

# THE BIG INTERVIEW

**James Crane**

Managing Director Overbyte Interactive Limited

## Preparing for the upturn as companies come out of recession

For James Crane, establishing a business in Chester was a form of homecoming. Although the managing director of Overbyte Interactive Ltd grew up in Norwich, his wife Lou was born in Chester.

The couple met in the first year of James' university course in Lancaster and after he graduated in 1996, they moved to her home town.

It was in Chester that James embarked on his business career, developing his belief that computer technology has to be a creative, as well as technical, process, and one that places as great an emphasis on content as it does on design.

Within a decade, having spent several years obtaining extensive experience with some big name companies, James and his business partner founded Overbyte Interactive in 2005.

The company specialises in providing high-end technical solutions for web and application builds for businesses and for James, his choice of career can be traced back his early years.

He said: "My interest in computers was sparked at school when I learned about computer programming. After university, I worked in various programming roles including as a senior developer producing in-house software for Bank of Scotland, Barclays and the Ministry of Defence.

"I also spent time developing web solution at McCann-Erickson. This is a world-leading agency and working there gave me a huge insight into the marketing and aesthetic feel for development."

He has taken that into his work with Overbyte Interactive Ltd, whose clients come not just from the North West but across the UK and further afield. It currently employs four full-time staff and partners with a number of highly specialised companies who supply further services when required.

James said: "The purpose of the business when we set it up was to provide technical support to design and public relations agencies across the UK who were pitching for large web contracts but needed people to fulfil the technical aspect of the deployment. This continues to form a large part of our business and we have worked with large agencies.

"We also work with manufacturing companies to help them fulfil their corporate clients' requirements. Through this, we produced systems for Asda to create an in-store ordering system, and with BT for whom we created a home-worker's furniture ordering site.

"Although there has been a recession, we have never been busier. I feel we have done well because we are very proactive. I am member of BNI and became a member of the board of the Chamber, which has given me a real chance to connect with business in the area.

"As the company has matured and grown, we now have many clients with whom we deal directly, and this is an aspect of the business that we're keen to grow. We have worked for some pretty demanding clients and that has meant delivering what we say we can do. I think to succeed you have to be able to achieve that. A lot of our business is repeat business."

The team is also constantly thinking about the ever-changing nature of the Internet. For all a lot of the company's work contains design, its team never loses sight of the fact that the task of a website, first and foremost, is to convey a message. That means ensuring that the site is easy to use.

James said: "We think about what functionality will benefit the user and the best way to present it. We believe that the Internet is primarily about information, so we tend to

focus first on what information will be displayed on what pages on a website and where things like menus will go.

"This leaves us with white pages with just textual information on but with no design. This approach allows clients to focus on the actual information that they are getting across rather than getting too distracted too early by the design aspect. Once we're happy that this is right, then we can start the design process.

"If you go back to the start of the Internet, initially it was about white pages down which you could scroll. As the Internet developed, people turned away from that kind of approach. However, we can see the sense in an approach that presents information in the best way possible. When the Internet was created it was about content and we believe that is still the case.

"That is not to say that there is not a place for design, because there is. The extent of that design depends on the nature of your website. If you are promoting a film or launching a video game, for instance, then you need a site with a heavy design element.

"But a lot of sites do not require such heavy design elements. If you look at some of the most successful websites, like E-bay, they are not big on design because they are about content.

"However, we are flexible about the design approach and we work with some outstanding design companies."

James is confident about the years to come as the country starts to emerge from recession.

To prepare for what he predicts will be a significant upturn in business, the company is currently re-branding and will be focusing much more on its core services.

James believes that five years after the company was created, the time is right to take stock of what is important to its future.

That includes Web development, Content management, E-commerce, Customer relationship management and Custom online applications. Another key part of its work is in Application development, including Non-web-based programming tasks and search engine optimisation and marketing, and helping businesses with placement of their material on Google.

James said: "We are very keen to expand and we feel the time is right to re-brand and focus much more on the core parts of the business.

"We have a lot of work on at the moment. My view is that if companies are prepared to invest in our kind of service during difficult times then what will they do when the situation improves? I really do think that it is going to explode and we are working hard to be ready for the upturn."



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