Leading the way

The channel has a lot to gain from helping partners on the road to SD-WAN
Here’s to a happy new year for the channel

Here we go again. A fresh year that should see some big changes, with technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine-to-machine (M2M) learning and the internet of things (IoT) all moving a further step along the maturity curve.

There is also the long-awaited moment when the UK is scheduled to leave the EU at the end of March, and there will be plenty of politics to get through in the first three months of the year. Predicting what will happen there is difficult, so let’s just look at what the next 12 months hold for MicroScope’s readership.

For the channel, the main thing is that the positive momentum of the past couple of years continues and those that are able to offer a high level of service and support are rewarded for doing so. The previous year was largely positive for most of those operating in the channel. It has felt as if the move by customers towards embracing digital transformation will ensure that those good times keep rolling. Let’s hope so, because it would be a tragedy if progress was derailed.

This year will see MicroScope celebrate its 37th birthday, and as it has grown up and started to move towards middle age, a few things have become clear.

Firstly, the channel is alive and well, and all those who have claimed that its future is in doubt must surely now fall silent. Secondly, the future is evolving and those running channel businesses are professional, ambitious and are operating some of the most important businesses out there.

The pressure is on to change and move to services – and there cannot be many who will not move further along that road this year. It will be a channel partner that can guide a customer to the promised land and it will be a partner that can turn all of the hype and vendor spiel into a working reality. Good luck to them – and good luck to us all this year.

Simon Quicke, editor
Commvault channel chief delivers on vision

Early in 2018, Commvault’s Owen Taraniuk talked about how he planned to make life better for partners and change the approach the company was taking – and he has been true to his word, writes Simon Quicke.

When Commvault’s channel chief talked about increasing support to resellers as one of his main aims after taking up the job, there might have been some who thought he was reeling off the usual clichés about helping partners.

But almost a year later, there has been real change at the data management specialist. Its ambitions to put the channel more at the centre have had a profound effect on both its partnership strategy and internal sales approach.

Owen Taraniuk, Commvault’s head of worldwide partnerships and market development, was given the channel role at the end of January and talked about it being a year of partner investment.

In an update on the progress made in 2018, there can be few doubts that Taraniuk meant what he said at the start of last year. One of the major tasks was to change the company’s internal sales structure and move rewards around working with partners. Commvault has drawn up rules of engagement and made it clear that sales reps who do not adhere to these will not be rewarded.

“Our customer approach had been somewhat hybrid because we had so many sales people in the field working alongside our partners and we were looking to become a partner-driven organisation,” he said. “The approach we were going to take to that was by migrating a lot of our people and their goaling and their role structures to being partner focused and partner facing.”

There has been progress on that, with more than 65% of staff now in partner-facing roles. It has also recruited more executives in channel roles, with a head of cloud and service providers and a head of distribution strategy as the next posts to be announced.

Reducing complexity

The next step was to make life easier for partners by reducing some of the complexity, with the number of products going down from 10-plus to just four, for example.

The partner programme was revised to make it easier to obtain business development funds and the firm launched its Partner Success Desk, which has been designed to support resellers with a specific helpdesk that can speed up quotes and answer queries.

“We were looking to realign a lot of the resources as a corporation into direct supporting roles for partners and embarking on a range of measures to simplify and reduce complexity,” said Taraniuk. “We wanted to shift from being a company that wanted...
people to sell Commvault to being one that provided all sorts of value, where it made sense for people to utilise Commvault to help their core selling motions, so it would add value.”

That desire to be seen as part of a wider solution has been one of the main challenges because it has involved adapting a mindset around how Commvault sells itself. The focus is now on being a key plank in a larger solution sale.

“It may previously have been about trying to convince a customer or a partner to sell Commvault,” said Taraniuk. “I have never seen that as our value proposition. The value is there for the customer, but when we are engaging more broadly with our customers, it has to be about how we augment what they are doing. How do we create momentum, velocity and longevity in the account? How do we create margin? And how do we do that by aligning to the partner’s core selling proposition?”

**Much wider channel base**
Commvault has alliances with the likes of HPE, NetApp and Cisco and so has got its products to a much wider channel base.

“We see Commvault having the potential to be a common thread and an architectured layer,” said Taraniuk, adding that the opportunity around data management is significant for the channel.

He said partners can expect 2019 to involve Commvault talking more about its “X-as-a-service” approach as it continues to react to market changes.

A term report card on its progress so far would be a positive one, and in its last earnings announcement, the CEO said Commvault was enjoying unprecedented pipeline growth with partners.
Security is a key driver for software-defined wide-area network interest

The channel might have thought that talking about cost savings was the way to spark an SD-WAN conversation into life, but its security benefits are what resonate the most. Simon Quicke reports

Resellers positioning software-defined wide-area networks (SD-WAN) might want to tone it down on the cost savings pitch, with customers keener to hear about how adopting the technology will improve their security.

The technology has been pitched as a way to save money through lower operational costs, as well as a way to improve management and capability proficiency, give end-to-end network visibility and improve security.

It is this last point that resonates with customers, with TechTarget research indicating that improving security posture and reducing risk is the number one driver for firms looking at SD-WAN. This followed in priority with enabling a cloud infrastructure with SD-WAN, and the desire to enjoy lower operational costs.

Zeus Kerravala, founder and principal analyst at ZK Research, said the findings of the research show that the WAN has not fundamentally changed in decades, and SD-WAN came with the promise of lower cost and more agility.

“The drivers for SD-WAN have really changed and security has bubbled up to the top. Over the past few years, there has been a lot of focus on cost savings,” he said.

A quarter of customers quizzed by TechTarget were using SD-WAN, and 44% were either in pilot or planning to roll something out in the next two years.

However, the results show that a third of respondents have no plans around using the technology, and TechTarget research uncovered some of the reasons as to why. These include a lack of skills and expertise, which has created a barrier to adoption, as well as the perceived high costs of SD-WAN and the cost of upgrading and migrating from legacy hardware.

A mission to educate
According to Kerravala, the lack of knowledge surrounding SD-WAN presents an opportunity for channel partners. He warned that investment from partners around ensuring they could provide support had to be made.
With some customers expressing uncertainty about the return on investment (ROI), struggling to get executive buy-in and, in the case of 11% of respondents, the belief that there was “no business need to deploy SDN”, the size of the education mission for the channel has become clear.

Kerravala sees networking as the foundation for digital transformation, which is a topic currently dominating most channel discussions, but he believes there is still more to be done to get that message across. “There is some education needed in the market to tie networking to digital transformation,” he added.

**Security strength**

The message about selling on the strengths of security has not been lost on vendors on that side of the industry. An increasing number of players are starting to talk about SD-WAN, with WatchGuard the latest to make a solution available for partners to take out to market.

Brendan Patterson, vice-president of product management at WatchGuard, said it made sense to add SD-WAN to the layered security services it already offered.

“Businesses are looking to leverage SD-WAN technology to reduce opex [operational expenditure] and support better user experiences on the network,” he said. “As threat actors continue to leverage advanced cyber attacks, adding these new capabilities to our services offers the best of both worlds by driving down the cost and complexity of SD-WAN deployments, while also protecting branch sites with industry-leading security.”

>> We assess the current SD-WAN options for enterprise CIOs and network managers
The managed services market is growing quickly, predicted to expand from $138bn in 2016 to $256bn by 2022. That’s the upside. The downside for managed service providers (MSPs) is that this growth is creating a lot of competition, as new players enter the space and try to gain a foothold.

To distinguish themselves, MSPs must be creative in the services and value that they deliver. One way to do this is by offering cloud-based storage as a service (STaaS), which solves a variety of challenges for customers, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Data storage is already a major inconvenience for organisations and it is set to get much worse. By 2025, data volume will be close to 1,000% higher than it is today. This is especially a problem for SMEs, which are drowning in the tsunami of information they gather. Data is relentlessly flowing to organisations of all sizes, but SMEs in particular are finding it extraordinarily difficult to keep their heads above water.

Once upon a time, SMEs could simply buy more hardware to meet their data storage needs, but that is no longer an option. The volume of data has outstripped their capacity to purchase new hardware and disks. They just can’t afford it. What is more, these companies are typically understaffed in their IT departments – assuming they have one in the first place.

The bottom line is that SMEs have reached a point where it becomes extremely challenging and expensive for them to deal with the information overload. They need help and they need the right solution. That is where a value-added STaaS offering comes in, because it can help SMEs to meet their storage needs and...
grow their business. SMEs can reap game-changing benefits from a robust, scalable storage solution that eases the management headaches associated with traditional storage.

For MSPs, there is a big business opportunity to deliver this service to SME customers. With storage as a service, MSPs can enable SMEs to access high-quality, infinitely scalable storage. Better still, they can give SMEs the flexibility to pay only for what they need, when they need it, without incurring any up-front costs.

**The deployment of STaaS means SMEs can easily scale their storage requirements up or down as their capacity requires**

**Florian Malecki, StorageCraft**

The deployment of STaaS means that SMEs can easily scale their storage requirements up or down as their capacity requires. It is a very attractive proposition for a growing business: storage at a price that is significantly lower than the cost of owning and maintaining an in-house storage infrastructure.

But low cost and flexibility are not the only reasons why storage as a service is increasingly appealing to SMEs. New data privacy laws, such as the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and other nation-specific regulations that prevent data leaving the country, are putting stringent data storage requirements on businesses.

Even the smallest businesses must now comply or face stiff, perhaps ruinous penalties. Thus, a third value that MSPs can offer is to help SMEs to store and manage their data better and remain in compliance with rules such as the GDPR.

Clearly, the market for STaaS is strong. But for the typical MSP, which itself is likely to have a rapidly growing business that offers a variety of services to customers, it is probably not practical to build out its own sophisticated storage infrastructure.

**Choose the right vendor**

This means that if the MSP wants to offer the very best storage service to customers, it will have to choose the right storage vendor for its business. Here is what you should look for in a vendor.

**Ease of use**

This factor is crucial. If you are an MSP, you are probably already stretched to capacity and you don’t have spare resources to allocate to the task of deploying and managing your storage service. But you don’t have to.

With the right storage solution, such as scale-out storage appliances, you can simply plug and play with the ability to “bring your own disks”. Scale-out storage allows you to mix-and-match drives of different capacities and types (SAS, SATA) in the very same bays and with zero configuration. This means no RAID, volume or LUNs to configure.
These scale-out storage solutions give you the power to manage the storage needs of your customers in any location, from any browser so you spend less time managing storage and more time driving strategic initiatives.

High scalability
There are MSPs that get engaged in data projects that, suddenly, require a much larger team and a new budget because they didn’t realise that customers’ data needs were going to grow so rapidly and become so unwieldy. But there is a better way.

Choose a highly scalable data storage solution that keeps pace with customers’ data growth, which is often more than 100% a year. The right storage solution will enable you to cost-effectively add any number of drives, any time and in any granularity, to meet the storage requirements of your customers. In addition, you can grow your global storage pool with zero configuration and no application downtime.

Intelligent analytics
Look for a self-organising storage solution that applies analytics and machine learning to the management of information. Ideally, such a storage system will use analytics to identify the data that should and should not be backed up, giving you an intelligent, tiered data architecture that provides rapid access to mission-critical information.

This is the only way that MSPs and their customers are going to keep up with the explosion of data – especially now that data is becoming bigger and faster than humans can handle.

Strong data protection
Finally, MSPs need to always keep customer data safe and available. Failure to do so will result in loss of business and risk regulatory trouble. That is why it is important to ensure that data storage offerings also include the ability to protect business data wherever it lives and guarantee that it is always available, no matter what happens.

"By offering a smart, cost-effective and highly scalable storage solution, MSPs can rise above the crowd"

Florian Malecki, StorageCraft

The best solutions use snapshot, replication and encryption technologies, and can also recover individual files, entire systems, or failover a whole datacentre very quickly.

There is increasing pressure for MSPs to differentiate themselves in the market. Standing out is no longer about what they can do – it’s about what else they can do.

By offering a smart, cost-effective and highly scalable storage solution, managed service providers can rise above the crowd, attract more business and build long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with their customers.
What has the channel ever done for digital transformation?

Karl Roe looks at the role of the channel in the drive for digital transformation

Digital transformation is a hot topic and appears in endless marketing material, but is it just hype and what does it really mean?

Wikipedia describes digital transformation as “not necessarily about digital technology, but about the fact that technology, which is digital, allows people to solve their traditional problems”. This does not help much or narrow things down.

The fact is that digital transformation means different things to different people, but only makes sense if it has a strategic objective, with a focus on enhancing the customer experience and/or improving operational efficiency through technology innovation. If businesses want to secure their future, they need a digital strategy to chart their digital transformation.

Digital transformation must always start by reassessing how your business currently operates and by looking closely at the people, processes and existing technology. Only then can you look to change business processes and harness new technologies to automate the way you work and deliver services to customers.

The endgame will be different for different sectors and businesses, but some common outputs involve giving customers direct access to systems for online sales, self-service help desks or logistics. In a business-to-business world, it may
involve taking people out of the equation altogether. So instead of “getting our people to talk to your people”, it is more a case of getting our systems to talk to your systems.

Most companies are already along the digital transformation track and need to calculate their own digital maturity to figure out where they are on the journey. A good starting point is to measure human-driven processes against automated processes and set a target to increase the level of automation. A common mistake is to see digital transformation as just about being online. It’s also about removing the human middleware at the back end, thereby reducing cost and improving efficiency.

My top tip is to find a digital transformation specialist or architect who can help demystify the topic and offer practical, actionable advice. This is where forward thinking and experienced resellers and integrators can play an important role. As a trusted partner, they can provide high-level strategy and with a consultative approach, they can help identify, tailor and deploy solutions that deliver service-level agreements and return on investment around operational efficiency and enhanced customer experience.

But before resellers start preaching digital transformation, they need to “eat their own dog food” and take an inward look to ensure they are also embracing the tools and technologies to support business processes and customer engagement.

It is also likely that resellers need to expand their product portfolios and knowledge base to address the whole of the problem and deliver a complete end-to-end solution. A good starting point is the network that will underpin almost all digital transformation initiatives, so performance at the network and application layers is critical. The next thing is security. Digital transformation is pointless if it is not inherently secure and optimised.

There is a flavour of cloud in most digital transformation projects and managed services have key role to play, reflected by the growing trend of resellers becoming as-a-service providers. Managed services speed up delivery, reduce up-front investment and are more flexible and scalable to adapt to constant, changing demand.

For the channel, digital transformation is a major opportunity. It is happening everywhere – in large corporates to the public sector and across all verticals. But for the channel, the biggest opportunities probably lie with SMEs. While many new SMEs were born in the cloud and are already agile and automated, many still need a hand to help them along the digital transformation journey.
There has been a lot of buzz around software-defined wide-area networks (SD-WANs) recently – and little wonder when you look at the growth predictions.

According to IDC, global SD-WAN infrastructure and services revenues are growing at a rapid pace and expected to reach $8bn by 2021. The figure for Europe, the Middle East and Africa (Emea) is predicted to hit $2.4bn. The growth is being driven by digital transformation, the rise in cloud-based software-as-a-service (SaaS) business applications and a wider acceptance of software-defined networks (SDN).

Further reinforcing the IDC estimates, Cisco’s Visual Networking Index forecasts: “SD-WAN traffic will grow at a CAGR [compound annual growth rate] of 37%, compared to 3% for traditional MPLS [multiprotocol label switching] based WAN. SD-WAN will increase fivefold and will be 29% of WAN traffic by 2022.”

Rohit Mehra, vice-president of network infrastructure at IDC, says interest in SD-WAN is growing because traditional WANs are not built for the cloud and are poorly suited to the security requirements. “SD-WAN is not a solution in search of a problem,” he says. “It builds on hybrid WAN to offer a more complete solution.”

Klaus Gheri, vice-president and general manager of network security at Barracuda Networks, says the IDC growth figures match the company’s own research from earlier this year, which found 26% of Emea businesses already have SD-WAN, 32% are in the process of deploying it, and only 7% have no SD-WAN plans at all.
But there is an issue when it comes to understanding SD-WAN and what it delivers, with only 32% of Emea businesses saying they totally understand the technology. A lack of internal skills is a concern for a third of Emea businesses when it comes to deploying SD-WAN.

To combat this issue, channel partners need to ensure their SD-WAN packages come with a high level of consultancy and support, and work closely with vendors to make this happen, says Gheri. “How many partners out there are already offering SD-WAN training? This could be another revenue avenue to branch out into,” he adds.

**Supporting customers**

But how prepared are channel partners to deliver, implement and support SD-WAN for their customers? And what can vendors and distributors do to help partners exploit the opportunities that SD-WAN brings?

It’s fair to say that there is a diverse range of opinion over how prepared the channel is to support SD-WAN. Louie Belt, principal solutions architect at Getronics, offers a blunt assessment. “The majority of partners are not prepared to adequately design, implement and support SD-WAN,” he says.

By contrast, Jason Poole, principal product marketing manager for networking at Citrix, offers a more nuanced view. “There is a mixture of ability when it comes to partners and SD-WAN,” he says. “Some actively promote it and others are not so forward-thinking, seemingly depending on the demand from customers.

Many businesses like the idea of SD-WAN and see intrinsic value in it, but are not convinced enough to move immediately. Meanwhile, many enterprise companies are locked into long-term contracts with their current WAN provider, which can also delay sales considerably.”

Poole says partners need to articulate the value of SD-WAN to promote its uptake, highlighting cost savings, resiliency in the branch and new service adoption. Partners could also consider offering SD-WAN managed services, he adds.

Tony Randall, global SD-WAN director for Westcon-Comstor, agrees that readiness for SD-WAN varies greatly. He says leading enterprise partners began their SD-WAN journey one to two years ago and are now reaping the rewards.

“The market is absolutely past the early-adopter phase,” he says, “and the technology is beginning to see fast-paced adoption, with those who invested early being in a great position to maximise on the opportunity.”

The distributor is working with more partners in training, technical enablement and opportunity scoping at all customer levels, which Poole says is “a definite reflection of the broader market interest.”

According to David Park, UK and Ireland channel director at Fortinet, many of its channel partners are already aware, experienced and driving opportunities in the SD-WAN space. “However, the challenge they have is how to get their sales teams to recognise an opportunity and then position a solution

**SOFTWARE-DEFINED NETWORKS**

❯ Whenever an enterprise weighs up whether or not to adopt software-defined WAN, it is essential that security is part of the picture.
that resonates with the customer,” he says. They also need to ensure that their technical resource can design and implement the solutions effectively, “without disrupting the normal cadence of their business”, he adds.

Mark Hiley, UK and Ireland channel sales director at Riverbed Technology, says the partner community is split. “There are those who are trained and on board with SD-WAN, who will start to see the benefits of this decision as soon as this year,” he adds. “The other half are yet to pick up on SD-WAN, but fortunately many are realising the market opportunity now and are currently picking up on a technology that many of their customers are requesting.”

Mike Kontowtt, Emea director of channel at Silver Peak, says the channel needs to help customers shift to a business-first networking model where the network enables the business, rather than the business having to continually conform to the constraints of conventional router-centric networks. “This will enable businesses to liberate their applications from the compromises and constraints of existing WAN approaches, turning their networks into a business accelerant,” he says.

“This means that channel partners need to shift their focus and attention toward bringing new levels of value to customers, partnering with them to address an entirely new set of challenges, including how to use the internet to connect users directly to applications, how to reduce the operational complexity and constraints of traditional WAN approaches, and ultimately how to secure their networks and deliver the highest quality of experience to their users,” he adds.
Easing confusion

That’s easy to say, but it doesn’t help that the SD-WAN landscape can be confusing to many. Simon Wilson, HPE Aruba UK and Ireland chief technology officer (CTO), describes SD-WAN as a crowded and complicated market. “Once analysts started saying that anything that wasn’t software defined was going to have a challenge, people started coming from all sorts of directions into the market,” he says.

Ian McEwan, Emea vice-president at Aryaka, agrees, describing it as a very crowded market with a very big umbrella called SD-WAN. “There are many different vendors in this space because it’s a hot space,” he says. “A number are trying to put an SD-WAN spin on how to protect the edge network or MPLS. There is a lot of noise in the market and there are quite a lot of new vendors coming in.”

Needless to say, established vendors such as HPE Aruba and Cisco are emphasising the virtues of incumbency. Wilson frames it as a way for an incumbent partner to expand their capabilities and defend against someone attacking their customer base. The vendor’s approach, he says, is to take a strong branch solution in terms of on-premise wired and wireless network capability and extending it, which provides partners with an additional revenue opportunity with their existing customer base.

“It is a useful defensive mechanism when a lot of customers are being hit with offers from solution providers trying to extend their business with a SD-WAN offering,” he says. “Smaller resellers’ customers are very loyal and would prefer to stay with them.”

David Goff, Cisco UK and Ireland head of enterprise networks, adopts a similar argument: “One of the key advantages vendor can provide to partners is customer incumbency and the ability to inform customers of new technologies that will help them achieve their key business outcomes. This is crucial given the perceived complexity of SD-WAN. It is a solution made up of many parts which customers do not wish to tackle individually. So, the real market opportunity is in offering customers a unified solution.”

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As a newer vendor with its own private SD-WAN, Aryaka adopts a different approach, but McEwan accepts that it still has to be able to show how it fits into the current IT ecosystem to a certain degree.

Paul Bulmer, head of product at Kcom NNS, says: “SD-WAN is much more than an overlay service, it’s more about how you run data over a number of network domains – whether it’s cloud access, voice, security or other applications.”

Getronics’s Bell warns: “Most vendors have not invested the time and effort into evaluating and understanding multiple
With a wide range of solutions at hand, the channel must help partners navigate the SD-WAN landscape

SD-WAN platforms, and therefore try to offer a one-size-fits-all solution.” He adds that partners need to have a strong understanding of the competitive landscape.

Westcon-Comstor’s Randall does not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach, revealing that the distributor has five vendors in its SD-WAN offer to suit particular customers. “No IT transformation project can be done with a single vendor,” he says. “Westcon-Comstor has an ecosystem of vendors to answer the needs of a next-generation branch solution – spanning networking, security, unified communications and cloud – to deliver solutions for the branch that improve application performance and availability, while lowering the cost of wide-area networks.”

What partners want
So what should partners look for from vendors and distributors? Education is high on the list.

Citrix’s Poole believes vendors can provide technical training to enhance product knowledge. “Routing is key to SD-WAN implementations and technical skills in this area are vital, for example,” he says. “Alongside training, familiarity with the product comes with usage – vendors and distributors need to make hardware and software products available to the partners to use in their labs or under PoC [proof of concept] conditions to ensure comfort and confidence.”

Justin Fielder, CTO of Zen Internet, observes that education is clearly needed around SD-WAN. “With such a broad term covering a wider variety of solutions, vendors and distributors need to work with their partners to ensure they understand the
services they’re offering to customers. The better the channel understands the application of the technology, the more valuable discussions they can have with their customers – in turn, making themselves invaluable,” he says.

Silver Peak’s Kontowtt agrees that vendors need to bring new levels of enablement, training and certification to partners, so they can address the evolving requirements of customers, but also build a profitable business model to capitalise on the rapidly growing SD-WAN market.

Riverbed Technology’s Hiley says: “Vendors need to help ensure that partners are trained to a sufficient competency level to be able to deploy the solutions correctly, to ultimately match and exceed the expectations of the customer. We cannot achieve this without well-informed and well-trained partners on board.”

Randall says: “It is important to educate partners with the knowledge we’ve accrued by being the early adopter, qualify and broaden opportunities, with the aid of our experienced sales teams and hand-hold partners with initial designs and PoCs through to deployments and professional services.

“The whole process should be painless. If partners are new to a technology, they need to focus on closing new business and not managing deployment issues. Heavy investment in our professional services business means partners can start deploying immediately with confidence, meanwhile investing as they see success from their SD-WAN journey.”

Poole adds that engagement with customers isn’t an issue because SD-WAN is a popular topic. “But because companies aren’t making the move immediately, partners are often faced with long sales cycles and lower-than-normal conversion rates. While this is frustrating for partners, and could affect interest levels, the main drivers are WAN refresh and the general digital transformation of branches that leads to increased SD-WAN adoption,” he says.

He accepts that the channel does not appear to be universally prepared for SD-WAN. “Understanding is sporadic and it is up to the vendor community to promote their products and services and offer education on key advantages, so that they can be amplified by the channel,” he says. “This will take training and encouragement from the vendors.”

In the end, partners need to ensure that SD-WAN is more than just a promise or hype, Kcom NNS’s Bulmer warns. They need to ensure they deliver tangible benefits because there could be some challenges down the road, where the vision falls short for the user, so any product has to offer real tangible business outcomes that add value to day-to-day operations, he says.

“We are seeing a lot of interest in SD-WAN,” he says. “The channel is about to make this its biggest opportunity.”

“IT IS IMPORTANT TO EDUCATE PARTNERS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE WE’VE ACCRUED BY BEING THE EARLY ADOPTER”

TONY RANDALL, WESTCON-COMSTOR
Cyber security will continue to play a prominent part in most organisations’ IT planning this year, so MicroScope canvassed industry views on the hot topics.

What does this year hold on the security front? Some of the same threats that caused problems in 2018 will continue to rumble on, but there are also expectations that there will be some fresh areas for resellers and concerned customers to look at. MicroScope asked a collection of industry players what they are expecting to see in the next 12 months. In this article, we share a sample of what they said.

Andrew Clarke, Director of Strategic Alliances and Channel Partnerships, EMEA, One Identity

The prevalence of password vaulting on the market will reach a tipping point. Many businesses still deploying vaulting haphazardly without covering all accounts or still allowing weak passwords will see more attempts at breaching systems externally as well as through misuse of passwords via internal threats. The days of security enforcement solely via password vaulting have to be finished: 2019 will be all about identity as the new perimeter, ensuring privileged account integrity.

Irfahn Khimji, Strategic Account Manager, Tripwire

Information security will be at the forefront of business decisions. IT risk will be looked at as a business risk, and therefore, have a higher priority in overall strategy than it has in the past. Organisations are starting to realise that blind spending on information security solutions does not help. Therefore, a smarter,
business-style approach needs to be taken with how resources are spent on combatting and preventing attacks. As such, businesses will start asking questions like, “How does this solution reduce risk to my organisation?” If there is a positive and quantifiable answer, that solution will proceed as a viable path.

**Markus Braendle, CEO, Airbus CyberSecurity**

Industrial internet of things (IIoT) devices will become a major target for cyber attackers, especially in the manufacturing industry. The trend with Industry 4.0 to use IIoT technology for real-time data collection of production processes will generate a benefit, but will also produce an additional risk due to the still low maturity of the cyber security protection of IIoT devices.

**Ralf Huuck, senior technologist, Synopsys**

Better decision-making support from data. There is a plethora of quality and security solutions, each with its own purpose, strength and data generation – be it penetration testing, log monitoring and intrusion detection or automated application security testing solutions. While capabilities and technologies

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**Bob Huber, chief information security officer, Tenable**

Serverless computing will create problems. Serverless computing, often called function as a service (FaaS), will create significant security headaches in 2019, especially when it comes to identifying and protecting assets. While serverless computing is a great way to reduce the burden of infrastructure management on developers, it also creates a lack of ownership and visibility into environments. Organisations are already struggling to identify and keep track of assets across their on-prem and software-as-a-service (SaaS) environments. FaaS adds yet another layer of complexity to the already challenging task of securing your key cyber terrain.
advance, they also create disproportionately more information and data points. It is easy to drown in this sea of information and lose sight of the essentials. As such, the key will be to fuse that data for making risk-based and business-based decisions. The challenge is to find the needle in the haystack on one end of the spectrum and to combine data from different methods and domains to obtain a holistic view on the other end of the spectrum.

**Ricardo Villadiego, general manager, secure access and fraud protection, Cyxtera**

Secure doesn’t necessarily mean security. Everyone sees it when they navigate on the internet – the small icon stating “secure” or “not secure”. Unfortunately, however, many users falsely believe that this symbol – which signifies that a website uses encrypted communications – means a website cannot be malicious. Fraudsters are already using seemingly legitimate web certificates – which cause the browser to display the “secure” icon – to hide their phishing and malware attempts. In just one year, we saw the use of web certificates to disguise malicious traffic double. There is no sign of this increase slowing down, as certificates provide an easy way to trick users into trusting a website and giving up their credentials.

**Corin Imai, senior security adviser, DomainTools**

The public will start to hold companies more accountable for security breaches. As breaches continue to affect individuals’ personally identifiable information, and we continue to see companies falter in their approach to security, we will see the public start to hold companies more responsible. A shift in public perception that cannot be quantified to initiate the budgeting for better security programs, it will be a chicken or egg situation, with some companies seeing the writing on the wall and acting first to protect their brand, and others waiting for the fallout to see what the damage is.
Suzanne Spaulding, former DHS under-secretary and Nozomi Networks adviser

The things that have been holding back Russia, China, North Korea and Iran from a critical infrastructure attack on the US could shift.

When it comes to nation-state threats to US critical infrastructure, we think of four key actors: Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. Each country has been held back from attacking the US for different reasons. Think about a graph with an X and Y axis. The X axis represents capabilities and the Y axis represents destructive intent. At the moment, Russia and China have the highest capabilities, but they fall lower on the scale of destructive intent. Of the group, they’re more rational and more dependent on their own critical infrastructure. On the other hand, North Korea and Iran have higher destructive intent, but fall lower on the capabilities scale. But it won’t stay this way forever. The level of destructive intent of Russia and China could change overnight – which is a concern given the capabilities they already have.

And North Korea and Iran are strengthening their capabilities every day. North Korea’s attack on Sony is a good example. In the news, the focus was on all the embarrassing emails, but the attack was about more than just leaked emails – Sony’s networks were damaged. And Iran made headlines when it

Martin Jartelius, chief security officer, Outpost24

Everyone will need a security specialist. Everyone will need a team of application security specialists. But they can’t have them, because the market is drained. This gives rise to the proliferation of managed security service providers (MSSPs) and consultancies, but also hopefully a shift to focus on usability and decision support in security technology, enabling non-security experts to make educated decisions based on advice by their support systems.
pulled off a damaging cyber attack against the Sands Casino. The US has yet to experience a highly damaging attack on critical infrastructure, but that may not be true for long.

**JAVVAD MALIK, SECURITY ADVOCATE, ALIENVAULT, AN AT&T COMPANY**

Managed security will take off. Managed security service providers (MSSPs) have been increasing in their popularity over a number of years. Driven by an ever-increasing technology estate that needs to be secured, and a lack of available skilled talent to hire, we see more and more companies turning to managed security providers to help fulfil their security needs. Within this, managed detection and response (MDR) is a category of managed security that has seen particularly high growth, but one which will probably be absorbed under the MSSP umbrella in due course.

**TIM SADLER, CO-FOUNDER AND CEO, TESSIAN**

Organisations will need to protect human vulnerabilities in their networks. Human error is natural and common, and a big cause of financial and reputational damage to organisations across the world. As digitisation of information grows in the workplace, and employees are expected to

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**JAVVAD MALIK, ALIENVAULT**

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**BILL LUMMIS, TECHNICAL PROGRAMME MANAGER, HACKERONE**

This year will see a real uptick in breach insurance. With the added pressure of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) on top of the existing financial and reputational pressures, it will start driving more process maturity as breach insurance starts to be more sophisticated in an actuarial sense. They’ll look for specific processes and procedures to be in place to determine rates, and I think that in turn will start to drive better auditing and, hopefully, better security.
securely manage and process large amounts of data, the potential for mistakes, and subsequent damage, is only going to increase. Moreover, it is possible that as GDPR flexes its muscles even more in the coming year, these changes will force companies to protect their employees to secure valuable data.

**Sam Curry, Chief Security Officer, Cybereason**

Return of the mobile. Mobile isn’t new, but it’s the favourite of chief information security officers and security departments to kick down the road. It’s always next year or when time permits, and security solutions are particularly weak. Most security solutions amount to insecure device management or, at best, an antivirus equivalent to signature checking. The standard enterprise response has been to limit exposure and access of mobile devices, and this has created a blind spot in our risk assessments that will lend itself to incremental increases in access and exposure. Attackers have long targeted mobile and known how to exploit it, but it hasn’t been as attractive as more traditional targets like laptops and application-layer attacks, or even going after identities and “layer 8”.

That will change as mobile is now perhaps the most exposed, ubiquitous, and under-protected vector for enterprise malicious operations. Attackers will use these to infiltrate and exfiltrate, as stepping stones on the way in and out, carefully cleaning their traces. The year ahead will see this come into the light and may lead to a small panic, too.

“**Attackers have long targeted mobile and known how to exploit it, but it hasn’t been as attractive as more traditional targets like laptops and application-layer attacks**”

**Sam Curry, Cybereason**

**Anton Grashion, Managing Director, Security Practice, Cylance**

Managing users is still the main point of failure in any security strategy. Many large enterprise customers are facing the operational challenges that come with a network-based detection and response system with heavy alerting and human-response transitioning to a cloud, application and endpoint management strategy. They are still buried in alerts and the network traffic is increasingly encrypted, which means they lose visibility and control.
On the topic of digital skills: change the channel, I’ve seen this one before ...

Nigel Dunn, managing director of Emea North, Jabra

The UK is in a bit of disarray. If we’re not constantly in debate over Brexit and the current turbulent political climate, we’re struggling to assert our continued prominence in the world of technology.

Whether it’s scaremongering about the potential apocalyptical effects of artificial intelligence (AI), issues with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) or the ongoing productivity problem, there’s always something troubling businesses. However, an issue which is equally – if not more – pertinent, which perhaps isn’t being so acutely addressed by UK businesses, is the digital skills crisis.

But it’s not just the mainstream technology market taking a hit. While businesses scramble to quickly plug the gap and stop our talent seeping down the drain as they look to move abroad for a more lucrative career, the issue is cascading down to the channel, which is facing the exact same problem – and it needs addressing.

Let’s put it in perspective. In 2017, the British Chambers of Commerce issued a stark warning to UK businesses around the current state of digital skills. According to the report, 84% of firms said digital and IT skills are more important to their business than they were two years ago, largely due to the need to be more productive and maintain competitive advantage. Fast forward to now, I can only imagine that this number has risen further and most likely quite dramatically.

The combination of disruptive technologies in conjunction with a complete digital overhaul of how businesses operate is putting the channel under immense pressure. It’s no longer sufficient to have a non-digitally savvy channel workforce. Channel partners need to sell, implement and offer consultancy around this technology. Customers aren’t just buying into the product, they’re buying into the brand.

Therefore, for channel partners, ensuring their customers believe in them as consultants and strategic partners, as opposed to simply technology suppliers, is key to facilitating this
change. However, if they don’t fully understand how the technology will support the user environment it is going into and its potential impact on their businesses, how can they do their job effectively? Therefore, it’s become increasingly apparent that we need to upskill the channel.

**THE BIGGER PICTURE**

The conversation on skills, however, shouldn’t just focus on what a company needs. It should also be about the pain-points businesses are dealing with, such as increasing productivity and efficiency so that the reseller can support this.

Ultimately, channel partners can’t just talk the talk, they need to dig down beyond the one issue that a user is asking to be fixed and think more holistically to see if there are other factors contributing to the main issue. In doing this, channel partners will be able to offer much more intrinsic value and help to solve the overarching issues that businesses are facing today.

Moving forward, channel partners need to think hard about where their skills lie and where additional training and support might be required. Only through building stronger relationships with customers can channel partners achieve their ultimate goals – growing sales and providing users with the guidance they need to complete their digital transformation journey.

**CHANNEL PARTNERS NEED TO THINK HARD ABOUT WHERE THEIR SKILLS LIE AND WHERE ADDITIONAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT MIGHT BE REQUIRED**

**NIGEL DUNN, JABRA**

Send your letters and comments to squicke@techtarget.com