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Synthesising TECHNOLOGY and Health Care

6PM Group is dedicated to providing cutting-edge IT and efficiency-enhancing software solutions, and takes pride in delivering award-winning healthcare products, infrastructure, and professional services.

Images by Kris Micallef

CEO and founder Ivan Bartolo set up the 6PM Group back in 2000 as a vehicle to invoice for his work as a contractor for British Airways in London. He registered the 6PM Group in Malta, thinking he would grow a small business for himself. “I was the first employee, and the first revenue earner, so effectively all the earnings I was generating from my time at British Airways were going to the company.”

Ivan identified the multitude of opportunities in London for time and resourcing businesses. There was great demand for IT professionals at cost-effective rates. Ivan recruited more staff in Malta to enhance 6PM’s offering as a service-type, time-and-material-based company. From small beginnings, the 6PM Group started landing contracts with high-profile companies like Bax Global.

When Malta joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, Ivan saw an opportunity to grow the business. “Malta joining the EU gave the company an incredible boost, overcoming all of the problems we had previously experienced relating to freedom of movement

and work permits from Malta to the UK. Our team grew suddenly from about 10 people in 2003, to 40 or 50 people by the end of 2004.”

Over the course of its existence, the 6PM Group had demonstrated dynamism and adaptability in the face of global economic challenges. After Malta joined the EU, Ivan had to shift operations out of the UK to compete with the cheap rates coming out of India and China. The company’s model also switched from a time-and-materials basis to a fixed-rate basis—a shift Ivan describes as a steep learning curve.

“Since its inception, one of 6PM’s core values has always been to earn the right to compete in the marketplace, by building trust between ourselves and our customers. This became very important, because if that trust hadn’t been there, our customers would not have agreed for us to shift the work to Malta.”

In 2005, Ivan met Alan West Robinson and Steve Wightman, who were keen to re-establish the company in the UK. “Once we had this presence in the UK, we won major contracts with companies

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like Capgemini and BT. As our model kept flourishing, our revenue grew from roughly €100,000 in 2000, to almost €7 million in 2008.

“In 2009, we were hit by the recession, with our revenue declining sharply to €3 million by 2010. By that time, we had built a great knowledge of the health sector, and it was one of those moments where you either get busy living, or get busy dying. Obviously, we opted for the former, and in 2010 we decided to execute a new business strategy. I was responsible for laying out the vision for 6PM to change from a service company to a products company, over a period of three years.”

According to Ivan, the key to 6PM’s successful transition comes down to its strategic partnership with the National Health Service (NHS). “The NHS employs the world’s best clinicians, while 6PM employs very good technologists. We have come together to develop leading-edge products, which can then be implemented immediately in the hospitals where those clinicians work. This means we have reference sites straight away, so others can come and see our >



products in action, and that is why our strategic partnership with the NHS is our most important relationship.”

“We also foster other strategic partnerships with companies like Motorola, IBM, and EMC, because some of our products incorporate other pieces of technology. We like to view all our suppliers as strategic partners, because of the crucial role they play in making our businesses run smoothly and enabling us to achieve new heights year on year. When strategic partnerships are founded on the right values and with the right mindset, they work to deliver amazing benefits to everyone.

“My recommendation to any CEO would be: ‘Don’t try to do it all on your own’. It’s impossible to do everything by yourself, and the best way to go about realising your ambition is to identify the best partners and ensure that you build a win-win relationship with them, so that everyone can grow their businesses together.”

The wisdom of these words is evident in the 6PM Group’s growing success. Today, the company has 156 employees in four locations, including the UK, Malta, Macedonia, and Ireland, with plans for expansion into Australia, Canada, and the United States. 6PM is making waves in the medical sphere: the company already has five core health products on the market, and a further three in the clinical space targeted at managing and treating debilitating diseases like strokes, HIV, and dementia.

With revenues now exceeding €10 million, the organisation is working hard on product development to continue its upward trajectory. Ivan’s plans to launch the company into the US market are already in motion: “In 2014, 6PM invested over €1 million in developing a new product with Javali LLC, in partnership with the University of Utah.”

The product—called Javali—assists with the aggregation of doctors’

notes into patient medical records, enabling a more accurate costing of patient encounters. Javali has already enabled the University of Utah Hospital to increase compensation due for health interventions by more than €900,000 per month. Given the product’s strong business case, it’s not surprising that the company already has four pilots planned for Javali within UK hospitals.

Ivan has a number of strategies in place to ensure 6PM continues creating innovative and marketable products. “First, we attend as many conferences as possible to meet clinicians and hear about their experiences. Second, we never develop any clinical products without the help of clinicians: software companies have a tendency to create a solution before finding a problem. At 6PM, we work with clinicians to identify the problems they face and develop appropriate solutions.

“To keep ourselves at the leading edge of technology, we employ the best people coming out of universities in our areas of operation. Employment and staff retention are very important to us. We also employ a team of people to monitor and identify new technologies, find out who is making them, and develop strategic partnerships. At the end of the day, one of 6PM’s key business values is to avoid reinventing the wheel.”

Over the next three years, 6PM will be striving to take all its products into the UK Government G-Cloud. This will mean that hospitals which might not be able to justify the investment in 6PM products will be able to buy the service of the product and pay against consumption, rather than buying the product outright. Ivan is hoping that this program will be ready for launch no later than 2016.

“Parallel to that, our product visionaries are working with clinicians to develop mobile apps for all of our products, so that when our patients leave the hospital they can keep being



monitored, cared for, and alerted where appropriate. The ultimate end game would be for 6PM to get to a point in three or four years where we are happy to provide our software to hospitals for free, then charge the mobile users a small token per month for the medical service they are getting.”

Ivan has also recognised that products like the HIV treatment imbue his company with a corporate social responsibility. “We have already started planning to work with welfare organisations like the World Health Organization to get our technologies into countries that cannot afford it.” Ivan says that once 6PM Group has activated its mobile and G-Cloud services, it would be happy to provide products like Climate-HIV to countries in Africa for free, as a way of fulfilling the company’s social responsibilities.

“The reality is that I have enjoyed every day in the past 14 years. It has been a struggle and a real challenge, but I believe the success of 6PM lies in the passion we have as a group working together. 6PM is not an IT company—it is a solutions provider—and the truth is every day we keep reminding each other that what we’re doing here is helping people overcome their health challenges. That gives everyone in the company an amazing reason to get up every day and come to work. We simply love serving.” ●

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