



Mystery Caller



In a tough economic environment SMEs can find selecting the right reseller for their business a difficult task. In the first of a series of features Assistant Editor David Dungay plays the part of our mysterious caller and has contacted several resellers to determine how certain technology can help his “business”.

The first topic that raised its head was “The Cloud”. What is it, how can it help small businesses and where does the mobile piece fit in?

Comtec

My first contact was Surey based reseller Comtec where I decided to use their live chat feature and spoke to a delightful chap that wasted no time in asking me a few basics about my IT infrastructure. Within three or four minutes he had got my mobile number and another 15mins later I was speaking to an account manager. Good start.

Tony was very polite and I could sense the eagerness in his voice. Basic human interaction scores are high for Tony which is what we all should expect. Tony ran me through a few basic options for my IT but he really wanted to know what I wanted to achieve. He even said cloud might not be the way to go for me. I expressed an interest at having a few hosted options because I really wanted my sales guys to be able to access the server via phones and tablets when out and about.

Tony reassured me that this was possible but again came back to what was best for my business. He enquired about my location and said connectivity shouldn't be a problem

but obviously they would check first. He talked about how he didn't want to sell me something that wasn't going to do the job because a long term relationship was far more beneficial to him, and me. Although he wasn't too sure on the cloud telephony side of things he said as much straight away and offered for me to speak with a colleague.

In terms of 'what I wanted to achieve' I simply said I wanted information. He said he would gather some for me and send it over to have a look at. Within about a minute of hanging up the phone Tony had emailed me his details and opened himself up for me to ask any questions. He wanted to know more about my business so if I didn't mind he would be asking a few too. Pleasant experience all round.

Highlights – The focus was on my business and what I wanted to achieve...Not the sell.

Lowlights – Not much knowledge on telephony side, a suitable alternative contact was offered though.

Scores

Helpfulness – 4/5

Manner – 4/5

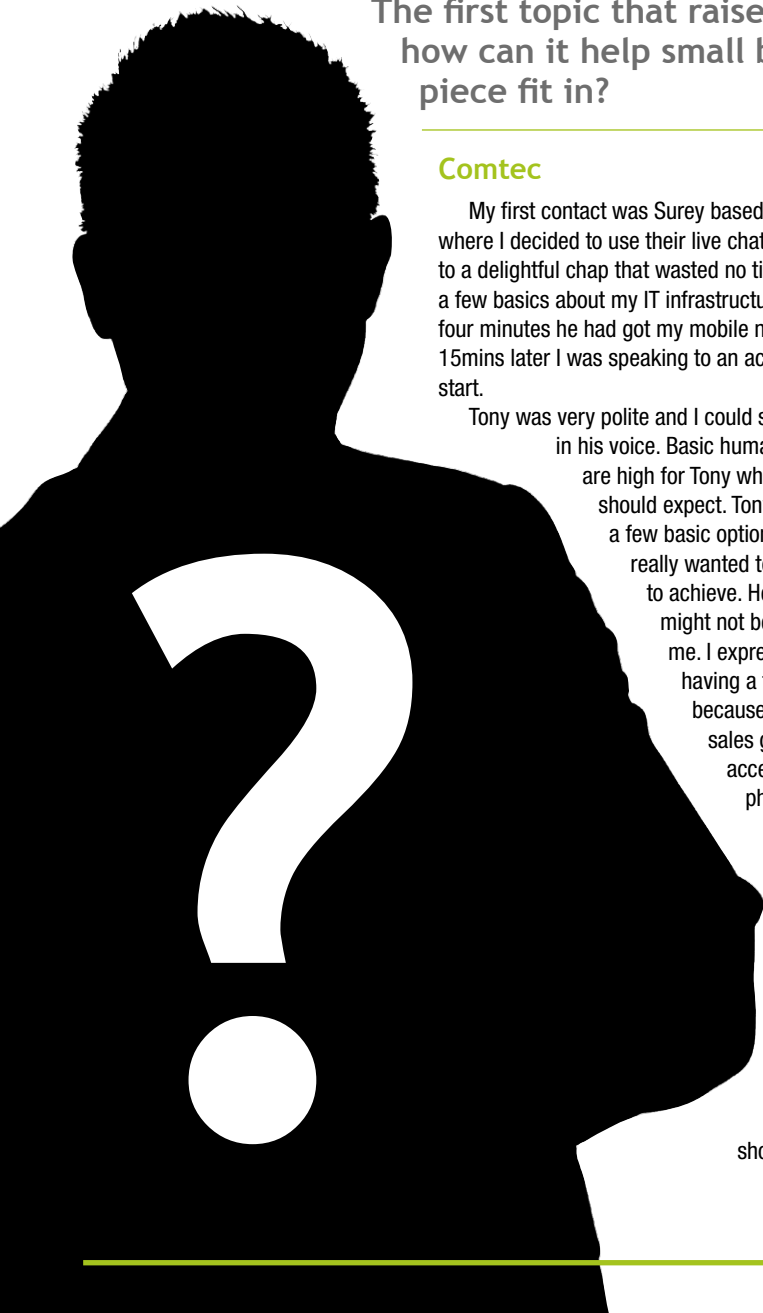
Knowledge – 3/5

Understanding – 3/5

Sales Technique – 4/5

Clarity – 3/5

Total -21/30: Good score! From the start of my journey at the website I was pleasantly guided through the process until I spoke with someone in sales. From the get go I felt here is someone who would work hard to get the best processes in place for my business...which may or may not have involved the technology I was asking about.





IntraLAN

I phoned directly and was put straight through to a member of the sales team. After establishing I was after information about cloud IT and Telephony services I was immediately told it isn't a question of either or but rather a factor of what was right for my business and the bandwidth available in my location. Luke was extremely knowledgeable about the broadband fibre product I am on and gave me a quick run down of the pitfalls of my connection including the SLA's in place and the average speeds I should be getting.

Luke didn't get into the specifics of my business but came back to a consistent "we need to sit down together" to go through my options. He was polite and extremely clear about what IntraLAN could offer me. A specific product was mentioned and I was told that when we sit down even though the connectivity may be there going down the hosted route might not be right for me. I mentioned data backup and remote working for the sales team and Luke immediately said this is all possible but this is a large topic area which will need an in depth discussion face to face. We went on to discuss the help and support they can offer me and although they weren't 24/7 operation they will do out of office hours at a chargeable rate. I like this sort of transparency in an organisation.

Highlights – Product knowledge. Interestingly Luke was the first person to really highlight the connectivity issue and he had the knowledge base to back that up.

Lowlights – We didn't get into the nitty gritty of what I actually do although he wanted to sit down with me to discuss that further.

Scores

Helpfulness – 4/5
Manner – 4/5
Knowledge – 4/5
Understanding – 3/5
Sales Technique – 3/5
Clarity – 4/5

Total 22/30 – I was impressed at the product knowledge here and the clear concise way in which it was relayed to me. IntraLAN was the first company to really delve into my connection speeds in any depth and the operator knew exactly what kind of SLA's were in place with my deal and the knock on affect that would have to my business. I asked for some information and was sent information on three products that may suit my needs shortly after.

Onhold Communications

I rang their switchboard directly and explained I was looking for some information on the cloud. I was immediately transferred to an account manager for a chat. He was very helpful and explained the whole concept. When I revealed that I was a small company he immediately told me that if I switched to a hosted VoIP solution it may not actually be much cheaper, if at all, once we sat down and did the maths. I was told that usually a PBX on site system was the best way to go because of reliability and that a VoIP solution would be of use if we had multiple locations. I explained that we have some remote workers and some of the guys are out of the office and I want them to be able access the servers from off site and he talked about their hosted server. Relatively quickly I was introduced to the concept of a mix 'n' match phone system which can operate on CPE PBX and VoIP if needed.

No questions were really asked about my business although the caller was friendly and sent me some information I wasn't quite as engaged as I hoped. My geographic location wasn't asked for and the level of connectivity I already possessed also wasn't obtained. I was however impressed with the explanation I was given as to which avenue was best to go down with regards to hosted servers or hosted VoIP. I again asked for some information which was sent to me swiftly and the door was left open for further communications.

Highlights – Helpful and clear.

Lowlights – Lack of discussion about my business

Scores

Helpfulness – 4/5
Manner – 3/5
Knowledge – 4/5
Understanding – 2/5
Sales Technique – 2/5
Clarity – 3/5

Total -18/30 – Friendly enough but I didn't feel like I was really asked enough questions about what I wanted to achieve. Although I was asking for information rather than a direct meeting I felt more could have been done to engage me. All information given was accurate but due to lack of questions surrounding my business low scores have been given in Understanding and Sales Technique categories.

Round up

This was an interesting first attempt at this experiment and it has been relatively successful. Cloud is a buzz word in the business world right now and it isn't always obvious how it can help the average SME either save money or become more efficient. I think the general attitude of the three resellers I rang summed up the general feeling out there in the community at the moment about cloud products.

Cloud service providers are singing loud and proud about the benefits of cloud and I suppose we as publishers are helping drive the hype wagon along too. When you actually get yourself in front of a salesman then 'hold your horses' is a typical response. I think I probably got a taste of one of the channels biggest issues right now as not one of the sales people I talked to was falling over themselves to sell me cloud services. Now, perhaps they genuinely thought cloud might not be the way to go for my small business or perhaps they were thinking about that commission check coming in at the end of the month...we can only speculate about this point.

It was very close at the top between IntraLAN and Comtec and although I thought the sales technique of Comtec was best it was the technical

knowledge and connectivity conversation had with IntraLAN that pushed them into the top spot.

Finally, it was salient I think that there was no mention of mobile communications and integration with any new communications platform – be it hosted or CPE based. Today a mobile workforce is essential for business to compete and I did mention to each firm that I had a couple of remote workers.

Altogether a pleasant experience with all three companies and we would like to thank them for their time.

Winners

1st - IntraLAN: 22 points

2nd - Comtec: 21 points

3rd - Onhold Communications: 18 points

Award Winning Support

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