

Making the global transition

Ongoing investment in R&D and a 'can do' approach to customers' needs has kept software specialist WinScribe at the top of its export game and transformed it into a truly global enterprise.

When the judges announced WinScribe as the region's top exporter in this year's Westpac Enterprise North Shore Business Excellence Awards, they noted that "the company uses objective measures to assess new market opportunities so that good quality delivery is achievable and customer satisfaction maintained at high levels."

This has been one of the primary reasons why WinScribe has consistently achieved success on world markets – reading the opportunities correctly, adapting product accordingly and maintaining focus on customers' needs.

WinScribe has been a relatively quiet achiever on New Zealand's export front for a number of years – largely because it operates in a very specialised niche.

A provider of digital dictation software that supports business requirements for dictation, transcription, voice recognition and workflow management, the company has been a pioneer in the industry for some 11 years and targets the legal, health, insurance

and law enforcement markets around the world. Its WinScribe solution, scalable for all size businesses, is built on Microsoft architecture to make it easy to integrate and maintain.

Today the company has more than 100 sales partners in more than 25 countries, and supports an estimated half million users worldwide. It has 70 staff (28 in New Zealand), two offices in the US (Chicago and Kentucky) as well as one in Australia, the UK and Switzerland. However, the bulk of research and development still takes place at the head office in Takapuna, on Auckland's North Shore – and that is unlikely to change.

WinScribe chairman Richard McLean says 2008 has been a very successful year, which he attributes to sound strategic planning and the efforts of their sales teams around the world. The Middle Eastern and South East Asian health markets are currently showing particular promise.

Over the years, McLean says the biggest challenges have included finding suitable sales partners and channel structures;

dovetailing the different time-zones where they have support offices to maintain a high level of customer service; establishing offices offshore (always an expensive exercise); and attracting and keeping high calibre people ("people you can trust, who can manage themselves and deliver to your expectations").

"Setting up business systems in multiple jurisdictions, with different currencies, languages and cultures is also a challenge," says McLean, "along with the inevitable exchange rate – although we're lucky that we have offices in different countries so we can trade in our own baskets."

So has the credit crunch threatened to clip WinScribe's wings?

"We're watching the markets very carefully, so we can act quickly if we feel there is a need

to," says McLean. "The biggest impact of the credit crunch has been the uncertainty, particularly in the legal sector, although the health sector is still a stable market and should be relatively untouched." He says the emphasis is now on careful planning and the preservation of capital.

Nevertheless, McLean says the company still has ambitious growth plans. WinScribe is one of the top three global providers, and the market opportunity is significant. He believes the company's greatest achievement has been transitioning from a New Zealand company to a global company, with separate CEOs responsible for the US and UK markets, and for the past two years, marketing being handled out of Chicago – where the markets are closer and time-zones more favourable.

McLean says for their customers it's not about which country WinScribe has its head office anyway, it's simply about how good is the software and the level of service.

As for export advice, McLean says exporting is a sensible blend of speed and aggression alongside care and planning – but it doesn't come without its risks.

"Realise that it will take longer and cost much more to set up in markets than expected, so don't go for opportunism. Take your time and understand why you're going into a particular market – what is your focus?"

He also advises potential exporters to leverage off relevant trade shows as well as digital media and new channels such as social networks.

"Build a strong relationship with NZTE, they have a lot of great resources to utilise; be detailed in your planning; develop good networks and ask for advice often; and insist on good governance."

For more information visit www.winscribe.com



Richard McLean



WinScribe has a long history of attending international trade shows.