

Steve O'Brien

CEO DNS Technology

STEVE O'BRIEN SHARES HIS JOURNEY FROM A YOUNG IT TECHNICIAN WITH A LOVE OF CARS TO BECOMING THE CEO OF THE COMPANY BEHIND ONE OF THE COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY'S LEADING ESTIMATING AND BODY SHOP MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS, IBODYSHOP.

NCR: How did you get started in the industry?

SO: It all began in the mid-1980s when I was working with a program called Breeze, a retail point-of-sale accounting software package in the B2B sector. Around that time, NRMA wrote an estimating system called MicroQuote, the predecessor to QuotePlus. Being the very early days of IT in the collision industry, uptake was slow. NRMA sold it to Megabus, who at the time were big in tyre retail software, servicing clients such as Bob Jane.

I was offered the opportunity to take up the agency for QuotePlus in Queensland in late 1989 at a time when the product was not really established -

Steve O'Brien.

this was back in the DOS days. I went to ACE Panels in Parramatta to look at the product and it was clear it would satisfy my passion for both computer software and cars.

NCR: Take us through your journey.

SO: We launched in Queensland in early 1990 and over the following two years put on some 40 systems. In 1992, The Woods Group in Melbourne were looking for a system, although we initially "missed the cut". I flew down to meet Woods, listened to their needs, and our programmer back then, Dylan de Silva, and I worked through the night to develop an interface for Woods' accounting software to demonstrate our capabilities. We went on to win the contract and I relocated to Melbourne to manage the account, at the time the largest network of shops in the country.

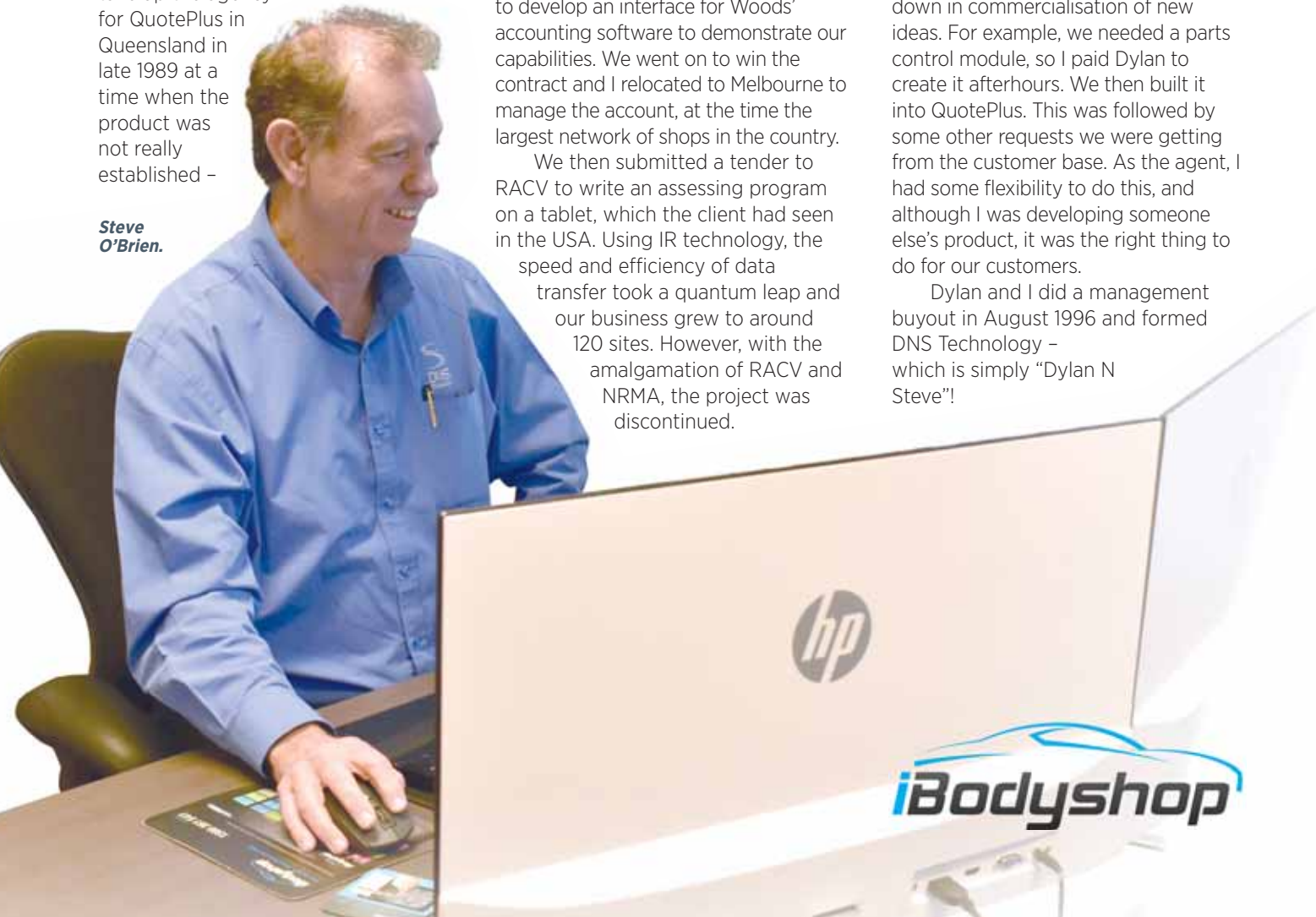
We then submitted a tender to RACV to write an assessing program on a tablet, which the client had seen in the USA. Using IR technology, the speed and efficiency of data transfer took a quantum leap and our business grew to around 120 sites. However, with the amalgamation of RACV and NRMA, the project was discontinued.

By this time, we were running version 3 of QuotePlus, but in 1995, Windows95 came along and we converted our products to Windows, which made it all so much more user-friendly.

NCR: So how did DNS Technology come into existence?

SO: From the early 1990s, Dylan de Silva and I really hit it off and formed a great team. Dylan did the programming and support and I did the sales, training and product innovation. However, by mid-1996 QuotePlus' owner, Megabus, was losing faith, which led to a slow-down in commercialisation of new ideas. For example, we needed a parts control module, so I paid Dylan to create it afterhours. We then built it into QuotePlus. This was followed by some other requests we were getting from the customer base. As the agent, I had some flexibility to do this, and although I was developing someone else's product, it was the right thing to do for our customers.

Dylan and I did a management buyout in August 1996 and formed DNS Technology - which is simply "Dylan N Steve"!





NCR: What was the first thing you did as DNS Technology?

SO: Sort out our customer service, product direction and billing system; all were not up to the standard Dylan and I wished to deliver! The customer records we inherited were poorly maintained – we had no idea who to support and how. We set about writing a proper customer support program to accurately record customer details, modules used, and support history. Support history is crucial to “bug fixing” and timely, appropriate support.

Product direction was next. As our number one priority was focusing on customer needs, we adopted a saying, “death by a thousand cuts”, which refers to the multitude of little time-consuming things that take up so much of our customers’ time. This philosophy carried right through to the design of iBodyshop.

NCR: And the business grew?

SO: Over the next 17 years we increased the number of sites to over 330, which allowed us to invest in more programmers, and our staff grew from six to 14 in the same period. However, one of the challenges of a desktop system was that upgrades required us to send out hundreds of CDs and then rely on the clients to load it onto their computer – we found people often didn’t have the time or opportunity to do it, resulting in a sub-optimal service. We had always been proud of our quality and this situation was damaging our brand. It was also becoming an expensive service, with the cost of the initial software, ongoing service fees and a requirement of the client to regularly update their

computer. We knew the time had come to take a quantum leap.

NCR: And you so launched iBodyshop in 2015?

SO: Moving to the cloud presented an opportunity to design from the ground up and do away with all the separate systems. One program with all modules integrated offered a seamless, truly efficient experience for our customers – aimed to improve administration efficiency. It really changed the game.

Being cloud-based is our big differentiator. As the collision repair industry was becoming extraordinarily competitive, our clients were being squeezed for every dollar and we were not immune to this pressure. We were, and continue to be, at the top end of the market and many repairers just couldn’t afford what we had to offer.

Moving to the cloud allowed us to offer a more cost-effective, efficient solution. No more CDs, no more back-ups, no more hardware upgrades – we now run a SaaS (Software as a Service) system.

NCR: How does SaaS work?

SO: SaaS allows us to deliver our high-quality service to many more customers at a lower price per user. There is no upfront licence fee, just a monthly subscription that covers everything. We do charge for training, be it online or onsite, but it is only a once-off and chargeable after the customer is live.

We have three levels of support to cater for the various needs of our clients: Standard, Professional and Premium. The fees are completely transparent and are found on the website. The only requirements are Windows 7 (or above) and a good



5 Minutes with ...



David Roberts
Capricorn Society

When did you join the industry?
1984

What was your first job in the industry?
Apprentice Motor Mechanic

What do you do now?
NSW/ACT Sales Manager for
Capricorn Society

What do you like about the industry?
The people and technology

What don't you like about the industry?
People undervaluing their services

What music do you like?
Oh it's broad: AC/DC, Eagles, John Mayer,
Dido, Phil Collins, Simply Red, Eminem,

Your Favourite Artist?
Comedian "Bill Engvall"

Your favourite food?
Thai Green Chicken Curry

Your favourite drink?
Jack Daniels' Gentleman Jack!

Your hobbies?
Go-karting or touring on the Can-Am
Spyder ...Vehicle restoration/modification

Who in the world would you most like to meet?
Elon Musk

- - - M O V E R S A N D S H A K E R S - - -



Programming and Customer Service team.

internet connection. The service now has greater flexibility and portability across the workshop, the office or even at home (you're no longer chained to the office).

Of course, we are now also able to offer clients access to the system for one month, free of charge, literally giving them the opportunity to "try before they buy".

NCR: How does it differ from other body shop management systems?

SO: Fundamentally, everything works seamlessly due to the longstanding focus on customer needs, a commitment to customer service and a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. As a new customer recently said after only one week: "Now I only go to work on a Saturday because I want to, not because I have to." The system is so efficient that the client does not have to be on site every minute of every day.

NCR: What's the biggest challenge for your business today?

SO: Internally, the biggest challenge is having the time and resources to implement all the great ideas we get through our highly engaged client base. Our mantra has always been to give the customer what they want, so we strive to do that - it really is an embarrassment of riches.

Externally, we find we don't have a competitor that can do everything that iBodyshop can do. Sure, there are other options, but being fully cloud-based, we are in every sense a fully integrated one-stop shop.

NCR: So, where are you now and where are you going?

SO: Our business now has over 900

sites and continues to grow at a rate of 12-15 new sites per month. Most of our growth comes from referral, which tells us we are doing something right for the industry.

We will continue to expand our support team as the business grows, although we do have very strict selection and recruitment criteria to ensure we continue to fulfil our customer promise.

We are also looking at opportunities to bring our technology to SMEs in other market segments, but that is more long term - we are committed to the collision repair industry, on which we will remain focused for the foreseeable future.

NCR: What innovations can we expect to see from DNS Technology in the next financial year?

SO: Without giving away our future plans, in a broad sense the focus will be on further automating our processes to simplify even the most fundamental tasks, such as cost allocation. Now, we all know that ratios are critical indicators in body shops, and we will help our clients better understand their businesses and how to use the information in a more meaningful way. In essence, "automation of allocation" will be a future step forward for iBodyshop.

This also creates the opportunity to benchmark our clients, although we have only applied this in a limited way, for example, supplying data to Glasurit's Vision 360 benchmarking system.

Barcode scanning and decoding of the VIN to extract the relevant information is another project in the pipeline. There is no shortage of opportunities.

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