

Flick switches Olive onto

Martin Flick, CEO of Olive Communications, took up the post early this year and is already on target to double revenues to £25 million by 2014. Here's his story...



Olive represented an exciting opportunity for Flick to put to use all of the skills, experience and learnings gained in his career. In 1998 he co-formed a business that was acquired by Azzurri in 2004, and although he has no regrets about the sale Flick always wondered where he could have taken the business. "Olive has given me a chance to answer that question," stated Flick.

Post-acquisition Flick spent eight years working at Azzurri with what he describes as some of the most successful,

ambitious and creative people in the industry, and he gained invaluable experience as the company went through a number of acquisitions, integrations and proposition developments. "I thoroughly enjoyed most of my time there, through the glory years and even during some of the tough times, however the opportunity to take all that I had learnt and apply that to developing the Olive business strategy at what is a very exciting time in its evolution was too good to resist," added Flick.

"What Mark Geraghty and the Olive team achieved in

the preceding years was phenomenal and having worked with Mark early in his career and having remained firm friends throughout meant that I had seen Olive develop, grow and flourish with interest. The opportunity Mark gave me to join as an equity partner and be instrumental in driving the next stage of its development is exciting and a perfect fit in terms of partnership."

According to Flick, Olive has an opportunity to really stand out in the market. "Our relationship with Vodafone is stronger than ever and our ability to develop the

portfolio as it integrates the recent acquisition of C&W is compelling," he added. "We have the financial stability, multi-product expertise and blank canvass from an infrastructure perspective to ride the wave of the comms revolution that is taking place."

On taking the role of CEO in February, Flick's first job was to create a plan to maximise the potential of all of the acquisitions Olive had made in the previous year. 2012 was a busy year for the Olive team which saw seven businesses acquired, due to opportunistic timing

in the run up to true revenue share. "As a fresh pair of eyes I was able to help the team take a step back and consider all of the synergies available both from a revenue and capability perspective and to maximise the benefit through integration," noted Flick. "We committed that we wouldn't make any more acquisitions until we had fully integrated those we had acquired.

"Two things surprised me: Firstly, the acceptance and support I received from the Olive team was phenomenal. Within weeks they had all given me their

enlightened growth path

full commitment and our long term-plan was created. This led on to the second surprise – the speed of execution of phase one. In only three months we had met all of our primary objectives had ticked all of the boxes on integrating seven customer bases and were then able to successfully make two more acquisitions, Direct Communications and Wish Holdings.”

Discussions between Geraghty and Flick before he joined the company saw the pair agree to invest heavily in the business in order to take advantage of the market opportunity. “It’s a very exciting time for the industry and for customers alike and we agreed we would invest to shape and develop Olive to take full advantage of market demand,” added Flick. “As a result, we have invested in people and have recruited some of the best in the industry to come and join us. We have invested in systems, processes and infrastructure to support converged product offerings, and have the ability to deliver

multi product managed services to customers of varying sizes consistently across a single CRM platform. Our third investment area is in products and services that provide differentiation for us and our strategic partners. To supplement organic investment we have just made a significant acquisition in Wish which has given us scale, additional expertise and strengthened management capabilities.”

Olive Communications has witnessed revenue and staff numbers grow steadily to almost £11 million turnover in its last financial year. “I set a budget this year of £13 million which we will exceed organically by about £2 million,” commented Flick. “As the acquisitions took place mid-year the full effect on revenue won’t be clear until the integration is fully completed and we have a full 12 months combined trading at the end of 2014, but I expect revenue to exceed £25 million.”

His three year business plan is to maximise the value of

the ten acquisitions made in the last two years and grow organically and aggressively. “Within our three year plan we will achieve significant growth and expect to challenge the market with disruptive and intelligent solutions delivered with the support of our strategic partnerships,” added Flick.

“Our culture is to build an obsession about customer service into the DNA of the business and with this personal touch enable people to work effectively and efficiently anywhere in the world. Customer service is at the core of our offering. The team likes to compare itself to a concierge style service for its connected customers. Our culture is dynamic and the team also socialise outside of the office. We are lucky to have a family-style culture at Olive, with everyone having a sense of belonging to something special.”

As is the case for all growing families, space becomes an issue and Flick rates accommodation as a current

pain point. “Having moved into a new HQ in February we have outgrown it already and will be expanding to a larger building early next year,” he explained. “Moving twice in 12 months for any business would be painful but its testament to the hard work from our team that we will do so without fuss or disruption. We couldn’t predict the growth we’ve seen in the past year, but have planned for the future to accommodate all of our possible requirements.”

His biggest industry bugbear is that nearly every player in the market talks in their marketing collateral about delivering managed services, value propositions, differentiation and world class support in an attempt to de-commoditise their offerings, but they do not live by those principles by training and developing their sales teams to sell the added value and be bold enough to charge a premium for adding true differentiation.

“As a result, nearly all bids that we see end up being

commoditised and driven to the lowest price point by customers,” added Flick. “While it is important to be competitive and deliver value for money, if organisations can’t be brave enough to justify their managed service costs customers will ultimately suffer in the long run as value, service and creativity will be degraded. You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, and I should know as we keep rare breed pigs on our Surrey smallholding!” ■

Just a minute with Martin Flick...

What talent do you wish you had? The ability to perform Jedi mind tricks

What do you fear the most? Going bald, zombies and talking to offshore call centres

Name three ideal dinner guests: Sir Ranulph Fiennes, Nigella Lawson and Chris Evans

Name one thing you could not do without in your job: My Olive management team