aspects of it certainly are, but I also believe AI will fundamentally change the way we work. We're only at the beginning of understanding its true impact.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our most exciting use of AI has been in cyber security, where intelligent tools are helping us detect threats faster and keep both our business and our customers safer. That's one place where I believe AI can make a genuine difference.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I would love to see responsibility become a competitive advantage. My prediction or perhaps my hope, is that carbon neutrality and Living Wage accreditation become the norm rather than the exception.

WHAT KEEPS ME AWAKE? MAINTAINING PRICING CERTAINTY FOR CUSTOMERS IN AN INCREASINGLY VOLATILE SUPPLY CHAIN, PARTICULARLY AS WE DELIVER LARGER INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS." MELISSA RAMBRIDGE, INTEC

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Wordle! I play it every day, although not through the app because I'd rather not share my data.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Ada Lovelace, because she was a brilliant woman whose ideas were far ahead of her time. Rosa Parks, for the courage she showed in standing up by sitting down. And Emily Davison, whose determination to fight for women's rights changed history.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Warning: Caring too much may result in extreme levels of focus."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? To be honest, I'm still waiting for a leader to emerge who talks passionately about people and the planet as they do about profit.

SCOTT NURSTEN
CEO, ITHQ

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Our biggest high point has been building an internal knowledge base that captures processes, decisions and strategy in one place. It has improved onboarding, sharpened clarity across the business, and given us a strong foundation for AI tools that genuinely accelerate work.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Build a more scalable, more intelligent

business by combining strong documentation, better systems and practical AI. The goal is not hype, but better output, faster execution and clearer decision-making.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Not much, if I am honest. If anything, it is making sure we take the right management and leadership decisions for the team, especially when internal tensions or poor decisions need sorting quickly.

Is AI being over-hyped? Yes, massively. Used well, it is a serious accelerant, but used badly it just produces polished nonsense faster, so the real difference is the judgement of the person using it.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our most successful project has been connecting AI agents to our internal wiki and knowledge structure. It works because the AI is grounded in our real strategy, processes and documentation, which makes it useful, scalable and far more trustworthy.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think the winners will be broader, more multidisciplinary partners, not narrower specialists. As client estates become more interconnected, the real value will come from people who understand how security, data, infrastructure, operations and AI all affect each other.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Truthfully, none.



I love technology, but I can function perfectly well without it, and I have tested that properly by disappearing off-grid for weeks at a time.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Isaac Asimov, Charlie Munger and Bob Marley. One for imagination, one for judgement, and one for soul.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Caution: blunt instrument. Not for those who prefer decorative feedback."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Linus Torvalds. He still represents deep technical integrity, long-term thinking and a belief that software should be built carefully and used for good, which feels more important than ever right now.

J



DAVID DUDMAN
Managing Director, Jigsaw24

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Within the last 12 months we have delivered three large-scale digital transformation projects that were executed exceptionally well and helped our customers see real tangible value from their digital investments.

It was a great achievement for the business, especially considering this was achieved alongside continuing to help our customers navigate increasingly complex technology decisions while growing our well-established services capabilities.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. In 2026 we are continuing to strengthen our position in the market as a trusted transformation partner, specifically by supporting our customers move from AI experimentation to AI at scale, delivering measurable business outcomes rather than proof-of-concept projects.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The pace of technological change. We want to ensure we are continuously investing in the right skills, talent and internal team capabilities to stay ahead of the market while being a market-leading voice that our customers can rely on to advise on technological change at scale – this is a constant priority and a real challenge.

Is AI being over-hyped? I'm not sure it's a case of over-hype. Like any transformational technology there's plenty of hype and, although I am often at the forefront with a level of cynicism, I suspect the level of hype doesn't come close to the level of change or impact we will see over the coming years.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Internally, our AI initiatives have focused on improving productivity and knowledge-sharing across the business to ensure that we are maximising the value our internal experts can provide to our customers.

We've also been embedding a lot of automation across our business to ensure that proposals and contracts can move to the right people at pace, which has allowed the sales team to focus more on customer engagement as opposed to internal processes.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think the distinction between reseller, managed service provider and consultancy and systems integrator will continue to converge, having seen two decades of resellers moving to be more services-focused.

There is also a technological

disruption that is redefining daily operations. The typical service desk and remote monitoring management landscape will see significant changes and adapt as AI develops and continues to integrate in these settings. The MSPs who lead with a consultative, business outcome-focused approach will be the ones who succeed. But this is the space where I see there being the biggest surprises over the next five years.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Noise-cancelling AirPods – the ability to switch off outside distractions to think uninterrupted is becoming a precious commodity. When I'm able to switch off external noise, notifications and information overload, that is when I can deliver my greatest outputs.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Alan Turing, Vivienne Westwood and Rory Sutherland.

These three British people challenged convention in completely unique ways, and the debates that could be had regarding leadership, innovation and human behaviour would be fascinating and something I'd take a lot from.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? As someone on my team once said: "Has an allergy to waffle". If there's a shorter way to say it, I'll probably suggest it. Cut the noise, give me the facts.

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Alex Kendall has been incredibly impressive. He's demonstrating that AI's true value lies in practical, real-world application, not just technical capability.

What really stands out to me though is his ability to anticipate where technology is heading rather than simply responding to where it is today. He backed a fundamentally different approach to AI and autonomous driving when most of the industry was following more established paths.

Showing the conviction to stick with a vision over the long term is a powerful reminder that true innovation comes from challenging

assumptions rather than just making incremental improvements to what already exists.

K



JOHN ARMSTRONG
CEO, Kascade

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Watching Kascade genuinely become Kascade. The rebrand was early 2024, but this last year is where it's felt real – managed services growth in double digits and real distance from our VAR roots. We're not just calling ourselves an MSP anymore, we're operating and behaving like one.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Becoming the go-to Microsoft partner for professional services firms serious about AI – not just licensing Copilot, but genuinely changing how their people work. We also understand that security underpins the whole journey, and having data in the right place is just as critical as the AI layer itself.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Self-funding our transition from VAR to MSP, where the cash benefit of recurring revenue comes far more slowly than the old hardware hit. I'm sleeping better now – past the steepest part of the climb, even if there's road ahead. The MSP model is more financially resilient and builds far more shareholder value, so the destination is worth it.

Is AI being over-hyped? The technology isn't – it's genuinely

transformative. The timelines are. In our market, most clients know they need to act, they're just not sure how. Helping them is the real opportunity.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Building our client-facing Kascade Journey tool using AI-assisted development, after PowerPoint and spreadsheets just didn't cut it. It's live, properly secured, and clients are already getting real value from it. Without AI it would have meant a long development cycle at significant cost.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? The partners still thriving in 2030 won't be the ones who managed the Microsoft stack best – they'll be the ones who joined the dots, with security as a single coherent posture and data as the thing AI actually runs on. AI is only as good as the data that feeds it and the security that protects it. That's not where most of the channel is focused today – it should be.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? The honest answer is AI – but I'm aware that's what everyone in this article is going to say. So I'll say my ultrawide monitor, and leave it at that.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Honestly, I've always

found this question a bit contrived – everyone picks someone obscure to look clever or someone funny for a laugh. I'd just invite three people I actually enjoy spending time with and call it a good dinner party.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "High bullshit detection. Will act on it." If something doesn't pass my sniff test – or the person presenting has previous for things that don't stack up – I'll go into the detail until I understand why. I'd rather ask the uncomfortable question than let something slide that shouldn't.

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Satya Nadella – and not just because we're a Microsoft partner. He has the conviction and drive of a founder-entrepreneur despite running one of the world's largest businesses. Repositioning Microsoft around AI without losing enterprise trust is something I have genuine respect for.

HANNAH BIRCH
CEO, Kocho

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Taking the helm at Kocho and resetting our strategic direction. We've built a new executive team, pivoted the business firmly towards identity and cyber, and continued to grow client trust along the way.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. To maintain Kocho's position as the UK's leading Microsoft identity and cyber security specialist, known for its deep technical depth and exceptional client outcomes.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Making sure we evolve quickly enough. AI, identity and cyber are moving fast, and the biggest risk is standing still.

Is AI being over-hyped? No, but the hype is ahead of the reality. The real value comes when AI is embedded into core business processes rather than treated as a side experiment.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? The development of our Kocho Alira platform, which enables the management of identity for both human and non-human identities.

ARTIFICIAL HYPE?

Partner Leaders had a range of views on whether AI is over-hyped or not; here's the breakdown for those that simply said 'Yes', 'No' and 'Both'.

38

No

5

Yes

23

Yes and no

38

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39

Alongside that, we've been embedding AI across our service delivery to improve automation and client outcomes. It's moved AI from theory into something we use every day.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? We'll see a sharp divide. Partners that specialise, build true IP and embrace AI to meet changing client expectations will pull ahead. Generalists will increasingly struggle to differentiate.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Microsoft Copilot. It's fundamentally changed how I work, from structuring thinking to making faster decisions.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Dame Stephanie Shirley and Freddie Mercury.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Will challenge constructively. Will not settle for average."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Satya Nadella, for translating the AI opportunity into something real and actionable for businesses, while keeping a strong focus on trust and security. A great announcement recently to track on the future of Windows...



FRASER FERGUSON
Founder and Director, Kubenet
What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? There's been a fair few; however, a real high point was hitting 94% MRR, which is a target we've been striving for.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. A signature acquisition. We've completed 2 in the last 12 months and it's given the leadership team a real hunger for growth.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Where does one start? **Is AI being over-hyped?** 100% no. It has the potential to transform both our clients and the way MSP's grow revenues and how we modernise into a true digital office culture. This is just the beginning

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Claude has accelerated our finance function by turning manual, time-consuming tasks into structured, repeatable workflows – from reconciliations and data collation to analysis and month-end tasks. The team now moves faster, with sharper analysis and tighter financial control across the group.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? With tightening regulations and heightened UK third-party vendor scrutiny, the channel could shift from traditional tech resellers to vendor-agnostic 'Digital Sovereignty and Compliance' brokers. It has the potential to increase revenues by supporting and underwriting the cyber-resilience of a client's entire tech stack. There's an opportunity to monetise AI-led data governance and strategic consulting, moving away from relying solely on low-margin hardware or basic subscription and me-too models.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Apple – they rule my life.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Bowie – a hero and crush from nine years old. Billy Connolly – a true comedic genius. Napoleon – I read Andrew Roberts book and the 'little Corporal' was a fascinating character.

Could I ask Judy Dench as well?
If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Take out my batteries please."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Jensen Huang of Nvidia. He's transformed Nvidia and the markets' appetite for AI infrastructure and game changing investments in backbone companies like Nubius & CoreWeave. From the dip to \$75 in February 2025 to stratosphere in just over a year is outstanding.



JEREMY KEEFE
CEO, Kubus

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Working with a great board and Kubus team that share the passion for excellence and focused on growth that has enabled Kubus to acquire two businesses that share the same drive.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Further growth in a global market.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Global economic factors that affects stock shortages and customer pricing.

Is AI being over-hyped? Yes and no. Not a great answer, but I believe a lot of people are talking AI at a basic level and not understanding how, when used properly, it can provide you huge advantages with business outcomes. The issue is around affordability in my view because fully embracing AI has a large £ investment needed.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Using AI to help generate board packs, ensuring the messaging has the right impact in delivering key messages.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I believe you will see a lot of consolidation as businesses double down on their key market strategies and ensure they have the core skills to deliver to their customer needs.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My iPhone for sure. I lost it for seven hours only last week; thankfully I found it – but I was a complete wreck without it.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? I was asked this in a previous interview and don't believe I have changed being a sport nut so it would be Gareth Edwards, Ian Botham and Bobby Charlton.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "He doesn't forget."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? I'm not sure there is a single person for this year; ongoing has to be Mike Norris at Computacenter for the way he constantly delivers and re-invents the strategy ahead of changes in the industry.

L



DANNY MASTERS
CEO, LIMA

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Achieving 'Great Place to Work' certification with an 86% rating.

When your people love where they work, everything else falls into place. We're seeing that in our customer satisfaction scores too.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Driving organic growth while moving the needle on NPS. The two are connected, so does that count as one thing?

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? My head is full of systems, processes and transformation we're working through. When we get it all working perfectly it will be amazing for the business and our customers.

Is AI being over-hyped? I'm not sure it's over-hyped, but most businesses haven't figured out how to make it work for them safely. That's a massive opportunity for partners who understand platforms, data and security.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Using AI to analyse the root cause of recurring tickets. It's helped us to become more predictive, spotting trends and resolving issues before customers even notice them.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Maybe not surprising but I think we're going to see continued consolidation in the market and an increasing number of companies not making it if they don't diversify and modernise their managed services.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Call me old-fashioned but it's got to be the voice call. Customers have my number. My team have my number. If we want something sorting then let's talk it through, rather than playing notification tennis!

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Controversially, Elon Musk, because I just can't figure him out. Winston Churchill, to understand how he showed such incredible leadership during a time of crisis. And Hulk Hogan – he was my favourite wrestler as a kid and I can't escape my inner child!

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "No food or drink after midnight" (like in Gremlins...)

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Russell Horton, [former] CEO of FluidOne. He's taken the business from £20-30 million to over £140 million, built a brilliant culture, invested in charity and education, and has some of the highest NPS scores in the industry. Impressive on every measure. And I don't mind saying so, even though he's a competitor.

N



ALASTAIR RUDMAN
CEO, Natilik

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Celebrating our 20-year anniversary! We are very proud of our 20 years of consecutive, profitable, organic growth and what we have built so far. There's lots more to come!

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Further harnessing the power of AI and automation internally and externally to provide frictionless client experience and provide more productivity gains. There is so much opportunity on both fronts.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Making sure we have happy clients and people. For clients, ensuring our proposition is valuable and differentiated, helping them achieve their outcomes. For people,

making sure we continue to provide an amazing place to work, offer continuous development and place real value on reward/recognition.

Is AI being over-hyped? No, because there are now plenty of proof points where assistive AI, partial agentic or full agentic are having a significant impact. However, because any solution that helps increase revenue, reduce cost, improve security, improve productivity or improve experience is being branded AI, that may result in the term AI being overused.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Natilik has reduced its average time to resolution for clients through our global managed services team by 60% and elevated its services NPS score to 82 over the past 12 months. We have achieved this by continuing to invest in growing our engineering teams and by supporting these experts with the power of AI and automation. Integrating our observability platform, ITSM platform and client portal has provided the foundation for huge AI/automation gains across case management, self service, alert automation, dynamic asset insights, task assignment, service reporting and more.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Evolve or disappear. Maybe this has always been the case but the pace of change means that how you got here will likely not get you to your next destination and certainly not in the same way. Whether that is becoming more of a specialist rather than a generalist, narrowing on a specific niche market/tech stack or changing your go-to market models. I think longer term, clients won't just allow margin gains for partners from using AI and automation and these will soon become table stakes with cost expectations tightening accordingly.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Outside of the predictable Claude Co-Work... Garmin Forerunner to remind me I should be doing some exercise.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Mathew Syed because I think he is an interesting bloke and I could also play table tennis against him after dinner. Jacinda Ardern as a great critical thinker and would critique my ropey cooking wonderfully. Steve Jobs: how would he have fared in the AI era?

The combination of all three would make for some interesting tension and conflicting views on many topics!

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Remove immediately if found on the Natilik annual Kick Off party dance floor. Side effects include an over reliance on the same terrible dance moves."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Michael Truell, the CEO of Cursor AI. A 25-year-old, with no start up experience, who founded the fastest growing SaaS company of all time! Revenue doubling every couple of months. Loved by engineering teams globally, including Natilik. Impactful evidence of AI and automation in practice resulting in crazy growth. Hats off to him and his co-founders.

CHRIS BUNCH CEO, NoBlue2

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Seeing the success of our Spanish business, as it's grown from a small outpost to a leading partner in Southern Europe. It's a bet I'm really pleased to have made.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. The core business is trading well; it's a good time to look at expanding via other routes.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? I sleep like a baby... however, most of my concern is global macro points around whether trade wars, or indeed actual wars, will impact our customer base.

Is AI being over-hyped? Only in some cases. Generally where people are raising money.

AI is a meaningful driver of efficiency



and creativity, and the pace of change is astonishing. Who would have been backing Anthropic three years ago to be where they are today? The next three years will be just as fast paced.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? One of our sales leaders building a new estimation tool using Claude, which has made the process of creating quotes and statements of work meaningfully faster for all involved. More enjoyable for the team, and a better service provided to our clients.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

There will be significant money to be made in fixing botched AI-led implementations from practitioners who didn't understand the basics well enough to steer and review the AI deployments.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Working on Apple hardware. I weep for those lovers of Windows.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Sir Kenny Dalglish – the man, the legend. Gwynne Shotwell – for a non-Elon view of the incredible business that is SpaceX. Sir Demis Hassabis – there's a host of people I could pick on for AI that would be interesting, but I think he's also had a fascinating life generally.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Impatient. Get on with it."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

I half want to say Evan Goldberg for launching a new AI product in a very balanced way, stressing the efficiency it's providing to humans rather than replacing them. However, given the amount of time I spend talking to Claude, I'll have to say Dario at Anthropic – for both an insane cadence of world-class product release, and an astonishing PR machine that constrains competitors while making Anthropic look like the good guys.



PAUL SHANNON CEO, OBT

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Launching OBT's data and AI proposition, and seeing us grow so quickly has been an absolute highlight of any year!

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

Significantly exceeding our business plan projections and shake up the unfathomably staid AI channel world.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Nothing, I sleep incredibly well. Whatever is on my mind before I get in bed, can't be fixed before the morning, so what's the point in worrying about it?

Is AI being over-hyped? Yes and no. Yes from a general media perspective, but definitely not from an impact in business perspective. Consumer AI has been embraced to a spectacular extent, but business AI has a really long way to go. But it is accelerating.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? OBT Grid – our internal and external customer portal. It tracks everything from once a project has been won, through to the customer engaging with their OBT managed service.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Some of the moribund larger players will wither and die once their lack of action over the last five years catches up with them... replaced with agile, customer value-focused partners. I can't wait.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Anthropic Claude, totally revolutionised my work day and personal tasks. Nothing else compares.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Dave Chappelle, Johnny Cash and Stephen Fry.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Beware, highly combustible."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Rene Haas at ARM; the organic growth in a UK tech firm is nothing short of spectacular. He comes across so well in interview too, much lower ego than you'd expect for a person in his position. I love his "Innovation doesn't wait" quote.



CARL HENRIKSEN CEO, OryxAlign

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Achieving our B Corp certification. It's something we'd been working toward for a long time and it represents far more than a badge. It's a formal commitment to the fact that we can be and will be a force for good. For our team, our clients and our partners, it signals what OryxAlign stands for.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Scale! Deliberately and sustainably. We've built strong foundations: the right culture, the right services and the right values. 2026-27 is about taking that to more clients, different geographies and doing it without losing what makes us, us.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Not much, I sleep well. OryxAlign is in great shape, our team is strong, and we're very clear on where we're headed. If I had to name something, it's probably the size of the opportunity in front of us can feel overwhelming at times.

Is AI being over-hyped? The short-term impact is over-hyped, the long-term impact is almost certainly under-hyped. We're in a messy middle period where everyone has announced an AI strategy but few have changed how they operate. The technology is obviously extraordinary, but the transformation takes longer and requires more change management than most vendors and consultants will ever admit.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We're currently mid-project on transforming our service desk operations, and while it's not finished, it's already one of the most promising things we've worked on internally. Early results are encouraging, and it's reinforcing a lesson I keep coming back to which is to start with an operational problem and work backwards to the technology.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think we'll see a consolidation, but not just the usual M&A activity. The partners who thrive will be the ones who've invested deeply in values-led business: sustainability, transparency, accountability to their communities. Clients are increasingly choosing partners who align with their own ESG commitments, and that's going to reshape the competitive landscape in ways most people in the channel aren't fully invested in yet.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My iPhone and MacBook. I'd like to say something more interesting but that's the reality, unfortunately.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Nikola Tesla, Cher and Heston Blumenthal. A visionary who was right about everything but got almost no credit for it in his lifetime, a woman who has reinvented herself for six decades and refused to ever be written off, and a chef who turned science and obsession into some of the most extraordinary food on the planet. The conversation would never end, the menu would be unforgettable and I've already asked Cher to give us a song at the end.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "May exhibit signs of impatience, strong opinions, and an irrational attachment to how things should be done. Steak served anything other than rare will not end well."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Jensen Huang. A man who bet

everything on a vision most people didn't understand for decades and watched the world finally catch up. What he's built is extraordinary and he did it with patience and conviction most leaders talk about but rarely demonstrate.

P



GUY GOLAN
CEO, Performanta

What's been your business high point for the last twelve months? Our new go-to-market focusing on data risk and including the convergence of identity with data and threat. This is the first time our GTM is covering the entire organisation. It obviously includes sales and marketing but also covers organisational structure, KPIs and areas of focus to ensure we are truly client centric and protect humans where data matters most.

Name one thing that your company is looking to achieve in 2026. A high level of profitability, driven by strong growth in both our managed services and consulting practices, and we intend to do so despite navigating a very tough market. It is a combination of financial discipline and strategic ambition that will define our year.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The mental health of our employees, and the responsibility we carry in helping them navigate an incredibly fast-pace changing market and job uncertainty. Our focus remains on maintaining safety for our clients throughout their data risk

journey, which is entirely aligned with our tagline: we protect people where data matters most.

Is AI being overhyped? AI may be overhyped by those who do not truly understand what to do with it, but it is being applied proportionally and purposefully by those who do. We have been on this journey since September 2023, and as a result, we use AI very responsibly across all areas of our business.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our most successful internal AI projects have been our SafeXDR Agentic SOC – Intelligent SOC for Intelligent People. Increase of client centricity and client safety were the guiding principles. As a result, our mean time to detect, respond, contain and remediate is now measured in seconds. Our rules are now dynamic and help clients reduce their business risk.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Surprise, surprise – the channel will still exist, despite what many predict. My belief is that it will evolve into a far more sophisticated channel, enabling clients on their IT and security journeys while maintaining a level of sophistication derived from both the technology and the people leveraging it. The channel will become leaner in headcount but more impactful in outcome, with greater automation, and even the human touch will increasingly be delivered through automated means. I do foresee more blurred lines between VAR, VAD, MSP/MSSP and vendors.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Anything connected to music. I listen to music two to three hours a day. It is an inherent part of my life. Whether it is my phone, the TV, the radio or a turntable, music is non-negotiable for me. It is one of three universal languages that bring people together.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? I would invite them

separately, across three dinners rather than one. That way I can truly invest the time in each conversation. My three guests would be Nelson Mandela, Rassie Erasmus (head coach of the Springboks), and Condoleezza Rice. Three people who have impacted my life in the most profound ways. Notably, I have not chosen anyone from business or tech; I believe the world today needs a little more sanity, and that wisdom drawn from the worlds of sport, leadership, and public service is far more essential for this day and age.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Be careful of the long route if you are not prepared for it."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

There are quite a few, but I will try and keep it close to home. This year I was mostly impressed with by my dear friend Refael Franco, former deputy director general of Israel Cyber Authority and CEO of Code Blue Cyber. Franco brings humility combined with tremendous level of knowledge and expertise in crisis management. And above all, he is the salt of the earth.

CLARE METCALFE Managing Director, Phoenix Software

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Achieving £1bn GII along with welcoming our 500th employee.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

Building on our heritage and focusing exclusively on the UK public sector – it's never faced more pressure with budgets, devolution and mergers, and we intend to be the partner that helps it through.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Listening to my Oura ring, it is eating too late!

As leader of Phoenix, it is my responsibility to ensure the resilience and security of our business, so that our 600 colleagues can sleep at night knowing their roles, and their families' futures, are secure.



Is AI being over-hyped? It depends on what you've read and who you've believed. At Phoenix, we kept it real from the start. We went all-in with Microsoft Copilot across the business, but paired it with adoption change management programmes to make sure we embedded it the right way, for the right reasons – step by step.

We've taken our customers through the same journey: secure data and infrastructure have to be in place before the AI 'icing on the cake' can take effect. When that foundation is right, the impact is a genuine step change – with clearly defined outcomes and expectations to match.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? I feel like I'm being asked to pick a favourite child – but the one generating the most excitement right now is Licensing IQ, our automated peer-checking tool for Microsoft licensing. As the channel partner with the largest number of Microsoft Enterprise Agreements in the UK, getting those right matters enormously. It's delivered real efficiencies for our Licensing Team, but more than that it's surfaced insights and analytics that simply weren't as accessible as before.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? It will be nearer than five years, but I do

believe how we measure consumption will change from devices/user to measurement of business outcomes – so 20% faster processing or 40% fewer support tickets.

Partners will move from selling products and people to selling outcomes, with 'Frontier Firms' being the winners as AI is embedded across organisations.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? If you'd asked me a few years ago, I'd have said my phone or my laptop but now it's Copilot. It's become a bit like a second brain for me: it finds things, connects dots, and saves me from having to remember everything myself, which, given how busy things get, is probably for the best.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Just three? Jürgen Klopp would be first through the door – a leader who proved that sustainable success comes not from ego but from culture, from bringing every person in the building along with you and making them believe they're capable of something extraordinary. The results speak for themselves, but it's the way he achieved them that I find most compelling.

Mary Wollstonecraft would be next; she was championing female social and educational equality back in 1792, and I'd love to discuss how much – and how little – has changed in 230

I DO BELIEVE HOW WE MEASURE CONSUMPTION WILL CHANGE FROM DEVICES/USER TO MEASUREMENT OF BUSINESS OUTCOMES - SO 20% FASTER PROCESSING OR 40% FEWER SUPPORT TICKETS." CLARE METCALFE, PHOENIX SOFTWARE

years. And to lighten the mood, Sarah Millican. I think she and Mary would get on brilliantly.

I'm also sneaking in George Michael as the evening's entertainment. Non-negotiable.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Redhead approaching." **Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?**

An obvious one, but Jensen Huang. To be respected from your engineering peers, a visionary who is able to turn that vision into a multi-billion business model, and continues to invent, re-invent, never standing still.

R



MARION STEWART
CEO, Red Helix

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? The biggest highlight has been successfully bringing Red Helix and Risk Crew closer together to deliver a stronger, more integrated cyber resilience proposition for our customers. For customers, the benefit is a more joined-up experience, with access to a broader range of services that work together to support their security, resilience and long-term risk management.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

To become the go-to partner for organisations looking to simplify and strengthen their cyber resilience strategy.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Making sure we stay ahead of threats and technologies that evolve faster than most organisations can adapt, enabling our customers and their businesses to remain as safe as they can be from the cyber threats that they are faced with every day.

Is AI being over-hyped? The hype is real, but so is the opportunity. The winners will be those who focus on practical outcomes rather than headlines. Companies need to embrace it, and I believe those that don't will fall behind their competitors. HOWEVER, it needs to be embraced safely by organisations, consideration must be given to appropriate levels of governance and security based on the value and risk profile such AI projects have in the business.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Using AI to deliver our Security Intelligence Portal, which allows our customers to see their live security status, specific security threats, and provides real-time AI-based threat hunting. This is a game changer for customers in how they gain insights and manage their overall cyber risk profile.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners will evolve over the next five years? I believe that the most successful partners won't be defined by the technology they sell, but by the business outcomes and risk reduction they deliver. Strong relationship selling will be required. I believe that customers are now more demanding than ever in terms of dealing with knowledgeable salespeople.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Microsoft Teams. It's become the operating system for modern collaboration.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Winston Churchill, Ada Lovelace and David Attenborough.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Warning: Will challenge assumptions and ask difficult questions."

Which tech figurehead has

impressed you the most this year?

Demis Hassabis, because he's helping turn AI from a fascinating technology into something that can solve real-world problems at scale, while also leading important conversations about its responsible development.



MICHELLE SENECAL DE FONSECA
CEO, Redcentric

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Having Redcentric recognised as one of the 100 Best Places to Work in a Big Company in the UK by the Sunday Times has been incredibly rewarding, especially given the organisation underwent a carve out of its data centre business and subsequent successful sale of it during this time. People really show up for each other and our customers so having it acknowledged was a high point.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Our corporate goals are focused on achieving organic growth with new customer logos. As one of VMware/Broadcom's limited number of Pinnacle Partners, we have invested heavily throughout the business in achieving their highest level of certification, are refreshing our infrastructure and focusing on defining industry-oriented business outcomes with a new set of customers.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Redcentric is one of the MSPs that will be governed by the new cyber security regulations coming into existence soon. The regulation itself does not

keep me up – we helped consult on it – but it's the acceleration and proliferation of attacks that AI is driving which concerns me and others in maintaining the first line of defence for UK's critical infrastructure and national economy, the goal of the regulation. In previous companies, I have taken that middle of the night call relating to attacks and it's not an experience I'd like to revisit.

Is AI being over-hyped? I believe AI is following the classic Gartner Hype Cycle and now is trying to escape the 'Trough of Disillusionment'. This means we've all trialled AI, had endless pilots and in some cases have seen promising improvements. However, a large proportion of UK businesses still have a way to go in investing in their basic digital transformation in order to take advantage of the full benefits we know AI can deliver. Moreover, training our workforces, being willing to change workflows and understanding the impact downstream of using the AI tools needs to mature to convert the hype to value.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? The introduction of AI into our service desk operations may not be the most innovative but it's certainly driven the most tangible reward in productivity and performance for us. Intelligence service desk ticket triaging and analytics have improved our response times and the quality of customer interactions, all contributing to our NPS ratings now trending with or above the IT industry average of 55.

// HAVING LIVED IN KANSAS A GOOD PORTION OF MY LIFE, MY TEAMS OFTEN HEAR ME DELIVER COMMENTS BASED ON MIDWESTERN WISDOM AND THE WIZARD OF OZ." MICHELLE SENECAL DE FONSECA, REDCENTRIC

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Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

I'm not sure if will be a surprise but marketplaces, coupled with AI, will become the only route to market for many vendors, shrinking the channel further, finally accelerating the formation of more differentiated or proprietary ecosystem-centric channel partners. The UK channel universe will remain highly fragmented as more try to focus on co-creating customer value in different ways, like those who will be AI trainers not implementers while others will become micro-specialists in a specific technology, industry or business outcome domain. Our chronic shortage of skills in the UK will continue, due to a host of societal issues. So channel partners can become more valuable as customers won't be able to invest the myriad of architects, analysts, engineers and specialists that are required to create these more bespoke solutions.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? We all need our mobile phones and laptops to work but to personally function, I need my portable stereo speaker. I commute from London to Yorkshire and live out of a different hotel each week. I need music to energise me in the morning and to keep me company late at night at work or in the hotel room. I like the music to surround me as opposed to wearing ear buds. So, while a speaker isn't super high tech, its essential gear for me.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? My first few bosses turned out to be famous and unfortunately, all have since passed: Senator Bob Dole, President George H. W. Bush, and President Ronald Reagan. Once they got over the shock of what has been happening in the world since we worked together, I would love to hear their take on the current state of affairs and what can be done to improve it.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? Having lived in Kansas

a good portion of my life, my teams often hear me deliver comments based on midwestern wisdom and the Wizard of Oz. One such warning label for right now might be: "Tornado-tested; unlikely to be rattled by corporate storms."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Gwynne Shotwell, the longtime President and COO of SpaceX. (Hasn't she got a great last name given her role?!) She is the one who actually turns Elon Musk's blue-sky visions into actual rockets, launches and revenues – meanwhile having probably the toughest job in managing upwards as anyone of us could imagine. Her leadership steered the company to its historic IPO, as everyone has seen.

Yet, for me, it has been her ability to consistently manage the company's transition to high-volume, factor-style rocket manufacturing, an industry first, and deliver some 630 launches that set the foundations for where SpaceX is today. She's earned every penny from her IPO!



MATT FRANKLIN-WILSON
CEO, Roc Technologies

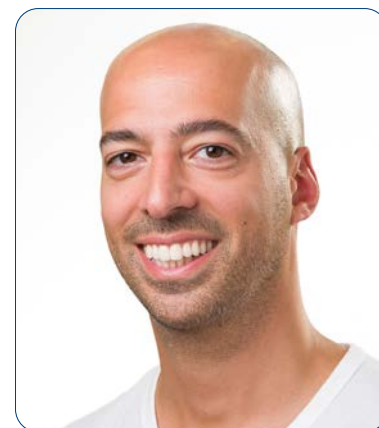
What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Delivering double-digit revenue growth and renewing all of our managed services contracts while increasing the adoption of AI-driven automation. **Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.** In pursuit of our strategy to be the UK's leading

secure AI-enabled MSP, in 2026 we plan to create an AI-enabled workforce with integrated systems where people spend less time on repetitive tasks and more time on innovation, customer engagement, and strategic thinking. **What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader?** Keeping up with the pace of change while maintaining service excellence through attracting and retaining the best talent. **Is AI being over-hyped?** No, it will change the world. I do think it's being under implemented. The real challenge is moving from PoCs to responsible enterprise-wide adoption with clear governance, measurable outcomes, and strong change management. **What's been your most successful internal AI project to date?** Our most successful initiative has been introducing AI-powered knowledge management and productivity assistants in certain areas of the business. By making information easier to access and automating routine tasks, we've significantly reduced time spent searching for information and improved decision-making. For example, the utilisation of AI in

qualifying and responding to customer proposals giving us a higher win rate and reduce bid cost. **Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?** It is a case of transform or die. Successful partners will spend more on AI tokens than they do on employees. **Which tech gizmo could you not function without?** Personally, I am obsessed with my Hume band and the data it provides on my key health and fitness metrics. **Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party?** Maggie Thatcher – what can we do to make Britain great again? Neil Armstrong – to find out if he really walked on the moon. Sir Bobby Charlton – How can England win this year's World Cup? **If you had a warning label, what would it say?** "Light blue touch paper and stand well back! Has an unhealthy obsession with customer satisfaction and continuous improvement." **Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?** Satya Nadella continues to impress

me. His ability to transform Microsoft through a culture of learning, partnerships, and responsible AI leadership demonstrates that technology success is ultimately about people and the outcomes that can be delivered through a shared purpose.

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AMIR NOORHALA
CEO, Saepio

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? We are running Saepio like the fast-growth

cyber vendors we support. It's been great to match their levels of growth. **Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.** We're not looking to achieve anything specific. We have a clear three-year plan, which involves us translating being the best-rated cyber partner in the UK, into being the largest. So, 2026 is about continuing on the execution of our plan.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? It would be nice if we can dial back world tensions from a 'hot war' and into a 'cold war'. Let's go back to threatening war, rather than starting wars.

Is AI being over-hyped? Absolutely not. We are at the start of an industrial revolution and change is now inevitable. The impact it can currently have to your business (outside of coding) is somewhat over-hyped. The AI threat from criminals though, is very real.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? At the moment, our AI focus is on margin efficiency in terms of automating operational processes like renewals. The next focus is on GTM.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I feel like we are entering a consolidation phase in the global channel partner world. Demands are so varied and technical, that partners without scale or technical depth will lose clients and vendors will not want to support them. I believe a lot of small partners will be absorbed into bigger players in the next three years.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? No brainer. The electric handheld thing I use to shave my head. I can't believe I lived without it before. What was I thinking?

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? I like fun dinner parties more than intellectual ones. As such, I'd probably pick some comedians like Bill Murray, Eddie Murphy and Dave Chappelle and then sit back, relax and watch.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Says exactly what he thinks." **Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?** My wife and I invest a lot (ClaireandAmir.com) and we are incredibly impressed by the founder of our portfolio company Higgsfield AI (Alex Mashbarov). He has broken the record for quickest SaaS from \$0-\$300mn ARR. Truly impressive guy.



ROBERT VASSOYAN
CEO, SCC

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? We have delivered a stellar business performance, with double-digit topline and profitability growth, while transforming the business and accelerating the portfolio towards more value and services.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. The implementation of our strategic investment in AI to become a leader in this space. We are completely transforming our internal processes with AI, and bringing it into all of our other offerings, whether it's cybersecurity or digital workplace. **What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader?** The channel is under pressure. With geopolitical uncertainties, there are many things

that could impact the supply chain. What keeps me awake at night is thinking about how we can continue to ensure our customers aren't impacted by these challenges.

Is AI being over-hyped? No.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We've seen quite an astonishing tender response assisted by AI, which has led to major wins. But the real success will come from multi-year business and process repositioning thanks to AI. That's what we're doing with our end-to-end quote-to-cash process.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I predict that channel partners will move towards more AI-powered services. If not, they will struggle.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? I'm trying really hard not to rely on any one tech product.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Claude Shannon was one of the first people in IT engineering to conceptualise the notion of normalising language by predicting the next word. This opened the world of what we see today with LLMs.

Noam Shazeer is the inventor of the LLM revolution, including transformer models and natural language processing. He has played a pivotal role in this new AI revolution.

And finally, St Thomas Aquinas, a philosopher from the Middle Ages. Having these three together to discuss topics like language, intelligence, and how AI, contrary to what people fear, can actually make us even more human, would be beyond rewarding.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Be patient."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Elon Musk. From a pure technology perspective, his ability to leverage tech and AI to do big things that totally change the way the world works. Even if some of the projects fail, his attitude to tackle big problems and succeed is impressive.

IN-HOUSE INTELLIGENCE

Our Partner Leaders talked us through their successful internal AI projects.

One of our sales leaders built a new estimation tool using Claude, which has made the process of creating quotes and statements of work meaningfully faster for all involved.

Chris Bunch, NoBlue2



CatNav – it's the kernel of an idea that will grow and grow. A system to help our people navigate the incredible breadth and depth of the Softcat offering as it continues to expand.

Graham Charlton, Softcat

The one generating the most excitement right now is Licensing IQ, our automated peer-checking tool for Microsoft licensing... it's surfaced insights and analytics that simply weren't as accessible as before.

Clare Metcalfe, Phoenix Software

We've seen quite an astonishing tender response assisted by AI, which has led to major wins. But the real success will come from multi-year business and process repositioning thanks to AI. That's what we're doing with our end-to-end quote-to-cash process.

Robert Vassoyan, SCC



At our annual golf day at The Belfry, the team built an AI caddie with real-time scoring, course hints, and club suggestions for each hole. It meant my score was only appalling rather than shocking, which I'm counting as a win.

Jason Osmond, Forge Technologies

**PAUL STARR****Co-founder and CEO, SEP2****What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?**

Reaching the 100-employee mark and celebrating our 10th anniversary were significant personal milestones for me. These achievements underscore the dedication required to scale SEP2 while remaining a truly People-Powered organisation.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. For the past year and a half, we have been dedicated to developing and implementing agentic AI into our SOC delivery. We are confident that our progress exceeds that of our competitors, and our primary goal is to establish SEP2 as the industry leader in this space.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? As an MSSP, the security of our customers is constantly at the forefront of my concerns. Therefore what keeps me up is that somewhere right now an attacker is being more patient and more diligent than the average defender. They only need to be right once. Across every customer, every night, we have to be right every time, which is exactly why we put agentic triage and human

analysts on the same problem.

Is AI being over-hyped? Rather than being over-hyped, I believe AI is widely misunderstood. Truly grasping its functionality and how it actually operates reveals it to be more transformational than any previous technology. However, that deep level of understanding is essential to making it work effectively for you. This is what we have done at SEP2 and it's making a real impact in our business and services we provide.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? While we have implemented AI throughout our entire organisation, the initiative that brings me the most pride is our agentic AI SOC that we offer to our customers, particularly our specialised triage and detection agents. The true measure of its success lies in the outcomes rather than the technology itself. Our triage agent operates directly on the case wall alongside our human analysts, managing the constant stream of alerts. This collaboration ensures that our human experts can focus their attention where it is truly needed, on complex decisions requiring critical judgment.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel

partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

This is less a prediction than a wish. I'd love to see the channel move towards genuine collaboration between specialist partners and away from organisations 'dabbling' in sectors they don't really understand. The temptation, especially as AI lowers the barrier to entry, is for everyone to claim they can do everything. But a mile wide and an inch deep doesn't serve customers well, particularly in something as unforgiving as security. My hope is that over the next five years we stop seeing breadth as the goal and start rewarding depth: partners who are genuinely the best in their niche, working closely with other specialists rather than trying to swallow the whole stack themselves.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My phone, which I'm not proud of. If I don't have it to hand or the battery dies then I genuinely break out in a sweat. It's mission control, calendar, all comms, the business in my pocket. But I hate what it's become for me. The distraction it causes is the thing I've fought hardest against in 2026. I've been making a real effort to put it away when I'm in a meeting or actually with people. It turns out the most valuable thing the device does is teach me when not to use it. Work in progress, but I'm getting there.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Alan Turing, first. He effectively invented the machine I've built a business on, and I'd want to know what he'd make of AI agents now triaging alerts in our SOC. Then John Lewis, the man who took a thriving business he could simply have pocketed, and instead handed it to his employees. He built the John Lewis Partnership on the radical idea that the people doing the work should share in the rewards, and it was a business obsessed with providing the best service. Finally Sean Lock because two brilliant minds and a lot of big ideas need someone to puncture it all and keep the evening honest. His

humour always got me. An absolute comedy genius.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Approach with caution: may bite. Especially before coffee, and especially if you say 'AI' and 'silver bullet' in the same sentence."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? While there have been several remarkable leaders this year, particularly within the AI sector, Assaf Rappaport of Wiz is the true standout for me personally. The speed at which they built and scaled Wiz is incredibly impressive, as is the fact that they maintained such a recognisable independent brand even after a \$32 billion acquisition into Google.

**HELEN GERLING****CEO, Shaping Cloud**

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Turning momentum into repeatable and recurring growth. Winning well is great, but building a business that can do it consistently is most important.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. To be the partner customers call first when the challenge is complex and the stakes are high.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Complacency. Markets move fast, and yesterday's edge disappears quickly.

Is AI being over-hyped? AI is over-hyped in theory and under-used in practice.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our best use of AI internally so far has been applying AI to enable better operational decision-making – because the biggest gains come from better judgement, faster execution, and less wasted effort. AI is helping us build business in a way we only dreamed of a few years ago.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

I don't believe the most successful partners will be the ones with the biggest catalogue. I think the highest growth will come from those with the clearest point of view, the strongest data and AI capability, and the courage to specialise and deliver brilliantly.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My phone – not because I love it, but because modern leadership is mobile by default.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Fame doesn't impress me in the slightest. I'd go for Jesus Christ, one of my daughters, and Dario Amodei – purpose, a next-gen perspective, and a hard-edged conversation about technology, power and responsibility.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Bring the effort and I'm your biggest backer; bring BS and I'll call you on it."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

The whole leadership at Anthropic have impressed me this year – laser-focused on their business, handling near-vertical growth, and still staying principled under pressure from some of the most powerful institutions in the world.

IAN FODDERING**Vice President of European Global & Strategic Sales, SHI**

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Building a dedicated European Global and Strategic sales team from the



ground up and watching it gain real momentum. While SHI is a global company, the UK arm was very much seen as an extension, whereas now it's becoming a European powerhouse in its own right.

We've gone from largely supporting US flow-down business to originating locally driven opportunities with some of the world's largest enterprises, and being trusted to do so. Seeing our people step up and own that has been incredibly rewarding.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026.

Establishing SHI as a genuine strategic technology partner for multinational clients headquartered in the UK and Europe, not just a procurement channel. That will see us further our client experience and ensure that they perceive SHI a joined-up global organisation, with strong local ownership and accountability. We extend the same level of support that marks SHI out by helping those customers navigate today's tricky macroeconomic issues from the global memory shortages to the strategic adoption of AI.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Talent. Finding, developing and retaining the right people in a market where everyone is fishing in the same pond. Technology is only ever as good as the people behind it, and the pace of change means we need sellers who can

hold strategic conversations, not just process transactions. It might seem ironic but in a very technical field where automation is increasingly taking over, people are still the lynchpin of the business.

Is AI being over-hyped? No, if anything I believe the potential of AI is not being articulated to businesses and societies. The potential is extraordinary, but too many organisations are still experimenting without a clear business case. The winners in 2026 will be those who move past the proof of concept and focus on measurable outcomes. SHI won the 2026 AI Excellence Award precisely because we've taken agentic AI from concept to production and we enable our customers to try out their business use cases and establish that proof of concept in our labs. That, along with the ability to determine RoI, are key to the success of AI.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Using generative AI, specifically Microsoft Copilot and Claude, to automate our sales performance analysis and executive reporting. What used to take hours of manual effort now delivers instant, contextualised insights from our Power BI data, enabling me and my managers to make faster, better-informed decisions. It's not glamorous, but it's genuinely transformative.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Within five years, the traditional VAR will be unrecognisable. Those who don't see the writing on the wall and adapt fast enough will struggle. The winners will be those outcome partners who blend procurement, advisory and AI enablement into one measurable engagement, and SHI is already building for that future. We're enabling our customers to experiment and scale, such as through testing AI use cases in a secure environment before committing to production, focusing on cyber resilience as a core pillar and then building managed services and proactive

threat capabilities around that which go far beyond product resale. And we're offering outcome-led advisory services, which see our solutions architects, cyber specialists and cloud experts guide customers to achieve measurable business value.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My noise cancelling headphones, without question. In a role full of back-to-back calls, travel and the occasional noisy train, they are my instant route to focus. Pop them on, and I can prepare for a client meeting, join a team call, or simply think clearly, wherever I happen to be. Quietly brilliant, and genuinely indispensable.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Graham Taylor: as a Watford Football Club fan, I would love to have the opportunity to speak with the ex-Watford, Aston Villa, Wolves and England manager. The positive legacy he left behind at Watford still lives on today, and his ability to lead a team from the old 4th division to 2nd in the 1st division is the stuff of dreams.

Sir David Attenborough: the voice of the natural world for nearly 70 years. A career spanning every continent and a perspective on our planet, and our place in it, that few could match.

And finally, I would have to say Thai Lee: 35+ years building SHI from scratch into a \$16bn business as a female, minority-owned enterprise. That's a story worth hearing over dinner!

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Caution: Will ask 'what's the plan?' repeatedly until there is one."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Jensen Huang. While everyone else was talking about AI, he was quietly building the infrastructure that makes it all possible. Nvidia's vision has shifted from powering gaming PCs to powering the entire AI economy, and Huang's ability to stay three steps ahead of the market while keeping his teams executing at pace is genuinely remarkable.



GRAHAM CHARLTON
CEO, Softcat

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Hosting 75 Softcatters for a typically mad weekend in Athens.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Growth.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Nothing – if you work hard with good intent in an industry like this, all problems are solvable.

Is AI being over-hyped? No.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date?

Something called CatNav – it's the kernel of an idea that will grow and grow. A system to help our people navigate the incredible breadth and depth of the Softcat offering as it continues to expand.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Not much will change.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Gaming PC with a massive screen (mainly to run F1 sims).

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Senna, Alonso and Verstappen.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "I can't tolerate narcissists and virtue signalers."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Demis Hassabis – combines incredible intelligence with genuine vision.

DAVID MANNERS
CEO, Sumillion

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Winning the King's Award for Enterprise for Sustainability has to be the standout moment and the proudest moment in my career. It recognised not just what Sumillion does commercially, but the values we have built the business around for many years.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. I want Sumillion to help change what customers expect from an IT partner. Price and service still matter, of course, but so should waste, carbon, reuse, charity, ethics and the real-world impact of every buying decision.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Making sure we keep growing without losing what makes us different. Scale is exciting, but only if the culture, ethics and standards grow with it.

Is AI being over-hyped? I don't think so. I believe it represents the single biggest change to our world. However,



the real issue is that too many people are just talking about it rather than using it properly to solve specific business problems.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our most successful internal AI project has been the rollout of Tiller, an AI-powered meeting and revenue intelligence platform. It saves 15-30 minutes per meeting across the sales team and roughly over 400 hours annually, while improving data accuracy, client insights, and overall sales effectiveness.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think customers will start asking much harder moral questions of their IT suppliers. The channel will have to explain not just what it sells and what it costs, but what it wastes, what it saves and what it stands for.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? It has to be my Fitbit (Google Health). My body would feel like I'm missing something if I wasn't wearing it. Checking in on my steps, workout and sleep quality have become part of my identity.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Muhammad Ali because of his mindset and reinvention; Ricky Gervais, because he is brutally funny and actually cares about the world; and David Attenborough, because his knowledge and experiences is second to none.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Not suitable for people comfortable with how things are." I can be loud and direct, but it comes from wanting things to be better.

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Sabih Khan at Apple. I like that Apple's environmental and social initiatives now sit with the person responsible for operations, because sustainability in technology has to be built into supply chains, materials, repair, recovery and real-world execution and not treated as a marketing department project.

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RUTH KENNEDY
CEO, TalkTalk Business

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? We've achieved a massive milestone this year: becoming a fully independent MSP after completing our demerger from TalkTalk Group. This marked two-and-a-half years of work that involved migrating every single one of our customers onto a new billing stack and ensuring our new 24/7 assurance desk and customer support systems went live in alignment with the migration. We also quickly followed this with our acquisition of managed IT and cybersecurity specialist, Planet IT – the sign of much more growth to come.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We'll be building on our position as a standalone MSP by cementing this with customers, activating our new brand and developing (and executing) an achievable but ambitious three-year plan.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The complexity of the change which the industry is going through and ensuring our customers understand this change and how to take advantage of next gen services.

Is AI being over-hyped? I don't believe AI is over-hyped. But balancing a structured deployment with effective governance – without slowing teams down – can be challenging.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? With our CRM migration complete and our data foundations in place, we're developing an AI strategy that we can truly live and breathe. It's not just about driving efficiency; it's about delivering even greater customer outcomes, as demonstrated by the AI capabilities already embedded within our new CCaaS solution.

By completing our own adoption journey first, we can confidently take those lessons to customers and help accelerate their own AI transformations.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Within five years, there will be no such thing as a 'non-cyber' UK IT channel partner. As AI expands attack surfaces and supercharges cyber threats, security will become a core requirement of every channel technology offering.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? I'm a big runner – so my Whoop band is my go-to.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Winston Churchill, Queen Elizabeth I and Brandon Flowers.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Careful what you wish for."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

The industry is full of inspirational talent and people who go above and beyond. This year, if I was to pick someone, it would be the remarkable

**I'M A BIG RUNNER
- SO MY WHOOP
BAND IS MY GO-TO."
RUTH KENNEDY,
TALKTALK BUSINESS**



work and change which Alison Kirby is implementing in BT. The focus and direction seems relentless and is being executed well.

TOM STEPHENS CEO, Techary

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Without doubt, earning our place on the Sunday Times 100 for a second consecutive year. Breaking into Britain's fastest-growing private companies once is hard but doing it two years running, against a higher qualifying bar each time, in the wider context of channel and industry growth rates, while being organic and not acquisitive growth, is our standout.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We are doing a lot – so to pick one is tough! If we have to select one goal for 2026 it's to have a successful launch of our proprietary software platform, that is already in production for some customers. We're working on a migration of all of our customers, as well as a market-wide launch towards the end of the year. It will be the first insight into how we are differentiating the market, and something we will launch publicly, a first for us.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? This could be a comprehensive list! The pace of change and our ability to adapt is probably the biggest thing here. Our industry is moving at a pace where if you stand still, you are instantly behind, and it's a mountain to climb to keep up with progress. This requires a balance between risk and reward, as well as needing to have a great core business.

Is AI being over-hyped? There's a difference between AI hype and AI in production and that gap is widening fast. We get a fairly unique view: some clients have run ML at an advanced level for a decade, while others don't yet have an agentic chat tool in the building. So no, I don't think the technology is over-hyped. It's a permanent shift in how people work.

What does concern me is the public-market AI race, where valuations are running well ahead of the value actually being delivered and adopted across the masses (SMBs are so far behind). It feels like the cyber revolution #2. It took years for the average UK business to understand the risk, and then move to adoption of technology. With AI, and the pace of evolution, it cannot take as long.

What's been your most successful

internal AI project to date? I'll keep the roadmap close, but the one I'm proudest of is also the simplest to state: we've put multiple agentic AI tools into production for every user at Techary, not a pilot, not a licence sitting unused, fully deployed across the business. When we show peers, distributors and vendors what that looks like, the reaction tells us we're ahead; a lot of 'AI strategy' in our industry still amounts to a single Copilot seat. The win isn't any one tool, it's that we can deliver AI capability at scale and in production, internally, in our customer-facing tools, and now in our service offering through building a dedicated AI Practice, we're very excited for progress and innovation in our space.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Since ChatGPT landed in 2022, technology has been changing at a pace the channel simply hasn't matched. Frontier AI is the clearest example: the broad channel still can't transact LLMs through normal distribution the way it resells a Microsoft licence – those remain bespoke, direct deals rather than something your average partner can quote and fulfil.

The framework of a VAR or MSP being able to transact and add value to the IT org has changed. For the first time, to progress adoption of a new technology, there is no transactional path in the channel. My prediction is that 'value' in the channel gets redefined entirely over the next five years. The winners won't be whoever moves the most boxes or licences, but whoever can integrate, secure and operationalise this technology faster than the customer could alone. Plenty of today's partners won't make that pivot.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Now, it's the use of LLMs for productivity. It's changed the way we work, and is a huge productivity gain. When used correctly, this gizmo can feel like it

actually creates additional time in the day, a valuable commodity!

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? I'll go tech-heavy and very predictable on this one: Elon Musk, Steve Jobs and Jensen Huang. I'd just let them talk and create the next tech era – and bet on the outcome!

If you had a warning label, what would it say? Tough to answer – it feels like self-critique! I would say: "Moves fast. Check twice before assuming this is finished."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Dario Amodei. Going up against the company you helped build and then surpassing it in enterprise adoption this quickly that also changed the perception of many of Agentic AI capability. Few people have the conviction and capability to do that.

ANDRE AZEVEDO CEO, Telana

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? We had lots of change over the last year – our maiden acquisition, the merging of two teams (and brand!), the expansion into new technology and

partnership areas, etc. So for me, the proudest achievement(s) must be the ability to continue to hire some great talent, sign significant new customers and ultimately achieve good growth and profitability, while managing all of that.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Nothing groundbreaking, really. I'll have to give you a boring answer to this one. We are just (!) looking to capitalise on the momentum we've built in the last 12 months, continuing to assemble a great team and delivering tangible results for our customers. But we also have ambitious growth aspirations and will continue to look for opportunities to accelerate that.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? This is always an interesting question, because when running a business you get an ever-changing answer. One day it can be a competitive deal and whether we're nailing the right strategy to win it. Another day it can be thinking about delivery quality or about the team. All the way to the bigger questions such as "do we have the right strategy?". And occasionally questioning the meaning of life! On a serious note, anything can be a major worry at any



given point in time, but the antidote to that is to sleep well knowing that you have the right team and the right approach. That will solve most issues.

Is AI being over-hyped? Yes and no. Yes, when you go to events and everyone is talking about “agents interacting with other agents” and other jargon, but no one really knows or explains what these ‘agents’ are doing or what value they are delivering. No, in the sense that this is an undeniable major shift in the industry. The real adoption is in its very infancy and you should ignore it at your own peril. As an organisation what we continually work on is making sure we’re here to capture the opportunity. And I 100% believe we are.

What’s been your most successful internal AI project to date? We have quite a lot internally, most of which also built using AI. From internal processing of documents from suppliers to an entire career development and recognition platform, or a full end-to-end programme management system, we have significantly harnessed its potential. But we’re not done yet; we have some key internal initiatives to accelerate this further.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I’m not sure anything can be that surprising anymore (and I don’t want to look daft if in a few years’ time!), but there’s one thing that is still underrated but will grow significantly in the next few years. And that’s FinOps for AI. FinOps for cloud is largely well understood and managed efficiently these days. AI adds an end-user element (on top of being embedded into software and IT systems, like cloud) and will create exponential proliferation. Proliferation, combined with impending cost uncertainty, will create significant focus on IT and finance teams to predictably manage costs. And more importantly, keep those tightly linked to business value.

Organisations like Telana are well positioned to help.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? I’ll be more provocative here and state that software or hardware alone do not make people more organised nor efficient. A disorganised person with a gadget is still disorganised and inefficient. Most things you have on your laptop and phone are enough to make you incredibly productive and are more than enough. Chiefly among them now is AI (Gemini, CoPilot, Claude – take your pick) which has undeniably accelerated that. But you must make sure you are still organised, you own and review your output, ensure you keep your style in anything you do, and definitely don’t outsource your critical thinking to it!

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? It depends on what I’d like to get out of it. I could invite historical ‘heroes’, such as Nelson Mandela, to learn and absorb their wisdom. Or I could go with some more ‘controversial’ figures, like Machiavelli or Napoleon, to get a sense for who they really were. But I’d also like to have a good night of fun and therefore invite someone like Freddie Mercury (judging by his parties in the movie!). What about one each? It would surely be memorable!

If you had a warning label, what would it say? “Warning: May organise awkward dinner parties.”

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? We have to acknowledge the impressive achievements in space exploration, AI and many other technologies, so lots of top people to recognise in those fields. Running the risk of not answering the question properly, the people that impressed me the most are the technology leaders we work with at our customers. They are facing the fastest-paced set of changes in their careers and are really stepping up to the challenge. So my recognition goes to them. (Obviously, working with Telana really helps!).



MARTIN LAUER
Founder and CEO, The One Point

What’s been your business high point of the last 12 months? We successfully exited one of our NHS-aligned IT MSP investments. It was our first significant ‘investment to exit’ sale that we have completed. It made sense for the business, the buyer and for us.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Like most, we intend on making the most of the AI/automation opportunities, so we have placed significant time and budget into this area, with new qualified hires and tooling. We are exciting about taking these solutions to our customer base too.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Encryption, encryption, encryption! The game of cat and mouse has just taken AI-steroids! **Is AI being over-hyped?** Absolutely not. Maybe the valuations have been over-hyped and we will see a ‘dot.com-bust’ on the horizon, but the technology is a fundamental technological shift; our lives will never be the same again! Issues created by our aging population and the lack of population growth can surely be resolved by harnessing AI and robotics allowing humans to be human.

What’s been your most successful internal AI project to date? Our software investment business Think360 has built a platform called

AI Suite. This platform is aimed at the ports, logistics and manufacturing markets. This platform is transforming how this massive industry operates with customers and opportunities around the globe. Within The One Point we have been busy building telephone handling and ticket triage agents, among other projects.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I am hoping that regulation will force all MSPs to operate to a minimum standard, and in doing so charge for services appropriately. There are too many ‘back-bedroom’ MSP businesses delivering a reactive service that SME Britain value while being blissfully unaware of their exposure. I would like to see regulation forcing change in this area.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My iPhone.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Winston Churchill, Leonardo DaVinci and Marcus Aurelius.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? “Beware: optimist in your vicinity!”

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? It is hard to look beyond Jensen Huang. I like his business philosophy, intensity and work ethic. I also like his ‘rags to riches’ story.

MARK LEE
CEO, TIEVA

What’s been your business high point of the last 12 months? Honestly, it’s been a tough year – and I think a lot of UK partners might say the same, with economic headwinds and general uncertainty making planning feel a bit like guesswork. But looking back, I’m proud we kept building: new cloud services, a growing data practice, and meaningful AI progress. Solid foundations that feel right for the climate we’re in.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. We want

to translate the groundwork we’ve laid in cloud, data, and AI into services that UK organisations actually find indispensable. There’s real demand out there; we just need to meet it properly. **What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader?** Right now, the skills gap – finding and keeping great people is genuinely hard, and getting harder. But underneath that it’s people in a broader sense: making sure my team has the support and clarity they need in an industry that doesn’t slow down for anyone.

Is AI being over-hyped? In the short term, probably – and I think UK customers are starting to see through the noise and ask harder questions, which is actually healthy. The longer-term potential still feels real and possibly still underestimated. Partners who help customers find genuine value rather than just sell the story will be in a much stronger position.

What’s been your most successful internal AI project to date? We continue to identify AI use cases within our own operations. The real benefit has been credibility: when we sit down with our customers, we can speak from real-world experience.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel



partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I think the UK channel will consolidate faster than most people expect – not just through M&A, but because smaller partners will struggle to keep pace with the investment required to stay relevant in AI and cloud. The survivors won’t necessarily be the biggest or the most technical; they’ll be the ones with the deepest customer relationships and the most trusted reputations. In a market as relationship-driven as the UK, that counts for a lot.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Claude. I use it every day – for thinking through problems, drafting, analysing documents, and sense-checking ideas before I share them. I’m appreciating its capability more and more every time I use it, which helps me think about use cases across the business – I’m not saying I couldn’t cope without it, but I’d notice its absence pretty quickly! **Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party?** Jeremy Clarkson would make the list. Love him or loathe him, he’s built an incredible ability to connect with a huge audience while staying authentically himself.

Steve Carell would be there purely for entertainment value – preferably in character as Michael Scott. It’s important to have someone who can make everyone laugh.

And Winston Churchill. I’d love to hear first-hand how he approached leadership and decision-making during some of history’s most challenging moments.

It’s an eclectic mix, but I’m sure they’d all get on.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? “Warning: Values facts over hearsay and evidence over assumptions.”

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? If I had to pick one figurehead, I’d say Jensen Huang, not for the hype, but because Nvidia’s position right now is the result of a very long, very patient bet that many people thought was wrong.

**LEE BUTLER**

Managing Director, Town & Country Communications

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Merging our comms company with an IT company to allow the full comms package.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Supply multiple products to our existing clients.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Maintaining maximum customer satisfaction and retention.

Is AI being over-hyped? I can see the benefit of AI for efficiency but we will be continuing to run our business with a personal and human touch.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We have not even attempted to integrate this into our business.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I have no idea how this will all pan out but I think keeping it simple and not over selling feature-rich products will generate more customers.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? WhatsApp.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Roger Moore, David Bowie and Billy Idol.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Keep it simple or I will lose interest!"

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Mark Zuckerberg because of the Meta glasses. I do not think these are for everyone but I have seen the benefits of these glasses for one of my customers that is blind and another with multiple sclerosis, and it is a game changer.

**PAUL BOLT**

CEO, Transparency

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Winning Microsoft Partner of Year: one award, 11 years in the making and everyone who has ever been part of Transparency has contributed to the award.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Scaling a business while maintaining what made it great in the first place.

Is AI being over-hyped? No – this industry loves innovation, so it's noisy. The big challenge is getting past the noise to real-world ROI.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We have 3x more agents than employees running, in various states of maturity. The big win is not one project (though there are many great examples) but frontier-firm-thinking from all depts: that is the AI project.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? We have talked about add value or die for decades. Now, it's fundamentally challenge your business model (before

your customers do!) or die. I think a select few will share the spoils.
Which tech gizmo could you not function without? Copilot Researcher.
Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Amelia Earhart, William Shakespeare and Elvis Presley.
If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Caution: Prone to obsessing over ideas."
Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? On a global stage, it's hard to look past Satya Nadella. But with a UK hat on, Mike Norris continues to do an amazing job at CC and Brendon Mooney at Kainos. I love UK success stories; we should celebrate them more than we do.

SIMON WILLIAMS

CEO, Trustmarque Ultima

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? The merger – bringing together 1,000 incredible people to deliver more value to our customers.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Arriving at Magazine London on 17 September and seeing the new Trustmarque Ultima brand for the world, to see at our annual Fusion event. That will be special!

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The speed of change in the tech industry has been increasing each year but in 2026, AI has moved at lightning speed. We have thousands of clients who rely on us to get the value from their tech but also to ensure it is secure and governed successfully.

Is AI being over-hyped? No. The technology is moving at lightning speed. We have embedded AI into our day to day, but we know some customers are broadly behind the curve. We need to help our clients absorb the tech into their ways of working, deliver the value and successfully govern.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? We

started our AI journey on sales, and the uptake has been fantastic. There is now a catalogue of skills and agents supporting our entire salesforce.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? I see the channel increasingly moving into the SI space. The technology is evolving to such an extent that a lot of the value can be delivered without an SI.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My Moleskin Smart notebook. I like handwriting notes and it feels more natural and present in a meeting than typing but has all the backup/search/saving capabilities.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Stephen Fry, Nelson Mandela and Michelle Obama.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Kindness costs nothing."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year?

Satya Nadella – MSFT-AI and use of Anthropic is genius.



U

**WARREN DAVIES**

Founder, Chairman & CEO, Utilize

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Seeing the trust our customers place in us reflected in the way they've grown with us. Several long-standing relationships have deepened significantly this year, with businesses bringing us closer into their strategic planning rather than treating us purely as a supplier.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Improve on our Best Companies rating from a 1-star to a 3-star. By working together, and focusing on improvements, we can make our company an even better place to work for everyone.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The pace of change is relentless, and our customers are under real pressure to keep up. We see our role as cutting through the noise helping them focus on what will actually move the needle rather than chasing every new development.

Is AI being over-hyped? The technology can genuinely deliver, but the way it's talked about rarely matches how it actually works in practice. Real results come from applying AI to specific problems with clear goals and proper guardrails, not from getting excited about the latest product launch.

What's been your most successful

internal AI project to date? We're starting to see some results applying AI to support call data to pick up on customer sentiment in real time via voice and email. Rather than waiting for feedback after the fact, we can identify when a customer is becoming frustrated during a call and get the right person involved straight away. It's still early days, but it's already helping us catch and resolve issues faster and that immediacy makes a real difference to how customers feel about working with us.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years?

Success in the channel over the next five years will have less to do with how broad your portfolio is and more to do with how well your customers know you. When things get complicated, people turn to whoever they trust most, and that relationship isn't built on product catalogues.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My phone, but not for the reasons you might expect. Without it I can't authenticate into anything, so in a world built on strict security, it's become the key that unlocks everything else.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? I can't answer this seriously so it's got to be Margaret Thatcher and Arthur Scargill, with John Cleese to commentate. The first two would be at each other before the starters arrived, and Cleese would spend the whole evening making it worse while pretending to be the voice of reason.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "No fluff, no jargon, no waffle." Too many businesses in this industry tell customers what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. We'd always rather have an honest conversation, even an awkward one, than say all the right things and underdeliver. Our customers deserve better than that.

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Elon Musk, reluctantly. The SpaceX

IPO was an eye-watering number by any measure, and pulling that off while running several other companies simultaneously is either genius or madness, possibly both. As a business story it's hard to look away, even when you want to.

V



DINO COOPER
CEO, Viadex

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months?

Completing our MBO from our parent company in December 2025 – who subsequently entered administration in February. Fortune favours the brave and it is said that the sun shines on the righteous.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. To be the partner other partners call when the deal goes somewhere they can't follow. Make Viadex the answer whenever a globally distributed client breaks the mainstream channel's model.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Partners facilitating cross-border HPC deployments without understanding GPU export control obligations under ECCN 3A090. The channel is sleepwalking into serious compliance exposure. That, and whether I replied to that email.

Is AI being over-hyped? Software productivity claims? Massively. Infrastructure demand? Not even close to hyped enough. Jensen Huang was right and everyone else is catching up to a bet he made a decade ago.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Asking Claude whether AI is over-hyped and getting a very confident, well-structured answer. Genuinely impressive. Whether it was right is another question entirely.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Half the channel will rebrand around AI without meaningfully changing what they do. The other half will quietly get on with solving real problems and wonder why they didn't shout about it more. The winners will be obvious in hindsight and invisible right now.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? My iPhone. I run a business across a dozen time zones. If I had to choose between it and my laptop, the laptop is gone without a second thought.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Edmund Burke, Margaret Thatcher and Keir Starmer. I'd love to watch Burke explain his speech to the Bristol electors to the other two and see which one looks more uncomfortable. I'd keep the seating plan careful. Probably.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Will identify the edge case. Will build a company around it. Do not attempt to convince him the mainstream option is fine."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Jensen Huang. A decade-long bet on GPU compute when the consensus said CPUs were fine, with the conviction to stay the course through all the years it looked wrong. Everything we're deploying now is the downstream consequence of that stubbornness. Respect.

// FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE AND IT IS SAID THAT THE SUN SHINES ON THE RIGHTEOUS."
DINO COOPER, VIADEX

W



EMMA CARTER
CEO, WestSpring IT

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Building WestSpring IT on stronger business foundations, enabling us to grow and change while keeping our people and clients front and centre. Growth is important of course, but I am most proud that we've made good (and occasionally difficult) decisions without losing sight of our values or the relationships that make the business work. Human touch is still the most powerful business tool.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. Growth, but sustainable growth with purpose. Not growth for its own sake. We want to work with more of the right clients, do more of the right work, and keep building a business that's commercially strong without compromising on values. The best clients for us match our values and ethics, and see technology as an enabler for real change.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? Honestly, it's culture drift. Making sure we don't lose what makes us good as we grow, especially not slipping into a culture where people feel they have to work all hours to succeed or wait for permission to get things done. I'm a big believer in trust, backing people to make decisions, and protecting that as we scale.

Is AI being over-hyped? No but it's clear there is a lot of fear, and A LOT of uncertainty around it. AI is not new,

but it feels like it is being used as the latest buzz word (or revenue generator in unscrupulous hands), rather than a genuinely useful business tool. I like to think of AI more around its power of automation – saving time, delivering efficiencies and improving consistency – but it isn't a substitute for judgment, trust or human relationships. I honestly believe companies that forget that will come unstuck.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Small, practical applications rather than a big shiny project. We've been able to use a mixture of automation, CoPilot and AI to reduce repetitive admin tasks, business (not technical) documentation, and sentiment scoring. The win isn't 'doing more with less'; it's freeing people up to do better, more valuable work, that requires brain power.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? Given my previous answers I don't think this will be a surprise, but I think the partners who win over the next five years won't necessarily be the loudest or the biggest – they'll be the ones clients trust most. As more activity gets transactional, automated and AI-driven, human interaction and authentic brand voice will become more important. Clarity, honesty and real relationships will become even more valuable in the channel than they already are.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? From a tech perspective I'm not interested in gimmicks; I like technology that helps people communicate better, work smarter and get things done – and no one will ever convince me that Microsoft 365 doesn't nail this. However, I own being an old-school note taker – using pencil and notebook – and I am lost when I don't have that to hand during the working day.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Radia Perlman, because she changed the world of tech without the ego. Deborah Meaden, because she's sensible, direct and commercially

astute (and I love her 'Female Invest' contributions). Victoria Wood, because life's too short for a dull dinner party!

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Getting 'shit' done is my motto. Some people struggle with that – both my declaring it, and what is needed to get it done. And, if you hadn't guessed, I'm a swearer!!"

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? I'm less interested in tech celebrity and more interested in leaders who turn innovation into something genuinely useful. The people impressing me most are the ones making technology practical, accessible and commercially relevant rather than just noisy.

X



SHERRY VASWANI
CEO, Xalient

What's been your business high point of the last 12 months? Seeing the trends we anticipated start to play out. As a specialist in identity security, secure networking and managed services, we saw early the shift to machine identities, the pressure on critical infrastructure and growing concern around post-quantum security.

Those issues are now very real for our clients, and it's validating to see our early focus translate into deeper, more strategic relationships.

Name one thing your company is looking to achieve in 2026. To be the partner that customers turn to as the attack surface expands into AI,

non-human identities and operational technology. Security is no longer just about people; it's about machines and critical infrastructure too.

What keeps you awake at night as a partner leader? The pace of change. Customers are navigating AI, cyber risk, regulation and cost pressure all at once. The challenge is switching off when there's always another problem to solve.

Is AI being over-hyped? Yes and no. The hype suggests everything is already solved, which it isn't. But the shift is real and significant. The priority now is governance, because control must keep up with pace.

What's been your most successful internal AI project to date? Using AI to remove operational friction. Our AI Ops platform, MARTINA, is a good example, spotting issues faster, improving resilience and giving better insight. That's where AI delivers real value.

Can you share a surprising prediction about how UK IT channel partners or the UK IT channel will evolve over the next five years? The focus will move firmly from products to outcomes. Customers will want partners who can simplify complexity, especially as AI reshapes how budgets and effort are allocated.

Which tech gizmo could you not function without? AI assistants. They don't replace thinking, but they accelerate it. At our level of complexity, that's becoming essential.

Which three famous people, dead or alive, would you invite to a dinner party? Leonardo da Vinci, Steve Jobs or Sam Altman, and Robin Williams. Creativity, curiosity and someone who keeps it human.

If you had a warning label, what would it say? "Low tolerance for endless slides. High expectation for action."

Which tech figurehead has impressed you the most this year? Sam Altman is the obvious name, but Dario Amodei stands out. He combines pushing AI forward with a serious focus on safety and governance.

That balance will define who earns long-term trust in this space.

LEADER INDEX

Foiz Ahmed Constor Solutions 25	Howard Hall DTP 30	Ciaran Rafferty ARO 14
Keith Ali Creative ITC 25	Neil Hall Focus Group 33	Malek Rahimi BDR 15
Paul Allen AHEAD 11	Andrew Harman Academia 10	Melissa Rambridge InTec 36
John Armstrong Kascade 38	Steve Harris CloudClevr 21	Stephen Richardson Digital Origin 29
Craig Aston Celerity 19	Carl Henriksen OryxAlign 43	Alastair Rudman Natilik 41
Andre Azevedo Telana 55	Emma Henry Inform Team 35	Nicola Saner Chorus 20
Jay Ball Flotek 32	Lisa Herbert Infinity 34	Clare Satchwell Cobweb 22
Gavin Bell Econocom 31	Simone Hindmarch Commercial 23	Michelle Senecal de Fonseca, Redcentric 46
Hannah Birch Kocho 39	Ian Hudson Committed 23	Paul Shannon OBT 43
Julie Bishop IT Naturally 36	Jeremy Keefe Kubus 40	Roy Shelton Connectus 24
Paul Bolt Transparity 58	Ruth Kennedy TalkTalk Business 53	Paul Starr SEP2 50
Sara Boltman Butterfly Data 17	Martin Lauer The One Point 56	Tom Stephens Techary 54
Chris Bunch NoBlue2 42	Mark Lee TIEVA 57	Marion Stewart Red Helix 46
Richard Burke Cisilion 21	David Manners Sumillion 53	Hege Store Advania 10
Lee Butler Town & Country Communications 58	Stuart Marginson Highgate 34	Barney Taylor Air IT 11
Emma Carter WestSpring IT 60	Danny Masters Lima 41	Richard Thompson ANS 13
Graham Charlton Softcat 52	Clare Metcalfe Phoenix Software 45	Robert Vassoyan SCC 49
Dino Cooper Viadex 60	Sam Mudd Bytes 18	Sherry Vaswani Xalient 61
Rob Davies BCN 15	James Napp Bechtle 16	Mike Wardell Charterhouse 20
Warren Davies Utilize 59	Amir Nooriala Saepio 48	Penny Williams CDW 19
David Dudman Jigsaw24 37	Mike Norris Computacenter 24	Glen Williams Cyberfort 26
Fraser Ferguson Kubenet 40	Scott Nursten ITHQ 37	Simon Williams Trustmarque Ultima 58
Ian Foddering SHI 51	Jason Osmond Forge Technologies 33	
Matt Franklin-Wilson Roc Technologies 47	Alan Paton Beyond 16	
Yolanta Gill European Electronique 31	Simon Pickering dbfb 28	
Helen Girling Shaping Cloud 51	Manny Pinon Ampito 13	
Guy Golan Performanta 44		

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