

A move that's paying off

Cornwall's natural landscape and fast developing business scene were both strong pulls for this thriving payroll services and IT consultancy firm.



Overview

Colin Parnell, director of Roskear Holdings Ltd, was ahead of the game when he anticipated the trend towards companies outsourcing non-key functions and set up Roskear Payroll Services in 1989. Having grown this into a successful, BACS-accredited business that manages payrolls for a wide range of clients, from sole traders to corporates in every corner of the UK, he's now made another smart move by relocating to Cornwall at a time when the county's economy is really taking off.

The move came about partly as a result of work that Colin was undertaking for his other business, Roskear Consulting, which specialises in corporate restructuring and IT systems integration. In 2005-6 he worked with the management at Furniss, the iconic maker of Cornish Fairing biscuits, keeping it afloat after his discovery of the financial black hole that ultimately forced the company into administration. This involved several months in Cornwall helping to overhaul the company's financial administration and introduce cost-saving measures, and although a lot of excellent work was achieved it was not enough to refill the coffers.

"I'd grown up in Cornwall and already had a house down here," Colin says, "but like many Cornish people of my generation I'd made a career outside the county. Spending time working here brought home to me how far the communications revolution has made it easy to run a UK-wide business from Cornwall itself."

Workforce

Roskear has one full-time employee and one part-timer on the consulting side of the business in Cornwall, while the payroll arm has six highly experienced employees who continue to be based in Leicestershire. Broadband has removed the barriers to managing a data-intensive business from a distance, and while moving the headquarters has entailed a certain amount of travelling between the two locations, Colin says that this does not present much of a problem if planned sensibly.

Support

"We didn't really need any support to move," Colin says. "In some respects it was an organic process; with the period I spent in a consulting role down here helping to give us a foothold." But he has found substantial benefits in membership of various local and national business organisations, including the Cornwall Chamber of Commerce and the UK IT Association (UKITA). He is also a founder member and Chairman of the ADMIT group, which brings together IT systems resellers with a holistic approach to customer requirements and encourages knowledge transfer, joint ventures and best business practice in application development. "What we've found is that there's huge value in companies with complementary skill-sets working jointly, as there are very few that can take on major IT projects solely from their own resources. That's certainly an area that we'd like to explore further in Cornwall," Colin says.

In 2005 Colin relocated Roskear's headquarters from the Midlands to Praze-an-Beeble, a village set in the beautiful landscape between Camborne and Helston. "It's a great place to be based," he says, "within easy reach of the A30 but without any of the traffic or other problems you get in a city."

Colin is equally enthusiastic about Cornwall's fast developing business landscape: "People here are already working with new technology in many different ways, but for Roskear there are real opportunities to help companies improve the ways they manage financial information. Integrating EPOS and e-commerce systems with good stock-control systems with is now a key area that we're very focused on. We apply joined-up thinking to make sure that these systems work together efficiently and can be scaled up smoothly as businesses grow."

For Colin, one of the best aspects of being in Cornwall is being able to achieve a better work-life balance. "There are so many things you can do right on your doorstep. For me these include golf, snorkelling and cliff walking, and there's a fantastic cross-country running circuit just a stone's throw from the office. It's important not just on a personal level, but also because it means your work improves," he says.

Technology

Roskear Consulting is able to give independent advice on a wide range of IT applications for business. Over the years, it has worked closely with Pegasus Software, an industry-leading supplier of systems for accounting, payroll, HR, sales and supply chain management. The company also collaborates on IT implementation and training projects with two other highly respected IT companies based in Cornwall: Applied Business Solutions of St Agnes and NCI Technologies of Penryn.

Clients

Roskear Consulting works with companies all over the UK from Devon to Sunderland, while Roskear Payroll Services has a highly diverse client base of over 150 companies – everything from SMEs with one or two employees to household names and charitable organisations with over 500. "Even with relatively small numbers of employees, outsourcing the payroll function can turn out to be very cost-effective," Colin says. "We always aim to establish a close relationship with the client so that they think of us as their payroll department. But even before moving the headquarters to Cornwall, 90% of our clients were based over 50 miles away. In that respect, the move has not made a huge difference."