

# Open all hours at customer convenience

*The 24-hour society is overloading IT infrastructure, but resellers can turn a headache into a range of opportunities, claims Ben Davies*

Technology, and in particular mobile connectivity, is changing the landscape of our business and personal lives. Providers of goods or services are adapting to consumer demands for purchasing opportunities at times convenient to them. You only have to look at supermarkets, which now offer online shopping alongside home deliveries.

IT infrastructure has been pivotal in this change to a more customer-driven environment which businesses use to jockey for more market share. Once more focus is put on consumer needs, improvements need to be made across the business to ensure all points of engagement are both relevant and valuable. Such improvements may require extensive investment in IT systems and ongoing support of the related infrastructure.

This is true in the public sector as well as private organisations. Increasingly, we are seeing public sector bodies under more pressure to provide services outside office hours. Lately, the cost-cutting measures in a nationwide austerity programme have added increased challenges. Never before has the IT function across the public sector been asked to deliver so much capability.

Taking this into account, and with more front-line and back-office functions outsourced, managing IT and its support across the public sector has become more complex, adding more pressure at a time when simplicity and functionality are required to meet consumer demand. This is more than a break-fix issue. It extends to all areas of IT management, from managing system capacity for web services to identifying consumer trends, technology advancements and resource availability.

When things go wrong with IT systems — as they do from time to time — it can be expensive. Depending on whose survey results you read, datacentre outages, for example, can cost anything from £3,000 to £9,000 per minute. Therefore, the team should respond as quickly as possible.

Our 24/7 service desk has data suggesting that out-of-office calls across the public sector may have increased by 45 per cent over the past three years. So,

taking the datacentre outage example, an already expensive issue could become even more costly to fix in future. This is why I think resellers need to act now to provide workable, around-the-clock support for their clients.

When it comes to selecting strategic partners, resellers need to do due diligence to address the key issues their public sector clients are facing. They should be asking what services they need, how to future-proof their infrastructure, and how they can move up the value chain.

A better service-level agreement (SLA) is one way to increase network availability and enhance your service proposition. A four-hour break-fix SLA — two hours to site and two hours to fix — is fast becoming the norm. Being able to include a multi-vendor, multi-technology feature reduces valuable administration time and costs for the customer.

Also, resellers should not be afraid to negotiate favourable partner support terms that could drive efficiencies through agreed KPIs.

Quality standards, particularly ISO, are often ignored. But there is a reason why ISO standards are challenging: they drive improvement and benchmark service excellence. Working with companies with the right certifications can reduce risk.

It also makes sense for resellers to consolidate as many of their clients' services under one support umbrella as possible, with a consistent framework agreement that simplifies administration and avoids multiple vendor arrangements and terms. Partners should obviously also keep abreast of emerging technologies and their possible effect on the enterprise. This is where future opportunities lie.

Just about every reseller we speak to wants to move up the value chain, so a partnership arrangement should be just that: a partnership. The public sector might be behind many parts of the private sector when it comes focusing on the end-user consumer, but it will not be long before every service across its IT infrastructure needs to run at the right capacity around the clock. Resellers with the right approach will take full advantage.



## CAREER CV

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