

Channel Partners™

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**2020
CHANNEL
INFLUENCER
OF THE YEAR**

**Meet the Channel
Influencers: 51
People, Suppliers,
Techs and Trends
Driving the
Channel in 2020**

**JOHN DELOZIER,
ROCKING
THE CHANNEL**



TOTALLY AMPED FOR THE INFLUENCERS

This is one of the most exciting times of the year on the Channel Partners calendar.

Our team is gearing up for our flagship show, the [Channel Partners Conference & Expo](#), which is expected to draw 6,400 channel professionals to the Venetian & Sands Expo in Las Vegas, March 9-12. Personally, this will be my ninth Expo, and 17th Channel Partners show overall. While that seems like a lot, I bet there are many of you who have that beat by a mile.

One of the highlights of the event will be a networking reception where we honor the winners of our Excellence in Digital Services Awards and our Channel Influencers of the Year — all 11 of whom are profiled in this digital issue. It's our third year honoring Influencers, major players in the channel, both for past contributions and for the impact we expect them to have in the year ahead.

A big congratulations goes out 8x8's John DeLozier, our Channel Influencer of the Year. Our Edward Gately does a great job profiling the man most of us know simply as "JD." We learn not only more about his well-known affinity for '80s rock, but the career moves and innovation that set him up to be worthy of such an honor. You'll see that Edward found no shortage of JD's colleagues who were eager to offer their thoughts on the influence he's had on them.

But while people are the lifeblood of the channel, we've also got our eyes on the organizations, technologies and trends that we think will be water cooler talk throughout 2020. (Do people still stand and talk at water coolers?)

The 25 organizations we're featuring are making tremendous waves in the channel. Take private-equity firm Thoma Bravo, for instance, which wields enormous power as it continues to gobble up more tech companies. How about Windstream, which faces a battle convincing partners that it will emerge from bankruptcy at least as strong as it was before? And how about the battle for cloud? We think AWS is just getting started.

Are you selling CPaaS? Do you have enough of a grasp on AI? Will IoT take the next step this year with the onset of 5G? These are just some of the 10 technologies we're following.

Channel convergence is among the five business trends we highlight here. That's [a debate](#) that will be front and center on the keynote stage at Channel Partners on March 10. Are the worlds of telecom and IT really coming together? Or are partners staying in their lanes?

It's a lot of questions, and we don't have a crystal ball. But we hope these people, organizations, technologies and trends will give you something to think about as you continue to develop your business plans for the rest of this year and beyond.

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2020 CHANNEL INFLUENCER AWARDS

51 People, Suppliers, Techs and Trends Driving the New Channel

Last year we covered the channel from A (artificial intelligence) to Z (zero trust). Here's what caught our attention – and yours.

By Channel Partners & Channel Futures Staff

Whether you call it perspective, perception or opinion, there are as many viewpoints on the channel as there are positions from which to observe it. In covering their respective beats, the editors at Channel Futures and Channel Partners report on different aspects of the channel, endeavoring to provide a comprehensive composite view of what's going on. And this year, for the third time, they've leveraged their unique perspectives to identify the organizations, people, technologies and business trends they think will be having the greatest impact on the channel in 2020.

aws In the past year, [Amazon Web Services](#) has upped its game in ways too numerous to lay out. Consider some of the highlights.

AWS is leading the way in security, a major concern surrounding cloud. Although AWS lost the Department of Defense's Joint Enterprise Defense Infrastructure (JEDI) bid to Microsoft Azure, it remains the [only provider certified](#) to store data in the cloud at the top-secret level. And the vendor reiterated their capabilities within the channel last year by hosting the [inaugural re:INFORCE event](#) for partners, focused solely on security services and features for cloud deployments.

AWS also continues to suit up partners with important industry-specific certifications, such as the new [AWS Public Safety and Disaster Response Competency](#), that help the channel distinguish itself.

Finally, AWS made good on its promise to outfit partners with new (albeit not new to the industry) products – mainly [Outposts](#), Amazon's answer to hybrid cloud powerhouses including Cisco, Dell and HPE. Organizations will rent AWS hardware on an as-a-service basis; AWS delivers, installs and oversees everything.

AWS may lead for now. But the brand can't afford to relax its efforts. Microsoft Azure keeps securing enterprise market share (and, incidentally, [the JEDI contract](#)), fueled by partner efforts. If that continues, Redmond could very well take the channel influencer reins again in 2021. —*Kelly Teal*

Autotask [Autotask](#) and Datto were [merged](#) by Vista Equity Partners in October 2017. Vista's simultaneous acquisition of Datto and merger with existing Vista portfolio company Autotask was a powerful move and provided significant opportunities for the IT channel.

The combination of Autotask's market-leading IT management solutions with Datto's core data protection solutions created a single provider able to meet the needs of managed service providers and IT service providers from operations through service delivery, including professional services automation (PSA), backup and disaster recovery, networking continuity, file sync and share, and remote monitoring and management (RMM).

"With the powerful combination of the Autotask Unified PSA-RMM platform and Datto's industry-leading business continuity solutions, together we can now deliver unprecedented innovation and unmatched levels of value and service to our customers and partners worldwide," said Mark Cattini, president and CEO of Autotask at the time of the merger.

Datto's Autotask PSA is designed for MSPs and crafted to fit their business model. While Autotask PSA provides tools to help every employee function more productively, it also offers reporting capabilities that managers need to analyze profitability in real time. Any JEDI company that needs to manage workforce resources efficiently and service customers will find that Datto's Autotask PSA will help maximize ROI. —*Allison Francis*

AVAYA All eyes were on [Avaya](#) last year as speculation ran wild over who was going to purchase the business communications company.

In the end, there was no acquisition. Instead, Avaya entered a strategic partnership with RingCentral in which it is introducing a new unified communications-as-a-service (UCaaS) solution, Avaya Cloud Office.

Avaya Cloud Office will provide a "truly differentiated world-class" UCaaS solution, said Dennis Kozak, its senior vice president of business transformation. Avaya also is ending sales of Powered by Avaya IP Office.

"Avaya is definitely a company to watch in 2020, as this will be a critical year for the company in more ways than one," said Raul Castanon, 451 Research's senior analyst. "The partnership with RingCentral will likely result in increased value for investors, reversing the downward trend they've experienced over the last few years; there is also strong upside potential for customers. I think we will find out how this will play out in the next six to nine months." —*Edward Gately*

datto As the world's leading provider of IT solutions delivered by managed service providers, [Datto](#) follows the philosophy that there is no limit to what [SMBs](#) can achieve with the right technology.

Since its founding in 2007, Datto has continued to win awards each year for its rapid growth, product excellence, superior technical support and for fostering an outstanding workplace. With global headquarters in Norwalk, Connecticut, Datto has international offices in the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Canada, Australia, China and Singapore.

Datto's product line features centralized, cloud-based management, including the Datto Networking Appliance, Datto Networking Switches and Datto Networking WjFi.

In November 2015, the company garnered \$75 million in a Series B funding round mostly led by Technology Crossover Ventures. In 2015, it became Connecticut's first "unicorn" company. In early 2017, Datto acquired Open Mesh. Datto was acquired by private equity firm Vista Equity Partners and [merged](#) with IT management provider Autotask in October of 2017. That merger brought several technologies under one roof for SMBs, including professional services automation, remote monitoring and management, backup and DR, networking continuity and file sync and share. —*Allison Francis*



In 2018, Microsoft selected [CloudJumper](#) as one of the first two cloud workspace-as-a-service providers to offer [the company's new](#) Windows

Virtual Desktop (WVD). The other was Citrix. Microsoft later added VMware's Workspace ONE to the mix.

CloudJumper now competes with its former partner and with VMware. Now that Microsoft's [WVD is available](#), CloudJumper bills its [Cloud Workspace Management Suite \(CWMS\)](#) as a VDI and RDS alternative to Citrix and VMware. Citrix and CloudJumper both use the Azure cloud as the control plane for their respective new digital workspace services.

"The value proposition to them is bringing a more modern desktop virtualization platform that was built from the ground up with the cloud in mind," said Robin Brandl, CloudJumper's vice president of strategic alliances. "If you look at Citrix Cloud, it's an on-prem solution, shoehorned in the cloud. And they have great product, they have a great set of customers. But if you look, the majority of their business has been for tactical solutions." —*Jeffrey Schwartz*

FORTINET Watch out Cisco and Palo Alto Networks, [Fortinet](#) is gunning for you.

Fortinet is gaining on its competitors through strategic acquisitions, such as enSilo, a privately held advanced endpoint security company, and CyberSponse, a security orchestration, automation and response (SOAR) platform provider.

The enSilo suite of endpoint security solutions includes automated detection and the ability to be integrated into the larger Fortinet Security Fabric framework, further enhancing visibility while driving corporate security policies deeper into endpoint devices, according to Fortinet.

Already a Fortinet Security Fabric partner, CyberSponse will further extend the automation and incident response capabilities of Fortinet's FortiAnalyzer, FortiSIEM and FortiGate.

Eric Parizo, senior analyst with Ovum, said the enSilo acquisition was a "solid move" by Fortinet, and the CyberSponse buy increases the pressure on Cisco to make a similar acquisition.

"Nearly every major enterprise cybersecurity vendor has already made a move of some kind to offer a combined endpoint protection (EPP) and endpoint detection and response (EDR) solution, but Fortinet had yet to do so," he said. "This quickly helps Fortinet gain ground on Palo Alto Networks specifically, but also Cisco, and certainly Sophos on the midmarket spectrum." —*Edward Gately*

25 Orgs to Watch



F-Secure, a Finnish cybersecurity and privacy company, has been busy this past year refining AI's roles and exploring its future forms. The company is leading the charge toward [swarm intelligence](#), aka swarm AI, in its new [Project Blackfin](#).

Rather than mimicking human intelligence, Project Blackfin mimics the collaborative intelligence found in nature in swarms of bees, ants and other inhuman creatures.

F-Secure feels swarm intelligence will be a superior answer to thwarting threats using machine intelligence. "My main focus will be in the evolution of the use of AI in cybersecurity — in terms of preparing for the imminent malicious use of AI and, most importantly, the continuous need to improve our capabilities on the defensive side — in close cooperation with our cybersecurity experts," said Matti Aksela, vice president of artificial intelligence.

"Our most significant achievement was the launch of Watch F-Secure for a heads-up on new and better ways to apply AI to cybersecurity defenses." [Swarm AI](#) will also finally defeat alarm fatigue since the entire system, alarms included, act as one synchronized system. —*Pam Baker*



Not quite one year after IBM's bold \$34 billion [acquisition of Red Hat](#) Ginni Rometty, IBM chairman, president and CEO, positioned the company as the world's No. 1 hybrid cloud provider.

"Businesses are starting the next chapter of their digital reinventions, modernizing infrastructure and moving mission-critical workloads across private clouds and multiple clouds from multiple vendors," said Rometty. "They need open, flexible technology to manage these hybrid multi-cloud environments. And they need partners they can trust to manage and secure these systems. IBM and Red Hat are uniquely suited to meet these needs."

Less than one month after the [Red Hat](#) acquisition, [IBM announced](#) the transformation of more than 100 products from its software portfolio to be cloud-native and optimized to run on Red Hat OpenShift, a hybrid cloud enterprise container platform for developers. The fruit of the IBM-Red Hat deal is Cloud Paks. The latest is [Cloud Pak for Security](#).

Hybrid cloud is the destination architecture for the future, said Rometty. Is it IBM's? That's what everyone will be watching. —*Lynn Haber*



When [Igel](#) tapped [Jed Ayres](#) to lead its North American business in 2016, few partners were familiar with the Germany-based thin client OS provider. Now Igel, which only sells its thin client hardware and [Igel OS](#) Linux operating system through the channel, has a thriving business and partner ecosystem.

Igel's Edge OS workspace software and [Universal Management Suite \(UMS\)](#) is certified to run on the AWS desktop-as-a-service offerings called Amazon WorkSpaces, Citrix Cloud and VMware Horizon, among others. Igel scored one of its biggest coups last year when Microsoft gave it early access as [the first Linux thin client certified](#) for the recently launched Windows Virtual Desktop (WVD).

As customers seek to migrate from the [Windows 7 OS](#) and with Microsoft's launch of WVD, Ayres is bullish about the potential for Igel and its channel partners. "It's almost like the perfect storm," Ayres told Channel Futures last year. "It's pushing people to look at other ways to deliver their desktops, which pushes them to Windows Virtual Desktop."

In addition to WVD, Ayres said Igel is seeing growth from its [Amazon WorkSpace](#) business as well as with those who use the companion [Teradici](#) PCoIP protocol. —*Jeffrey Schwartz*



Intelisys was on our first roster of organizations to watch back in 2018. An early participant in the M&A trend in tech, the master agent was [acquired by ScanSource](#) in 2016 and gained access to resources it used to fuel considerable expansion during the following year.

Has the expansion continued? Most definitely.

Intelisys has [tripled in size](#) in the last four years and is eyeing more growth. The company increased its line card roster to approximately 160 names and benefitted from ScanSource being named a [primary distributor for Mitel](#) and acquiring [Canpango](#), RPM and intY.

The nationwide expansion of the channel support team saw the addition of channel managers, [sales solutions engineering team members](#) and programmers. A new, [purpose-built office](#) was opened in Texas, new sales tools and enhancements were added to the [partner portal](#) and a [wireless/IoT certification](#) was added to Intelisys Cloud Services University.

As for partner success, how about a [partner-led UCaaS deal](#) for \$340,000 in monthly recurring revenue? Intelisys has set the bar high for others wanting to move upmarket — not just in terms of revenue, but in providing partners with the products, tools, training and support they need to get the job done. —*Buffy Naylor*



As more companies [migrate](#) from Microsoft's Skype for Business to Teams and usage of Webex and Zoom conferencing continues to

rise, [Poly](#) has positioned itself with a diversified portfolio of new audio and video communications and collaboration products.

More than a year following the [\\$2 billion merger](#) of Plantronics and Polycom, the new Poly is delivering or readying everything from Bluetooth headsets and desk phones to video conferencing systems for small offices and huddle rooms to large boardrooms. Poly has long-established alliances with Microsoft and Zoom and last year added Google Cloud to the mix. Poly also has alliances with key VoIP providers including Ring Central, 8x8 and Vonage.

Among the company's newest products: The new [Poly X30 and X50](#) will give partners the opportunity to deploy affordable, turnkey video conferencing solutions for executive offices and huddle rooms on a broad scale. Initial units will be designed to work with Microsoft Teams and Zoom, though for now the systems will only work with one or the other. Over time, they will support multiple conferencing services.

For larger conference rooms, Poly delivered its new G7500, a turnkey video conferencing bundle that enables 4K video. At the other end of the spectrum, Poly also has refreshed its CCX line of VoIP phones. —*Jeffrey Schwartz*



Going all in on one vendor poses great risk — unless you've got a sound strategy and a strong provider. [SADA Systems Inc.](#) took

that leap in 2019 when the managed services provider [shed its Microsoft cloud business](#) to become a Google Cloud-only partner.

At the time, Tony Sofian, president and CEO of SADA explained that when the company's Google Cloud business became larger than its Microsoft-based service offerings, he began exploring various options.

"The path, which we felt was more up our alley and more to our natural strengths, was to partner closely with one provider. We picked Google Cloud," Sofian told Channel Partners. Since making that pick, SADA has [soared](#).

The MSP once again clinched the title of Google Cloud Global Partner of the Year. It also opened eight new offices in the United States and Canada, [teamed with Avant Communications](#) to sell Google Cloud licensing, [added to its portfolio](#), [named two women](#) to its board of directors, and continues to serve big brand names. SADA's success can serve as a template for other MSPs seeking to grow through, in essence, shrinking. —*Kelly Teal*

25 Orgs to Watch



Quintessence Labs, a cybersecurity company headquartered in Australia, is accelerating its research in quantum-based cybersecurity

products. It may feel as if [quantum computing](#) is a far out, futuristic dream, but there are many [deep-pocketed research teams](#) working to bring it to fruition soon.

Quintessence Labs uses the latest in quantum innovations to protect data for its clients today using a sophisticated high-speed true random number generator, encryption key management and one-time pad encryption, among other defensive measures. Quintessence Labs is also working toward developing next-generation quantum cybersecurity products to thwart future attacks by AI-led quantum computers.

At some point, swarm AI and quantum computing will likely merge to battle multiple, highly aggressive and lightning-fast AI attacks. For that reason alone, it's worth your while to pay attention to how these technologies progress in the cybersecurity space. MSSPs will need to know where threats and security products are headed.

Channel Partners chose Quintessence Labs as an organization to watch in part for its new Quantum Entropy Enhancer and Quantum Key Distribution products. Keep an eye on its quantum physics-based R&D work as well. —*Pam Baker*



Silver Peak Systems SD-WAN provider [Silver Peak Systems](#) launched its Unity

EdgeConnect platform in 2015 and watched its adoption grow. Customer deployments hit 600 in 2017, 1,000 in 2018 and 1,500 last year. The growth caused it to land in the [Gartner WAN Edge Infrastructure](#) leaders quadrant for the second year. Industry observers wondered in 2017 if Silver Peak would seek a buyer in order to survive the crowded SD-WAN market, but the company stands very much on its own three years later.

CEO David Hughes said the company will use its channel partners to [expand its routes to market](#) in 2020. An expanded partnership with Synnex and several new financial incentives highlighted Silver Peak's revamped focus on the channel.

"To be No. 1, we must move quickly and aggressively to seize the day," Hughes said.

We're watching how Silver Peak matches its benchmarks in various SD-WAN leader boards and how it dedicates time, personnel and resources to drawing various types of channel partners. And will Silver Peak position itself as more than an SD-WAN provider, as Hughes recently hinted? —*James Anderson*

25 Orgs to Watch

SOPHOS Security and hardware company [Sophos](#) is one of the largest endpoint security vendors in the market. The British company offers cloud-native and AI-enhanced solutions to help secure the networks used by more than 400,000 organizations in 150 countries.

Sophos's [Intercept X](#) product combines cutting edge technologies such as deep learning and endpoint detection and response to protect against malware, exploits and ransomware. Sophos explains that, "The artificial intelligence built into Intercept X is a deep learning neural network, an advanced form of machine learning that detects both known and unknown malware without relying on signatures." In January, Sophos [rolled out](#) new security capabilities for Chrome OS devices and improved mobile threat defense for Android and iOS devices.

Intercept X received the highest scores in the 2019 Advanced Endpoint Protection (AEP) Group Test by [NSS Labs](#), an independent product testing firm.

In October 2019, private equity firm [Thoma Bravo](#) acquired [Sophos](#) for \$3.9 billion (the acquisition hinges on shareholder approval but could be completed by early 2020). While the move could foster growth for Sophos, enabling it to continue to move upmarket and target larger enterprises, there is also the possibility that Sophos could be subsumed in the deal, with portions of the business sold off. —*Lauren Horwitz*

Tech Data In the world of distribution, 45-year-old [Tech Data](#) has been the company to watch since agreeing late last year to being [acquired by private equity firm Apollo Global Management](#) in a deal worth about \$5.4 billion.

At the time Tech Data's acquisition by Apollo was announced, Rich Hume, Tech Data's CEO said, "The transaction will enable us to build on our success, making Tech Data a growth platform and enabling us to further differentiate and expand our end-to-end solutions and provide our channel partners with unparalleled reach, efficiency and expertise."

Distribution, despite rumors of its demise, continues to play a significant role for channel partners in a market where the U.S. technology industry 2020 projection is targeted at \$1.7 trillion, and the global IT industry is estimated at \$5.2 trillion, according to the IT Industry Outlook 2020 report from CompTIA. Tech Data reported \$37.2 billion in sales in fiscal 2019.

Now, to watch how key partner and vendor distributors shake out for partners as a result of the recent M&A activity. —*Lynn Haber*



Open source software vendor [SUSE](#) experienced a series of major events in 2019, from hiring a [new CEO](#) to regaining its independence after being owned by Micro Focus for four years to dealing with the news that its biggest competitor and the open source market leader, Red Hat, was being acquired by global IT powerhouse IBM.

But despite the commotion, the Germany-based SUSE continued to come out fighting by [expanding its standard partner program](#), working to increase its name recognition in the marketplace — particularly in North America — and by bolstering its highest-level accredited partner program for its best partners.

SUSE [realigned its product line](#) in 2019 as well, ending the development and availability of its SUSE OpenStack Cloud products and services as the company pivoted to focus more strategically on its Linux and other core open source software product lines. That move, which was also seen as a reflection of low customer demand, followed a top to bottom review of the company following the hiring of former SAP executive Melissa Di Donato, as its new CEO in July. Di Donato is SUSE's first female CEO.

Now SUSE is working to further differentiate itself in the open source marketplace as the smaller and friendlier partner, particularly in contrast to the IBM-owned Red Hat, as it seeks continued growth in 2020. —*Todd R. Weiss*

TERIDIION [Teridion](#) goes by many descriptions: SaaS accelerator, [WAN](#) optimizer and even SD-WAN services provider. But Teridion executives say their company occupies its own lane.

The company provides an internet overlay network through public cloud. Teridion aims to match the internet's performance with its resiliency. Relying on the internet is a more challenging proposition than people realize.

Although network-based SD-WAN providers are Teridion's biggest competitors, the company is not an SD-WAN vendor. In fact, the company partners with several SD-WAN vendors, including Silver Peak, VeloCloud and Cisco Meraki, to give them a more efficient middle mile.

"There's not even a Gartner Magic Quadrant for what we do," said [Kevin Moynahan](#), director of channel sales. "That's a positive and a negative. It just means we've got to do a lot of educating."

The company scored a big win last fall when it announced its [re-entrance into the Chinese market](#) after developing a workaround for the country's new VPN restrictions. We're watching Teridion for new vendor partnerships and partner wins in 2020. —*James Anderson*

THOMABRAVO Amid all the M&A activity in the tech sector over the last few years, [Thoma Bravo](#), one of the top private equity firms investing in software and technology, has distinguished itself with a decidedly channel-friendly approach. The company pioneered the "buy-and-build" investment strategy and has been applying it to its acquisitions for 20 years.

Over the past two decades, Thoma Bravo has acquired more than 200 software and technology companies worth a total of more than \$50 billion. Currently their software-centric portfolio includes total or partial ownership of 35 companies, many with names familiar to the channel such as Riverbed, Solarwinds, McAfee, Continuum, Barracuda, Imperva and ConnectWise.

A prime example of how Thoma Bravo's strategy can impact the channel came last October, when it effectively consolidated two of the companies it owned in [ConnectWise's acquisition of Continuum](#). At the same time, Thoma Bravo backed ConnectWise's acquisition of IT-Boost. Combining the strengths of the rival MSP platform providers and adding the IT documentation system put more problem-solving resources, tools for efficiency and fuel for growth in the hands of partners, ConnectWise said at the time. —*Buffy Naylor*

VAST It was a big year for [Vast Data](#) in 2019 as the company [came out of stealth mode](#) in February and began working to grow its partner network so more customers can learn about its innovative all-flash, exabyte-scale universal storage system technology.

Vast Data uses extremely low-cost quad level cell (QLC) flash memory to offer data storage that is faster, while being just as economical as traditional mechanical storage drives.

All of Vast's business is done through the channel, which in 2019 only included 15 partners; that number is expected to grow in 2020.

In June, Vast Data bolstered its products by adding a new [zero compromise performance guarantee](#) against data loss and an uptime guarantee for customers of the company's all-flash universal data storage systems. In September, [the company added](#) accelerated support for AI applications and asymmetric cluster expansion to give users more tools to improve the performance and resiliency of their business data storage systems. —*Todd R. Weiss*

25 Orgs to Watch

T-Mobile [T-Mobile](#) made a big splash in 2019.

The Bellevue, Washington-based carrier landed a long-awaited agreement to [merge with Sprint](#). The companies agreed to T-Mobile's \$26.5 billion purchase, although they faced regulatory gridlock from federal and state agencies. The merger agreement with the feds required divestment that would lead to Dish Network becoming the fourth wireless carrier in America.

As court cases raged on, T-Mobile launched its [5G network](#) in December. The company doesn't claim to provide the same speeds as its competitors but rather bills itself as the carrier that reaches the widest geographical region and largest population. The numbers for now are 200 million people and 5,000 cities.

"We believe that this technology is truly transformative and could potentially be the most transformational technology of our lifetime," one executive told Channel Partners. "But it's not any good to anyone if only a few people in a few cities can get it."

We'll see what happens if the Sprint deal is successful. How will T-Mobile utilize Sprint's "mid-band" spectrum for 5G? Will a winner emerge in the "5G wars?" What will channel integration look like for the two large companies? —*James Anderson*

VEEAM [Veeam Software, the Switzerland-based](#) backup and recovery vendor, has a firm foothold with enterprise customers and in recent years has moved from virtualized backup to cloud computing.

Veeam has been profitable since 2009 and in early 2019 hit a longtime goal of \$1 billion in annual revenue.

Last December, Veeam [bolstered its channel program](#) with new benefits for key partners. The move provided select partners with deeper leverage into the company's sales force, developers and others, giving them additional help in selling Veeam's products.

In January it was announced that [Veeam is being acquired](#) by venture capital and private equity firm Insight Partners. The \$5 billion deal will help the company continue to evolve into hybrid cloud services, expand into new markets and become a U.S.-based business.

Insight Partners had invested \$500 million in Veeam a year earlier to help the company accelerate its presence in the global software market. —*Lauren Horwitz*

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Warranty Master is a market-leading software-as-a-service (SaaS) provider and a global leader in life cycle management and renewals. The company protects more than 50 million devices worldwide, performing continuous warranty lookups and updates of said devices with masterful reports and two-way sync. With fully automated warranty discovery and management for more than 26 supported integrations, Warranty Master's engine boasts the broadest worldwide device coverage with the greatest accuracy/highest speed while leveraging advanced techniques to adapt itself over time.

Warranty Master is an asset life cycle management (ALM) software company. The firm has 6,000 partners and is backed by Top Down Ventures — a SaaS-focused investment firm led by IT Glue founder Chris Day.

By performing continuous warranty and service coverage lookups directly from the OEMs, Warranty Master seamlessly updates all IT device assets in an easy-to-navigate dashboard, saving time, improving productivity and delivering asset refresh and extended warranty sales opportunities.

The company named channel veteran Dan Wensley CEO back in July of 2019. Anthony Day, who had led the company since its inception, has remained with the organization and is deeply focused on product and engineering.

Warranty Master operates as its own business with a dedicated team of more than 30 full-time employees. —Allison Francis

[Warranty Master](#) is a market-leading software-as-a-service (SaaS) provider and a global leader in life cycle management and renewals. The company protects more than 50 million devices worldwide, performing continuous warranty lookups and updates of said devices with masterful reports and two-way sync. With fully automated warranty discovery and management for more than 26 supported integrations, Warranty Master's engine boasts the broadest worldwide device coverage with the greatest accuracy/highest speed while leveraging advanced techniques to adapt itself over time.



windstream

Late February marks one year since Windstream filed for Chapter 11

bankruptcy after losing its court battle against Aurelius Capital Management.

A lot of progress has been made since then, but an exit from Chapter 11 could still be several months away. In December, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Robert Drain rejected Windstream's request for an extension to May 31 to file its reorganization plan to emerge from bankruptcy, and instead set an April deadline.

A major holdup in the process is [Windstream's](#) ongoing court battle with Uniti, a publicly traded real estate investment trust (REIT) consisting of network assets that Windstream divested in 2015. Windstream pays Uniti about \$650 million annually to use Uniti's network and wants to modify its agreement.

Windstream filed suit against Uniti last July over its annual payment. A trial is scheduled for March in federal bankruptcy court.

Looking ahead, the big questions are what will Windstream look like when it emerges from bankruptcy and will partners be pleased with the outcome? While working through Chapter 11, Windstream has increased its SD-WAN and UCaaS sales, and the company continues to invest in the deployment of those technologies while having "significant liquidity available," said Matt Milliron, Windstream's channel chief and head of strategic channels.

"We will emerge from restructuring as a financially stronger organization," he said. —Edward Gately



Data backup and disaster recovery vendor [Zerto](#) underwent an in-house channel transformation in 2019, bringing in a new vice president of global channels and cloud sales, a new vice president of Americas sales, several new and updated core products and a healthy dollop of new energy in the crowded backup and DR marketplace.

For partners and customers, data backup and disaster recovery are essential services and responsibilities in every line of business, and Zerto continues to build out its offerings and partner relationships to fulfill those needs.

In February, former VMware and Cisco channel executive [Jim Ortbals](#) joined the company as its new vice president of global channels and cloud sales to help grow its combined channel partner and cloud businesses and help them generate new recurring revenues. In December [Chris Nelson](#) became the company's new vice president of Americas sales. In August, [Eric Barnhart](#) was brought in as the new director of channel sales for the Americas, while Emily North Weeks was tapped as the director of sales for the Americas, East.

The company continues to stress its aim of working to drive increased revenue opportunities for its partners. In 2019, Zerto's flagship data backup and disaster recovery platform, [Zerto 7.0](#), gained new long-term data retention capabilities, support for purpose-built backup appliances (PBBAs) and new enterprise subscription-based licensing and services for customers. —Todd R. Weiss

BREADTH OF THE CHANNEL



EVENTS



March 9-12, 2020
The Venetian Sands & Expo,
Las Vegas

6,400+
EXPECTED IN VEGAS



September 29-October 2, 2020
Gaylord Palms Resort &
Convention Center, Orlando

3,200+
EXPECTED IN ORLANDO



December 1-2, 2020
Park Plaza Victoria London

300+
EXPECTED IN LONDON

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analysis to indirect sales channels
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MSSP INSIDER

Our brand-new MSSP Insider section on
the Channel Futures website features
in-depth content to help managed security
service providers run their businesses.

channelfutures.com/mssp-insider

AWARDS

MSP 501 2020 EDITION

The MSP 501 is the IT channel's largest
and most comprehensive ranking of lead
ing managed service providers.

channelfutures.com/msp-501



The Excellence in Digital Services Awards
is our newest awards program where we
recognize partners who deliver stellar
business outcomes for their clients.

bit.ly/CPDigitalServicesAwards



The Circle of Excellence is Channel
Partners' program that recognizes IT and
telecom channel leaders who are helping
their partners create business value for their
customers.

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Top Gun 51 recognizes a new generation
of channel executives, those who build and
execute programs in a way that drives
partner, customer and supplier success.

channelpartneronline.com/top-gun-51

Channel Futures European Partners | 51

The European Partners 51 Awards are a new
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best in ICT excellence. This program is open
to European partners of any stripe — any
company that sells, manages and integrates
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2020
CHANNEL
INFLUENCER
OF THE YEAR

JOHN DELOZIER, ROCKING THE CHANNEL

Helping partners succeed is the perfect gig for 8x8's channel chief
BY EDWARD GATELY

If 8x8's [John DeLozier](#) wasn't a channel leader, he'd like to be jamming on stage with Sammy Hagar or the boys in Van Halen, or maybe playing acoustic in a little bar somewhere.

Either way, he has a lot in common with classic rock stars in that he knows how to get a crowd pumped, roll with the changes, exploit opportunities and survive setbacks. As [8x8's](#) senior vice president and channel chief, he is charged with developing the strategy, governance and results of the 8x8 partner program and channel.

Needless to say, he's a channel superstar and our pick for 2020 Channel Influencer of the Year.

Scott Sampson, [8x8's](#) senior vice president of worldwide sales, said [DeLozier's](#) commitment to the channel is "evident in every action and decision he takes at 8x8."

"His broad experience as both an owner of a VAR and as a senior executive in multiple organizations uniquely puts him at the top of the list in channel influence," Sampson said. "Personally, I've learned a great deal from John over the last two years, including the importance of trust and relationships with respect to channel development. John's can-do attitude, coupled with his commitment to excellence and outstanding relationship-building skills, allows him to foster trust with channel partners while giving them a blueprint for success. John

is all about helping channel partners build thriving businesses."

Rhythm of the Channel

DeLozier tells us there are "amazing" parallels between changes that have taken place in the music industry and the channel.

"We've gone from eight-track tapes to cassette tapes, to laser discs, to CDs and now downloads," he said. "Most of the millennials don't even know what a CD is. It's the same in the channel. We've gone from technology that started out as an analog phone signal where the phone company came out and had to hook it up at your house or business, to cloud communications today."

"Adapting to change is something that I've had to learn, and I think I've been successful with it. Exposing opportunity is another thing that I would touch on. In change there's opportunity. There's confusion and there's mystery, and I always tell the partners this is your opportunity, as we move from on-premises communications to cloud communications with 8x8, to be that consultant that helps your customers get there."

[DeLozier](#) has always worked in the channel in one way, shape or form since he began his career in the 1990s.

"Senior year in college, I started ACT with a partner and then sold it in 2007 to Cross Telecom, which was [Avaya's](#) largest

VAR," he said. "I went on a VAR run for three years. In 2010, we sold that to Arrow Electronics, which was a distribution company, and then eventually I went on to work at several different suppliers. So I've been in the channel my entire career. I was raised in the channel, and I will tell you that it's really interesting because I've been able to look at the channel from every angle. Whether it's a services company or a VAR, a distributor or a supplier, I've been on all sides of it."

DeLozier surprised the channel in June 2018 when he [vacated his position](#) as CenturyLink's senior vice president of strategic partners and alliances to lead 8x8's channel. At CenturyLink, he and the channel team performed a major overhaul of the telco giant's partner program, offering tiers for the first time.

Having experience in every facet of the channel has come into play as DeLozier has built channel programs.

"For example here at [8x8](#), our channel program is called Elev8 and it has a place for each one of those things," he said. "We have a place for the master agent, the VAR, alternative channels, alliances and even DevConnect. Because I have grown up in the channel and because I've been a part of each one of those pieces, it makes it easier as we architect the channel program to hit each one of those audiences and do each one effectively, because they're very differ-

ent sales motions and they think about things differently. And 8x8 has a place for all of those aspects in the channel. I think everywhere I've gone, I've accomplished that because of my experience in the channel. I understand it."

Innovation Rules

When it comes to innovation in the channel, cloud tops the list, with a massive total addressable market (TAM), DeLozier said. 8x8 and all of its competitors put together make up just 11% of that TAM, he said.

"Customers and partners are looking to the channel for cloud solutions to really jump into this new foray and this new game to be successful, and there's a lot of mystery in that," he said. "And where there's mystery, there's margin and there's innovation. And I think that, just from a core community and genre discipline of cloud, there's all kinds of innovation opportunity."

From 8x8's perspective, the company has been "super innovative" in programmatically putting something together that reaches every part of the channel, and "there's a place for everybody in Elev8," DeLozier said.

"Another thing I want to hit on is how you communicate with the channel. We've been very innovative in that and put together an incredible partner portal called Partner Exchange," he said. "If you're a master agent, a subagent, a VAR or an

Cover Story

alliance partner, you can go to that partner marketplace and communicate with [8x8](#) from quote to cash. Not a lot of other cloud companies or any technology companies can claim that. We're very excited about that here at 8x8."

DeLozier said his biggest accomplishment in the channel has been the team he's assembled through the years, and he's always targeting people who "frankly, are better at their jobs than I am."

"I've been able to collect over the years a group of people that have come together and realized that there's something bigger than them as an individual in this community, and that has been along the whole ride," he said. "So now, today, with 8x8 in this cloud community, I look at this team that we've put together, I look at the accomplishments that we're seeing quarter over quarter, year over year, in a very short time, and it's what makes me the proudest. I'm very grateful for my team."

A "super key influence/inspiration" on his journey has been his wife Joanna DeLozier, who also works in the channel as a [Cisco](#) select account manager.

"She comes from the industry and continues to give me insight and opinion, but mostly inspiration," he said.

As for the future, DeLozier believes if you put yourself in the right position, around the right people and in the right industry, the "natural next steps just kind of show up because you're doing all the work to get to that place."

"I am very happy at [8x8](#), I'm very grateful for the opportunity that my boss, our CEO [Vik Verma], has given to me; it's rare that a senior vice president and global head of channel reports directly to the CEO," he said. "There's a lot I can learn there. And what you can expect from me and from 8x8 is continued external vision into where the cloud business is going. We're going to enhance the program we've put in

place. We're going to continue to surround ourselves with great people, and from a technology platform perspective, we're going to continue to innovate.

"I think if we do all those things and we continue to see the success that we're all seeing today, everyone will have a nice career path going forward, including me, and the natural next steps will be in play because we're surrounding ourselves with so much success. I'm excited about what the future holds not only for me, but 8x8."



Photo Credit: Clay Wieland Photography

No Regrets

Looking back on his career, DeLozier said he has no regrets because "any of the mountains that we go over or the valleys that we go through gives us the opportunity, the knowledge and the experience to be where we are today."

"Look, I have made mistakes along the way like everybody has," he said. "Maybe I believed a few people that I shouldn't have. Maybe we put too much reliability in some of the buzz turns in the marketplace and went in the wrong direction, then had to course correct — all kinds of things. I

could give you 20 different examples of mistakes along the way. But the key is this: Making mistakes along the way makes you better, makes you stronger. I'm very proud and very pleased with my career to this point. I'm excited about what the future holds. I've got the armor on for those valleys, I'll celebrate the mountaintops and we'll rock on from there."

Jasmina Muller recently joined [Everbridge](#) as its vice president of North America channel after working with DeLozier as 8x8's regional vice president of channel for the West.

"He is one of the best mentors I have had the pleasure of working for and learning from," she said. "His leadership quality consists of three main areas: patience, trust and fun. Of course, the day-to-day leadership skills are always there, such as motivation, showing up and leading by example. But he always said, 'Jas, be yourself, support your team and do what you feel is right.' That's key in being the best you can. JD always has and will continue to be there for his team even when they have 'flown the nest' to grow with their own careers. That is what makes him JD — always making sure his extended family is good."

After hours, music remains a big part of DeLozier's life. He's played guitar since the age of 6 and he surrounds himself with a lot of friends in the music business.

"I don't play nearly enough anymore, we've got so much going on with this cloud opportunity with 8x8 to keep me pretty busy, but I play as much as I absolutely can and I love it," he said. "Guitars are like children in some ways [and] I clearly have a problem in how many I have. You walk into my living room ... and my wife literally put my six favorite babies on the wall. We've got a jukebox in our living room, we've got a keyboard in our living room and we've got microphones, so it's pretty easy just to pick it up and start going."

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10 INNOVATORS TO WATCH

CHERYL COOK



There's a reason [Cheryl Cook](#), senior vice president of global channel for Dell Technologies, keeps coming out on top as a channel leader. Cook is viewed as a long-time and consistent advocate of the channel who helps partners succeed. Her passion for helping partners win is in her

DNA. She's held top channel positions for 25-plus years.

Cook, who was among the channel executives awarded inaugural [Channel Partners Top Gun 51](#) recognition, advocates for the channel model internally at Dell, doing what she calls "raising the channel IQ." She is committed to [partners' business success](#), and is visible to partners, working to earn their trust by clearly articulating the vision of the company and a methodical process for achieving partner success. —Lynn Haber

JIM DELIS



[Jim Delis](#) is taking the reins as TPx's channel chief as the company embarks on a [new era](#) under the ownership of Siris, a private equity firm focused on investing in technology and telecommunications companies.

Longtime channel chief Ken Bisnoff is leaving TPx and Delis will assume

expanded responsibility as senior vice president in charge of TPx's partner channel across all regions. For the past year and a half, Delis has led TPx's national channel development and sales organizations in the East.

Delis said TPx will be in a stronger position financially with Siris.

"We intend to increase our focus on expanding our business nationally through the partner channel and in providing additional technical and support resources to help the channel grow at an accelerated rate in 2020 and beyond," he said. —Edward Gately

JEFFREY GOLDSTEIN



When [Jeffrey Goldstein](#) took over as president of [the International Association of Microsoft Channel Partners'](#) U.S. chapter [two years ago](#), one of his key priorities was to boost membership in the influential organization, which had declined to less than 600 members. Goldstein, who is managing director of Dynamics

partner [Queue Associates](#), said membership rose to 900 last year, and was confident that it would continue to accelerate.

Goldstein has traveled the globe to meet with various chapters and channel executives in Redmond to help partners navigate the new One Commercial program. Also on his watch, the Women in Technology (WIT) Network and IAMCP [came together](#) and the IAMCP stepped up its long-held focus on serving as a forum to enable [partner-to-partner networking \(P2P\)](#) with the launch of its partner directory, [the Index](#). —Jeffrey Schwartz

BRANDON KNIGHT



[Brandon Knight's latest move](#) in the channel lands him a spot among our 2020 Channel Influencers. After working on the supplier side as Serenova's channel chief, he's returning to the master agent channel as Telarus' new vice president of business development for

contact center.

Prior to his role at Serenova, Knight ran Intelisys' contact center-as-a-service (CCaaS) practice. As Telarus' head contact center evangelist, he will specialize in helping Telarus sales partners design, present and close large unified communications and contact center opportunities.

Knight has more than 25 years of combined experience running contact centers, consulting for contact centers and running contact center practices, and has big plans for accelerating contact center for Telarus. Expect to see huge moves and mega deals during his tenure. —Edward Gately

MIKE KERR



As SUSE's director of North American partner sales and alliances, [Mike Kerr](#) had a busy 2019. [SUSE](#), an open source vendor of Linux and a wide range of open source applications including cloud, software defined storage, container and other platforms, got a new CEO, [regained its](#)

[independence](#) as a company after four years of ownership by Micro Focus and watched as IBM acquired SUSE's largest competitor, open source market leader Red Hat. All the commotion, however, doesn't seem to affect Kerr as he looks to the future. An affable and knowledgeable spokesman for SUSE, Kerr is fueled by passion for his company and its mission to help its growing partner network and customers do their best work with open source software in a wide range of industries. —Todd R. Weiss

GARY PICA



[Gary Pica](#) is a leader and a true pioneer in the managed services field. He has built two top-performing MSPs and has been named one of ChannelPro's 20 industry visionaries and MSP Mentor's most influential leaders.

Pica is the founder and president of [TruMethods](#), a training, peer and accountability firm aimed at helping IT solution providers reach their full potential as MSPs and cloud providers. Through TruMethods, which "provides the playbook for MSP success that helps IT solution providers move forward," Pica shares the key ingredients that transformed his business and his life through his training process. Today, hundreds of IT providers around the world utilize the TruMethods business transformation framework.

—Allison Francis



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Phil Eden, IGEL Technology
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CHANNELS



“Our engagement with IGEL helped us to substantially grow both our IGEL and cloud workspace business last year, which contributed to satisfied clients and award-winning work.”

Pete Downing , XenTegra
IGEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR

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10 Innovators to Watch

ANDREW PRYFOGLE



The seven-year Intelisys veteran [moved to Pax8](#) last summer to lead an ambitious initiative.

Pryfogle declared that the Colorado-based cloud distributor would bring together the managed service provider (MSP) and telecom agent channels.

“We think where convergence is happening is that both parties — agents and MSP, respectively — are leaving money on the table,” he said in September. “We believe those services can cross and converge between both parties, creating bigger opportunities for either agents or MSPs.”

It was a bold statement for a company whose 7,000 partners were almost 99% MSP. And if the [spirited conversations](#) we witnessed at the Channel Partners Evolution conference are any indication, the channel has absolutely taken notice of Pryfogle’s declaration. We’re excited to watch Pax8 and the traditional master agents innovate and evolve in 2020. —James Anderson

DANIEL SAKS



[Daniel Saks](#) was only getting started as an entrepreneur when his company acquired a master agent in 2018.

AppDirect [bought](#) World Telecom Group (WTG) to merge it into the new company AppSmart. The organization’s stated goal was to be a

channel-led B2B marketplace that harnessed the strengths of a cloud service provider and a telecom master agent. But WTG wasn’t the only master agent involved.

AppSmart acquired [Telegation](#) last fall and didn’t stop there, [buying CNSG](#) a few months later. That gives AppSmart 66 years of combined master agent experience and one of the deepest supplier portfolios in the industry. And for Saks it’s an opportunity to combine the best of the SaaS world with the best of the master agent world. —James Anderson

KEVIN ROONEY



[Kevin Rooney](#), vice president, Americas channel sales at [Veeam Software](#), is a [Top Gun 51](#) award winner and channel partner evangelist. [Rooney](#) was recognized by the Top Gun program for his leadership and ability to cultivate relationships between vendors

and partners.

Rooney understands how to bridge the gap between these sometimes antagonistic entities and foster collaboration rather than competition. “[Partners] know, when they work with Veeam, it’s a partnership, it will never be adversarial,” he said. “That is our way to the market.”

Rooney is also an evangelist for modernizing how the channel delivers services. Successful channel partners embrace the [as-a-service model](#). “[They] are evolving with what customers are requiring. Those partners are going to survive the day,” Rooney said. —Lauren Horwitz

MILES WARD



A channel influencer need not run a partner program to impact the indirect world. Meet [Miles Ward, CTO of SADA Systems](#), a managed services provider that works only with Google Cloud. Ward, who joined [SADA](#) from Google Cloud, guides cloud strategy and engineering culture, and tackles

projects hands-on with customers. He has proven himself one of the smartest, most accessible and engaging channel players who holds a clear commitment to making sure technology serves a purpose. Overall, the [developments Ward fosters](#) of course benefit SADA and its partners but, more deeply, underscore and model how a successful born-in-the-cloud strategy works. This is paramount for the traditional telecom/mobility channel as it evolves, and for other cloud MSPs as they learn how to build momentum, even when teaming with just one vendor. —Kelly Teal



10 TECHNOLOGIES THAT WILL TAKE OFF IN 2020

The Year of CPaaS?

Yes, we know we've thrown an unreasonable number of five-letter acronyms at you in recent years, but communication platform-as-a-service (CPaaS) is worth remembering. [8x8's summer acquisition of Wavecell](#) helped confirm that CPaaS, which is the API integration of communication features and application into customer environments, is a crucial battleground for UCaaS providers.

Analysts aren't sure how consumable CPaaS will be as a stand-alone offering, but they agree that it will play an important role in enhancing customer experience.

"It's a platform to give developers tools to build new things, which in turn can be sold, monetized or simply added to increase the value of something else," said Jon Arnold, principal at J Arnold & Associates. —James Anderson

Edge and Swarm Computing Transform Collaboration

[Edge computing](#), which brings architecture to the data instead of data to the architecture, began the flip from a traditional centralized model (data centers and cloud computing) to a highly responsive distributed model (think real-time analytics and response times in autonomous cars). Most IoT subsystems today work on a hybrid model where some data is analyzed on-site, and some in the cloud.

Now [swarm intelligence](#) looks set to push more computing into IoT devices by creating a collective behavior of AI-fueled, decentralized, self-organized systems. This expands the notion of collaboration beyond a group of cooperating humans to a collection of cooperative things. All devices in a swarm system change their behavior according to the algorithm outputs of one or more IoT devices in that collective. Think of it as distributed, group computing that works like bees or ants in a swarm. —Pam Baker

XaaS

Anything as-a-service (XaaS) is gaining more traction and attention in the channel. It encompasses a broad category of services related to [cloud computing](#) and remote access delivered via subscription. With cloud computing technologies, vendors offer companies different kinds of services over the web or similar networks.

However, the decision of whether to jump on the XaaS bandwagon comes with dilemmas of deciding what to offer, determining what customers want and how much they're willing to pay for the service. —Edward Gately

The Empowered Edge

Talk about [edge computing](#) is heard just about everywhere. Gartner describes it as "an emerging topology-based computing model that enables and optimizes extreme decentralization, placing nodes as close as possible to the sources and sinks of data and content." And they say it is an undeniable reality.

Why? Because an edge computing architecture brings data closer to the devices that process that data rather than have it traverse a long trip

to the data center and back. Edge computing is largely driven by IoT and the expected proliferation of devices that require that data be processed quickly. Other benefits of edge computing: security, reliability and scalability. —Lynn Haber

AI-as-a-Service

While large companies may always opt to build, train and manage artificial intelligence (AI) models themselves, smaller companies may not have the in-house expertise. Accordingly, some companies will find that it's far easier to recycle a model that's been built and trained with data, even if it's for a different industry.

This new "[model-as-a-service](#)" form of AI will enable companies that don't have well-established AI initiatives in-house to use others' expertise, circumventing the need to reinvent the wheel. Using existing models and building on them with transfer learning can bring efficiency and cost-effectiveness by building on preexisting models to shorten training time.

As always, though, AI-as-a-service requires solid data management practices to ensure that the data used to train and build models is clean, up to date and statistically valid to eliminate bias. Enterprises will need to consider how to validate that existing data models are rigorous. —Lauren Horwitz

The Internet of Things

In less than a decade, internet of things (IoT)-connected devices have moved from novel corner case to ubiquitous phenomenon. The [\(IoT\)](#) has permeated homes, cities and office buildings as well as industries

like retail, health care, manufacturing and logistics.

As a result, IoT market growth is predicted to continue to grow. International Data Corporation ([IDC](#)) estimates that there will be 41.6 billion connected IoT devices, or "things," generating 79.4 zettabytes of data in 2025.

Technologies such as 5G have enhanced the capabilities of IoT devices, enabling faster data transfer and richer experiences, such as virtual reality, with less data latency. IoT devices bring challenges too. Hacks of vulnerable IoT devices, for example, can cost significant dollars. One survey of 400 IT leaders found [48% had experienced](#) an IoT breach. Among companies with less than \$5 million in revenue, the cost of IoT hacks was equal to [13.4% of annual revenue](#). For larger organizations, that cost was in the tens of millions of dollars. —Lauren Horwitz

Intelligent Knowledge Networks

The center of gravity for work group collaboration is shifting from document management and email to chatbot platforms, notably [Microsoft Teams and Slack](#). As that transition accelerates, along with the continued application of AI and the proliferation of speech and image recognition, collaboration's next wave will be intelligent knowledge networks.

A prime example is Microsoft's [Project Cortex](#), which is the culmination of the company's advances in AI, search and its graph APIs to establish organizational knowledge networks that will enable customers to automatically surface collective information. Project Cortex is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27



5 BUSINESS TRENDS FOR 2020

What changes inside and outside the channel will impact partners?

Cybersecurity Funding

Investing in cybersecurity was hot in 2019 and there's no reason to think it's going to slow down this year.

Investment firms have poured tens of millions of dollars into cybersecurity companies — well-established businesses as well as startups.

In one week last summer, Vade Secure, KnowBe4, Critical Start, Cyber Observer, Edgewise Networks and Orca Security all reported getting millions in funding from investment firms. And

all of the companies said the money would be used to fuel growth and beef up their technology to get a jump on their competitors.

Ovum's Mike Sapien, who covers security services, said demand for security technology and services is clearly very high. —*Edward Gately*

Zero Trust Security

Cisco defines zero trust as “a comprehensive approach to securing all access across your networks, applications and

environment. This approach helps secure access from users, end-user devices, APIs, IoT, microservices, containers and more. It protects the workforce, workloads and workplace”

In other words, trust nothing.

Chase Cunningham, principal analyst at Forrester, describes zero trust as a pragmatic approach to solving security that security leaders can actually understand and employ: no default configurations; monitor all network communications; monitor all users, all the

time; implement mandatory two-factor authentication, SSO and pushing the boundaries of security from the internals of the network, where you actually have an established beachhead externally. —*Lynn Haber*

Convergence of IT & Telcos

The story of telco agents and IT managed services providers [joining forces](#) is fascinating, as well as a topic of ongoing debate.

While some say that there are many instances of agent and MSP collaboration, others insist that agents and MSPs occupy different places in the tech universe. Telcos have dabbled in managed services over the years, but it hasn't been a pervasive trend. On the flip side, there's a tremendous opportunity for MSPs to partner with telco agents so that they can sell their ser-

vices upstream to midmarket enterprise customers. —*Allison Francis*

Ecosystem Data Sharing

There's safety in numbers when it comes to increasing share in a constantly changing market while warding off disruptors and meeting consumer demands on sustainability and other issues. Ecosystems built of partners and suppliers are forming around everything from blockchains and supply chains to [circular manufacturing](#). To succeed, members in these ecosystems must share data freely but that's easier said than done, due to a variety of concerns over data sharing. Still, there is tremendous pressure to share data, and those who do so wisely will prosper. The question to be answered is how to come to protective agreements without throttling data flow. —*Pam Baker*

The Masters Go Global

AppSmart drew headlines for bringing three master agents under the same banner, but organic expansion was a quiet but consistent theme throughout the year.

Multiple master agents — including [Intelisys](#) and [PlanetOne](#) — opened new offices in the U.S., and some of their rivals expanded outside of the country.

Chicago-based Avant Communications rewarded its partners for doing business with [European customers](#), even as it opened an office in Dallas. Telarus hired regional vice presidents for the United Kingdom and [Canada](#), pledging to imitate its success in the states.

We'll be on the lookout for master agents announcing new personnel and offices outside the states — especially in the United Kingdom. —*James Anderson*

TECHNOLOGIES TO WATCH (CONT.)

scheduled to appear in Office, Dynamics and other connected applications in the first half of this year. —*Jeffrey Schwartz*

Multicloud

As public cloud vendors nailed down their individual platforms and expanded market share, one glaring reality became apparent: Few, if any, enterprises choose just a single provider. The majority want to combine clouds because different services offer different advantages — and that means different clouds have different weaknesses, too. Enter the buzzy term “multicloud.” The channel has its work cut out. Organizations want more than one cloud, in different configurations (private, hybrid, public), and they need it all to integrate and

operate smoothly — all while meeting security, compliance, access and other specifications. [Expect “multicloud” and its challenges](#) to rule cloud talk in 2020. —*Kelly Teal*

AI Is Everywhere

In 2016, many IT analyst firms started making predictions that by 2020 artificial intelligence (AI) would be pervasive. Well, they were right. It's 2020 and AI is showing up everywhere. AI is becoming a more important component for a wide range of IT services, including software. In November 2019, Red Hat even [bolstered its JBoss BPM Suite](#) with helpful AI capabilities. Channel partners need to watch these developments closely. —*Todd R. Weiss*

Software-Defined Storage

As the costs and complexity of traditional network attached storage (NAS) and storage area network (SAN) systems have increased, software-defined storage continues to gain popularity and users. That trend will continue for channel partners in 2020 as the benefits of SDS become even clearer. SDS uses cheaper, standard x86-based hardware and enables faster and easier configuration changes compared to proprietary systems, while providing capabilities for deeper systems oversight and control. The key to SDS is the software layer it uses that is abstracted from physical storage devices, essentially decoupling the storage software from the hardware and giving users granular control. —*Todd R. Weiss*