

M J ALDRICH

PRESS CUTTINGS

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BSE CRISIS BOSS WORKED UNTIL COWS GAME HOME

PROVIDING every cow in the UK with a passport was one of the most difficult yet satisfying tasks Michael Aldrich has ever undertaken.

His company, ROCC Computers, was engaged by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to help the country's beef industry through the BSE crisis and get its produce back into the export markets.

Michael said: "I'm really proud of our role in the British Cattle Movement System. It really was a challenge and a half and I think we all aged about 20 years."

"The UK needed a complete cattle tracing system if it was to persuade the rest of the world that it had BSE under control."

"And ROCC had the job of producing the software so that every cow in the UK had a passport and so that every piece of beef could be traced back through suppliers to the farm on which it was born."

"Thankfully the crisis appears to be over but should anything similar happen in the future there is now a system in place that will make it so much easier to deal with."

"I believe that British beef is now the safest in the world. All we want now is for the export ban to be lifted."

ROCC has its roots in the Redifon group of companies, which was once the biggest employer in Crawley.

During the Sixties the firm devel-

AS WELL as providing passports for cattle, ROCC Computers provide software used by seven out of local authorities in the UK.

Argus business writer KEITH WINSER went to talk to Michael Aldrich, the man at the head of the Sussex-based firm, about his company's tremendous success.

oped the technology used in the flight simulator industry, and it was the success of its spin-off applications that led to the formation of Redifon Computers in 1976 as a dedicated computer company marketing forms processing and data capture applications.

The following year Michael joined the Redifon board after 15 years in senior management positions with Burroughs (now Unisys) and Honeywell (now Bull).

In 1981 the company name was changed to Redifusion Computers and three years later the entire Redifusion Group was broken up and sold by its owners.

The executive directors of the computer division, led by Michael, formed a consortium with Charterhouse Development Capital Fund to buy the company and business continued without change.

It was only last year that Michael became ROCC's sole owner.

In the early 1990s ROCC expanded from its data capture business to application software, third party maintenance and contract electronics manufacturing.

The town has so much to offer them and we are well-positioned to recruit from among the brightest young people in the country."

Michael was chairman of the board of governors of Brighton University for ten years and for the past two years he has been vice-chairman.

ROCC is a long-term sponsor of awards at the university.

Although the headquarters are now in Brighton, the company's registered office and its factory are still in Crawley where it has a workforce of 100.

It also has offices in Surbiton, Bristol, Rochdale, Manchester, Edinburgh and Prague and has a total workforce of 220.

Having so many sites is not a problem for Michael.

He said: "I do Mondays and Fridays in Crawley, Tuesdays and Wednesdays in Brighton and Thursdays wherever I'm needed."

Rochdale was chosen for a site because of its closeness to the University of Manchester and its ready supply of students to take into the workforce.

The factory produces sub-assemblies for transport projects and was heavily involved in computer systems for the Jubilee Line on London's Underground.

Michael said: "Competition in this industry is enormous. But we are a specialist company and we are unbeatable in our field."

Now seven out of ten local authorities use ROCC software in their highways, ground maintenance, environmental services, leisure management and catering departments.

The system will issue instructions for tasks that council workers have to carry out and will allocate resources and prepare and invoice.

WHEN it came to choosing a site for his company's new offices, Michael had no doubts about setting up in Brighton.

He said: "Brighton has a wealth of computer talent and a rich mix of cultures and is great for recruiting staff. We wanted to be sitting at the gates of the higher education system."

"With two universities and a technical college, the town has everything to offer a hi-tech company and its staff."

"It is just minutes from the A23 and has easy access to the country's motorway links and it's close to the other major businesses in Crawley."

"Brighton was the right choice for us."

"Students come to Brighton from all over the country and when they finish their courses they don't want to leave."

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BUSINESS

Computer king helped rescued beef industry's reputation

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PASSPORT CONTROL: Michael Aldrich's ROCC recruits heavily from Sussex universities

PICTURE: STEPHEN LAWRENCE