

## Wired for success

Software developer and IT consultancy Altcom has found Cornwall's thriving digital community provides great opportunities for creative projects and partnerships.

### Overview

When altcom moved its headquarters to Penzance in January 2004, it was hardly taking a leap in the dark. Managing Director John Cowles had spent nearly 20 years living and working in the county. Then in 1999 he joined altcom, a Tiverton based company he had helped set up in 1995, which developed sophisticated news processing and taxonomical analysis systems for the news and financial information giant Reuters.

The company built a strong reputation in this field and began to diversify, taking on clients in the global information, environmental and professional and public sectors, for whom it provides scalable and dynamic content management systems for internet and intranet projects.

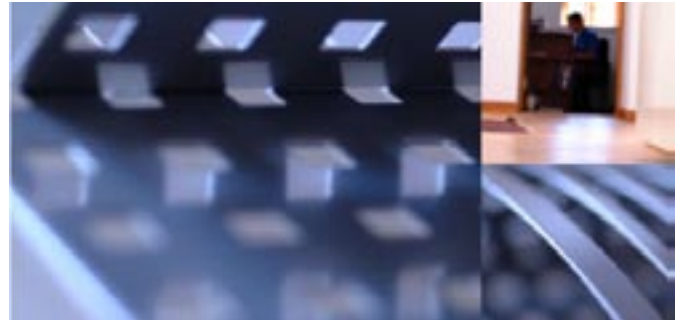
Altcom's success is built on its ability to meet the demand for timely and cost-effective software using tools and methods matched to the scope of the project. It is also quick to spot

### Workforce

Altcom has a core team of six software development and management professionals, all with extensive experience gained from working at major corporates. It also draws on a network of Cornwall-based graphic designers and other creatives, on a project basis. The company provides in-depth training in specialist IT skills both to its own staff and to some of the local contractors that it takes on for individual projects. John Cowles believes that the new Combined Universities in Cornwall will help ensure a continued supply of highly skilled creative talent for Cornwall's rapidly growing ICT sector.

### Clients

Current and recent clients include the DTI, the Environment Agency, several local authorities, and Factiva - a major joint venture between Reuters and Dow Jones. Altcom has also developed a content management system based web presence for the South West branch of creating:excellence, a national programme that focuses on regional centres of excellence and brings together best practice across target sectors. The company takes pride in the high levels of client satisfaction that it achieves - as shown by the fact that 70% of its turnover comes from repeat business.



and act on market opportunities - one reason why it is now developing low-cost but feature-rich e-commerce packages that can be easily tailored to the specific demands of SMEs. The exceptionally high quality of Altcom's services was recognised recently when the company achieved the much-coveted ISO 9001:2000 certification for software design & development services.

As with many other companies, altcom's move to Cornwall was enabled by the high level of broadband connectivity that the county now offers. Dave Wilcox, altcom's Technical Director, explains: "Transatlantic conference calls and video conferencing are becoming the norm in this business. We meet face to face with our US clients maybe twice a year but we meet online every week, with messenger and email filling in the gaps. Where we are physically located is really irrelevant - as long as the technology is there."

### Technology

One of the company's strengths is its expertise in open-source web-development technologies such as PHP and MySQL, as well more conventional tools such as Java, CSS and HTML. Altcom is based in the Westloc building in Penzance, which provides wired office space featuring dedicated in-house servers, independent, climate-controlled rackspace, uninterruptible power supply and on-site generation. Backbone connection is via multiple telcos for maximum peace of mind, and the building's high-spec security includes measures such as state-inert gas fire purging.

### Support

An 'Accelerator' grant from actnow recently helped altcom to totally revamp its web marketing operation. It has also received valuable help from Devon & Cornwall Business Link, which part-funded an expert consultant to guide altcom through the rigorous auditing process that led to it achieving ISO 9001 certification. The company's staff make extensive use of the Digital Peninsula Network, a dynamic networking and skills-development group for IT and media professionals in Cornwall.