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‘Irish companies need to be able to deal with a bigger marketplace. That lends itself to the cloud’

Ray Ryan’s newly formed Noledge Group aims to deliver software solutions that help manufacturing companies become more efficient from the warehouse up, writes

Emmet Ryan

Ray Ryan began his working life in a warehouse and, a few decades later, he's still involved with warehouses, but from a rather different perspective.

He is chief executive of the Noledge Group, the recently formed collective comprising his two businesses Envisage and OSSM (pronounced "awesome"). The new group has been formed as Ryan is eyeing potential acquisitions and looking to expand the focus of his organisation.

The Noledge Group provides business software solutions to aid with manufacturing, financial management and other services.

"We wanted to harmonise our websites and make everything consistent. We are in a position to present a message explaining what we do," Ryan told the *Business Post*.

"I wanted to put an investment vehicle in place. We've been fortunate over the years to build a war chest. There are many opportunities in the marketplace to move us into other areas of business."

Envisage is focused on providing products from Sage, which provides finance and HR cloud packages, while OSSM delivers services through Oracle's NetSuite, which provides professional services automation and enterprise resource planning software through the cloud.

It's far more technical than what Ryan had imagined he'd end up doing when he started out in a warehouse in Tallaght in Dublin in the 1980s. Back then, he worked for Thor Appliances, with his claim to fame being that he could recite every spare part for the two washing machines sold by the business.

Now he's changing the way warehouses work, providing those businesses with



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ways to improve efficiency and automate tasks.

"We call the manufacturing sector distribution and digital commerce now. The ability to do shop-floor data collection is changing the world now," Ryan said.

"It used to require big overheads from running cables down to the floor, and the floor manager tended to have to keep the information on how to manage it in their head."

Bringing tablets to the floor of manufacturing companies means Ryan's company is now making it easier to access information quickly. It has also enabled some of his clients to broaden what their staff do.

"I had one client who said he didn't have great salespeople, he had people who knew the catalogues. They'd know what parts to get for a door and where to find them but not how to sell," he said.

"Configuration catalogues mean nobody has to worry about getting it wrong and they can focus more on selling and

the communication involved there.”

Ryan’s first introduction to tech came through connections he made in that job, being involved in the first launch of Atari computer games in Ireland.

“I made the massive decision in the early 1980s that this gaming thing was over and it was time to move on into the real world. How big a mistake was that?” Ryan said.

He moved into business software solutions and that gave him an insight into the impact automation could have on businesses and end users. Ryan’s business began as Intellect in 1996.

“I was selling Unix systems at the time, but the software we were selling was bought out by Sage. I had this idea that Sage was just a payroll company so wondered how they could buy it,” Ryan said.

On a hunch, he called the sales director of Sage in Britain and that led to him getting a chance to pitch to sell Sage in Ireland. It was only when he got to Newcastle for the pitch that he realised

the scale of his new partner.

“I knew I had a problem when I got into the taxi and the driver knew straight away where they were. I realised they weren’t three guys in an attic,” he said.

“Sage showed me where they were going. I came home and started out. Some of the team that started with me are still with me.”

The journey has given Ryan some grounding over the years. He is serious about business, but knows it’s important to have some fun along the way. That’s where the name for OSSM and its pronunciation came from.

Ryan was looking for a name that related to cloud systems. The term comes from the definition for a true cloud system (on-demand, measurable, self-service, scalable), but the idea came from attending a talk given by NetSuite where the speaker used the word awesome around a dozen times in relation to its software.

The next step in the journey has been inspired by challenges Ryan’s custom-

ers had to deal with through the pandemic. Communications tools became vital to businesses as they moved to remote work, with the likes of Zoom and Microsoft Teams becoming crucial to continuity.

“As I look to the future, a lot of people have a communications platform and a lot of people have the IT platform. My vision is to have that merged,” he said.

“I’m looking at investments in areas of communications that we can bring into business systems so we can offer the complete package.”

The two businesses within Noledge group grew over the past year, leading to the new organisation forming and Ryan deciding to expand the business. The group plans to add at least ten new jobs over the next 18 months, bringing total staff to 42.

“We’ve had quite a good business year. The demand for cloud applications and business systems has been growing,” Ryan said.

“We need to increase the number of consultants we have on board because we see demand growing.”

The need to adjust how we work has made businesses rethink how they use IT, and Ryan said this was an opportunity to get customers to realise the potential of the tools at their disposal.

“What was happening up until the pandemic was that services were just being moved to the cloud. Nothing was being changed about business processes, there was no newness as a result of the cloud,” he said.

“There were silos of business. Now, systems need to be global and integrated. The key is that all the functionality is in one platform that can be used anywhere, any time.”

Ryan said the sector, including both those creating software and the vendors, needed to do a better job of simplifying its offering. The Noledge Group boss said the priority should be in showing customers what the end result of adopting new technologies will mean to their businesses.

“It can be very confusing for the customer. A true cloud, using modern technology, can change their world.”

That improvement in communication is being prioritised by Ryan because he considers Noledge’s potential to grow internationally to be in tandem with that of its customers.

“Irish companies need to be able to deal with a bigger marketplace. That lends itself to the cloud. If someone is opening an office in Vietnam or Hong Kong, they need a system they can log onto globally,” he said.

“We need to be able to deliver solutions that make running a business easier. We need to grow to do that. I tell my staff to be more focused on outcome than income, because our customers have more complex challenges now.”



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