COMPANY PROFILE

Company Profile: Yokogawa Marex

Tom Stroud goes behind the scenes at "the masters of reinvention" – a software company with record results, owned by a Japanese corporation and operating independently in Cowes.

"Wherever there's an industrial process, we can provide a software solution," says Wayne Matthews, Technical Director of Yokogawa Marex. The Cowes company is owned by Yokogawa, a Japanese industrial automation company. The team, based on Medina Road, currently has over 2000 systems in place across the world. Their software solutions are employed in industrial facilities, oil rigs, refineries and plants, overseeing oil and gas production, oil refining and petrochemicals, power generation, pharmaceutical production, water purification and food production.

The story begins in Cowes almost 50 years ago with Marine Exploration Limited, a company specialising in Metocean statistical data analysis and reporting. The team used data buoys to monitor waves and weather conditions. This data would be interpreted by oceanographers, who would then make long-term sea state forecasts to companies who were building oil-rigs. Over time the business moved in to software products and solutions.

Wayne joined Marex in 1993, straight from university.

"The meteorological and oceanographic division of the business was tailing away when I started," he says. "We'd invented a new software product called Promace, which was regarded as one of the first 'process historian' systems in the world. We were definitely pioneers." Marex's pioneering product made them an attractive purchase, and in 1997 they were taken over by the Japanese process automation giant, Yokogawa Electric Corporation.

'Marex had a good relationship with Yokogawa in the nineties and they saw us as a good acquisition, to complement their business. They bought us for our expertise and our people. They then commissioned us to build a new ground-up product called Exaquantum, taking forward the foundations laid with Promace. Exaquantum started development in 1997 and was officially released in 2000. It's now our flagship product."

Wayne Matthews

biggest petro-chemical plants in the world.

"We're seen as a really strong team within Yokogawa. Nobody else in the Yokogawa Group does what we do. We develop and deliver our solutions and our team covers all elements of the life cycle, from sales to support. We can take ideas from nothing, delivering products and solutions to the marketplace and we have a very rich history. As part of the Exaquantum integrated suite we now have around 35 different products, ranging from simple interfaces through to sophisticated safety monitoring software."

In selling their products the Yokogawa Marex team focuses on business benefits and on the savings their software can bring, not just the features on offer. "It's always a challenge with customers," grins Wayne. "They don't really want to let you know how much money we're saving them! We will do exercises with companies looking at return on investment, and it's not uncommon for our systems to pay back within six months. We've tried in some cases to say 'don't pay us anything, pay us on the return' but they're not so keen to do that!"

The Cowes team can be sent anywhere in the world. Their support engineers will fly in to install and commission systems. The sales team have recently visited Russia, Australia and Vienna. The company uses video-conferencing to save on travel time but they still like to meet their clients.

"In terms of business, being on the Island makes no difference to us. Yokogawa has offices all around the world and our solutions work across the globe," says Wayne. "Keeping the Marex name has meant that a lot of companies see us as a specialist group and it does give us that added recognition. The majority of our big developments in the last five years have been commissioned from our customers. Companies do like to engage with their software developers. That way they have a louder voice and can get what they want."

Delivering to an international market can lead to some isolation locally. Wayne is keen to be recognised at home, as well as abroad.

"We don't have a consumer product that people are familiar with so they don't often relate to us. We are working to get our message out and raise our profile. We see it as very important to work with the community. We're really looking forward to the Chamber Of Commerce Awards this year. We've also had quite an aggressive

recruitment campaign in the last few months, taking on software and support engineers. We've recruited graduates and we've had student placements too."

"We are the masters of reinvention in this team. We're always coming up with new ideas and new ways to solve problems. Our people are driving the products and solutions forward. Technology is moving ever faster and we try and keep a step ahead all of the time. We've really done a great job here and we've seen the company grow in the last 10 years after a management restructure. We've delivered from a profitability point of view, with year-on-year growth. There is nothing better than building some software, getting it out there in the marketplace and then seeing your product in place, contributing to society. There is no greater buzz than that."

YOKOGAWA
Yokogawa Marex Limited

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Wayne Matthews
Yokogawa Marex

Yokogawa Marex now employs 40 people and their Exaquantum software is installed in thousands of industrial facilities across the world. It collects information on temperatures, pressures, flows, operating conditions and production rates. As well as monitoring the safety of the workplace the data can also be analysed to optimise productivity and continually improve plant operations.

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Yokogawa Marex's strong order book has been helped by a better economic climate. Confidence has returned to the energy sector with previously stalled projects being revived. Wayne says this is now "levelling out", and the company has just issued a significant bid for one of the