

## ROCC 1984 - 1994

In November 1984, ROCC Corporation acquired Rediffusion Computers Ltd and changed the name of the company to ROCC Computers Ltd. The name 'ROCC' was either "Redifon's Original Computer Company" or "Rediffusion's Old Computer Company" - no-one can quite remember the exact etymology.

Redifon had started making digital computers in the late 1960s, had pioneered instant response real-time data entry at a time when most people were punching holes in cardboard and by 1976 had become Redifon Computers Ltd, the UK's leading data entry computer manufacturer. Such was the success of the company that in 1981 the name was changed to Rediffusion Computers Ltd so that the Rediffusion Group could enjoy a hi-tech profile.

By 1984 however Rediffusion had ceased to be a public company and the then owners decided in the light of the then prevailing "services are best" culture ("there is nothing wrong with being a nation of waiters") to withdraw from hi-tech. Out of electronics and into office cleaning! The Rediffusion Group was broken-up and sold off and one of the UK's best engineering companies disappeared. There wasn't even a silver lining for the sellers in that the office cleaning strategy collapsed in the 1990 recession.

It could be that a silver lining for UK industry has been ROCC Computers, virtually the only part of the old Rediffusion to have survived with its business and management unchanged, with an enviable record of profitability and financial strength and with a continuing commitment to the best in engineering and services.

The last decade has seen great changes in the computer industry. In 1984 ROCC was primarily a proprietary computer hardware manufacturer. In 1994 ROCC is primarily a software manufacturer and technical services company, although hardware manufacture is still a successful and growing part of the business. As a software manufacturer, ROCC targets its products at professional managers in a number of niche markets - forms and document processing; property, highways and grounds/estates management; street cleansing and local government financial control systems. ROCC's Technical Services are likewise targeted at professional managers - hardware and software maintenance, consultancy, training and project management. ROCC's engineering sphere of knowledge has broadened from

electronics and electro-mechanicals to civil engineering, with a number of specific specialisms therein, and into the new areas of software engineering, business process engineering together with the human dimensions of socio-technical systems.

Notwithstanding all the changes, the company has maintained an unchanged view of its role, mission and financial strategy. The role of the company is to create satisfied customers and to derive profits from that satisfaction. The mission is to create a 21st Century computer products and services company with a strong profit and growth profile. The financial strategy is to fund all growth from internal sources while remaining cash positive and to balance annual revenues heavily towards recurring revenue.

Perhaps because of these policies the company weathered the re-structuring of the computer industry and the worst economic recession in 60 years from 1990-93. In part the industry re-structuring was expected if not somewhat overdue although the severity of the recession was shocking.

In many ways ROCC is a counter-cyclical company. During the 1980s, ROCC held back from investment in the computer business knowing that the industry would have to re-structure. Once that re-structuring began, ROCC started to invest heavily in the products and services of the future, ironically at a time when the UK recession began to bite. This strategy included acquisitions the largest of which was Aramis Computing Services in 1994.

ROCC has been fortunate to achieve a number of key objectives - No.1 in UK local authority technical service management systems; positioned to be No.1 in UK forms processing; positioned to be a major player in UK document processing; one of the best managed and most profitable technical services operations; a leading player in contract electronic manufacturing; and well positioned for global market penetration.

ROCC has always been an international company with around 20% of its revenue coming from outside the UK. In the 1970s and 1980s most of the international revenue came from the old Eastern Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Bloc changed that business and today ROCC operates from the newly re-discovered Central Europe in the newly created vibrant Czech Republic in Prague serving customers primarily in Central Europe. ROCC systems are installed throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

The Aramis acquisition brought inter alia an Asia Pacific company headquartered in

Wellington, New Zealand with customers in New Zealand, mainland Australia and Tasmania. ROCC Computers Ltd (New Zealand) Ltd is poised to develop the Pacific Basin markets.

The successes of the last 10 years have been due to three groups of people. The owners had the courage of their convictions and didn't mind being oft characterised as 'idiosyncratic'; the staff accepted, adapted to and made change beneficial and never stopped caring about customers and not least the customers whose support never flagged and who provided the inspiration and impetus for everything that the company achieved.

The next 10 years most likely will be equally tumultuous. While there is much to do in the UK, overseas opportunities are enticing, challenging and potentially very rewarding. The quality and novelty of our products and services are such that they are saleable perhaps on a global scale. ROCC's computer systems are tied to no national boundaries. The business game is to concentrate to dominate first in the home market and then to move proven items to world markets in a carefully controlled fashion so that customer satisfaction is created wherever we operate. To win the game we have to be creative and innovative in the UK where the products and services will be developed and this means working with world-class UK organisations. It is impossible to be creative in a vacuum.

Given the support and partnership of the best of British which we have had for the last 20 years, although we live in the UK at a time of some pessimism, there is every reason to be very optimistic and we are. We look forward to the next decade and the new millenium with confidence.