

“TELL ME HUGH, how did Truckcom start?”

“In the late 1990s I played keyboards in a band...”

“Uh... what?”

When *CM* arranged to interview Hugh Wightwick, co-founder of Truckcom Systems, the self-styled vehicle tracking and transport management software company, this was not how we expected the opening exchange to go.

“The bassist in that rock band was a guy called Doug Baker. At the time when we were playing together in a rock band he was the founder of this haulier called ContainerLift.”

Hang on... ContainerLift? The haulier famed for its side-loading container trailers? Today the company is run by Doug's son, Joost.

### Niche operation

“It was very much a niche container haulier back then, and the core business was to operate the side-loading containers,” says Wightwick. “Doug and I have been friends since then. I was working for an IT company called Logica; it no longer exists.

“I was in project management with Logica but I've always very much enjoyed technical work and writing code,” continues Wightwick.

“In my spare time I was moonlighting for Doug, writing a database planning transport movements. I'd been doing that for several years. During that time the company grew and as we got into the early noughties there was a revolution going on around mobile handheld devices – big, clunky personal digital assistants with a stylus that you pulled out and used to tap on the screen.

“Doug and I were talking about these personal digital assistants and he was intrigued with it. He thought it represented a whole new thing and asked ‘what if we give these to drivers?’ and the idea was born in 2003. The concept would be that the driver uses the device and we use some software based on the databases I had already got for a fully functioning tracking system.”

Wightwick resigned from his Logica job and started working for ContainerLift where, in 2004, the beginnings of what is now called Truckcom were created within a haulier in Essex. There can't be many hauliers that have dabbled in the world of the IT start-up.

A year into the venture it became clear that the business that would become Truckcom was constrained by being part of ContainerLift.

“At that point a group that included me,” says Wightwick, “an angel investor and the then directors of ContainerLift all signed on a spin-off company. The company was called Truckcom, the trademark was called Truckcom and the product was called Truckcom.”

### Pre-smartphone era

Thinking back to October 2005; it's hard to imagine a technology company existing before there were smartphones. Imagine the reaction of a driver told that a handheld device could be used to plan routes, loads and vehicle maintenance. It must have been much like explaining they had to do 35 hours of mandatory training



# Striking the right note

Two ex-rockers split from their noughties band to form Truckcom Systems to produce a fully functioning vehicle tracking app

By **Christopher Walton**

to attain a certificate of professional competence.

“We got enough business for the company to survive; we lasted our first year... just,” says Wightwick. “Then in 2007 we got two big customers, and we have still got them, Goldstar Transport and OOCL. ContainerLift had been the cushion underneath us, but we were a micro-business with one to one-and-a-half employees. We're



still a micro-business but now we have eight employees and aim to continue growing.

"We started out with a product that was the bare bones, but it has grown over the years to become a product that users want. If a customer came and asked us to make an improvement, or add an interface, for example, we would build it. Or, if one haulier asked for the app to work with one click and not two, then we would build it.

"One of the things that separates us from the competition is once people are paying us month by month they are our customers and they are our friends. And there is no contract. So everything we do is about making our product better and our customers better," he says.

### No charge

"Our business model and our commercial model is that we do not charge for those changes. That probably surprises a lot of people. It is a good thing for us because we get real intelligence from the sharp end and we find out what people want," says Wightwick.

What does the future hold?

"We're starting to see a bit of a revolution with the demographic of people who run those fleets and the technology that is available to them. When we started, we got through the noughties by the skin of our teeth. In the next few years you will have ubiquitous hardware, ubiquitous apps.

"Even for the 64-year-old driver, in 2018 it is increasingly difficult for them to say I don't know what you mean by this. We will get to a stage where it will be steadily more difficult for people to say no to this technology." ■



### What does Truckcom do?

**Truckcom Systems offers** a way to manage vehicle tracking, transport management, proof of delivery and vehicle checks via a mobile device – either iPhone or Android. There is also a web-based office system.

Take vehicle tracking for example, you can get warnings when your truck goes past a particular place of interest, a distribution centre for instance; you can replay the route a vehicle has taken every minute of the day; and you can manage the working time of that vehicle with a warning to the driver and traffic office if the vehicles are at risk of tachograph infringements.

"We've just cleared 10,000 installs for that app, and that was quite a milestone," says Wightwick. "Every one of those 10,000 installs represents somebody getting a truck driver to use technology like this. That is what Doug and I wanted when we started in the 1990s.

"We were born in containers and one-third of our customer accounts are in containers. There are still rich pickings in that sector. If we could design the best customer, it would be Goldstar. It is actively engaged and technologically aware. It does so many things right," he says, before adding that other customers include The Green Group, Seven Lincs, Sea Transport and DFDS.

**Welcome aboard:** in 2007 Truckcom won its first two big customers – Goldstar Transport and OOCL

