



WHO

John de Giorgio set up Shireburn Software in 1983. He has a forceful and charismatic personality, is a work horse and a 'go getter'. Today, he leads the Shireburn Group of Companies which is involved in the implementation of collaborative solutions based on Lotus Notes and the web, transactional systems for financial and inventory management, as well as its own in-house training programmes, internet solutions and systems.



John commenced operations providing IT awareness training courses, consultancy and some software development. For the first five years he was a 'one-man band'. He was then invited to take up a scholarship on entrepreneurship in the USA. On his return to Malta in 1988, he recruited two developers and focused his efforts on software development. He developed various software packages and continued to expand his operations and increasing his staff. His team improved the software packages by continuous dialogue and personal contacts with their customers.

In 1998, John started undertaking consultancy and implementation work selling his financial software packages in the U. K. through his brother, a London-based, qualified accountant and auditor. Eventually, a U. K. office was opened, selling a variety of computer applications packages and related services. As the available communications and remote access systems improved, much of the work being carried out for clients in the U. K. could be undertaken from Malta at a much lower cost and the U. K. office was shut.



Having been the distributor for Lotus Software in Malta since 1990, Shireburn was heavily involved in the development of solutions for Lotus Notes. Working on various client projects and faced with the limitations of the Lotus Notes environment regarding reporting, an opportunity was identified to utilize integration between Lotus Notes and Microsoft Word and Excel as a means of addressing reporting within Lotus Notes.

After resolving client reporting needs using the Notes-Office reporting technique, the idea was formed to develop a specific product aimed at addressing this need. Ultimately, this decision resulted in the development of *Integra for Notes*, a reporting tool developed specifically for Lotus Notes users. This product was launched in November 2001.

Shireburn is now focused on marketing *Integra for Notes* globally. The product is a reporting tool for the Lotus Notes environment, developed and supported by Shireburn with clients that include large corporate firms from all business sectors, including finance, insurance, government and manufacturing. A heavy investment was made in promotion and marketing; today, the company is exporting this product to 18 countries.



WHAT

Integra for Notes was developed primarily for the export market. It was a superior reporting system to the other packages being offered abroad. It provides facilities to enhance the reporting, printing and analysis of data held within the Lotus Notes environment and is a high value addition to any Lotus Notes site. It generates reports of the Lotus Notes data printing needs via MS-Word and Excel and automates the importing of data into Lotus Notes and the export of these notes to Excel, Word or Text files. With these features, it is targeted to Lotus Notes users and is leading in its field, thanks to its diverse functionality and innovative possibilities.

Integra for Notes created a huge potential for this niche market and diversification of products to address the market worldwide. At the same time it offered an opportunity to tap a large market beyond Malta's limited market size.

The export market price for *Integra for Notes* is similar to that within the local market; and it can compete in the export market mainly thanks to the product's unique innovative features. The product does not have any local competitor in Malta; while, overseas, there are just two rival firms: one based in the U.S.A. and one in Croatia.

WHERE

The firm began to market the product by participating in seminars and exhibitions and appointing business partners who sell *Integra for Notes* on its behalf. It has currently 24 business partners [or agents] in each of the countries it is selling its products and services. The strength of the organisation's marketing abroad is primarily through the alliance with its business partners.



Export opportunities are continuously being explored the world over, but especially in the U.S.A. Export marketing is undertaken via advertising in leading specialised magazines, sponsoring and attending major



conferences/fairs and speaking about the product at users' group meetings. Initially, it was very difficult to sell this new product and a very high percentage of the profit margin had to be ploughed back into a major marketing campaign whose key purpose was to recruit business partners.. The first export sale was made in Las Vegas, USA at a Lotus Notes Conference. The client was so impressed with the product that he, in turn, became a business partner. Deutsche Bank, Hertz U.S., Henkel, Ingersoll Rand, Philips, Reuters, Siemens and various U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy agencies are counted amongst Shireburn's clients.

INTERNAL SUPPORTS

As the product is highly technical there is a need for highly-skilled and technically competent employees. The skills required are not readily available on the labour market and consequently the company provides in-house training. Heads of the development groups carry out the training. In some instances, additional training is also undertaken abroad.

The Shireburn Group of Companies has 21 full-time employees. The number of staff dedicated to Integra for Notes is 5. These are 2 sales representatives (who are not Maltese) and 3 developers. Finance and administration for Integra for Notes is centralised at the Shireburn Group level.

Some 20% of the Shireburn Group employees have had training stints and/or work-experience outside Malta; 15% have had overseas educational experience. All employees are well remunerated and their salaries are considered above average for the sector.

Shireburn thrives from its staff's commitment towards developing new enhancements and product releases. Other reasons for its success include its product support, in spite of any time-zone differences with clients, and the excellent product documentation which is available on the product's web site: www.integra4notes.com. Innovation and creativity are encouraged by John and he likes to surround himself with people who generate ideas.



The firm is technology-driven: flexibility and innovation are its major strengths. Its internal architecture is made of small development groups with clearly defined goals and a flat organizational hierarchy.

As an incentive to its employees, the company operates a profit-sharing scheme: a percentage of the company's pre-tax profit, if any, is shared equally amongst all the employees who are on the company's books as at December of each year, following a performance review.



EXTERNAL SUPPORTS

The firm has excellent relations with the Bank whose overdraft facilities it occasionally uses. Otherwise, the firm makes use of accumulated internal funds to service and develop its operations.

Manufacturing exports from Malta are facilitated by the Business Promotion Act. Shireburn Software benefits from the tax incentives contemplated in this piece of legislation, and which will apply until 2008. Rather than paying tax at the normal rate of 35%, the firm qualifies for a reduced tax rate of 5% for the first seven years of operations, followed by a rate of 10% for the next six years and a rate of 15% for the following five years. It also benefits from an incentive scheme for the training of its personnel: 120% of actual expenditure for work-related training is deductible from the firm's taxable income. Shireburn also qualifies for export subsidy support under the same Act. Most such schemes are administered by Malta Enterprise.

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Shireburn Software enjoys the administrative and financial support of a larger company, while it focuses on specialised and customised services and products for export. Useful contacts and experiences in the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. triggered the decision to set up the firm. Information Technology expertise enables the firm to deliver customer support across 21 time zones; market its software worldwide, sell through a channel of 24 business partners; while its owner continues to enjoy Malta's quality of life.