



Going global, virtually

PROFILE

ROBERT WILSON

FOR most businesses, opening up shop means opening an office. It's not cheap, but it's as essential as the proverbial suit and tie in providing an image of professionalism and competence. For businesses that don't want to sink their capital into real estate or rentals there is a better way. Sydney-based Servcorp has been providing a place to do business for 30 years, solving the problem for as little as \$220 a month for a supported virtual office.

"What we do is offer the infrastructure of a large company or a multi-national company to our clients," says executive director, Taine Moufarrige.

"We provide the facilities they need, either a physical office to work from, or if they want to they can take a virtual office and we provide them with all the other facilities. They can use our meeting rooms, our boardrooms, they can use our secretarial services and business services and they can use our telecommunications services."

A virtual office is vital for any international business, according to Mr Moufarrige. "If you are travelling to Singapore, you can go online get a local telephone number and give it to the people you are meeting," he says. "Our people will answer your phone and divert it to where you are. It's a global service to provide a local identity."

Servcorp has embraced technology with an automated online booking system for its facilities, where clients can check availability of offices, rooms and services and book them immediately.

"The real point of difference is that we've got a network of offices and services that's online and available immediately," says Mr Moufarrige.

"There's nobody else that can provide that seamless network. It's all done online there's no human and it's immediate."

But according to Mr Moufarrige it's the human touch that has been behind Servcorp's success.

"When you join as a Servcorp client, you are allocated a Servcorp person who becomes your go-to person," he says. "That's unique. We're the only ones in the industry who provide that service."

"We have no call centres. It's about our people understanding our client's business so they can help them. If our clients succeed, then they keep using our business."

Judging where to deploy human capital and

where to automate has been the key to creating a superior service, he says.

"We've taken our people out of the administration of our business, leaving them free to better look after the needs of our clients," Mr Moufarrige says. "That creates a better service for our clients and a better job for our people."

Servcorp has 17 locations in Australia and provides serviced and virtual offices in 14 countries, with an emphasis on Asia, where it has been since the Singapore branch opened in 1987.

The Asian presence now includes six addresses in China and 18 centres in Japan.

It is expanding its presence in Europe, with a London office opening in January, in North America with Chicago premises opening soon, and the Middle East, with new centres in Jeddah and Kuwait.

"We're expanding in the US and the UK now," Mr Moufarrige says. "It's obviously a great time for us to expand in those markets and we've been waiting for this time."

"There's no one particular industry we're focused on. It's for anyone who needs to do business. The SMEs (small and medium enterprises) love it because it gives them the infrastructure to compete with the bigguys and the multinationals love it because it gives them the infrastructure they're used to."

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Big winner: Apple have revolutionised Firemint's business

FUN, GAMES AND A LIFE TRANSFORMED

PROFILE

JAMES DUNN

LIKE many people, you may think that the iPod and iPhone have changed your life. But that's nothing to the effect that the Apple suite of products has had on the game development industry.

Melbourne-based game development company, Firemint Pty Ltd, has ridden the App Store wave to move from being a work-for-hire studio to this year, self-publishing its original games.

Chief executive officer Rob Murray, 36, says Firemint, formed in 1999, has benefited from the "massive change" that Apple has brought to the industry.

"The iPhone, the iPod Touch and the App Store have completely changed our industry," Mr Murray says.

"We used to make games on Java and Brew and other mobile phone platforms, and at one time we thought the colour screens on mobile phones had changed our lives."

"But a developer like us had to go to every single telco around the world, get our games out there. The telcos would collect money from our consumers and eventually pay us."

"It's like PC: you can put any app you like on it, but you have to distribute it yourself - you have to get it to the user and collect the money from them."

"But the iPhone came along in 2007 and it gave us a new business model. We develop a game, send it to Apple, they say yes, unless there is something specifically wrong with it that could cause them problems. They put it on the App Store and sell it through their handsets, they collect money from the consumer, pay us 70 per cent of all the revenue and give us detailed reports on where the sales come from."

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"Apple does all of the complex things that are required to distribute games worldwide, because they have this one handset that they control in the market, and they have the App Store."

"You only have to go to one vendor: you put your application through Apple and it goes worldwide on their handset. It's a brilliant business model." Under the old model, Mr Murray says it was difficult to get content through the distribution channel, but Apple has "completely changed the game."

He adds: "With the App Store, they have just opened up the doors and said anyone can be a game developer."

"That's not how it was previously. It has allowed us to put our own intellectual property directly into the market and sell direct to our consumers, rather than doing contract work for publishers. We went from having 10 customers to having one million customers in three months."

Mr Murray says it is not competitive to get an application into the App Store, but it is "hyper-competitive once you're live."

"There are more than 100,000 applications available on the App Store: you're competing against all of those," he says.

Firemint has six games on the App Store, three of its own applications and three developed for another publisher.

This year, it launched two of the most popular iPhone games, Flight Control and Real Racing. Flight Control sold more than one million copies in its first three months in the App Store.

The launch of Real Racing was accompanied by a free live version of the game, Real Racing GTI, which was used by Volkswagen to launch its 2010 GTI in the US, the first-ever launch of a car via a mobile-phone campaign. Volkswagen gave away six limited edition GTIs to US residents as part of the launch.

Real Racing GTI has been downloaded more than two million times, including more than one million downloads in one week. Industry reports say Flight Control and Real Racing have each grossed more than \$1 million, but Mr Murray is reticent on this.

He says that more than 95 per cent of Firemint's sales are export sales. "Australia is a great market for the size it is, but it is still relatively small in population."

Next up for Firemint is "more games", says Mr Murray. "We're obviously going to make the most of the hit brands we've built, but we have a number of very exciting titles in the pipeline. We're looking forward to the new handset and the growth of the market in 2010. There's nothing quite close to iPhone and iPod Touch yet, it's just a wonderful medium for games," he says.