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September NEWSLETTER

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Case Communications September 2009 Newsletter

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In this Issue:

[VMware ready to take on Microsoft](#)

[70 per cent of UK households have internet access](#)

[New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud](#)

[Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds](#)

[ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders](#)

[Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report](#)

[Ofcom may watch internet networks](#)

[Was the broadband plan influenced?](#)

[Digital Britain tax may be scrapped](#)

[Framework cut over admin error](#)

Welcome,

VMware ready to take on Microsoft

Senior management at VMware have indicated that the company is ready for a fight if Microsoft wants to take them on in the virtualisation sphere

[\[More\]](#)

70 per cent of UK households have internet access

More than 18 million homes in the UK now have internet access, representing 70 per cent of UK households, according to the latest figures from the Office of National Statistics .

[\[More\]](#)

New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud

The government has published a set of guidelines to help prevent fraud caused by the growing use of contactless payment technology on mobile phones.

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Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds

Government plans to help fund rollout of fibre-optic broadband are likely to fall far short of the forecast growth for demand for the technology, according to research.

The study by analyst Point Topic has cast doubt on the government's ability to reach its broadband access targets with funding of £12m.

[\[More\]](#)

ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders

Human rights groups and ISPs have said they are preparing a challenge to government proposals that would introduce a "three-strikes rule" for illegal downloaders.

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Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report

Cyber attacks on Georgia were co-ordinated closely with Russia's five-day campaign in August 2008, claims technical report

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Ofcom may watch internet networks

A Consultation has explored the idea of Ofcom monitoring the UK's communications infrastructure and identifying any shortfalls that could affect aspects like the nation's emergency preparedness, writes Mike Lowe.

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Was the broadband plan influenced?

New government proposals to disconnect those doing too much illegal file-sharing will appear to the public as the film and music industries putting pressure on the government, an ex-minister warned.

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Digital Britain tax may be scrapped

The proposed phone line tax to pay for the Digital Britain broadband programme could be postponed until after the next general election.

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Framework cut over admin error

Buying Solutions, the government's purchasing body, has had to cancel a £150m framework agreement due to an administration error.

[\[More\]](#)



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[VMware ready to take on Microsoft](#)

[70 per cent of UK households have internet access](#)

[New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud](#)

[Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds](#)
[ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders](#)

[Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report](#)
[Ofcom may watch internet networks](#)

[Was the broadband plan influenced?](#)

[Digital Britain tax may be scrapped](#)

[Framework cut over admin error](#)

VMware ready to take on Microsoft

VMware chief executive Paul Maritz, speaking at VM World 2009 in San Francisco, was blunt in his assessment of the challenge from Microsoft and how he intends to beat it.

"Obviously Microsoft is a serious competitor. Virtualisation is not easy to do and it takes significant effort," he said. "Microsoft has been working on Hyper-V for five years, and is at a stage we were at three years ago. The way you deal with competitors is by producing a better value than they do."

Microsoft has been seriously worried by the success of VMware. Last year it released its 'Hyper-V virtualisation software' ahead of schedule and dramatically undercut the price of VMware's package.

Microsoft was also a sponsor of last year's VMworld conference, but was barred from doing so this year as VMware considers the firm a serious competitor.

Maritz is well versed in Microsoft's competitive tactics. He spent 14 years at the company and played a key role in the development of Windows and Internet Explorer.

VMware argues that Microsoft came to the virtualisation field too late and is too tied to the principle that the operating system is the binding force behind virtualised computing.

"That's been a historic Microsoft strategy, and in this case it works very clearly against customer interests," said Raghu Raghuram, vice president of Server business at VMware.

"By definition it constrains the solution to be a very narrow partitioning solution that you add on to Windows as opposed to a datacentre solution. That's why we think that solution is flawed from the get-go.

"The other interesting aspect of this is that every security vulnerability that affects the Microsoft operating system by implication will require you to look at your Hyper-V environment to see if there is impact, as opposed to an operating system-independent solution."

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Case Communications
September 2009
Newsletter

In this Issue:

VMware ready to take on
Microsoft
70 per cent of UK households
have internet access
New government guidelines
aim to prevent mobile phone
fraud
Superfast broadband demand
to outstrip Digital Britain funds
ISPs and privacy groups to
fight "three-strikes rule" for
downloaders
Russian hackers co-ordinated
with military, claims US report
Ofcom may watch internet
networks
Was the broadband plan
influenced?
Digital Britain tax may be
scrapped
Framework cut over admin
error

70 per cent of UK households have internet access

The ONS study also shows that 63 per cent of UK households have a broadband connection, compared to 56 per cent in 2008.

The number of adults going online in 2009 was 37.4 million, a 10 per cent increase from 2008, with the 16-24 age group having the highest level of access at 96 per cent.

However, although the 65-plus age bracket had the lowest level of access at 30 per cent, it showed the highest increase in access of any group at 15 per cent, while 16-24-year-olds registered an increase of only three per cent, as that group approaches saturation.

Men were eight per cent more likely to go online during the past three months – 80 per cent versus 72 per cent for women.

The growth in wireless hotspot availability has also changed the way internet users go online. In 2007 the ONS statistics showed 700,000 people using wireless hotspots to access the web - in 2009 this rose to almost 2.5 million.

The statistics were generated through the ONS Opinions Survey, which recorded 1,200 interviews with adults over 16 living in private households.

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**Case Communications
September 2009
Newsletter**

In this Issue:

[VMware ready to take on Microsoft](#)
[70 per cent of UK households have internet access](#)
[New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud](#)
[Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds](#)
[ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders](#)
[Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report](#)
[Ofcom may watch internet networks](#)
[Was the broadband plan influenced?](#)
[Digital Britain tax may be scrapped](#)
[Framework cut over admin error](#)

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New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud

Mobile operators and banks such as Barclays and RBS are carrying out trials of nearfield communication technology that allows customers to pay for goods by swiping phones over sensors in a similar way to Oyster cards.

But the Home Office is concerned that the technology might lead to more stolen phones and so has proposed the following measures:

- SIM cards and phones will be disabled as soon as possible once a contactless payment mobile phone is reported lost or stolen;
- Any transactions above £10 will require verification such as a PIN code;
- Any customer who signs up for a contactless payment phone will be encouraged to add their details on the National Mobile Phone Register to make it easier for stolen phones to be identified and recovered.

Home Office minister Alan Campbell said the guidelines will help reduce the theft of phones.

"This technology is an exciting new development but we must continue to work together to reduce any new opportunities for criminals to profit from mobile theft," he said.

"As new technologies like this develop we aim to consider where safeguards can be incorporated at the drawing board stage."

The National Mobile Phone Register is linked to voluntary databases, such as Immobilise, where people can enter their phone's details.

If a phone is lost or stolen police can identify it and return it to the rightful owner. Approximately 22 million phones are currently registered in this way.

Banks and phone companies will be encouraged to enforce the guidelines.

Jack Wraith, chairman of the Mobile Industry Crime Action Forum, welcomed the move.

"The mobile phone industry has welcomed the opportunity to work with the banking industry in developing these guidelines to ensure that the customer experience in using contactless payments, via mobile devices, is both secure and robust," he said.

Dan Salmons, director of Payment Innovations at Barclaycard also welcomed the guidelines.

"Contactless is the future of payments and with plans for payments to be possible via mobile phone in 2010 the guidelines announced by the Home Office will ensure that security and consumer

confidence in mobile payments is further improved," he said.

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Newsletter**

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Ofcom may watch internet networks
Was the broadband plan influenced?
Digital Britain tax may be scrapped
Framework cut over admin error

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Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds

The sum announced as part of the *Digital Britain* report is "pretty weak" when compared with the scale of the challenge, according to Tim Johnson, chief analyst at Point Topic.

"Allowing only £12m to get more homes online looks pretty weak when you consider the size of the task on one hand and the potential benefits on the other," said Johnson.

The cash is meant to help ensure that superfast next-generation broadband is made available to homes and businesses in areas that would not justify commercial rollout.

Point Topic's latest forecast suggests there are still more than nine million UK homes without internet access and that the number is falling only slowly. The company estimates that by 2014 there will still be 6.5 million homes without web access.

These figures clash with Digital Britain's estimate that six million people without access would be assisted. But the confusion seems to arise from the definition of those without access – new digital inclusion champion Martha Lane Fox will be targeting six million people who are "both digitally and socially excluded".

Nevertheless, Point Topic is optimistic about the growth of broadband access in the UK, and has adjusted its forecasts accordingly.

The number of broadband lines rose to more than 17.8 million in the first half of 2009, which was 100,000 more than the company had predicted at the beginning of the year. As a result, Point Topic has inflated its overall forecast for the whole year by 36 per cent.

"Looking further ahead, Point Topic now projects more than 23 million broadband lines in the UK by the end of 2013, nearly 1.2 million more than in its last forecast," said the company in a statement.

"Set against the targets in the government's new implementation plan for Digital Britain, the statistics and forecasts show how far there is to go," it said.

"[Next-generation access] coverage is actually negligible today although it is expected to increase quickly over the next year and Point Topic forecasts it will pass 50 per cent by 2014. At that rate, the 2017 target should be achievable, although it will depend on some kind of subsidy to reach the more remote areas."

Point Topic expects there to be more than seven million next-generation fibre lines in service by the end of 2014. By then, there will be more than 20 million households and 1.7 million business premises with one or more broadband lines. Next-generation access will have 30 per cent of the market, with cable claiming 21 per cent and DSL down to 49 per cent.

Point Topic's figures separate out fibre-based next-generation access from fibre-based cable services such as those already provided by Virgin Media.

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Newsletter**

In this Issue:

VMware ready to take on Microsoft
70 per cent of UK households have internet access
New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud
Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds
ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders
Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report
Ofcom may watch internet networks
Was the broadband plan influenced?
Digital Britain tax may be scrapped
Framework cut over admin error

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ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders

Human rights groups and ISPs have said they are preparing a challenge to government proposals that would introduce a "three-strikes rule" for illegal downloaders.

The Government announced the move this week in a U-turn after lobbying from the creative and media industries who are concerned that existing plans did not pose enough of a deterrent.

Earlier this summer, the Constitutional Council in France declared access to the internet to be a basic human right, and many privacy campaign groups in the UK feel the same way.

Jim Killock, executive director of the Open rights Group said the organisation is preparing a formal complaint to the government.

"This is the wrong moment to go in this direction. Online music revenues are going up, illicit filesharing is going down," he wrote on the group's blog.

"This would be in direct contravention of their own goal of universal broadband access, as well as a curtailment of people's freedom of expression."

Simon Davies, head of campaign group Privacy International, said the group would fight the policy.

"We know that rights will be denied and innocent people will be victimised," he told the *Financial Times*.

ISPs are concerned that any such law would effectively require them to "police" the internet – a responsibility they say should not be theirs.

During the government consultation on filesharing, no ISP was in favour of any regulatory solution, and all suggested the way to deal with the problem was through the provision of legal offers and education.

The ISP Association said it was concerned that amendments were proposed without consultation with the internet industry and is raising these concerns with the government.

"ISPs and consumer groups consider disconnection of users to be a disproportionate response, a view that was recently supported by the European Parliament," the group said in a statement.

**Case Communications
September 2009
Newsletter**

In this Issue:

[VMware ready to take on Microsoft](#)
[70 per cent of UK households have internet access](#)
[New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud](#)
[Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds](#)
[ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders](#)
[Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report](#)
[Ofcom may watch internet networks](#)
[Was the broadband plan influenced?](#)
[Digital Britain tax may be scrapped](#)
[Framework cut over admin error](#)

Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report

Russian cyber attacks against Georgia a year ago were conducted in close connection with Russian criminal gangs, and used US identities and software tools, according to a technical report released about the attacks.

The attacks were co-ordinated closely with Russia's five-day military campaign in August 2008 that drew international condemnation.

The report from the US Cyber Consequences Unit (USCCU) also found that Microsoft software tools were used and that hackers communicated through Twitter and Facebook as well as dozens of other web forums

Some of the software used to carry out the attacks was a modified version of Microsoft code commonly used by network administrators to test their systems, the report found.

The cyber attacks in August last year rendered 20 Georgian political and news web sites incapable for over a week and used a combination of traditional hacking and denial-of-service techniques.

Many US corporations and citizens may not have had knowledge of their involvement as their systems were part of botnets used in the attack, according to John Bumgarner, chief technical officer at USCCU.

"US corporations and US citizens need to understand that they can become pawns in a global cyber war," he said.

The unit made it clear that the Georgia attacks were perpetrated by organised criminals and had no direct connection to the Russian government. But the timing of the attacks just before the Russian military incursion began suggested some collaboration, the report says.

"Many of the cyber attacks were so close in time to the corresponding military operations that there had to be close co-operation between people in the Russian military and the civilian cyber attackers," says the report.

"Many of the actions the attackers carried out, such as registering new domain names and putting up new web sites, were accomplished so quickly that all of the steps had to be prepared earlier."

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Case Communications September 2009 Newsletter

In this Issue:

[VMware ready to take on Microsoft](#)

[70 per cent of UK households have internet access](#)

[New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud](#)

[Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds](#)

[ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders](#)

[Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report](#)

[Ofcom may watch internet networks](#)

[Was the broadband plan influenced?](#)

[Digital Britain tax may be scrapped](#)

[Framework cut over admin error](#)

Ofcom may watch internet networks

In the Digital Britain report, it was proposed that Ofcom should have two changes to its duties. The first surrounded the promotion of efficient investment in communications infrastructure. The second wanted Ofcom to monitor the national communications infrastructure to check to see if the nation's requirements were not being met.

In a consultation examining the two changes, it explained that if Ofcom did discover anything that was not meeting the nation's needs, it would be expected to report it to government. Areas Ofcom would focus on would include the resilience of communication networks, their emergency preparedness and the level of preparedness demonstrated by the network operators.

The consultation has envisaged that Ofcom would also produce a bi-ennial report, giving both the Culture Secretary and Business Secretary a breakdown of everything that Ofcom identifies. The consultation said the full report would remain confidential, due to its sensitive nature, but headline details would be made public.

The first of the bi-ennial reports would be expected in 2012.

Stephen Timms, the minister in charge of the Digital Britain programme, said in a letter to Peter Luff, chairman of the Business Committee: "The [Digital Britain] white paper emphasised the increasing importance of monitoring the national communications infrastructure, and the need for both government and Ofcom to take a broad view of the nation's needs and any ways in which those may not be being met.

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Case Communications September 2009 Newsletter

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In this Issue:

[VMware ready to take on Microsoft](#)

[70 per cent of UK households have internet access](#)

[New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud](#)

[Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds](#)
[ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders](#)

[Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report](#)
[Ofcom may watch internet networks](#)

[Was the broadband plan influenced?](#)

[Digital Britain tax may be scrapped](#)

[Framework cut over admin error](#)

Was the broadband plan influenced?

The former Cabinet Office minister Tom Watson, who famously stepped down during Gordon Brown's leadership crisis earlier this year, said he was disappointed with the announcement and that he thought people would question where the decision came from.

"It will lead to accusations that the government has been captured by the big lobby operations of powerful rights-holders," he said.

The surprise decision to reintroduce the disconnection idea, which was ruled out in the Digital Britain plan, has also sparked reports that Lord Mandelson was swayed in his decision following meetings with senior officials in the music and film industries.

Lord Mandelson's plans to cut off the broadband connections of internet users who illegally download copyrighted music and films have also been attacked by privacy campaigners, internet service providers and Labour MPs as unworkable, unnecessary and potentially illegal.

TalkTalk, Britain's largest consumer broadband provider, warned that innocent web users could be disconnected after having their connections hijacked by pirates looking to circumvent the new rules. It added that the move "will likely breach fundamental human rights".

A spokesman said: "Barely two months after the publication of largely sensible and pragmatic measures to tackle the problem Lord Mandelson has, it seems, caved in under pressure from powerful lobbyists in the content industry."

Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat's culture and media spokesman, told BBC News that Lord Mandelson's move was "reckless and dangerous".

"There are many families whose children, unbeknown to them, might be illegally downloading but now their own access could be put in jeopardy by Lord Mandelson's proposals," he said.

The Conservative MP John Whittingdale, who is also chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, said he was broadly supportive of Lord Mandelson's proposals, but said that he may have inadvertently "killed his own bill".

"Personally I am on [Lord Mandelson's] side; peer-to-peer sharing is the greatest threat to our creative industries," he said.

"I don't think people should have their broadband cut off, but there are measures to restrict speed which is better than prosecuting people so they get a criminal record.

"That said, I have severe doubts that the government can get this bill through in the time available as if there is any opposition to it - and there will be now - there will be a general election before it goes through."

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), who is leading the Digital Britain programme, denied that it had changed its position since the publication of the report and said that the recommendations were open to consultation.

"We are simply adding new ideas to the table that could potentially

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make the whole system more flexible and provide a quicker way to bring in technical measures," it said in a statement.



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[VMware ready to take on Microsoft](#)

[70 per cent of UK households have internet access](#)

[New government guidelines aim to prevent mobile phone fraud](#)

[Superfast broadband demand to outstrip Digital Britain funds](#)
[ISPs and privacy groups to fight "three-strikes rule" for downloaders](#)

[Russian hackers co-ordinated with military, claims US report](#)
[Ofcom may watch internet networks](#)

[Was the broadband plan influenced?](#)

[Digital Britain tax may be scrapped](#)

[Framework cut over admin error](#)

Digital Britain tax may be scrapped

According to The Guardian, the new communications minister Stephen Timms may hold back the proposal as he does not believe there will be enough support for the proposal. Labour MPs are said to be unhappy about introducing a new tax just before an election and the Conservatives are said to be not keen on the tax either.

"When you face a general election you tend to have a short finance bill before the election and a longer one afterwards. It [the levy] is unlikely to make it through the short finance bill without opposition support and that does not look likely ... In that case, it would have to wait until after the election," Timms said.

Asked if that meant the levy was unlikely to happen, he said: "Possibly, yes."

Adam Marshall, of the British Chambers of Commerce, said: "Both political parties need to find a consensus about how the next generation of broadband will be delivered, regardless of who is in Downing Street. Businesses need sustained, efficient infrastructure investment in place to deliver growth and jobs."

Clive Davenport, of the Federation of Small Businesses, said: "The government must secure funding to ensure the next generation of broadband speeds is put in place ... This is vital if we want the country to be internationally competitive."

Any delay in the levy could see rural areas fall even further behind more urban areas, the Country Land and Business Association warned.

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Newsletter

In this Issue:

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Microsoft

70 per cent of UK households
have internet access

New government guidelines
aim to prevent mobile phone
fraud

Superfast broadband demand
to outstrip Digital Britain funds
ISPs and privacy groups to
fight "three-strikes rule" for
downloaders

Russian hackers co-ordinated
with military, claims US report
Ofcom may watch internet
networks

Was the broadband plan
influenced?

Digital Britain tax may be
scrapped

Framework cut over admin
error

Framework cut over admin error

The framework in question – the Pan Government OGC Framework for Office Supplies – was due to start this month and run until September 2011. According to the Office of Government Commerce's (OGC) website its purpose was to supply desktop office supplies, stationery, cut paper, business stationery, electronic office supplies (EOS), electronic storage media and small business machines.

But a letter seen by **Public Servant Daily** informs the five participating companies that the awarding of the framework agreement has been withdrawn due to an administration error by the team working on the framework.

"[An internal] review found that you were not given sight of the 'Evaluator Guidance Document' provided to the evaluators in order to carry out the evaluation. We feel that in order for bidders to be able to prepare properly they should have had this information. For these reasons, we have decided to postpone the procurement and will be issuing a new [tender notice] in the near future," it said.

Buying Solutions told **Public Servant Daily** that it apologises for the "inconvenience caused to both the suppliers concerned and our customers". But a spokeswoman added: "Our top priority was to protect the integrity of the procurement and we could only do that by cancelling the award and conducting a new procurement."

The procurement process for the framework started in April and when asked why it took five months of work before the error was noticed, the spokeswoman said it was a human error and that Buying Solutions is reviewing the current processes to ensure the same thing does not happen again. She added that as the documentation and processes for the restarted procurement will be very similar to the original, they do not expect to incur substantial additional costs. The spokeswoman could not reveal how much the first procurement process cost.

None of the companies involved in the agreement – Office Depot, Supplies Team, Staples, Banner Business Services and GP Commercial – would comment other than to confirm that the letter had been received.

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