CDN: from medical imaging to cloud solutions

Central Data Networks has been leading innovation in medical imaging software in Australia for 20 years, challenging and out-performing some of the world's largest technology companies.

Central Data Networks Managing Director Robert Zanier, with examples of the company's medical imaging technology on the screen in the background.

The Wollongong-based company's technology is widely used in hospitals and radiology practices across Australia, and is being adapted for veterinary applications.

The company has developed a strong reputation across Southeast Asia and in China, and now has a strong focus on building its presence in these markets.

CDN has developed sophisticated interface software to build networks that allow patients' 3D digital medical images such as CT scans to be easily transmitted between radiologists and other medical specialists. This allows doctors to view and manipulate the scans on their workstations while they are treating the patient.

CDN is also at the forefront of PACS (Picture Archival Communications Systems) technology for handling large volumes of medical images in public hospitals and radiology practices, having been one of the first companies to introduce the technology to Australia in 1996. Some of the PACS equipment CDN installed in large public hospitals in the late 1990s is still going strong.

Now, a grant from the Illawarra Regional Innovation and Investment Fund is helping the medical software development company to diversify into cardiology imaging technology and Cloud-based "Collaborative Research Dossier" storage for patients' own medical records, and develop markets in Southeast Asia and China for its imaging software.

One of China's largest hospitals, with 10,000 beds, recently introduced CDN software and the company has received orders from other parts of China, Mongolia and Southeast Asia.

CDN Managing Director and company founder Robert Zanier said the company had 30 employees and a history of taking on multinational companies head-on. He is proud of the way CDN outperforms them through a strong commitment to innovation and agility that the larger companies are unable to match.

"We are a small Wollongong company that performs miracles, because we roll up our sleeves and get things done," Mr Zanier said.

"We have taken on large international companies from Munich to Milwaukee, and we succeed because we don't listen to what the Europeans or Americans are saying, we listen to our customers."

Mr Zanier, an electrical engineer who had worked for a large Japanese electronics firm in its medical imaging after graduating from the University of Wollongong, established CDN in 1994 with business partner Robert Frizza because they could see the potential for using the then emerging internet technology to transmit medical images.

"We formed CDN and got our first sale in September 1994 connecting nuclear medicine machines in a large hospital in Northern NSW, so the staff could transmit their CT scans electronically. That gave us the impetus to get moving, and we haven't looked back."

Mr Zanier is proud that his company is still based in Wollongong - in a purpose-built building designed to handle administration, software development and manufacture of the high-tech hardware.

"Wollongong has some real advantages for our company, including access to very well trained Computer Science and Computer Engineering graduates from the University of Wollongong," he said.

"We have very strong staff loyalty and stability, which is a big advantage compared to larger cities where staff are more likely to be poached or to always be on the lookout for the next opportunity. Our staff are passionate about what the company is doing.

"We have also found that being based in Wollongong resonates with our Chinese customers. The University of Wollongong has some close links with China, so the Chinese we deal with are aware of Wollongong. They respect our university, they respect our company, and they admire the lifestyle we enjoy in Wollongong."

Mr Zanier said the NSW Government decision to establish the $150 million Metronode data centre in Wollongong had also influenced its move into Cloud-based e-storage.

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