

Stepping into the breach

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Imagine being bought into a business to turn it around, gutting it out and remodelling it, making it into a successful company, and then being given the opportunity to purchase the fruits of your labour. Well, that is exactly what happened to Nadahl Shocair.

Shocair, chief executive officer of former UK subsidiary of Germany-based DeTeWe AG and Co, DeTeWe Limited, and directing strategist of the parent company, acquired the UK business as part of his purchase of DeTeWe Group Limited.

Shocair was bought in as chief exec of the UK wholly owned subsidiary of DeTeWe AG, DeTeWe Limited, two years ago. His remit was to turn the failing business around when he was handed the reins in November 2002, beginning work in January 2003.

When Canadian-based Aastra bought the Frankfurt-based side of the business a few months ago along with the Swiss arm as part of its move into Europe, Shocair took DeTeWe Group Limited and is now lording it happily over his personally created domain.

"The structural changes in the company have already taken place, as I was handed the task of restructuring, deconstructing and doing a complete realignment of the business in the UK in January 2003," Shocair states. "This put me in a very good position when it came to buying the company, as I know the business inside out, including the financials."

The name DeTeWe went in the sale to Aastra, so DeTeWe Limited is in the process of rebranding. There is currently a choice of five names, according to Shocair, who made some of them himself and got the others from a branding company the business is now working with. The new name will be announced at the end of 2005 or the beginning of 2006, Shocair says. "We're looking for a modern, fresh image for this company," Shocair explains. "It's about my style and the people around me. Even though the company has a legacy, I think it's time for a refresh."

DeTeWe Limited is doing well with its InterTel products, which it first took on one year ago. It is already number three in the UK according to Carl Houlding, sales director at DeTeWe Limited. The company may become the number one seller of InterTel in one more year, he states.

The business is also fairly focused on its key market sectors, Shocair says. These are primarily call centres, education and health care, with some recent big wins in government boosting that area for the business, including the entire telecommunications structure for the Milton Keynes local council.

Yet the future for the soon to be renamed DeTeWe Limited is not about Intertel; it is about a new set of products focused on integration that will work to tie the converged space together. Shocair elaborates: "On our key sectors, there will be specialised solutions for each sector in the vertical market space, with horizontal products cutting across them all."

It is all about voice over IP (VoIP) according to Shocair. "There's a lot of confusion and hype still in manufacturers," he states. "The likes of Mitel and Avaya are busy developing products, but from the customer point of view, there's no real understanding of VoIP despite some uptake in products. By this, I mean that the behaviour of customers with the products they're buying today is similar to how they're using analog systems, so where's the advantage of VoIP? It's ok to sell voice-ready products, but the pure VoIP market won't be ready till 2007 and beyond.

"We have products we've been developing to address this space," he continues. "We're now moving from fairly entrenched, commoditised business, to different things with VoIP. These different things are the areas we will be addressing as a company. VoIP is about integration, not about saving on the phone bill; that's silly. A multi-site company can benefit from cost savings, but it's not good enough. In the UK the metre on the phone call is disappearing and in the end it will be fixed rates for phones because of IP, so where's the advantage of VoIP in saving phone costs? It's all going that way anyway."

The question Shocair poses the industry is what does VoIP mean? His answer is simple: "VoIP is about the data component. Integrating models are where VoIP becomes a success. If you look at Microsoft's Live Communications Server, the user has a soft PBX sitting on their server with session initiation protocol (SIP). And it's at the small end of the market, for up to 75 employees. That will push a dent on this industry and a lot of companies won't survive the shakeout. Even the new version of Microsoft Messenger is based on SIP. If people really understood what SIP was, they would be very frightened."

And SIP is at the foundation level of the VoIP integration products that DeTeWe Limited is now working on, for a first quarter 2007 launch. Shocair says: "We're working very closely with integrators and others including the winning horse, Microsoft, to work on distributed networks,

riding on SIP as a technology. We aren't pioneers, we don't want to be. My opinion is pioneers get shot with arrows and we don't want that. So we're not reinventing the wheel. I don't want people to think we're inventing another PBX! The world's not waiting for that. We're working on voice and data network related products. I've invested in research and development over that past year through my investment company, which I used also for this acquisition. Now I am looking to move some of that investment in R&D into DeTeWe's future."

As far as the channel is concerned, the soon to be renamed DeTeWe Limited is no longer working indirectly. However, DeTeWe AG is still working through Nimans with the channel. In the future following the launch of its new products in 2007, an indirect channel will be re-established for specifically skilled resellers, Shocair forecasts. "We need intelligent resellers, used to intelligent solutions, with the capability for integrating intelligent solutions. They're who I want to be speaking to in 18 months time."