

HARNESSING IT

INTERVIEWS

Martin Scott

COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR



HALL & WOODHOUSE

Taylor Made
COMPUTER SOLUTIONS

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In a series of interviews with Taylor Made Computer Solutions, directors reveal what they perceive to be the issues if IT is to deliver key objectives.

The interviews will be brought together as a report to be published by DECISION magazine and then as a digital book.

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HAVING ONCE BEEN accused of “always wanting the latest thing” in technology, Martin Scott is conscious that he might be appear to be a “killjoy” if he doesn’t approve an IT proposal he’s been asked to consider. As commercial director of the independent, family-owned brewers and pub chain Hall & Woodhouse founded in 1777, he was responsible for IT as part of his remit before moving into operations.

One thing he has learned is not to buy cheap. “There’s a danger that you are then constantly firefighting. We don’t want to be in a position where few years we have to take out the system because the technology isn’t working for us,” he explains.

“By putting in good quality solutions in the first place, we can concentrate on what we are trying to get out of technology. This approach means we are not taking as much of a risk.”

The company prefers to keep bespoke systems to a minimum, (“we don’t want to be re-inventing the wheel”), and there has been very little outsourcing except for disaster recovery. This is because some IT suppliers take a “here today, gone tomorrow” approach to technology, Scott points out. “That can be annoying if you have gone to the trouble of embedding them only in time to discover that you will no longer being supported on a system that is core.”

The aim at Hall & Woodhouse is to add IT in incremental steps. “There is always something else that can be improved through technology,” says Scott. “For example, everyone wants information instantly. But then companies spend a lot of time collating data and don’t necessarily know why or what to do with it.”

“We have made a big investment in a structured network to connect all of our 200 or so outlets and

that has had great benefits in terms of backup,” explains Steve Lacey, IT manager at Hall & Woodhouse. “We won’t go to the front, customer-facing end until we know the systems are solid in the back.”

The is spending increasing amounts on IT, not least because customers increasingly want broadband in pubs. Scott explains: “This is a business which is always building for the long-term and that isn’t going to be facilitated by cutting IT costs in the short term. The infrastructure has to be right.”

Hall & Woodhouse have been trialling handheld devices for order taking (and potentially for instant inventory control) in pubs. “Younger members of staff in particular love these devices but more mature employees can’t read them so readily, so we have to find the right balance,” Scott says:

The danger, Lacey points out, is tending up with multiple applications and devices which don’t work seamlessly together. “I will give you a really good example,” interjects Scott. “Our managing director does a daily sales report which was showing figures to eighteen decimal places, which just wasn’t necessary. We fixed that, but the figures were still showing in the wrong format on an iPhone.”

One of the problems, he says, is that technology companies are not just pitching their products to IT departments any more, but increasingly to the end

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user, which creates demand for the latest IT sensation. “But IT procurement should be about what will give the business the biggest benefits - not buying the latest thing simply because it’s available.”

All that said, Hall & Woodhouse do seek out suggestions from around the company when it comes to buying decisions as part of a two-year rolling plan. “We ask people what they feel is important,” says Scott. “We say what do you really want?”

As Lacey points out, the IT department can cover off the infrastructure to give more capacity or resilience but the wider business needs to decide what its operational priorities are. And there’s a line in the sand. “IT is an enabler; it’s the people who make the difference,” avers Scott. “No question about it - our ethos is that people come first. We have very strong values including kindness and teamwork. We aim to be a great place to work, so if it’s a great place to work with the IT, we have achieved what we set out to do.”

The sheer and increasing amount of data generated by IT, as well as the pressure to have a social media presence can be a challenge, he says. “We struggle with a vast amount of information swirling about us and how to control it. I counted about fifteen places people can post comments about us, and they expect a swift response if they post something

online. Guest service is not just about whether you resolve the problem but how you do it. One of the questions a company has to address is who do you authorise to reply to that review. I’m a great fan of TripAdvisor but it does attract extremes of opinion. If someone complains on TripAdvisor at one o’clock in the morning that their steak was not cooked properly, and the manager of that particular pub or hotel is tired and wants to go home, there’s a chance they will respond the wrong way.”

With so much data stored in the cloud these days, Scott admits the company is in a sense taking a step back by considering having standalone PCs for certain things. “We are paranoid about being hacked, as every business should be,” says Lacey. “There’s certain information we don’t want to have out there, for example shareholder details. In a way it’s turning the clock back but it is good sense to ask ourselves ‘should we be going up in the cloud with something, or would it be safer to put it on hard drive on a PC not linked to anything’.”

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I N T E R V I E W S



Established in 1994, Taylor Made Computer Solutions are one of the largest and most highly-ranked IT service and support organisations in the south, currently employing over 110 staff.

Taylor Made are the first technology company in the region to have gained a third consecutive gold award from Investors in People. Taylor Made are also ISO 9001:2008 certified.

The company has been ranked in the top 10 managed service providers in Europe the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) in a leading annual industry survey from MSPmentor since 2012. Taylor Made are a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, HP Preferred Partner and a NetApp Silver Partner.

Services include:

IT support, IT strategy, IT consultancy, hosted telephony, project management, Securo online back-up, hosted solutions, remote management and monitoring, cloud solutions, disaster recovery, remote access, outsource engineering, security, service desk support.

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