

PAUL GIBBONS and ANDRE PHILPOT of KnowledgePoint Limited

Beginning of a new chapter...

By PAUL ROBINS

IT IS little more than a decade since two Reading print experts took a big gamble.

Andre Philpot and Paul Gibbons left their high-powered jobs in 1997 to launch their own on-demand digital printing business in Lower Earley.

Their aim was simple – to become a leading provider of bespoke training and marketing materials to customers at the touch of a button.

Ten years later and KnowledgePoint, based at Cutbush Park in Danehill, does exactly that, with a turnover in excess of £7 million.

“The way the printing industry works has essentially remained the same, but the technology has changed dramatically,” Philpot told *Business Post*.

“The development of colour printing has improved things beyond recognition in terms of speed and quality. Everything is done electronically. Machines do things that 10 years ago people would be doing.

“Printing used to be thought of as being paper-based, but now we can create training materials on just about anything – CDs, DVDs, USB drives and so on.”

KnowledgePoint employs a team of 120 staff, with Gibbons as business development director and Philpot working as operations manager.

In 2006 they launched a subsidiary called KnowledgeCast, based at Winnersh Triangle, to handle the production and customer services arm of the business.

The firm produces a huge range of tailored training manuals, student guides and seminar delegate packs and prides itself on doing everything from design to distribution.

Philpot said: “The process involved can be tailored to each client but, whatever the customisation in place, we can automatically output to individual client requirements no matter how complex and regardless of volume.

“We use ‘in time’ processes. We design it, we produce it and we package it. We have an end-to-end capability. It’s a one-stop shop approach.”

The duo met at London-based outfit Microgen when they were charged with setting up a new division of the company in Woking.

“It was a good learning curve,” said Gibbons, but admits that both men felt they could do better on their own.

“So we decided to form our own company focusing on the IT training course market,” he said. “We felt this was the right move because we were in the middle of the Silicon Valley.

“We could see there was a big market for our systems because of the major companies that have a presence here.

“It was quite tough, even then. We decided we weren’t going to take any customers from our previous organisations so we started with a



DRAMATIC CHANGES - Print experts Andre Philpot, left, and Paul Gibbons Greenfield site.”

But the decade of hard work paid off as KnowledgePoint now counts the likes of Computeach, Dell, Oracle and Cisco Systems among its list of major blue-chip clients.

To mark its 10th anniversary, the firm recently rolled out a new corporate identity and launched a new website, offering customers greater access to online tools which allows them to place orders and track progress of goods.

Gibbons said: “This really marks the beginning of a new chapter in KnowledgePoint’s development as a business.

“We have been so customer-focused that we forgot about marketing ourselves. For example we are one of Xerox’s biggest customers yet we are not even known to them internally.

“It’s been 10 years so we felt it was time to look at our own image.”

Their reputation was given another shot in the arm after they were shortlisted for the British Computer Society IT Industry 2008 Supplier of

the Year Award.

And the co-founders have enjoyed some exposure on the big screen too, after participating in a TV documentary on professionalism in IT just before Christmas.

However this recognition hasn’t led to complacency and Gibbons and Philpot told *Business Post* that 2009 will be a tough year for all sectors, including print.

“There has definitely been a lull recently and I expect to see a lot more businesses fall by the wayside,” said Gibbons.

“These are hard times but we are well-placed to deal with it. We are still getting business and have grown year on year. We will continue to invest in new equipment. Next quarter we are installing continuous feed machines, which will enable us to cater for higher volumes.

“In fact in many ways we see it as an opportunity. We know our systems can help companies reduce their costs by up to 30 per cent and we know we offer a blend of services that others don’t.”

New BID decision

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Oxford Road and Forbury Square.

However, not everyone inside the zone is in favour of a second BID and Mr Douglas revealed that on at least one occasion when he visited a business, he was able to retrieve the ballot paper from a wastepaper bin.

He also stressed that it takes time to get the votes in because 75 per cent of businesses in Central Reading have to apply to their head offices before they can vote.

“Some are concerned about the cost, but the majority understand what we have got from the BID and they know it would be silly to let it go,” he said.

“Apathy will be the BIDs undoing – those people that support it in concept but haven’t made the effort to put the ballot paper in the post.

“My message to them is; think about what you are saying no to by not voting. Imagine next Christmas in the town centre with no Christmas lights.

“Imagine no additional PCSOs, no cleaning the



VOTE ‘YES’ - Says BID manager Guy Douglas

chewing gum off the streets – without a BID Reading will be a very sticky place underfoot.

“If we are blessed with a good summer, there will be no money for a sizzling floral display.

“There will also be no marketing and no voice for business.”

Final ballot reminders were sent out to businesses yesterday and Mr Douglas, who has been BID chief since April, reiterated the importance of getting a ‘yes’ vote.

“This will be a tough year for businesses and the BID will be their crutch,” he said.

“We will be the factor that will make Reading town centre stand out from the rest of the Thames Valley.

“There is no alternative.”

If successful, BID2 will come into force on April 1 and run until the end of March 2013.

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