


BUSINESS PROFILE

One2One with Alastair Broom, MD of Valley Technology Creators of The Pod Father the Pay-As-You-Go (PoD) system

What is your day to day role at Valley Technology in relation to the development of The Pod Father?

As Managing Director I have overall control of the sales, marketing and development of The POD Father, along with our other customer relationships. I'm lucky in that I have excellent teams managing the various parts of pushing The POD Father forward, who understand the markets and our customers' needs.

How long have you been in software development?

The first piece of user friendly software I wrote was on a Sinclair ZX Spectrum in the mid-1980s for keeping scores for the games of tennis my sister used to play with her friends in our back garden. The software saved many arguments, and also got me out of running round the garden chasing a small yellow ball. I've been writing software solutions for business since 1992, when I developed a stock ordering application for a handheld computer for a retail chain.

What, in your own words, makes The Pod Father different from any other similar product?

Low cost of entry. Traditionally, courier or haulage companies have had to invest in expensive rugged handheld computers and pay large software license fees up-front, before ever completing a delivery job. The POD Father runs happily on any Microsoft Windows Mobile 5/6 commodity mobile phone meaning there is no large up-front cost for a company to try out the system.

We also believe we are unique in our "pay-as-you-go" pricing model, whereby we charge a small amount for each job completed. Competitors charge fixed costs per driver, and usually a hefty license fee for the back-office software. With The POD Father, you get everything for the price of a job.

If you're having a quiet time of year - no problem - you're not using The POD Father, so you pay us nothing.

Which markets are your targeting and why?

We started out with Heavy Haulage and Plant Hire because these are the markets we already have customers in. Then we started heading for markets where vans



and drivers were involved, including couriers and service engineers.

How flexible is The Pod Father - i.e. - is it tied to any particular service provider?

The POD Father is incredibly flexible and not tied to any particular service provider. To access the back office software, all you need is a web browser, such as Internet Explorer or Firefox, and an internet connection. The back office software can be accessed from anywhere in the world. The hand-sets need to run Microsoft Windows Mobile 5 or 6 and need a data connection (GPRS or 3G), but can be from any network. The handsets communicate with the back office over the internet, so the handsets can connect from anywhere in the world.

Where do you foresee the development strategy heading for the product?

We're keen to keep The POD Father focused on getting jobs to drivers and mobile workers, and getting signature confirmation and pictures back. As customers request new features, we'll build complimentary applications around The POD Father core, staying with our "keep it simple to use" and "pay as you go" philosophies.

Is Europe an option for the development and if so, why?

We're keen to take The POD Father worldwide. The back office software is accessed using a web browser from anywhere in the world, and the handheld computers can access the back office over the internet from anywhere in the world. This makes it ideal for companies who cross borders, but need proof of delivery or journey every step of the way.

What would you say is your USP to end users?

Pay as you go! Low cost of entry. No expensive kit or software required.

How can The Pod Father be enhanced?

With Valley Technology's long experience in providing bespoke applications, we can easily link The POD Father into existing software which a customer may have. For example, if a customer has existing Fleet Management software, we can generally take delivery jobs from the existing system and post them into The POD Father via our open XML API. Similarly, once a job is complete, a customer's existing software system can be updated with data from The POD Father.

Describe a typical Pod Father user?

There isn't really a "typical" user. Whether you are a small business with one van, or a medium-to-large company managing tens or hundreds of drivers and vehicles from multiple depots, the pay-as-you-go model provides improved cash flow and customer service.

What external factors do you see impacting on this form of communication?

With companies focusing on their "green" credentials and the price of fuel ever increasing, The POD Father helps reduce administration costs and paper, while improving communication to the drivers, meaning fewer wasted journeys and fuel.

Where do you think the company will be in five years time?

We're already talking to customers about a presence in Europe, so in five years, the company will have a number of international offices providing sales and support to local customers for the suite of complimentary applications which will have built up around The POD Father.