



This episode was recorded live at the CompTIA meeting in Birmingham in June this year. Richard led a panel discussion on various aspects of running and growing a managed service provider (MSP) business.

Richard: We had a conversation last night about the future of the MSP and emerging technology, and we were sharing thoughts freely, so we thought we'd try it here today.

Let's start off with something a bit different. We'll give each of the panellists 40 seconds to introduce themselves, how they help their clients and their answer to the question: "What's the worst business advice you've ever been given?"

Ian Vickers: Managed Enterprise Technologies based in Birmingham, and it's our 20th anniversary this year. We've seen quite a bit since 1998. What's the worst piece of advice that's ever been given to me? Probably 'start your own business'!

Janet O'Sullivan: My day job is that I work for a company called StorageCraft, and we do disaster recovery. I see my role as helping my customers, because I work on the commercial side, is 'how do I help my customers make money and seize the opportunities that are there?'

I'm trying to think of the worst bit of advice I got. It's quite probably Richard saying, 'Oh yeah, join the panel, it'll be fine.'

Tracy Pound: I have a business called Maximity based in Tamworth. Our strapline is, 'Taking the SH out of IT' and that's pretty much what we do. It's training, business consultancy and around how you can make sure that businesses take technology and use it properly. A lot of companies don't.

I don't know what the worst piece of advice is that I've ever been given. I've been given a lot of advice over the years, and that's been really useful. I think one of the best bits, if I can turn it on its head, is 'to trust the people that work with you, to give them the opportunity and let them do things their way'. As a business owner, that's really quite hard to do.

Perry Ashby: I'm the owner of a London-based MSP called Urban Network. We've been going for about 16 years and we're still running strong. In terms of the worst piece of advice, I'd put it around the sales area to be honest with you.

We were given advice on selling our products as cheap as you can, because that's the way you can grow your business. That's absolutely not the way to go in any way, shape or form.

Chris Ward: I own and run a managed service provider (Vermont Systems Ltd) based down in Southampton on the South coast. What we do for our clients is we try to help them through the use of technology to win in their marketplace, whatever that is.

Traditionally, we've spent a lot of time doing what I guess a lot of us have done, which has kept the lights on, but now the challenge is how do we help them win through the more intelligent parts of technology.

Probably the worst bit of business advice, and I can't think of one specific person who told me this, so I think it's a general pervasive view among business owners and people starting businesses is that you've really got to man up and put in 15 or 16 hours of the day, if you even want to scratch the surface and be a proper business owner.

That was the worst advice that I've ever been given. Just working hard is a fool's game, and just being busy for the sake of being busy. Working smart and intelligently and managing your time, for me, has been much better.

RT: This conversation was born out of a discussion that we had about the future of the MSP (managed service provider). Tell me a little bit about that – what do you see as the future of MSPs in your view, Chris?

CW: Like I just mentioned, 20 to 25 years ago, IT service providers did a great job of helping businesses innovate by introducing them to great technologies like email, which revolutionised their ability to communicate with their clients.

It's really hard to think back, but we did some revolutionary stuff. We got a whole bunch of new kit in and took people into the computing age. I feel like for the last 10 years or so the job has been very much keeping the lights on.

I talk about all the little green LEDs flickering away, and the job is 'keep all of those flickering away, and not have any of those amber ones'. That's the job, but actually I think technology is changing and the LEDs stay on on their own, or disappeared to someone else's data centre so we don't have to look at them anymore.

The technology in one sense is getting easier, but on the flip side there's a huge explosion of new technology that's going on – apps, cloud services and things people can use. How do we stay abreast of all of that?

The crux of the issue for me comes from the point that for our company and our staff team, do we have the skills that we need to be able to do the job that the customer wants us to do, which is more business enablement than infrastructure management.

RT: Ian – the staff that you've got now, are they going to see you through for the next 10 years?

IV: We've been running for 20 years, so we've seen generation after generation of innovation. Back in the 90s it was predominantly about UNIX, mini-computers and mainframes.

We progressed into a significant leap forward, and we're facing in the next 10 years artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain and so on. For me, when we started in the mid to late 90s, you could really understand who your competitors were.

There were 20, 30 or maybe 50, now there are probably 5,000 competitors and more and more MSPs. I think the challenge still is the one that you have to think about, 'Who do you want to be? Who are you going to be moving forward? What are you going to stand for? When people look at your brand, what are they going to associate you to?'

You're going to be competing with people who have the same sort of supporting technologies, whether that's Autotask, ConnectWise, SolarWinds. There are maybe 10 or 12 global platforms, PSAs (professional services automations) and monitoring technologies.

Ultimately, you're going to have the same kind of platforms, services and so forth that everybody else is, so you're really going to have to decide about where you're going to be and how you're going to enjoy working with your MSP.

You're going to have to pick a technology sector of some kind of specialism that really sets you apart from all the other MSPs that exist in the UK and globally. Brexit's going to happen next year and we have to think global not just UK. There'll be opportunities.

TP: I have a slightly different perspective, because I'm not an MSP in the way that a lot of you are. My clients have MSPs who support their systems, and one of the biggest frustrations that my clients have is that their MSPs don't understand their business.

When they have a problem, they can't prioritise what's an important issue from a non-important issue. If the computer has gone down, it may only do one function, but that

function is critical to a client to keep them operational. The MSP doesn't see that, because they don't understand what the client does.

For the future of the MSP, that's one of the areas where we really have to wrap our heads round client work and workflow. What does that business actually do? What does their industry need them to do?

What's their terminology and how we can talk to them on their terms not ours, and take it away from the technical speak and really turn it into a business conversation? There are so many opportunities for everyone around that, because if you can have a business conversation like you have a technical conversation, you get the ear of senior people.

One of the biggest problems that we have is that we don't get that airtime in the boardroom. Whether it's a small company that's owner-managed or a big company with a board and managers, if we can't talk to them about their business issues and how we help them solve those through technology then we're missing out on whole, big opportunities to sell more products and become stickier.

RT: I think Tracy's made a great point. I'm going to jump in with something there, because I want to ask the panel specifically about automation and AI. I saw a very cool tool called Upstream from a distributor based in Sweden recently. They've produced a chat tool where end users can send their request to a chatbot and say, 'My printer doesn't work, can you fix it?' or 'My Office365 password has expired. Can you?'

I think this goes back to something we've touched on earlier – the skills that IT staff have got at the moment are going to become replaceable. It's the age of the robots, isn't it? AI is going to be able to take over these roles.

Further to Tracy's point, Chris, what are your staff going to look like in the next 10 years? What skills are they going to have?

CW: It's a great point. Linking back to what Tracy was saying, one of the things that I'm finding in my business is I've found myself working diligently, under the advice of professional coaches, who've said that I need to get out of working *in* the business so I can work *on* the business.

I've successfully done that, but then I've found that the team I've got don't have the business skills you're talking about. I've now reinserted myself back into the business to go and have those conversations with the clients, which is fine.

A client said to me, 'I love all this Office365 stuff, but the problem is it seems like another bunch of stuff. How do we use it and where do we start? How do we use the functions?'

I tell them it's a great opportunity and invite them back to the office, but I'm sitting there thinking, 'I have no idea who in the team I can pass this on to.' I've got actions sitting on my list and I'm facing up to the fact that I'm either going to have to do them myself or throw a client in the deep end.

RT: And how does that make you feel?

CW: Really nervous. Do I tell the customer we can't help them and they go and find someone else? Is that a problem? Should we be doing that and enabling them to use software, or should we stick to what we know and just deal with the infrastructure?

For me, that's the conundrum, and picking up on what Ian was saying about the specialising – what does that look like? I totally appreciate the points you're making, but I just don't know how to get from A to B when it feels like we're going down a hill at 70 miles an hour and I've got to change the wheel without stopping the car.

RT: Perry, I know you've done a grand job of extracting yourself from the business. Do you have that same sort of frustration when you get drawn back into the sort of stuff that only you can do?

PA: I do, but a lot of it comes from ego as well. You will always get sucked back into a business somewhere, and what Chris is talking about is true. Your staff are becoming a consultant or taking the advisory role, business rather than technical.

I disagree that all the staff will become redundant, because there will always be a need for infrastructure, even if it is to facilitate the business operations. It will be diminished though.

I fully agree with people sitting on this panel, that if you look five years forward it will be entirely different. If people sit on this stage and start talking about blockchain, AI and virtual reality – is it going to impact my business right now?

No, not directly. It's not something I can fully embrace and say I'll sell it. But the vendors, the manufacturers and the developers will absolutely bring that into a service or product which will affect my life and my clients' lives.

My business will operate around machine learning and AI. It does now with various security vendors, who employ machine learning. Azure sells machine learning. It's out there and it's impacting our business now.

RT: We've talked a little bit about technology. Let's talk about the human aspect, so I'm going to jump to you, Ian. More and more in the workplace I'm seeing that employees don't want to be employees anymore, they want to be freelance.

I've got a team of virtual assistants around me, I've got people sat in the audience (here in Birmingham) who I work with – they are professionals, they do a great job. I don't do performance reviews with them, I don't do any of the employee stuff with them, and that's what they want.

How difficult are you going to find it to build relationships and retain that type of speciality staff going forward?

IV: I think for us, you've got to embrace these things, you can't ignore them. This gig economy is exciting, isn't it? We have to think about trading globally, not just in the UK.

The technologies that are being implemented globally will allow us to do that, so we're talking about Microsoft Azure, about hybrid cloud computing, Office365. These allow us to then disengage to being on-premise and having that requirement to be geographically placed near to where the systems need supporting.

I think it's a huge opportunity, then, to look at the resourcing you've got within your own business, and not naturally think, 'I'm going to replace that for a like for like person.' It may be a great opportunity for you to look at your business and reach out to the gig economy, or to collaborations and partnerships with others.

If you look at CompTIA worldwide, it has 4,000 members. Why don't we look within ourselves, in the CompTIA membership, to see if there is any resource and capability in our community globally? I think it's a global thing we have to think about it, and it's a huge opportunity for us.

JOS: The conversation is about how it affects the MSP, but you're kind of losing sight of the fact that the customers' businesses are under threat. If you've built up an MSP where you're supporting architects, for example, and they aren't moving with the technology that's out there, they're going to lose their business to other architects who are.

I'm building a house, and normally I'd go to the architect who lives down the road, but now I can go online and get an architect in Sweden. If you're not advising your customers how they can defend their turf with the technologies that are out there, then you'll wake up some day and you'll have no customers, because their businesses will have folded.

While you say that AI and all of this is not relevant to my business now, you need to be getting ahead of it, because you need to say to your customers: "This is how you protect your own business."

RT: That's a great point. Tracy, how do you help your customers? Perhaps most of them really don't care what the technology is, they just want it to work? How do you help them to understand what they need going forward?

TP: Mainly by getting inside their business. We work very much from the ground level up, working with people. At the end of every computer there's a human being, and it's understanding what that human being needs to do to get their job done and how well they can do it.

What are they afraid of? When it comes to tech, there are still a lot of people who are very afraid of change and technology. Talking about new technologies like artificial intelligence and the fact that you can just pop a question into a chat box on a screen and get an answer for it, actually there's a step back you need to take before that.

That's about understanding how people think and how they're going to react to a change in the way that they interact with you as an organisation. A lot of people are still dealing with people because they like them, and that will always be the case.

People buy from people who are like them and work with them too, because it's about the relationship side of it. Technology for its own sake will never work and it's never been proven to work. It has to be something where there is some element of human interaction skill as part of this process.

We look at the human side of it a lot more than we look at the technology side of it, but we'll understand what people need to do and what they're not likely to do. If you look at the NHS and some of the big, failed projects that they've implemented. They've been very systems-led, all about the technology, and not enough about the people.

What's going to make people change? Why should they use a new system? What's it going to do for them? Unless you understand that, you'll never get a lot of change, because you don't get the buy-in.

We talk to a lot of people at ground level about what are their fears and insecurities. What do they need to do and how can we help them along that journey to make it a safe place for them to understand how technology fits into their daily life cycle?

RT: When we talk about helping our clients, we've got to look internally and see how we're going to handle change.

CW: I really get what you're saying, and it sounds brilliant, but I probably only have some of the skills that you're talking about, and my current staff don't have any of those skills. I don't know how I'd go about engaging with my clients on that sort of level to have those conversations. It would be way out of my comfort zone, so have you got any practical advice to help me and others?

TP: First thing is, be nosy. There's always the problem with technical staff as to whether or not you could actually put them in front of the customer and talk to them so the customer understands.

I think soft skills development is a big area where we're going to see a lot of development in the tech sector. We've got a lot of technical staff who are very clever and good at what they do, but they're not necessarily good at communicating, asking questions, interrogating people.

But they're your best unofficial salesforce as well, because they're the people who don't have the same relationship as you. If you go in as an account manager, the client will think, 'OK, you've come to sell me something.' Whereas when a technician goes in, it's, 'You're here to solve my problem,' so they don't have the same brick wall of defence up against you.

It's trying to leverage that and give people soft skills training. Show them how to question, how systems work but also take them outside of just the pure technical area. People have networks to run applications that help their business work more efficiently, and it's understanding what those applications do.

For example, a lot of MSPs support Sage platforms, but they don't understand Sage, so whenever there's a problem with it, it takes forever for that helpdesk to sort it out. They can't

speak to Sage because they're not Sage resellers, they can't speak to the client, so it goes round and round in circles.

The helpdesk staff get really frustrated and the client gets really frustrated. I think understanding that end-user application will go a long way to helping that transition, but it is a slightly different skillset, and it's understanding those soft skills.

PA: There are some points where, from a technician's point of view, you can only teach them so much in the way of soft skills. There are limits in their ability, because it's not always client-facing.

I agree that everyone is a salesperson in your business and they should be trained to be so, because they're representing your brand and your message. But, there is always a limit with a technical person as to how you're going to get them to elevate their soft skill and deliver what you want.

TP: You're absolutely right. Back in the 1980s I worked for an Olivetti distributor, and we were an MSP in those early days. We put Unix systems in, PC-Net and MS-Net in, horrible, early, basic networking systems.

We were structured so we had an engineering department, a training department, a support department and a sales team. I sat in training and support, but we worked really closely with the engineers. We had slightly different departments which kind of overlapped but didn't do the same things.

The technical guys had a very different skill set to training, support and implementation work, but we worked really closely with them. They installed the network, we'd go in and do the configuration, training and support. We had the pre-sales role as well, so we went out with the sales guys. We worked with them in those different roles to make sure it worked.

What surprises me now is that most MSPs don't have anything to do with training – they are purely technical. I think adding that training onto it is a really good way of getting that skillset in there.

PA: If we came back to Chris' comment at the beginning, there will be a point where his staff are rotating and the people he's got now won't be the same in two or three years' time. Therefore, as business owners, we've got to start preparing ourselves and bring in external support, either via virtual assistants through the gig economy, or we've got to change our workforce. That's frightening, at least for me.

I think all of us would be looking for when do we do it and how do we feel that's the right time? We know it's coming and there is a change. I know from the internal meetings we have that our business isn't going to be the same in three years' time.

We'll be more consultative and educational, and that's where I need to start prepping. I look at our staff and think, 'They're technical, because that's how the business started.' It worries me.

IV: There is that, but again, I'm a really passionate person about partnerships and collaborations. We're working on a real-life case study at the moment – we've got a customer who's been with us for about nine years, and they would openly admit that they would struggle to increase their IT budget year after year.

It comes under pressure every year, and the financial department ask them to reduce their spend. It's very difficult for them to engage with the business and talk about how they can improve things from an IT perspective when the business doesn't want to spend money on it.

We've engaged with a consultancy firm that's not competitive to us, and they talk about digital transformation. One customer was spending around £200,000 a year, and about 70% of that was with us from an IT perspective. Every year we'd have the same conversation – technical upgrades to PCs, laptops and servers.

We brought in this consultancy firm and they've unlocked £1m worth of savings for the next two years. It's unheard of. They sat and consulted with the business about where they want to be in the next three to five years, and said if they wanted to achieve those things they had to do X, Y and Z.

For this company, it was their new membership system, their CRM, talking about cloud innovation, collaboration and growing the membership. They'd stemmed the erosion of membership and it started to increase slightly, but over time, this 50 year old membership organisation saw their numbers halve. They needed to be able to engage better with the membership and offer more digital connectivity and enablement.

I would say to anyone in the MSP community is to reach out to consultative firms, like Tracy's Maximity, who aren't in a competitive space. It's really good to be honest in this community, and be able to openly admit that maybe we're not quite ready to do this transition.

We're still learning, but there are companies out there who want to win business. For that consultancy, it was a huge opportunity to be able to walk into a £1m contract for the next two years, and it will lead to other opportunities too.

RT: As you know, I'm a massive geek. I run a podcast talking about emerging technologies for MSPs. I want to talk about the tech that makes us uncomfortable.

I was reading a statistic that we all of us now, as of 2017, spend 5.9 hours per day on the internet, on mobile devices.

Starting with Janet, how is your business equipping people to do business with you via mobile?

JOS: I would say we're not brilliant at it. Traditionally, our products would have been looked at by people sitting at support desks. We haven't envisaged a time where that work will be done by somebody with an app. We haven't moved the dial too much on that.

RT: What about marketing, then? The spend on mobile marketing is massively lagging behind the adoption of mobile. What are you doing about reaching people via mobiles?

JOS: It's back to the type of marketing we do and how do we best reach our customers. Mobile isn't a big part of our marketing spend at the minute, and maybe it should be but it isn't.

One of the things that I'd say around marketing, and I hear others say too, is how you define your business and what it is you do. I think people in this room take a very narrow view of what they do.

If you ask people what they do, they say: "Oh, I look after IT for companies in the Greater Manchester area." I think, if you define yourself that narrowly, you're going to be pigeon-holed. Chris said 10 years ago he was on the cutting edge and changing businesses, and now you're looking after IT.

I think it's how you define yourself, and that's where the marketing challenge is – to get MSPs to step back and say, 'What we do is make companies more profitable and more efficient by using technology.' If you accept that and embrace the new technologies, that's the challenge for us as marketers as well.

RT: Perry, you use email marketing?

PA: We do, although we've backed off from a lot of it, because the uptake is quite low. We've even discussed trying to go old-school. People receive a letter and open it because they don't receive one very often. There's the joke about sending a fax -everyone forgets it's there, so people will pick something up from it.

We've predominantly moved into the social environment and are trying to do more inbound marketing. It's slower, and you have to pick the right channels. We've put things across all the social streams and now we're trying to narrow, because although the activity is there you're not getting the engagement you need. You have to pick and choose where you work, it's about measuring, learning and reporting on the data you get back.

RT: Anybody on the panel using Facebook bots for marketing? (Nobody on the panel was, and only a couple of members of the audience).

There's a company I know based out of Newcastle, and their email open rate was around 5%. They're now using Facebook bots, the preferred method of their target market, and they're getting 98% open rates. If you think things like Facebook bots is a throwaway idea, absolutely not. People are being delivered the content they want in the format they want.

What other types of modern marketing have you seen out there? You mentioned social, so what else is working for you at the moment? What does it look like for you?

TP: We use Facebook, Twitter and a bit on LinkedIn, but not enough. We don't do anything on Instagram at the minute. Marketing is hard, and it's tough when you're a small business to find the time to do it.

Social media takes up such a lot of time, to think up the right words to put out there, that have meaning and will get people's attention, and the right images to go with it. Doing that

across different social media platforms so that it's interesting for your audience and doing it regularly and consistently is tough.

We now work with an external marketing consultant, and she's helping massively, so we just feed her information. We tell her where we are and what we're working on, and she helps us by telling us what to do and where.

That's starting to have engagement, but it takes a long time to build that up. People see it and think, 'So what?' You asked what we do from a mobile point of view – I've got a website. Is that sufficient? No, probably not.

It's trying to think of where your customers go and what they're going to look at. A lot of our marketing is still face to face.

RT: I think you've answered this question from the audience, but I'm going to ask Chris – what do you find is the most effective way to bring in new business? Referrals, LinkedIn targeted marketing, SEO, PPC? What's the number one thing you can do?

CW: The one thing is there's no one thing! Referrals are great, but the problem with them is that they will only get you so far. At some point you've got to bring systems in to bring opportunities.

My view on this whole digital stuff is that it's like the emperor's new clothes. It has a purpose, but you can waste so much money on AdWords, Facebook Ads and all this sort of crap, without ever thinking about the kind of basic questions like Janet asked.

Three years ago, my view of marketing was that it was a mixture of voodoo magic and downright lying – for a person from a technical background, that's how I felt about it. I made it my business to learn about it, so if there is a one thing, you have to build systems and use different media to get your message out.

We generate three sales meetings a week from the marketing processes we use, and I can tell you a couple of tips we've learned. The most effective thing to get to speak to a decision-maker is to send them something through the post. We got our decision-maker conversion rate up from around 9% up to 75% by doing this.

We do a lot of seminars around cybercrime with Hampshire police, which has been brilliant. We've spoken to over 200 business leaders over the last 12 months. Finally, telesales. People tell you it's dead and customers hate it, but I think that's total crap, because my stats say it's not.

For example, we had a conversation in the CompTIA Executive Council meeting. Estelle had sent a survey round to the members and hardly anyone had filled it in, including most of us. Attention is so hard, isn't it? You get bombarded.

When we send invites to our seminars, we do them by paper and email and get a few responses. But, when we phone them and say, 'Hey, did you get the invite?' They say,

‘Yeah, I’m interested, actually,’ and they ask a few questions, so we offer to sign them up there and then.

It’s the same with booking appointments with them – they engage with our content online, but booking a meeting means we have to phone them. We call it inside sales but it’s telesales or telemarketing, and I think it’s a crucial component of any marketing strategy.

RT: I come across a lot of MSPs who say they do a lot of business through word of mouth, but they never actually go out and ask for those referrals. I think it comes back to some of the old methods of doing business, but they can be systemised and emphasised.

I want to talk about systems specifically. We had a conversation last night around the world of AI and automations, and if I paraphrase – if the system’s crap, the AI’s going to be crap. Explain, Tracy.

TP: For AI to work well, it has to be founded on something that works well. You’ve got to have your processes right first, and a lot of businesses don’t understand theirs. They don’t have them written down or structured and they’re in their head.

That’s fine to an extent, and for growth up to a certain point, but if you really want to grow rapidly or in a big, sustainable way, you have to have those processes buttoned down. Not to make them inflexible, but so that people have a consistent approach to the way that they work.

AI is new, emerging tech for a reason. It’s something that hasn’t really touched us in our world right now, but it has the capacity to going forward. In the IT world, an emerging tech trend is artificial technology and data insight.

It’s where we want to go as businesses, as people, as consumers, as retailers – all sectors want more information about the way their customers work so they can better target new business in the right direction. We all want to be able to do that in our own way.

AI and data are going to be big trends going forward, but we have to have the core processes buttoned down underneath it, otherwise they’re not going to work that well. AI, because of what it is, is self-learning, so it might well be able to overcome some of the problems we have with processes.

When Peter (earlier speaker) was talking about a steel manufacturer and how to optimise the waste to make sure it can be used later on in the process, that kind of solution is technology-led.

A person *could* have sorted that out, but they hadn’t, and AI has. AI may well come into play in situations where we have serious problems with processes and workflows and solve them itself.

RT: What would you say was true to you when you started out in your career, that you look back on now and thing is an absolute load of old rubbish?

IV: I alluded to it before. In the 90s it was golden for the IT industry, it was ground-breaking and probably the best sector outside of being a footballer. It was a licence to print money and an amazing time to get into IT.

I think that's not true right now, but I think we're coming back into an environment which is truly ground-breaking and exciting with AI, blockchain technologies and machine learning.

We've recently embarked on a journey with Birmingham University, and we're hoping to reach out to Aston University, as they're part of the Big Data Corridor programme. We've started with artificial intelligence for our cyber security platform we've developed, so it's exciting times and we're looking forward to the future.

JOS: I remember my first job and being shown a fax and thinking it was magic. I could not understand how you could put a document in there and it would appear on the other side of the world. I still have that with technology, but because I come from a commercial background I see that technology is a means to an end, it's not the end in itself.

I think that's what you need to do with your business. Look at your customers and ask what are they trying to achieve. Maybe what they're doing right now is complete rubbish and you could do it in a better way. If you can do that for your customers you'll never be out of work. The technology you use to implement that may change radically, but you will still be relevant.

TP: My first job was way back in 1984, and I started out as a programmer, writing software for estate agents. The guy who'd started that company was a jeweller, so he had no idea, how to run that company as most people didn't, because it was such a new industry.

I think he'd seen that it was the opportunity to make a quick buck, and his view was that he could make a lot of money very quickly by setting up an IT company writing software and off it would grow to a global company in a few years' time.

It went bust within two years, and I think the biggest lesson from that is that you can't make a quick buck out of tech. It's here for the long run, and it has the ability to really transform the way an end user business works, but it's not something you stop investing in.

It's constant change. We see new technologies coming out all the time, and you can't stand still with it otherwise you lose your competitive advantage. People need to understand the need to invest and I don't think they did back then.

PA: My belief when I first went into business was, 'Work for yourself, manage to get some staff and life would be easy.' I wouldn't have to work, I could spend my time on the golf course and life would be great.

That's absolutely not the truth in any way, shape or form. The more staff you get the harder business becomes. If you feel you can step out of it you learn very quickly that that's not the case. You have to continue to manage and nurture a business and the staff within in, and it's a tough lesson to learn.

CW: When I started the business 10 years ago I thought I knew IT and that was enough, because we were great at what we did. But having grown to a certain size, it's not about me

understanding technology, it's about me knowing how to run and grow a business, to nourish staff and create an environment where they can thrive.