

Up for the challenge

• Press cuttings

Midnight
Communications

MARTIN POLLINS says he has a fondness for the good things in life but at the age of 68 he refuses to entertain thoughts of a leisurely retirement.

When I ask how much longer he intends to carry on working 12 hours a day he looks slightly bemused, as though the question had never crossed his mind.

He looks in excellent shape, much younger than someone approaching the big Seven-O and, more importantly, he notes, "my brain still works".

Martin, a chartered accountant by trade, has enjoyed a long, entrepreneurial and very profitable career but he is still hungry for new challenges.

His latest venture is Bizezia, an internet company which provides online marketing and management tools for accountants, lawyers and the like.

It has five core products which clients can install on their websites to improve the day-to-day running of their business and impress their customers.

These include a monthly business magazine, a business calculator, a library of more than 650 articles, a contract management system, and online video and audio tutorials.

The products allow firms to provide information to their customers more easily, work more easily with them, and "get paid properly for the work they do".

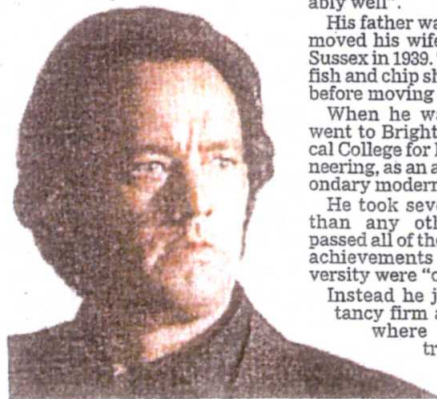
Bizezia, based in Haywards Heath, was in the planning stages for several years but is starting to bear fruit with more than 250 clients on its books.

Martin estimates there are approximately 30,000 law and accountancy firms in the UK. He wants ten per cent of them in the bag before 2009.

A quick history lesson is useful to put the company in context.

Until 1984 there were strict restrictions on how accountancy firms could advertise and market their services.

TEAMWORK: Tom Hanks



by JAMES LANCASTER

Remarkable as it seems now, they were only allowed "tombstone adverts" in the press to announce the death or appointment of a partner.

When these sanctions were lifted an entire industry grew up around marketing and media training for the number-crunchers of the world.

Martin was quick to take advantage. His firm, Pollins Raynour and Boxall - later PRB Martin Pollins - was the first accountancy practice to advertise on national television.

At about the same time Martin founded the CharterGroup Partnership, the UK's first accountancy networking group, which he chaired until the early-Nineties.

Impressive

In 1996 the growth of the internet opened up new opportunities for accountants and other professionals to communicate with their clients.

Again Martin saw a business opportunity and began toying with the idea of an internet-based company which would provide a range of online marketing and administration tools specifically for accountants. Bizezia was the end result.

Martin's technical know-how is impressive. He is a firm believer that, used properly, technology is a force for good and that there are still a lot of firms out there who have not woken up to the fact yet.

He says: "In every firm there's somebody who's technically savvy and if that person has reasonable clout then the firm itself becomes technically savvy."

"But in most cases the technically savvy person is a junior battling away against the old guard who don't really want to change anything."

Martin's grandparents were Polish immigrants. They had seven sons, one of whom became a professional ice-skater, another a shopkeeper, but none of the rest, Martin recalls, "did remarkably well".

His father was a carpenter who moved his wife and four sons to Sussex in 1939. They lived above a fish and chip shop in Burgess Hill before moving to Hassocks.

When he was eleven Martin went to Brighton Junior Technical College for Building and Engineering, as an alternative to a secondary modern in Burgess Hill.

He took seven O-levels, more than any other student and passed all of them, but despite his achievements A-levels and university were "out of the frame".

Instead he joined an accountancy firm as an office junior where he eventually trained to become a chartered accountant,

qualifying in 1964, aged 26.

While he was qualifying he earned £1.50 a week and had to, "polish shoes and have a milk round and a butcher's round to pay my way at home".

In 1967 he went to work for a film production company in the West End of London which was responsible for iconic TV adverts featuring cooks Fanny and Johnny Craddock.

After a few years he left. "I swore to myself that I would never, ever have anything to do with film-making again. Why? Because it's completely mad."

"There are so many people whose perception of the truth is very different from reality and people who are spending money that simply doesn't exist."

"There were exotic locations, yachts, everything you can imagine. I had no idea where the money was coming from. Eventually, I think, the company went out of business."

Despite his reservations Martin has ended up back in the film-making industry.

In 2002 he was asked to help establish MoVision Entertainment, a film production and financing company which raises capital from private and corporate investors.

The company - which shares an administrative address with Bizezia - produced *The Merchant of Venice* with Al Pacino and *The Da Vinci Code* starring Tom Hanks.

Martin is MoVision's operations director, a job which takes up six of his 12 working hours, Bizezia taking up the remainder.

In the little spare time he has Martin likes to relax in his hot-tub at his home in Maresfield, near Uckfield, listening to "whatever's on the radio". He has three acres so he can play the music as loud as he likes.

His neighbours are the glamour model Jordon and her pop singer husband Pete Andre but he swears he has never seen them.

He is hugely proud of his children, four sons and a daughter, all of whom are doing very well for themselves.

He is also looking for something worthwhile to do. He is involved in the Prince's Trust but is not finding it particularly satisfying.

"It's like walking through treacle really," he reflects. "My wife is involved in the Citizens' Advice Bureau, maybe I'll have a look into that."

But no plans to take it easy Martin? "No. For me sitting in front of a computer is really enjoyable."

"It's good to have a problem and be able to solve it."

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No let up for old hand who has a new internet business and a role in the Da Vinci Code

PICTURE: TONY WOOD

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TECHNICALLY SAVVY: Martin Pollins enjoys the buzz of business and has no intention of retiring as he approaches his 70th year

