

# HARNESSING IT

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## INTERVIEWS

Mick Gibbs

CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE



**Taylor Made**  
COMPUTER SOLUTIONS

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## INTERVIEWS



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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**“I’VE ALWAYS CONSIDERED technology as an enabler. It means people can do what they do well but better. So when I see other companies investing in kit as a way of removing people from the payroll, I think do you know what, that’s not the way forward.**

While technology should enhance the experience for the customer, they will always want to speak to someone there and then if they need help.”

Mick Gibbs is chairman and chief executive of Norad Travel Group, corporate travel management and bespoke holiday service provider, and sits on the executive board of the Guild of Travel Management Companies [GTMC]. He points out that it would be a mistake to assume that millennials just want to envelop themselves in technology.

“Actually they get pretty fed up with having to go through so many processes on screen,” he suggests.

“I can remember when IT in the travel industry was just about legacy systems. There wasn’t much forward thinking. Then British Airways changed everything with their new system for bookings. But that was technology being introduced to cut costs; it wasn’t about thought leadership.”

At the time, in 2002, Gibbs was brought into a travel agency as a consultant to bring their IT up to speed. The former director of Portman Travel and AA Travel fitted in rather well, and not only did he stay but in 2010 acquired what is now Norad Travel Group. From a staff of five, there are now sixty employees at three locations.

“I would suggest that IT has revolutionised travel like no other sector,” says Gibbs. “Trivago and other internet-based companies are great PR people, and the danger is that we try to follow them and end up a poor relation internet company. If a customer is spending £1million a year on travel, is their driver solely trying to save a small percentage on airfare and hotel cost, or is it the time efficiency and safety of its staff when they are abroad?”

“Left to their own devices, a customer might think they can find a great deal on flights by searching the internet, but it will take them time to do it, and are all the arrangements sufficiently robust so that the staff concerned can do their work without thinking about travel and accommodation once they are out there?”

On the other hand, what the internet means is that a travel management company can have clients anywhere in the world. The biggest on Norad’s roster is a technology business headquartered in Seattle. “Technology has dropped out the cost for a service business like ours of having clients overseas,” Gibbs suggests.

“There is so much happening with IT but we need to make sure we don’t just chase the fluff and shiny stuff. Otherwise we will become focused on trends, not the customer. The starting point, as it always has been, is what does the customer want, and

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what do we need to do to deliver it. Our focus is on technology which gives more control to the customer.

“Technology helps the customer to aggregate information but if the bottom line is a dashboard that really only looks pretty and someone likes pressing the button because it’s a nice shade of blue, then you are going to be found out. In travel management, information and duty of care are completely linked. Good data also enables effective blue sky thinking; it gives us the opportunity to aggregate our thoughts with information.

“But with the speed of technology, a company needs to pause sometimes. Otherwise it’s like we’re trying to outdo Asimov, attempting to create a robotic world that we don’t need. Already companies will have systems to monitor systems. If we’re not careful, instead of the customer, IT will be the driver.

I’m seeing companies invest in new technology just because it’s available or a competitor has installed it. Would you use a service provider because they have a particular piece of kit? I’m not being blasé, but technology is too complex for that to be a differential.”

“I think too many IT companies sell on fear,” Gibbs says. “They will tell the customer they should invest in a new one of those, the latest release, and then engage in scope creep which ramps up the cost. Of course companies have got to think about scoping the future, but by focusing on the changing needs of the customer.

“What doesn’t help is that the travel industry has its own language, and for an IT company it can be hard to read the room, so we have a policy of not speaking in jargon and we don’t allow the supplier

to speak in jargon to us.”

Gibbs is adamant that proficiency brought about by IT has to be accompanied by commercial pragmatism. “A system will flag up when a customer is in debt when they shouldn’t be, but there could be a number of reasons why that has happened,” he says by way of example.

“Simply sending out a reminder letter isn’t the answer if the system won’t allow the customer to be issued with their tickets; that will cause the relationship to collapse.”

He’s sanguine about where data should be held. “I’ve always adopted the approach that if we haven’t got a skill set, we’ll find it elsewhere,” he says. “I believe the cloud is more secure than anything we could achieve, and it means we can access information anywhere in the world, at any time.”

According to Gibbs, technology has resulted in the end of the ubiquitous five-year plan. “The timeframe can be five months now,” he points out.

“You could say that technology is resulting in more short-term thinking, but I know travel is not going to stop; I just need to identify how it might change. The desire to travel won’t go away. But the danger is that technology is making us re-active rather than pro-active. There is a constant need for everything to be faster - this is the age of the instant response - and my concern is that our learning time is being reduced.

“But what is essential is that we have absolute understanding of where we’re going as a business as our priority, rather than where IT is going. Only then can business and IT strategies be aligned effectively.”

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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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