

A SPECIAL ADVERTISING REPORT

Our IT hotshots give Mumbai a run for their money

THINK of information technology and those grumpy people from tech support safely tucked out of strangling distance in Mumbai generally come to mind.

But IT is a sector Australians excel in – and we are actually exporting to the world.

Australian-owned software company Pronto, has been operating for 30 years and managing director, David Jackman, puts the company's success down to a culture of listening to businesses.

Jackman owns 11 per cent of Pronto, winner the 2006 Dun and Bradstreet Victorian business of the year award.

Pronto has 250 staff—all based in Australia.

"It's all done with Australian-based people; we don't have offshoring of development, or call centres," he says. "Quite a number of our competitors have offshoring of development and call centres, but we do it all in Australia and we do it for the world."

Jackman says the secret of the company's success is "providing value to our clients and outstanding service".

The company turned over \$41.5 million last financial year for a net profit of \$6.6 million and approximately 20 per cent of the company's revenue comes from overseas.

"The Australian culture works overseas as well," Jackman says. "It's not just the product,

it's the people that appeal to the clients and their needs. We listen to our customers – we don't tell them how to do business. That is part of the Australian culture and it works overseas."

The company's largest client is UK camera retailer Jessops, which has been a Pronto client for four years. "We provide them with their retail and warehousing and accounting systems – basically everything that runs their business."

Pronto also has over 120 clients in Malaysia and also exports to PNG, Canada and the US.

Jessop says: "It is the people and the value we give to our clients. Our clients have a good return on their investment – we don't have a nightmare situation where they spend tens of millions doing something. "We pragmatically do the job and that keeps them very happy."

Pronto Software provides Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solutions to the Australian and international mid-market (generally companies with turnover between \$10 million to \$500 million).

In a market characterised by global players such as SAP, Microsoft and Oracle, Pronto Software is proudly swimming against the tide.

It is one of the few Australian companies that makes and supports its own software with the R&D team based in Melbourne, and has achieved 15 per cent compound growth in sales over the past five years, with revenues of \$41.5 million >



> and profits of \$6.6 million last year. With 1200 customers in 27 countries worldwide, Pronto is a major technology vendor in Australia.

Other customers include Kathmandu, Fantastic, Mitre 10 and J.Boag & Son.

For Australian customers, bigger is not necessarily better. Pronto offers the proximity and agility to develop solutions to meet specific Australian business requirements.

Pronto was the first ERP vendor to provide a EANnet data synchronisation tool allowing Australian companies to provide their product information electronically to major retailers such as Coles and Woolworths.

Managing director of another Aussie IT company Planit, Chris Carter, puts the success of his growing enterprise down to the company's ability to "understand client needs and delivering to meet those needs". He says: "Our clients like our ability to rapidly react to their demands."

Carter, who is technically not Australian until he gets naturalised "as soon as I call the local council" is one half of a husband and wife team.

They acquired the company through a management buyout in 1999. Since then, Planit has grown to have almost 200 permanent staff and around 20 contractors in its Sydney and Melbourne offices.

The company has experienced 50 per cent growth year on year since 2004. This past

financial year, Planit turned over in excess of \$17 million. Planit boasts high-profile customers such as Vodafone, Commonwealth Bank and Sydney Airport Corporation. Carter is also chairman of the Australian/New Zealand Testing Board.

Carter says their clients "love our value for money and in-depth understanding of testing". The company is involved in testing software "before it goes live" and trains testers as well.

Carter says one of the biggest challenges was coming from Britain and "trying to implement a consulting testing practice here when Australia was 10 years behind the UK".

He adds: "Australian companies didn't see the value in what we were offering. In the beginning, we were educating people about the availability of testing. Now demand is growing. In 1997 the split is our business would have been 70 per cent training 30 consulting, now it's 90 per cent consulting and 10 per cent training."

Planit is also exporting to New Zealand and is beginning to operate in Britain.

Carter says: "At the end of the day, you need to be sure of the quality of the systems in order to do business. People don't buy cars without a test drive.

"What we do from a testing perspective is unit testing to prove that a system is technically correct. The second one is a system test to prove that a system is functionally correct and the last

one is user acceptance testing to prove that a system is fit for business purposes."

He says the company operates exclusively in software testing: "We don't do tech support we're not management consultants and don't work in development. We are experts in our field."

Since late 2005, Planit has partnered with Vodafone to provide testing services for a variety of ongoing projects. These projects include implementing new initiatives, system upgrades and configuration changes, all of which require stringent levels of user acceptance and cutover verification testing.

Planit has helped with the deployment of industry mature test practices and methods which not only cover the traditional software development life cycle, but fast track it as well.

Project timeframes may span from a few weeks to several months, which means Vodafone looks to Planit to manage the fluctuating demand on testing resources. Because it has an extensive pool of skilled staff, Planit can ensure a quick ramp up of testing resources for Vodafone as and when needed.

Pronto meanwhile has been selected by telecommunications solutions provider Connect to integrate their business functions and achieve greater operational and cost visibility using Pronto's flagship ERP solution, PRONTO-Xi.