



# Serious About Support

Comms Business Magazine recently met up with Nine Group CEO James Palmer and Paul McEwan who is heading up their wholesale channel development team following the acquisition of McEwan's own Comms One business in October.

Nine Group was in the midst of further acquisition activity at the time of the meeting, with Comms One being one of several businesses that Nine Group had either just bought or were about to conclude deals on.

McEwan is a staunch, committed and enthusiastic channel player having spent time at the likes of Energis prior to setting up Comms One.

"I remember our first Comms One bill run in March 2010. It was for a grand total of around £3K. When we agreed terms with James and Nine Group our last bill run was not far short of £800K. We had grown the company very quickly compared to our competitors but that growth brought in turn many challenges in terms of resourcing and cash flow. Throughout the life of Comms One we had used the Dataflow billing solution that Nine Group runs as a service to resellers so we had a good working relationship between our companies and I knew James well."

Nine Group will end the year with a turnover approaching £60m and over 170 employees.

James Palmer, "Our reseller base is now approaching 500 and although we do have acquisitions as part of our growth strategy, our ethos is to not buy up any reseller that wants to sell but rather to ask them 'are you sure you want to sell now?' The reason for this is that we believe Nine Group is perfectly placed to help them grow their business further, with the result that the resellers will maximise their business exit value at a later date.

For example, Nine Group provides branded first line support to the end users of 50 resellers. Many resellers do not have weekend cover, so our ability to provide this as well as; answering calls, delivering support, services and WLR3 provisioning – 7 days a week, is an incredible value add for our channel partners that they can use to secure even more business."

Both Palmer and McEwan observed that BT Retail has upped its game in recent times. "Resellers need to do the same with their customers and with our contact centre Nine Group can deliver the kind of services to resellers at such a low entry point that they truly can compete with the giants of the market.

We believe that by working with Nine Group most dealers today could readily and cost effectively transition to becoming resellers in their own right. This is why we believe Nine Group could grow our base from its present 450 reseller level to over 1000 in the next few years."

Heading up the new combined Nine Group Channel Team, Paul McEwan, says it is now all about momentum and sustaining it.

"We have nine Channel Development Managers and in the first two months of the combined operation we have signed an incredible 20 new resellers and secured an amazing £3m+ of new annual revenue. This is just the start we had planned as we take the fight to the 'big guys' who we see as being complacent, adding little value to their channel partners and resting on their laurels. Our message to them is 'watch out!'

Resellers love our contact centre offering which makes resourcing to win business very simple and easy for them.

Nine Group's contact centre support service provides resellers with a big company engineering resource, a wide product and service portfolio designed for voice and data integration, billing and DD collection services and on-going customer service and sales support.

Outsourcing these services to Nine Group makes a huge amount of sense for resellers. Our services are scalable and rapidly deployed to the point where a reseller can sign up to our offering on a Monday and be billing customers by the Friday.

"As a result of our overall product and services wrap several of our resellers are having conversations with very large potential customers and are about to conclude some 'life changing' deals, to include many household names making big commitments to IP services for example."

Looking back at 2012 James Palmer says that his company has spent several million on reseller

acquisitions. "In all cases these were resellers who wanted to realise an exit plan having achieved their business goals. However such is the trust and relationships that we have with our resellers we can say to them, 'are you sure you want to sell?' We don't want resellers to leave business on the table, as today just selling a portfolio of lines and calls is not enough. Resellers can maximise their business value by building new and additional income streams from other product sets such as mobile, data and IP."

Palmer concludes, "Nine Group want to become the 'home' for every reseller, including dealers with ambitions to become a reseller. With a wide product portfolio, first class training on how to sell more and gain additional wallet share, Nine Group has a channel Partner Business Development ethos that provides a compelling reason to work with us."



James Palmer of Nine Group