

Joining PLATO™ ‘is like having a non-executive board’

A Hampshire ‘captain of industry’ who joined one of the UK’s first PLATO™ groups back in 2003 is encouraging business owners and managers to take advantage of the benefits offered by the unique peer group learning programme.

Max Toti is managing director of Fareham-based Captec Ltd, which designs, manufactures and supplies bespoke or off-the-shelf industrial computers to withstand extreme and hostile conditions.

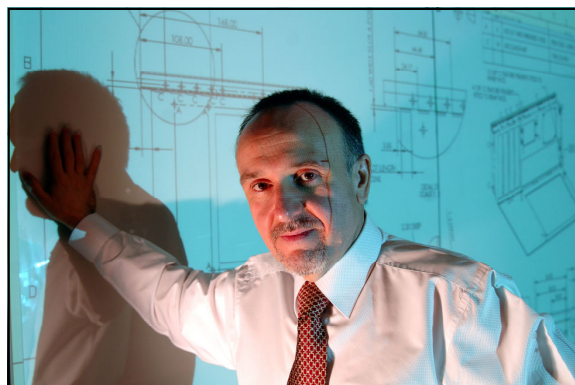
‘I believe the PLATO™ programme is a wonderful thing for small and medium-sized businesses that want to grow or become more profitable,’ he said. ‘The opportunity to share best practice and pick other people’s brains is a winning formula.’

‘I found the elements of sharing knowledge and helping each other of great interest. Indeed it was a fascinating two years even though I admit there were stages when I sometimes lost enthusiasm. However, this was because, as a new initiative in the UK, some of the early groups didn’t necessarily get the right mix of companies and in a programme such as this the composition of the groups is crucial.’

‘For example, when I joined PLATO™ the difficulties and concerns I had running a company with a multi-million pound turnover were quite different from those of much smaller businesses with more straightforward problems like how to fill in VAT forms. It was therefore sometimes quite frustrating although I was pleased to be in a position to give advice to others on the programme.’

Despite these minor frustrations, Max stayed with the programme for the full two years – by which time Captec’s turnover had almost doubled.

‘I must say I met lots of extremely interesting people and made many very



Max Toti, Managing Director, Captec Ltd

useful contacts,’ he said. ‘The composition of the PLATO™ programme is first-class and there are many excellent business development and networking events.’

‘I’m very pro-PLATO™,’ said Max. ‘The advice that is given is sometimes harsh and sometimes complimentary but there is no doubt that this programme is an excellent opportunity for business owners. It’s almost like having a non-executive board with business people to look at your organisation dispassionately. Of course, whether you take the advice or not is up to you but it is always sound, practical advice.’

Each PLATO™ group has around 12 participants plus two senior executives from blue chip companies who are facilitators for the group. They meet once a month – more frequently if required – for two years to discuss a wide range of management issues, undertaking problem-solving in groups or working in one-to-one coaching relationships.

Max Toti has the last word: ‘This is a business development programme that is well-established in several European countries. The proof of its success is shown by the fact that companies taking part have experienced a 34% average increase in turnover. I am most certainly among the 96% of participants who would wholeheartedly recommend PLATO™ to other companies.’