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One-Stop Shop

EZE Group Europe has grown over the past decade from a small operation in the Canary Islands to a multi-country company with more than 48 employees, thanks to one simple concept—listening to what the market wants.

Images by William McLellan

After working for most of his career in the travel and hospitality sector, Dominic O'Reilly understood the market and what customers wanted. What they were looking for was a travel and leisure system to make holidaying easier. After searching worldwide, Dominic, along with Daniel Darias, acquired EZE Group, an American-based travel and leisure service. Today Dominic is CEO of the group, which continues to grow and offer new services to its clients.

The CEO Magazine: What was the idea behind forming EZE Group?

Dominic: I had worked in hospitality and leisure for some time, and back in 2003 I noticed that the market was becoming more and more restrictive from a consumer's point of availability. I

had a background in the Canary Islands with one of Europe's biggest timeshare resorts in the 1980s, and that was a wonderful way for people to afford a holiday of a certain standard and a level that was normally only attainable with whole ownership purchase. The marketplace changed, and having a lot of knowledge firsthand with clients, I found they wanted to experience Europe on a bigger scale, enjoy a higher standard, and the hotel and leisure industry was moving to these demands. And I thought, 'Well, why don't I look at providing some kind of hospitality and leisure vehicle that would enable them to do all of this?', and the EZE Group EU was formed.

What was your personal career before EZE Group?

I started in the 1980s in the Canary Islands, with fewer grey

hairs than I have now, working within the business watching what was happening around the area. From my point of view, I always knew there would be more to offer than what people were getting then. People had come to me over a period of time and said there is an opportunity in the marketplace to provide a lot more hospitality and leisure, and people are working these days in smarter environments so they have more leisure time on their hands.

One thing about the marketplace I've noticed is that people are looking for ease and convenience, and if you have somebody else providing some form of concierge service for them they'll use it. So when it's a one-stop phone call, a one-stop email, or a one-stop click onto a website they become quite excited about that. We then decided that there was an opportunity to not only be one of >

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the best vacation and holiday sites of the world, but also to provide hospitality and leisure, and that's where we saw an opportunity.

You were previously involved in the travel and leisure industry. How has that shaped the way you run your business today?

We started talking to our customers to improve our status in the sector because we didn't want to become a faceless business. So when people were taking holidays and vacations we would arrange for some of our members of staff to meet with them to discuss their experiences. We were also talking to the consumer and asking them what else they wanted: what did they need to make life a little bit easier for them?

They said service, service, service, and that was one of the main things that inspired me because service is invisible. When you walk into your hotel room, that room should be nice and tidy and

cleaned, with fresh flowers, but without seeing the person that's put them in there. So to me that's the invisible side. So I was very much and I am very much into providing service for clients so they enjoy their experience and then come back and use EZE Group again.

Being a very competitive industry, what challenges has EZE Group faced and how has it worked to overcome these challenges?

One massive challenge was due to the fact that I have been based in the Canary Islands for the past 25 years. My family are based here, my children are educated here, my home is here. I am more than happy living here. We received a lot of criticism because we were the new kids on the block; we were on the first rung of a multiple-rung ladder, so right at the bottom of the food chain. We persevered with that because our products are unique in many areas

and it wasn't like the old tried and tested hotel room or products that people were used to when they came to the Canary Islands, so there was lot more flexibility.

In the beginning, we had a real tough battle on our hands because to a degree existing hoteliers and timeshare companies felt that we were taking business away from them, but the answer was simple: unless companies change to reflect future trends and what the public and consumers are demanding they will eventually become irrelevant. EZE Group carried on and battled forward and we have now established ourselves as a fresh, dynamic company that really takes care of their consumers, that protects its brand, and who also place themselves upfront to offer a service to clients. If that service is already available, EZE Group's philosophy is to go out and improve that experience for them.

How has the company grown and expanded over its existence?

When the European arm started back in 2004 we were a very small operation because, like all ideas, people were very nervous about coming on board with something so new. Together with my business partner, Daniel Darias, I spent many hours trying to get people to understand what we believed was going to be the end product. So we started up as a very small operation. More than 10 years later we currently have more than 48 employees in the company, based either in the Canary Islands, Malta, or the United Kingdom.

Our turnover and membership has increased year on year on a huge scale. One thing we do is that when the client is actually having the experience—if it's using one of our partners or using us directly—afterwards the service team are not there to sell them anything more, but to look over the experience they had. Some things are out of our hands, because we can't control basics like the weather or the airlines, the train arriving late, or the car



not starting. What we can do, though, is make sure we do all we possibly can to get the experience right for them.

What does EZE Group do to look after its clients?

Once the client is initially introduced to EZE Group, we work with them on a one-to-one basis to gather a profile of their likes, dislikes, desires, and needs. From that profile we can then establish out of the range of our 28 products—which is expanding on an annual basis—what the client would take out of it because every client has different wants and needs. So one average family might say that out of 28 products, maybe six appeal. We will also send them emails if they request them, and distribute a quarterly magazine, so they know what's going on with EZE Group and where EZE Group is moving with its expansion. This regular communication enables the client to access and use more products from us and have a better understanding of those they already use.

How does EZE Group collaborate with its key suppliers and partners to achieve success?

When EZE Group started out, not many people were aware of us, and there is still a big world out there that doesn't understand EZE Group or hasn't heard of us yet. So, one of our biggest challenges was to be seen in the public eye as supporting either local communities or local businesses. I am originally from Birmingham, which provided a good foothold and opportunity for us. We negotiated and became partners, front shirt official sponsors, with Birmingham City Football Club, giving us visibility on the football pitch in front of 30,000–40,000 people over two or three matches on a regular basis, providing a real presence out there.

We then had clients coming to us on a professional and corporate basis, saying they were interested and enquiring about our membership base. We got involved with Amazon recently, one of the biggest suppliers in the world of

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products. If you recall when Amazon first started they only sold books and magazines, but now you can buy everything through them. When EZE Group first started we were just tailored for the holiday market but then we teamed up with other partners to offer a broader range of services for clients.

What does the future hold for EZE Group?

The future is exciting. We are in negotiations with some major brands that want to be associated with EZE Group and the membership base. I am totally open to the further development of the product. I have a great team around me—some fantastic people that have some brilliant ideas. We have a policy here at EZE Group that anybody can call me or suggest meetings and come forward with ideas. Sometimes eight of the 10 ideas might not work this time around, and it doesn't matter if somebody puts an idea to us and it doesn't work, because we are always open and looking for improvements. ●

