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Weekly Round-Up

So long and thanks for all the stalling

One down, one to go. So farewell, Sir Iain Vallance, thanks for the memories and all the ammunition. The man who almost single-handedly held back the rollout of broadband services in the UK has decided to call it a day.

By [Aled Herbert](#)

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Of course, he can't take all the glory for hamstringing the internet industry - take a bow Sir Peter, who may follow him shortly.



Vallance had been with the telco for 35 years, occupying the role of chairman since 1987. During those years he has led the company onto the rocks, strangling innovation in one hand and competition in the other. Both he and Bonfield had come under intense pressure following the debacle surrounding the unbundling of the local loop and the failure to make Britain broadband. It became a question of when, not if, the axe would fall.

Once BT's PR department held up its hands and admitted defeat in the impossible battle to improve the telco's image in the press and industry, Vallance's approach to media relations had all the grace and subtlety of a buffalo on roller skates.

Vallance once described BT as a "lollipop man trying to restrain the

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over-exuberant children," referring to the clamour from the UK media, government and telecoms industry to open up the local loop and jumpstart Britain's ecommerce drive.

So enter stage right Christopher Bland, who joins BT from the BBC to take over the top spot. Mr Bland? Sounds like one of the Reservoir Dogs.

Mr Bland is the former chairman of London Weekend Television and deputy chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority and once admitted that at the time of his appointment to the IBA he didn't own a television and had to "rush out and buy one".

At the time of writing, The Roundup was unable to ascertain whether he owns either a phone or a computer.

Mr Bland, who was previously touted as the possible saviour of Railtrack, has absolutely no experience of the telecoms industry. So the future of UK broadband looks rosy then.

Ironically a banner next to the story on the BBC website declared 'BT in Crisis'. Does the Beeb have that little faith in its chairman? I think we should be told?

Sir Peter Bonfield's grasp on the chief executive's reigns is also tenuous. Speaking on Radio 4's Today programme on Thursday morning, Mr Bland responded to a question about his future with the quivering CEO, with: "We'll have to see how we get on... the relationship is something we'll have to work at." Sounds promising.

And so as Mr Bland dons his black suit and tie, slips on his sunglasses and mutters: "let's go to work" the UK internet industry holds its breath and waits for the carnage to begin.

Good luck Mr Bland, the Roundup will be right behind you...

Still with BT, readers of last week's Roundup will recall a heinous attempt by the telco on the life of silicon.com journalist Ben King at the launch of its GPRS range.

A piece of the display set toppled over and damaged Ben's heel on the day he was meant to make his debut for the silicon.com football team. Ben has since had an apology from a member of BT's PR company.

The email read: "I brushed against the said wall as I was getting something out of my bag and was more than a tad surprised when it started toppling over in slow motion. I had no idea that it had actually hit your heel and hope it didn't affect your performance on the pitch too much. I can also confirm that no malice was intended, the whole thing wasn't put together particularly well - the wall not the press conference."

Ben is recuperating nicely and the armed guard protecting him has been relaxed, much to his relief.

The dot-com crash has been spectacular, sudden and dramatic, but is it art? Apparently so. An exhibition in San Francisco claims to be the first art show to chronicle the demise of the ecommerce start-up

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industry.

The centrepiece of the show is a wall covered with hundreds of business cards donated by former new media employees. Artist Jamie A Michael said: "Your business card is a piece of your identity that has been distributed who knows where and then it's ripped away from you when you are laid off." Indeed.

Other exhibits at the show include an image of the plummeting Nasdaq index and, most poignantly, the fading photographs of former dot-com execs above a water cooler.

Who knows, one day the Roundup's desk may appear in a gallery a la Tracey Emin's bed. Irrespective of whether it has any merit as a work of art (again, a la Tracey Emin's bed) it will draw considerable interest as the world's largest repository of post-it notes and stress-relief squeeze balls.

Virgin mobile supremo Richard Branson is aiming to secure a sponsorship deal with the Warbury Warriors - the virtual stars of The Sun's Striker cartoon strip.

For those unfamiliar with the series, four or five miniscule snippets of a football match are published each day showing the Warbury stars striving to put the ball in the net. It can take weeks for the ball to get anywhere near the goal - something that might prove frustrating and alien to anyone other than QPR fans.

Dickie will make a special appearance in the strip on Saturday to seal the deal with the club chairman.

How sweet, Richard Branson's bought a virtual football team to go with his virtual train service.

And finally, Hans Snook, the perma-tanned founder and special advisor at mobile operator Orange, gave a speech at the Institute of Directors' annual convention at the Albert Hall on Wednesday. Snook whose commitment to a sun lamp is second to none, was summing up his speech with his usual spiel of "The future's bright, the future's Orange."

From below him, a voice from the press pit squeaked: "So's your face."

The Roundup will return tanned and healthy next Friday...

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