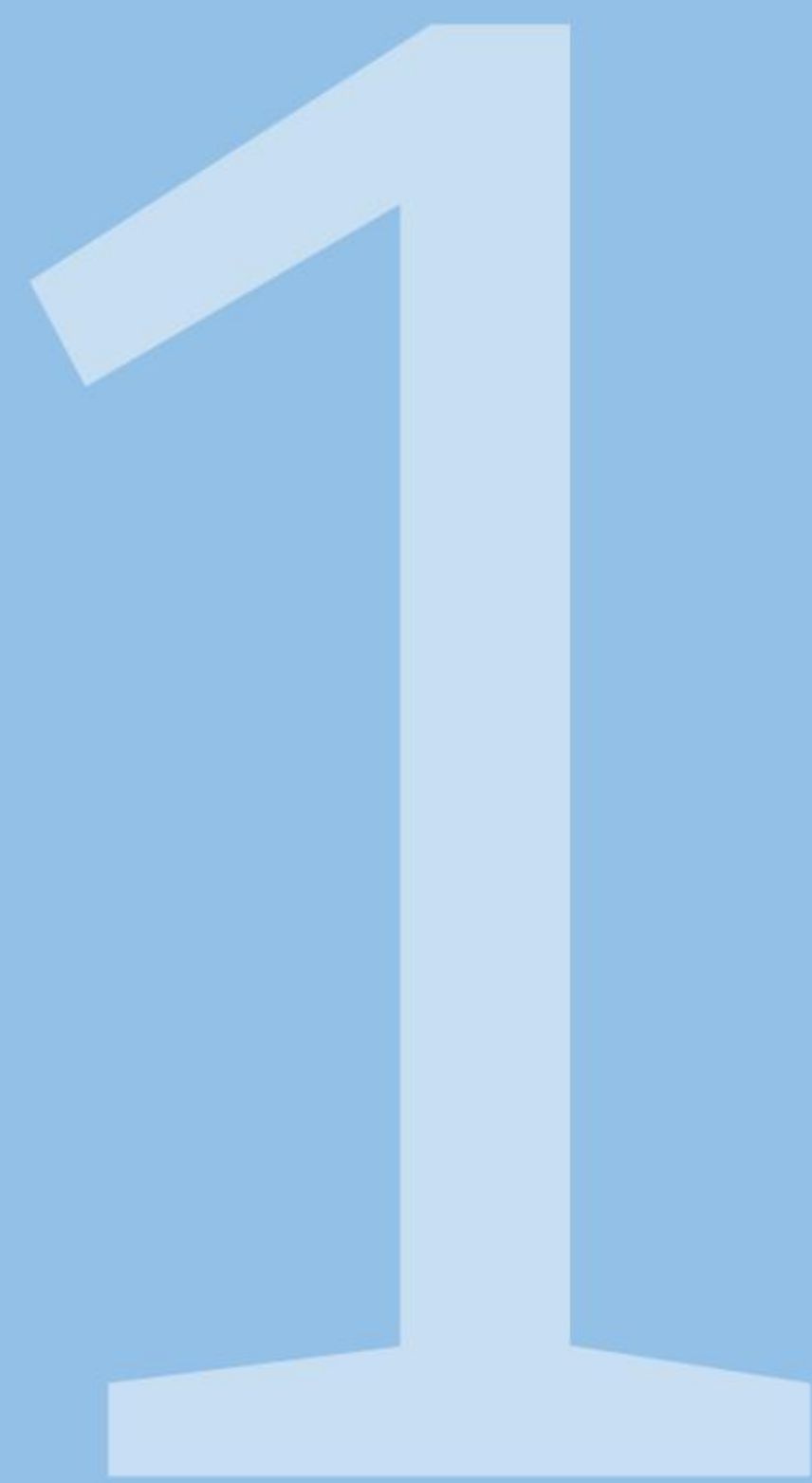


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AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE  
MALTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, ENTERPRISE AND INDUSTRY

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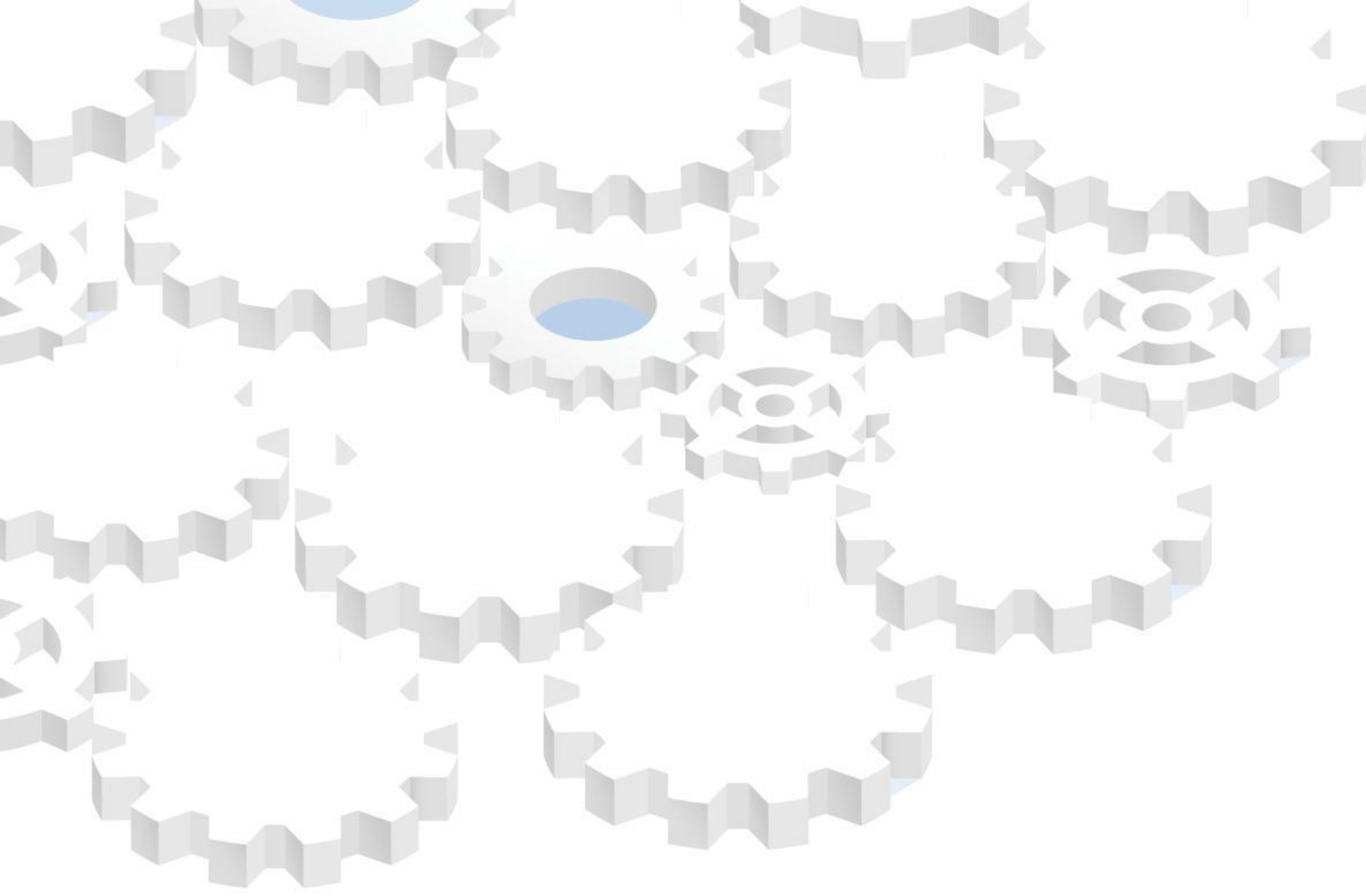
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PRESIDENT OF THE MALTA CHAMBER, MARISA XUEREB

# MOVERS AND SHAKERS: THE FUTURE IS YOURS TO CONQUER

Business is about identifying future market needs and developing innovative solutions to address those needs.

**W**hether it is about technological solutions to address the pressing sustainability challenges of today's economies, smarter marketing platforms to reach more customers, improved delivery channels to overcome logistical challenges, new payment gateways, superior customer experiences, or innovative investment opportunities, there are always some innovative entrepreneurs behind every successful business venture; they are the movers and shakers of the business world. And they are typically also members of the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry. We are therefore very proud to showcase their achievements.

Great business ideas generate significant value in the economy. They create new jobs and generate wealth. They provide other businesses with more opportunities to provide supporting services for new ventures. They up the game for operators within the same sector and stimulate more ambition and a drive for competitiveness. They provide the edge with which local companies can access international markets and grow beyond our shores. They can also provide investment opportunities for those who have the cash and want to diversify their investment portfolio into new ventures.

Investing in start-ups is a relatively new concept in the local economy, but the market is ripe for this both in terms of innovative business ideas and idle funds.

Movers and shakers are also a source of inspiration for others who may be mulling over innovative business ideas. The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry is not only the voice of business, but it is also the home of entrepreneurs of all ages and from all sectors, who come together to support and inspire each other.

The constant exchange of ideas that happens between The Malta Chamber and its members and among its members in the various consultation and networking sessions that are organised by The Malta Chamber is what inspires policy proposals and recommendations to local authorities to foster a more positive and enabling business environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have tested the resilience of our businesses and our economy. It is in trying economic times that the impetus for the greatest leaps in business is created. It is reasonable to expect that, while the next months will be challenging for business, the future is full of opportunities and our businesses



will strive to be part of those great leaps that we expect to see in digital transformation, application of artificial intelligence and data exchange technologies, smarter building and transportation solutions, innovation solutions in agricultural production and food supply, and breakthroughs in the energy generation, storage and distribution that will inevitably be provoked by the current food and energy crises.

As geopolitical developments reshape the map of the world and put more onus on strategic international relations for future prosperity, The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry will continue supporting our movers and shakers in developing their businesses and reaching new heights both locally, and more importantly beyond our shores. **M+S**





# Q&A with Carlo Stivala, CEO of ARChives International

## **BRIEFLY, WHAT DOES ARCHIVES INTERNATIONAL DO?**

ARChives International provides cutting edge holistic digitisation services whereby physical documents are scanned using state of the art OCR technology which transfers images to digital data. ARChives also offers other functions which are applied during scanning, such as searchability, data capturing, and indexing. We also offer our own DMS (Document Management System) Software which is an important kind of software used to organise and manage document filing.

## **HOW MANY PAGES A MINUTE DO YOUR SCANNERS COPY?**

We invested in high-tech American equipment which scans documents from an average speed of 400 to over 900 pages per minute on dual format at high resolution. ARChives software subsequently generates all foldering and sub-foldering during scanning using QRcodes systems.

## **HOW DOES YOUR SYSTEM TRANSFER PHYSICAL FILING TO DIGITAL FILING?**

Once the documents are scanned using our high-tech scanners and software, physical documents are transferred to digital documents creating meta data onto servers. On the server, extra software add-ons generate the services requested by the client which are performed on the data.

## **ARE YOUR CLIENTS MOSTLY IN THE PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SECTOR, OR BOTH?**

Both. We offer our services to small and medium sized businesses starting from small shops, audit and accountants, notaries and lawyers, to large industries, banks and government entities.

## **I UNDERSTAND THAT ARCHIVES INTERNATIONAL IS A PARTNERSHIP WITH A GERMAN MOTHER COMPANY. CAN YOU ELABORATE?**

ARChives International Ltd is a partnership between a Maltese investor and InfoScan GmbH which is the leading digitisation company in Germany with over 15 years' experience. Currently or in the past,



InfoScan has carried out projects for the German Income Tax Department, Daimler Mercedes, German public and private hospitals, Bosch, Sparkasse Bank, Fiat Chrysler Automobile, Otis, and VolksBank, to mention a few.

## **THERE MIGHT BE THOSE WHO WOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SECURITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF THEIR DOCUMENTS. HOW DO YOU ADDRESS THESE CONCERNS? DO YOU CATER FOR CLIENTS WHO FOR SECURITY AND OTHER REASONS WOULD PREFER TO SCAN THEIR DOCUMENTS AT THEIR OWN PREMISES?**

With each client, ARChives International finalises ad-hoc GDPR agreements which will include all terms and conditions regulating data security and confidentiality. In addition, most of ARChives

International employees are foreigners, and we implement rigid internal rules whereby no mobile phones or other photographic equipment is allowed on our premises.

ARChives offers digitisation services from its premises in Corradino, but it also offers the possibility to scan at the client's site. This is usually requested by clients who have sensitive information and whose documents cannot be transported. In these cases, our equipment has to be temporarily installed at clients' premises where the digitisation process will be effected.

## **WHAT HAPPENS TO THE DOCUMENTS ONCE THEY ARE SCANNED, GIVEN THAT SOME OF YOUR CLIENTS WOULD STILL WANT TO KEEP THEM WHILE SOME WOULD NOT?**

ARChives offers the possibility to store data on our servers and/or shredding services and/or document storage services. Some of our clients request that their files be returned after digitisation project is affected. We therefore offer the possibility to recompose the files as they were originally handed over to us.

## **IS THE SERVICE EXPENSIVE?**

With new technology, it is much cheaper than you think. **M+S**



CEO OF THE MALTA CHAMBER, DR MARTHESE PORTELLI

# A Business Environment for Movers and Shakers

**E**mbarking on a new business venture typically requires a passionate commitment to a vision and a significant capital outlay. Many people who are not in business believe that being in business is about getting rich quickly and having a cushy life thereafter. But most entrepreneurs work very hard round the clock, and even when their business is successful, they tend to reinvest most of their earnings into their business.

Another common misconception about entrepreneurs is that they are risk lovers who are constantly taking gambles. Business is about taking risks, but typically it is about taking calculated risks. There is also a big difference between risk and uncertainty. Businesses hate uncertainty because it hampers their ability to take calculated risks. As a matter of fact one's attitude towards risk is an important aspect particularly when it comes to banking and financing. However, the question that often arises is whether banks are adopting a systemic approach rather than a risk-based approach.

In recent years, we have witnessed a banking sector that has become highly regulated across the globe. This drive for increased regulation has been spurred primarily by money laundering concerns that are deeply routed in international politics and the need to curb illicit trafficking and tax evasion. Banks are adopting a systemic handling of AML risks that is seeing banks refuse to do business with whole sectors of the economy rather than individual companies.

Business risk is different – whilst it will always be and should always be a pertinent consideration for banks, business risk should be typically based on a case by case assessment as opposed to the more systematic handling of AML. This is particularly more important in the case of movers and shakers. Movers and shakers are typically operating in new economic niches and emerging markets. They often face significant challenges financing their business ventures, particularly during the startup and scaling up stages of their business. Malta has no venture capital market and banks have traditionally been rather risk averse, particularly when considering projects whose collateral is not brick and mortar. Regulatory pressures related to AML have made banks even more risk averse as they have now become highly sensitised to the potential risk of a business being used as a vehicle for money laundering. But banks approach to this has so far been systemic rather than risk-based. So where does this leave movers and shakers?



**Movers and shakers are always in search for this change - they respond to change in a timely manner, they reinvent themselves and exploit such change to an opportunity.**

Lending institutions are a key player in the movers and shakers ecosystem. They need to adopt a risk-based approach when evaluating business risk. Business risk requires smarter use of the information available on a business. It also requires a good understanding of the sector in which a business operates, best practices in that sector, growth prospects, and the regulatory framework of the sector itself.

Many non-traditional sectors, such as gaming and medical cannabis, are in fact highly regulated. The regulatory environment of industries provides important operational safeguards that banks would do well to factor into their risk assessment.

Another important player in the movers and shakers ecosystem is the Malta Development Bank. The Malta Development Bank supports private sector development by offering financing facilities for viable operations that the financing market is unwilling or unable to accommodate. It does this through innovative financing schemes, credit enhancement as well as venture capital. The Malta Development Bank is currently consulting with The Malta Chamber on a number of new financing instruments that it intends to launch in the coming weeks so as to ensure that the needs of the industry and business are met.

We are living in a fast-paced world. The customer wants things faster and easier. Movers and shakers are always in search for this change – they respond to change in a timely manner, they reinvent themselves and exploit such change to an opportunity. They are the true representation of entrepreneurship and this is why the system must support them. **MS**





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# There is no new wave, ONLY THE SEA

In Malta, the maritime industry dates back several centuries and is now evolving rapidly, creating a multitude of opportunities both offshore and at sea. These opportunities give a boost to economic improvements both at a local and international level.

**P**utting the magnifying glass over the term maritime industry, one can see that there are specific industries which, although they all fall under the same umbrella, are very different. To name a few of these industries: the Merchant Navy industry (at times referred to as the shipping industry), the oil and gas and renewables industry, the cruise lining industry, and the yachting industry.

Malta, being a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean, poses myriad prospects. When looking at the island's main resources, the sea features high on the list, it being the only unlimited resource. Other resources are limited and pose various challenges to the overall economy in Malta.

## SO INSTEAD OF RUNNING AFTER THE WAVES, WHY DON'T WE LET THE SEA COME TO US?

The sea offers endless employment opportunities, and the minute we hear of jobs at sea, many people think of the Captain. However, there is only one captain on a vessel, and beneath that rank there is a plethora of other ranks and jobs that are important for the vessel to make its trajectory. Not to mention the vast number of opportunities of shore-based jobs that are required to sustain the thriving maritime sector.

The three main departments onboard any vessel are the deck, the engineering and the hospitality departments. All have different responsibilities, but all report to the Captain.



*Pauline Micallef, CEO of MaritimeMT –  
the leading maritime school in Malta*

## 1 THE DECK DEPARTMENT

This department is primarily responsible for safely operating and navigating the vessel under command both at sea and in port. This department is highly regulated, and each rank needs to be qualified to be allowed to operate.

Some positions within this department include the Chief Officer (the next in command after the Captain), the Second Officer, the Third Officer and the Bosun. The basic entry level would be the Able Seafarer or as they are known in the Yachting Sector, the Efficient Deckhand. At all these levels, there are different requirements set in terms of education and experience at sea.

## 2 THE ENGINE DEPARTMENT

The engineering department handles all technical operations in terms of the engine room.

Headed by the Chief Engineer, this department can go from being relaxed to stressed in minutes. In the middle of the ocean, where there is no access to specific equipment, the engineering department is responsible for solving any faults that the engine might encounter during a passage.

This department includes highly qualified crew that can understand the technicalities and mechanics of the equipment onboard, especially the engine/s. Under the command of the Chief Engineer, one finds the Second Engineer, and other engineers depending on the size of the vessel. Certain large vessels also include the electrical technical engineer sub-department.





### 3 THE HOSPITALITY DEPARTMENT

This department may also be referred to as the catering and food department, interior, or food and beverage department. This includes the general housekeeping of the vessel, and servicing the onboard guests and the crew. Depending on the type of ship, hospitality service may vary. On board cargo vessels, there are no guests, so the hospitality department would be working to support the crew; however on board superyachts, the VIPs demand silver service and high-quality hospitality.

Depending on the type of vessel, a different level of education is required at different levels and positions. You cannot really be a yacht chef serving high-end customers if you are not trained and experienced to do so. However, being a ship's cook onboard a tanker does not necessarily need a high-end chef. The role of the steward or stewardess for a yacht is different to that onboard a cruise liner and a cargo ship.



### MARITIME EDUCATION

*The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a specialised agency for the United Nations (175 member states) which is responsible for measures to improve the safety and security of international shipping and to prevent pollution from ships (IMO, 2019).*

The IMO has set a standard level for maritime education, known as the STCW – Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers. On an international level, the STCW convention sets out the level of training required for seafarers to be able to work on board. This means that a course that is STCW accredited in Malta, and a course that is STCW accredited in the United States, should be generally acceptable by all flag states. The STCW convention is constantly being revised and updated in line with ongoing developments.

If that 9 to 5 office job is not fulfilling your full potential, then the seas might be calling. All you need to do is look out for that STCW course and get prepared for a life at sea. **M+S**



When looking at the island's main resources, the sea features high on the list, it being the only unlimited resource. Other resources are limited and pose various challenges to the overall economy in Malta.





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# Putin has turned Russia into an international outcast



“We owe it to democratic values to continue to confront Putin and his regime and stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine in fighting for their lives, for their sovereignty, they are fighting for us too,” states journalist Patrick J O Brien.

**T**he scenes in Ukraine are difficult to observe. We had all hoped that work being carried out to promote a process of de-escalation would prevail, but our fears were tragically realised. It was easier to believe that media images flashing on our television screens amplified the current situation, blowing it out of proportion and that Putin was not unhinged enough to actually invade. On Thursday 24th February these fears materialised as the world watched in horror as Russian missiles landed in mainland Ukraine.

Putin's misguided dream of rebuilding the Russian empire has always rested on the lie that Ukraine isn't a real nation, that Ukrainians aren't a real people, and that the inhabitants of Kyiv, Kharkiv and Lviv yearn for Moscow's rule. That was a complete lie. We in Europe know that Ukraine is a nation with more than a thousand years of history, and Kyiv was already a major metropolis when Moscow was not even a village. But the Russian despot has told his lie so many times that he apparently believes it himself. Putin's actions in Ukraine are best described as pro-Putin not pro-Russian.

Putin's policies are designed to bolster his popularity and the strength of his regime, not Russia's actual security interests. Many Russian citizens are ashamed of their government's imperialistic behaviour and fascist-like rule, and they want the world to know they do not approve.

In 2020, Russia saw extreme political upheaval with the constitutional reforms announced by President Putin. They marked a critical turn in Russian politics, towards a much more authoritarian and repressive regime, with no tolerance for opposition. People with Russian heritage have nothing to do with the Russian government declaring war on Ukraine. It's easy to select a population to scapegoat, but that would make us hardly any different from the real oppressors.

Living in a neutral country, where we are militarily non-aligned, we are certainly not neutral on an issue like this, when there is blatant

aggression happening on the continent of Europe. We applaud the Ukrainian people and its President Volodymyr Zelenskyy who have shown remarkable resilience and resolve.

The use of brute force in pursuit of a warped perception of national interest is a serious affront to destroy the very essence of democracy. The world's quarrel is not with the Russian people, it is with President Putin and those around him who have made the choice to threaten a sovereign democracy. Europe understands what is at stake. We know that the people of Ukraine, in fighting for their lives, for their sovereignty, are fighting for us, too. Neither the people of Ukraine nor those of the world, outraged by Putin, will let him install a puppet regime and try to turn Ukraine into another vassal state like Belarus and just leave it at that.

The struggle will endure. What is sure is something has fundamentally changed with Putin, with many commentators stating he has 'lost the plot'. Putin has crossed almost every red line and turned his country into an international pariah overnight. As the conflict intensifies all measures must continue to be taken carefully to keep the way open for a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

The EU has a humanitarian responsibility and must commit to welcoming refugees without delay, and support every initiative to protect civilians. Immediate political asylum must be granted to all soldiers who do not want to participate in Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine. There's a genuine danger to Putin that he has greatly underestimated - the breadth of opposition he could now face with a war against a people whom most Russians don't see as an enemy. He's not just facing metropolitan protesters, as European leaders continue to punish Russia for launching this conflict on their continent.

This conflict is going to be nasty with global financial shocks. But the West cannot sit by and let him get away with it. After this war is over, an uneasy truce is possible and even likely. But normalisation is out of the question. We in Europe can't let our ideological commitments blind us to the reality of who and what we are dealing with. **M+S**



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V&C group is a multi-faceted business group involved in a number of sectors within the Maltese Islands. The group, originally established in 1992 has rapidly become one of the leading groups on the island being market leaders in every sector they operate within.

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THE MALTA CHAMBER HEAD OF MEDIA AND  
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY, RACHEL ATTARD

# WHAT'S YOUR BUSINESS X FACTOR?

"It is not easy to stand out from your competitors in today's world. What you need to keep in mind are the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents."



**F**or a moment imagine that you want to become a famous artist or pop star. This means you are going to put yourself in one of the most competitive industries on the planet. Being born with a beautiful face or an amazing voice is not enough to make it out there. You could try the traditional route of putting together a demo track, find a manager and start knocking the doors of different music industry moguls.

Another route you could take is to try and audition for The X Factor singing competition. This will help you perform on a stage in front of a huge audience. At the same time, it is a platform run by influential people in the music and entertainment industry.

The same X Factor formula should apply to your company or business. Are you offering the right service at the right time? What makes your business different from the others? Do your customers speak highly of your business?

People are one of the most important factors in any business, and a big chunk of your success relies on them. You need to ask the question: who are my real clients? Obviously, you think, not everyone is your client. This is one of the most common mistakes in business.

Having a high level of competition in your chosen niche or industry is a strong sign there is a demand for your service or product. Not having any sort of competition is really not a good sign because it can indicate that you are not on the right track.

A lot of people assume that having a strong online presence is crucial for your businesses. Yes, it is an essential element nowadays.

But its not all about digital marketing and social media likes. No matter how many posts and videos you post, if you don't have an established X Factor, your businesses will not stand out and your content needs to reflect this.

It is not easy to stand out from your competitors in today's world. What you need to keep in mind are the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents. This is very similar to what makes a good football coach. As a businessperson, you need to know what your customer's wants, needs, fears and desires are. If you manage to 'tick' these four elements, your clients and employees will have room to grow and be able to help them to be more engaged. This will eventually lead to a greater organisational result.

In my experience, the entrepreneurial X Factor comes down to a dichotomy of two inborn traits. The first - and most important - aspect is creativity. Creativity is essentially the ability to discover and develop viable new business ideas. The second aspect is intuition, which means knowing who will be benefiting from your new ideas and how to sell those ideas. Basically - knowing who your target audience is. These two elements work in tandem.

In conclusion, the X Factor that will make your business unique is how your company approaches its relationships with people. If you communicate your values, beliefs and benefits well, people will trust you and your product or services. All this will create an environment where both the client and the organisation will grow and thrive together. **M+S**



# 20 YEARS OF iGAMING IN MALTA

# Are we at a

# CROSSROAD

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2022, The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, in collaboration with WH Partners, Bronze Sponsors of The Malta Chamber, organised the event titled: 20 years of iGaming in Malta: Are we at a crossroad? The event was supported by the GamingMalta Foundation.

Various local and international leaders and prominent players within the industry addressed the attendees. These included Minister for Economy, European Funds and Lands Silvio Schembri, President and CEO of Betsson AB Pontus Lindwall, and CEO of GamingMalta Foundation Ivan Filletti.

The event highlighted several opportunities and challenges that the iGaming industry faces through five panels:

1. Maltese licences: evolution, utility and what to expect next over the next 20 years

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2. Tax: Can Malta's challenges be turned into opportunities?

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3. Online gaming's local domino effect

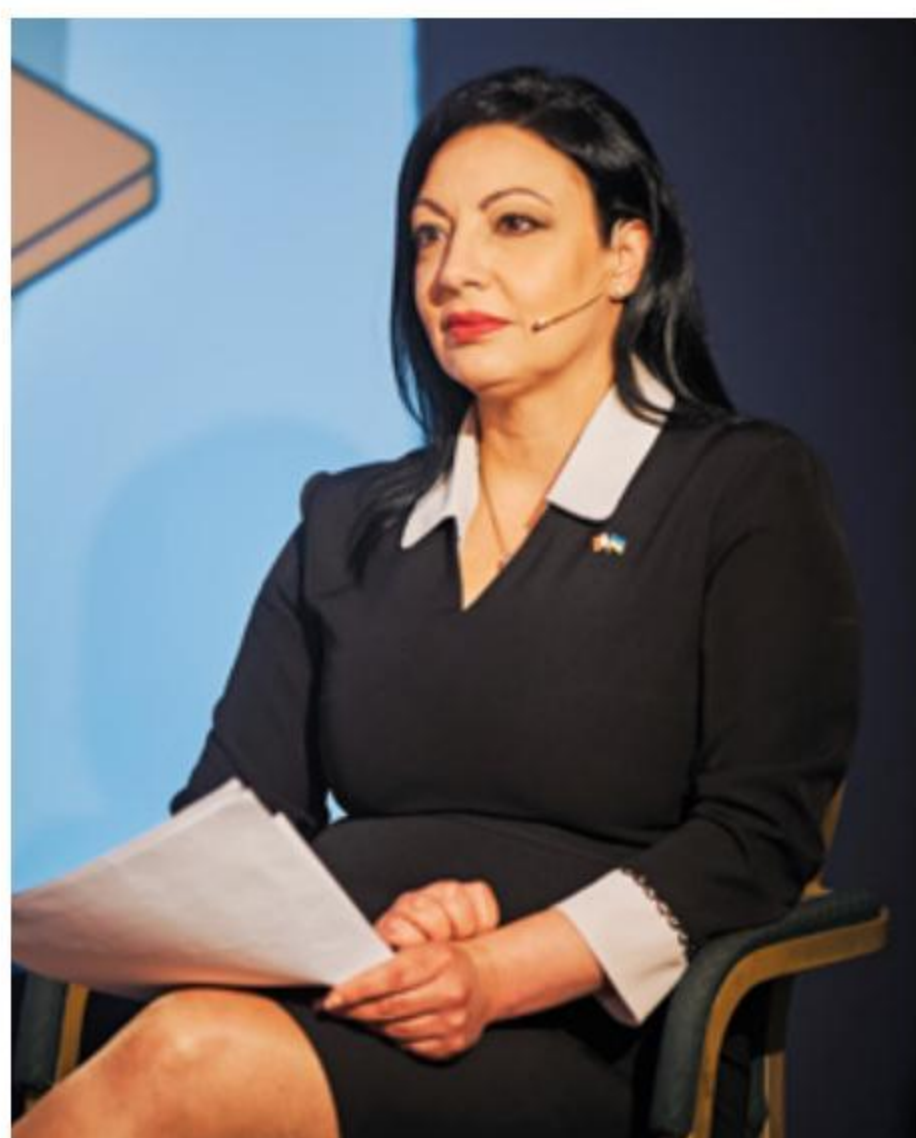
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4. Online gaming spin-offs, new businesses and fuelling digital entrepreneurship in Malta

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5. Can regulatory and AML compliance become a competitive advantage?

A networking session followed. The coffee networking breaks were sponsored by Costa Coffee Malta. **M•S**





# AD?





# STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT THE

INDIS Malta is responsible for the administration of the government-owned industrial estates and related facilities around the Maltese islands, as well as supporting and promoting their further development. Chief Executive Officer Perit Joseph Attard explains that, as a forward-looking organisation, it is committed to 'future-proof' industry in Malta.

BY CORYSE BORG



“While we need to address the shortage of industrial properties, we are aware that doing so does not necessarily have to come to the detriment of the environment around us.”

**I**NDIS Malta continuously embarks on projects to ensure that the necessary industrial infrastructure is available, including a varied portfolio of projects as part of a €470 million infrastructural investment programme.

While traditionally, its portfolio comprised mainly of factories and two dedicated artisan villages, nowadays, it also provides other facilities such as laboratories for the life sciences industry, hangars for the aviation cluster, as well as office space for ICT and other knowledge-intensive industries, among others.

Mr Attard was first engaged at INDIS Malta – which at the time was still known as Malta Industrial Parks, or ‘MIP’ – as an architect and civil engineer a few years ago. He left the company for a couple of years, during which he had a stint at the Foundation for Tomorrow’s Schools, before returning to INDIS Malta as its Chief Executive Officer in 2021.

“I re-joined INDIS Malta within the context of one of the most difficult challenges the world has faced in recent years: the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, we worked hand in hand with the central

government and other entities to minimise the pandemic’s economic impact as much as possible,” he says. “We knew some of our tenants were struggling, so we came up with ways to support them, including the drawing up of repayment agreements for their rent. Simultaneously, we implemented measures to reduce the spread of the pandemic at our work environment.”

For this, he commends the employees’ hard work to overcome the challenges the organisation faced.

INDIS Malta is continuously working on several projects, amongst which are those it launched within the framework of a €470 million infrastructural investment programme. Amongst others, the programme comprises a wide variety of projects, including an expansion of the Malta Life Sciences Park; the rebuilding of the Kordin Business Incubation Centre, the upgrading of the facilities that serve the aviation industry, and clustered facilities for SMEs, as well as several projects for the provision of amenities within the industrial estates or their embellishment.





“All of these are important as they will enable us to address the shortage of industrial property that we are currently facing, thereby enabling the country to attract even more investment or to cater for the expansion of existing operations and, in so doing, generate wealth and employment opportunities in the country,” he states.

INDIS Malta’s infrastructural investment programme spans over several years; thus, in five years’ time, the organisation expects to be reaping the fruit of the seeds that it is sowing today. By then, some of the new facilities will have been completed and will be hosting new economic operators, while work will still be ongoing on some longer-term projects.

Mr Attard explains that the organisation is striving to incorporate as many green measures to reduce their impact on the environment as much as possible, among which is their ‘going vertical’ approach in the development of new properties.

“While we need to address the shortage of industrial properties, we are aware that doing so does not necessarily have to be detrimental to the environment around us. We are thus doing our utmost to implement our projects in a sustainable manner that strikes a balance between optimising the space available, whilst at the same time respecting the environment and the communities that live and work within the areas that we manage.”

Land allocated for industrial purposes in Malta is limited, even more so due to the small size of the islands. Thus, in order not to expand horizontally any further, INDIS Malta has adopted this ‘going vertical’ approach whereby, wherever possible, facilities are built on multiple levels. This is also being applied to older facilities that are returned to INDIS Malta for some reason, which are then upgraded or rebuilt in a more efficient manner as multi-level facilities.

Throughout his career, Mr Attard says that he has tried to learn his lessons from all those who could provide inspiration. He attests that if he had to identify one person who was the biggest inspiration to him, he would say it was a company director in one of his previous roles; he was the beating heart of the company and a great mentor who he still looks up to, he says.

As for his own leadership style, he says that in certain environments, focusing on your team and leading it in the right direction – encouraging all employees to give their best contribution – is crucial if you want to be successful. However, at the same time, he also believes that one must be a strong decision-maker in order to manage well, and one does not get anywhere by saying “yes” to everything.

“I try to learn lessons from all my experiences, as I believe that whatever we’ve done – not only in our professional, but also in our personal lives – gives us the knowledge that we need to find solutions to the challenges that we are facing or to plan for the longer term,” he adds.

## Quickfire Questions

- Tea or coffee? **Tea**
- Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**
- Sweet or savoury? **Sweet**
- Books or television? **Books**
- Working alone or in a team? **Team**
- Summer or winter? **Winter**
- Android or iOS? **Android**
- City breaks or country holidays? **Country**
- Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**

Mr Attard hails from and lives in Mellieha, which is surrounded by beautiful countryside and a coastline with some of the most popular beaches in Malta.

“Whenever I have the time, I love to spend time in nature and enjoy this environment – especially going for a walk with my German Shepherd. This also makes me more appreciative of the importance of doing our utmost to reduce our impact on the environment and ensure that we strive to be as sustainable as possible in our line of work.” **M+S**



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# DRIVEN

## BY PASSION AND LOVE

BY CORYSE BORG

As Director General of the Civil Aviation Directorate, it is the responsibility of Director General Capt. Charles Pace to, first and foremost, ensure that the directorate is fulfilling its regulatory obligations as laid out in the Authority for Transport in Malta Act and to attract more foreign direct investment. He tells Movers and Shakers more about the past present and future of the CAD, and about what makes him tick.

**C**apt. Charles Pace has been in the aviation industry for nearly 44 years now, having started out with Air Malta in 1978. He has occupied several roles, ranging from flight attendant to chief pilot.

The Civil Aviation Directorate has grown significantly in recent years, both in its size and the scope of its work. The industry has increased significantly, going from practically nothing to having what is probably the fastest growing aircraft registry by attracting major industry players such as Malta Air and Lauda Air, Wizzair, Lufthansa and many others.

Today, it has 670 registered aircraft and if things go according to plan, the numbers will continue to increase, says Capt. Pace. The

Directorate is also responsible for the oversight of helicopters and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. This growth has significantly increased their workload and the responsibilities.

“In essence, the Civil Aviation Directorate is responsible for the oversight of all aspects of aviation in Malta,” he explains, “We issue licenses to companies and individuals who want to operate out of Malta and oversee their activities to ensure safe operations within the parameters of international regulatory frameworks.”

The directorate is also tasked with furthering the aviation sector in Malta. It is constantly engaging with industry stakeholders and promoting Malta as an ideal jurisdiction for aviation. The growth in the number of aircraft registered in Malta and the relocation of major European airlines to Malta is testament to the success of these efforts in recent years, he adds.





**“The local industry’s main priority at the moment should be removing unnecessary bureaucracy because it is the only way we can continue to attract further investment while also ensuring proper oversight of the airlines we already have.”**



Practically all the players in the local aviation industry are foreign and tend not to know their way around Malta and its business landscape, he explains. In most cases, in addition to the assistance provided by the CAD, companies looking to set up operations in Malta will require technical assistance over and above that related to aviation.

“The Malta Chamber and other official bodies, like the Malta Business Aviation Association, act as a reference point for foreign investors and facilitate the process of them doing business in Malta. Through the Chamber, the industry is also able to offer its feedback and makes suggestions on how local legislation and work practices can be improved to increase efficiency,” says Capt. Pace.

Capt. Pace is adamant that without the necessary talent and resources enabling the directorate to continue growing, they will not be able to match these expectations and would risk undoing much of the progress that has already been made:

“Since being appointed Director General, I would say that the biggest challenge has been acting as the bridge between the fast-paced and sophisticated aviation sector and the often lethargic and bureaucratic civil service. In my view, the local industry’s main priority at the moment should be removing unnecessary bureaucracy because it is the only way we can continue to attract further investment while

also ensuring proper oversight of the airlines we already have.”

Capt. Pace explains that Malta faces harsh competition from other countries which are also aiming to be the jurisdiction of choice for aviation companies, adding that certain inefficiencies in the way the civil service engages with the directorate can often hinder its ability to cater for the industry’s needs and place Malta at a disadvantage.

“At the end of the day, regulating an industry like aviation requires extremely knowledgeable and driven people working in every part of the sector. Established airlines as well as prospective investors need an effective and efficient regulatory body that they can engage with throughout the whole process of setting up a Maltese airline,” he states.

In his life – and in his long and fulfilling career – Capt. Pace says that he has been inspired “by real talent and by commitment. By people who strive for excellence and whose mindset does not allow them to accept anything but that. People with vision, who are constantly challenging the system and the status quo and who can produce real value, be it through art, business, or sport.”

He says that he continues to be driven by passion and love for an industry which he feels has given him so much over the years, and one he would like to see growing:

“I have had the pleasure of working with some amazing people who were part and parcel of everything I’ve done. If you manage to have a good team, the job becomes a lot easier and the rewards become bigger. I don’t believe in taking a half-baked approach to anything in life and I’ve been fully dedicated to every role I’ve held over the years. During my flying career I was driven by respect for both passengers and crew, and by the obligation to never compromise on their safety. Proper preparation has always been key.”

When he is not at work, Capt. Pace is a football aficionado... although he admits that this pastime is not as relaxing as it could be: “As a Leeds United supporter I must say the sport has had a habit of aggravating me more than it does relax me! To truly relax, I enjoy music and cinema and taking care of my olive trees.” **M+S**

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Tea**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**

Sweet or savoury? **Sweet**

Books or television? **TV**

Working alone or in a team? **Team**

Summer or winter? **Summer**

Android or iOS? **Android**

City breaks or country holidays? **Country**





ST  
DE



# MAKING MALTA THE IDEAL START-UP DESTINATION

When Kurt Farrugia joined Malta Enterprise as CEO in August 2019, he was determined to help Maltese businesses grow and attract new companies despite unforeseen challenges. He speaks to The Malta Chamber about the current and future plans for Malta's business ecosystem.

**YOU JOINED MALTA ENTERPRISES AS CEO MERELY A FEW MONTHS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC HIT THE GLOBAL ECONOMY AND ULTIMATELY REACHED OUR SHORES. HOW HAS THIS AFFECTED YOUR WORK?**

The pandemic meant that we had to hit the ground running in making sure that COVID-19 left as little impact as possible on the Maltese economy. It was a reality that instantly showcased the importance of the organisation on a national level and the need for us all to work together as a dynamic team. Malta Enterprise had the responsibility of managing the largest government financial package ever and it is not a responsibility that we took lightly.

Looking back on the last two years, I would say that there were some silver linings particularly in the way our team members came together. We also saw stakeholders from all the different industries establishing a social pact, and witnessed the country as a whole rising up to the challenge.

We will now be focusing on helping businesses grow and move towards sustainability and digitisation.

**WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS FOR MALTA ENTERPRISE DURING THESE CHALLENGING MONTHS?**

One of the most important milestones for all of us at Malta Enterprise was the safeguarding of 120,000 jobs and assisting over 17,000 self-employed people and companies during the pandemic. We pride

ourselves on maintaining constant assistance to enterprises, engaging in frequent discussions, and knowing when to adjust the assistance as required. This was especially important as employees and their families were relying on our aid to keep afloat. If one were to look past the pandemic, I would say that the launching of new schemes such as the 'Change to Grow' and the 'Smart & Sustainable Investment Scheme' were two other steps forward.

**MALTA HAS BEEN REFERRED TO AS THE IDEAL START-UP LOCATION. WHAT WAS MALTA ENTERPRISE'S ROLE IN ADVANCING THE LOCAL START-UP ECOSYSTEM?**

Start-ups have a huge role to play in the direction that we want our economy to develop into. They have the potential to innovate and positively disrupt a number of economic fields, while attracting some of the best talent around. We have a very clear idea of what we want to achieve with the start-up ecosystem. A good example of this is the launch of the 'Start in Malta' portal and initiative in March of 2021, which has now become a go-to tool for start-ups. From contact building to incentives, this portal aims to facilitate and simplify the process of launching a start-up in Malta.

Our message to start-ups is clear; Malta Enterprise is here to help you start and grow in Malta. A continuation of this was 'The Start-up Festival', which brought together key players in the field to discuss the various opportunities and challenges at hand. Today, we are



**“We will now be focusing on helping businesses grow and move towards sustainability and digitisation.”**



already celebrating success stories of start-ups coming from various countries and sectors who now call Malta home, not to mention local entrepreneurs who are achieving success here and beyond our shores.

TrustStamp is one of our success stories. They came to Malta in the middle of the pandemic and have made Malta their home while also listing on the NASDAQ earlier this year. They have even collaborated with us to bring ‘Plug and Play’ to Malta in another milestone achievement for the Maltese start-up community.

#### **YOU MENTIONED BEFORE THAT THE WAY FORWARD FOR COMPANIES IS SUSTAINABILITY AND DIGITALISATION. HOW HAS MALTA ENTERPRISE COMMITTED TO THIS?**

Achieving a greener future is something that we all need to do together as individual citizens and businesses. Green investments help both our planet and our long-term efforts towards sustainability. We believe that moving towards sustainability is essential for businesses and that early adopters will flourish. We want to create schemes which help business understand that being green is not only good for the planet but can also help them decrease costs and increase profitability.

In this regard, we have launched the ‘Smart and Sustainable’ investment grant scheme. This scheme aids businesses to improve their operations and move towards sustainability both in their processes as well as in the products that they offer to the market.

We are focusing on five main areas: water efficiency, energy efficiency, waste minimisation, sustainable materials and sustainable digitalisation. We have also made it a point to highlight good practices from companies and entrepreneurs who are coming up with sustainable alternatives and solutions to improve our world and the environment that we live in.

We have shaken the mentality of how we look at business operations and are constantly pushing for this transformation in our business processes, from the micro-companies to large businesses across every industry.

#### **FINALLY, WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR MALTA ENTERPRISE, AS WELL AS FOR MALTA’S BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM?**

We have a lot to look forward in our future. We want to keep improving on the quality of the jobs which are being created. Foreign Direct Investment is central to our success and as such we will be focusing on our international efforts as much as we focus on helping companies which are already present in Malta.

With the help of different stakeholders and the different teams within Malta Enterprise we aim to increase our visibility in specific regions within and outside of Europe to develop the most valuable pipeline possible.

The pandemic has led to the realisation that specific new economic sectors do leave a positive impact and should be recognised and elevated. Such sectors include MedTech, EdTech, Cyber Security, AI, AR/VR and Digital Games.

We also want to keep on consolidating the work which we’re doing with start-ups. After supporting Shark Tank Malta, later this summer we will be hosting the second edition of the Start-up Festival.

An exciting project which we have coming up alongside the Residency Malta Agency is the Start-up Residency Programme. This new scheme aims at attracting investment by granting start-up investors a residence permit upon fulfilling the initial requirement to establish a solid project in Malta.

It is also important to be aware of the new challenges which are presenting themselves such as the global impact on the supply chain of almost every product. This is not just a food security issue but also other commodities. However, seeing the smallest country in the EU registering the largest economic growth, as well as the lowest unemployment in modern history, makes us hopeful for a positive future. **M+S**

## **Quickfire Questions**

**Tea or coffee? Coffee**

**Sunrise or sunset? Sunset**

**Sweet or savoury? Sweet**

**Books or television? Books**

**Working alone or in a team? Team**

**Summer or winter? Summer**

**Android or iOS? iOS**

**City breaks or country holidays? City breaks**

**Home cooking or dining out? Home cooking**





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# WORKING BETTER TOGETHER

Zak Borg and Benji Borg, co-founders of ANCHOVY. Plc, together with James Abela and Matthew Sammut, co-founders of NIU Ltd., recently announced the formation of a comprehensive technology and digital services group, Capital 9H Ltd. Through this collaboration, they aspire to create the largest digital services offering in Malta and pave the way for an international growth programme within this rapidly growing sector.

**C**apital 9H Ltd. will lead, own and manage both companies' local market leadership position and technology talent base as an integrated digital offering, providing each client-base with end-to-end digital services that will support them throughout their digital transformation journey.

9H plc is a result of the converged vision of the four founders, strengthening the local market offering while embarking on an exciting roadmap to internationally expand the group's operations.

The group is set to become the natural digital transformation partner for local businesses irrespective of size or maturity.

The founders believe this merger to be a major milestone in the evolution of Malta's digital economy, reflecting the transformation aspirations of the country. They also underline the group's intention to grow further by attracting other ventures with similar aspirations into its structure.

"In five years' time, I see myself being part of a group of companies that works with great organisations that fit a purpose," asserts Benji Borg, "Right now we are on a mission to consolidate the value chain, but our next phase will be purpose-driven. We want to be part of the solution and work with organisations that are driven by the same core



*Left to right: James Abela, Zak Borg, Matthew Sammut, Benji Borg*

values that we have. Our biggest strength is that we are a founder-driven organisation, with a very clear mission. We are determined to consolidate and provide all services under one roof for a seamless client experience."

Zak Borg's first job was as a sailing coach and a software engineer. He says that he always had a vision to do something big, and it all changed when he read one of Richard Branson's books.

"Our biggest challenge so far has been achieving scale while maintaining service level quality in local and new international markets such as the Middle East. Scaling a service business internationally is no easy feat and we are still experimenting in order to find the best structure," he explains. "Our biggest success stories, I would say, have been the mini milestones along the journey, from issuing a bond to building great business relationships."





The employees are the heart of this organisation. Making them happy is important to ensure the company thrives, the founders say.

“One thing which I believe in is to prioritise work-life balance. Not every employee is happy with the same things, so listening and understanding what makes them happy is key in my opinion,” says Matthew Sammut. “There are various things that make teams successful: communication between the team members, the focus on goals and results, offering support to one another, being organised and also good leadership.”

As for his own work ethic, Matthew says he finds inspiration in a variety of people and things:

“A big inspiration in my life is actually my baby boy who loves anyone that smiles at him. He is barely able to sit down on his own and yet he fills my life with joy whenever I spend time with him. I would also

like to add that the person who has most greatly inspired me has been my mother. She always has a smile on her face no matter how hard she worked, and she loves everyone. She is well respected and always gave more than she received. I try to live like she did, as much as I can.”

Going back to employee satisfaction and happiness, James Abela shares his secret to motivating your employees to go the extra mile.

“Simple: being a leader and not a boss,” he states, “In practical terms, this means dedicating your time to coaching, giving credit where credit is due, owning up to leadership mistakes and providing a way forward, asking and getting to the bottom of the issue (not taking decisions on hearsay). Investing in employee wellbeing can lead to better employee engagement, reduced sick leave and higher performance and productivity. This includes a healthy work environment with balanced workload, as well as good and proper tools.” **MS**



# Quickfire Questions

## Zak Borg

Tea or coffee? **Tea**  
 Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**  
 Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**  
 Books or television? **Books**  
 Working alone or in a team? **Team**  
 Summer or winter? **Summer**  
 Android or iOS? **iOS**  
 City breaks or country holidays? **Country**  
 Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**



“Our biggest challenge so far has been achieving scale while maintaining service level quality in local and new international markets such as the Middle East.”

## James Abela

Tea or coffee? **Coffee**  
 Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**  
 Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**  
 Books or television? **TV**  
 Working alone or in a team? **Team**  
 Summer or winter? **Summer**  
 Android or iOS? **iOS**  
 City breaks or country holidays? **Country**  
 Home cooking or dining out? **Dining Out**



“Investing in employee wellbeing can lead to better employee engagement, reduced sick leave and higher performance and productivity.”

## Benji Borg

Tea or coffee? **Coffee**  
 Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**  
 Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**  
 Books or television? **TV**  
 Working alone or in a team? **Team**  
 Summer or winter? **Both**  
 Android or iOS? **iOS**  
 City breaks or country holidays? **Country**  
 Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**



“Our biggest strength is that we are a founder driven organisation, with a very clear mission. We are determined to consolidate and provide all services under one roof for a seamless client experience.”

## Matthew Sammut

Tea or coffee? **Coffee**  
 Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**  
 Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**  
 Books or television? **TV**  
 Working alone or in a team? **Team**  
 Summer or winter? **Summer**  
 Android or iOS? **iOS**  
 City breaks or country holidays? **City**  
 Home cooking or dining out? **Dining out**



“The person who has most greatly inspired me has been my mother. She always has a smile on her face no matter how hard she worked, and she loves everyone... I try to live like she did, as much as I can.”



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# IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE

Michael Bonello, CEO of Alliance Real Estate Group speaks about the company's vision and biggest strength: its people.



## WHAT WAS THE VISION FOR ALLIANCE IN THE EARLY DAYS AND HOW HAS THIS EVOLVED?

As well as being defined in our brand name, our vision has always been to create an alliance of like-minded professionals working together in synergy, to conclude real estate deals that are equitable to all stakeholders. In the early days we were just as driven as we are today. What has changed is mainly that we are now much better equipped to deliver on this vision in every transaction we facilitate.

## WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS YOU'VE EXPERIENCED SINCE FOUNDING THE COMPANY?

The company was originally founded in 2006 but we rebranded to Alliance in July 2020. Since then, I would say our biggest achievement has been making Alliance the independent real estate brand it is today. The decision to move a very successful business with more than 150 people from an international franchise framework into an independent new brand was not easy as there were many mixed emotions. The fact that we retained more than 98% of our people proved our team's approval of the move, and winning five prestigious industry awards within just a few months was further confirmation that we are doing things well.

The launch of the new Alliance brand generated so much market interest that within the first 18 months, five operational real estate

companies decided to rebrand their premises and engage their existing teams in the Alliance franchise network. This is unprecedented in the local market and is a clear industry endorsement of our work. Moreover, when earlier this year we re-launched our Letting division, within the first five months we already engaged no less than 42 letting advisors, with even more substantial growth forecast for the coming months.

I must add that all this went on regardless of the global pandemic of 2019 to 2021. That makes these accomplishments even more rewarding for us all.

## AS CEO, WHO HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST INSPIRATION THAT MOTIVATES YOU TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS?

I admire business leaders and find some motivational speakers inspirational and motivating, but my biggest influence has to be the people I have around me. All Alliance sales and letting advisors working across the branches, my partners, and the management team, are my biggest inspiration and my motivation to work harder every day. One of my biggest rewards is helping people turn their lives around. Meeting people I worked with to launch new venture ideas years ago, and seeing them now leading very successful lives, fills me with personal satisfaction.





“One of our main aims when we set up the new Alliance brand was to put our clients firmly at the forefront of all our activity, and this is what is driving us forward to achieve these goals.”





Alliance Real Estate Partners and Managers (L to R): Nikki Vella Petroni, Erika Deguara, Jamie Dimech, Lorraine Dimech, Gordon Cachia, Adrian Friggieri, Paul Sammut, Ana-Marija Zafirovska, Dylan Micallef, Francois Spagnol, Michael Bonello (CEO), Brian Magri, Gordon Valentino, Aidan Xuereb, Fabien Debono, James Mallia, Nicky Sammut, Raphael Degabriele, Claude Balzan Demajo, Peter Frendo, Andrew Debono and Abigail Simiana. Missing from the photo are: Angelo D'Arrigo, Jeremy Borg Grech, Jay Jay Micallef, Sandro Pace Bonello and George Tabone.

#### WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, ARE THE BIGGEST STRENGTHS OF YOUR TEAM?

As I mentioned previously, our people are our biggest strength. As you can imagine, within the whole of Alliance we have many different teams working individually and with each other both internally and externally; it always boils down to people working well with others. Successful teams are those which can integrate well together and collaborate effectively, filling in gaps to emerge as a stronger whole. I consider myself very fortunate to have managed to attract and retain some of the best people in the business over the past 20 years. These great people also inspire others like them to join Alliance, resulting in sustained organic growth that benefits the entire organisation. I would also like to thank my partners and management team who play a big part in this.

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS EMPLOYEE WELLBEING IN YOUR COMPANY CULTURE AND WHAT DO YOU DO TO PROMOTE THIS?

We promote employee wellbeing with our mantra “work hard, play hard”, and give a great deal of importance to the onboarding process of new recruits to make sure we are engaging the right people. We then continue training, mentoring, and supporting our people throughout their entire careers. Even if someone joins us with experience from freelance work or from another agency, we still carry out the same integration processes tailored to the individual, to ensure consistency of service. On a day-to-day basis, whether it's the branch manager, office admin or colleagues, there is always constant contact, so everyone is on the same page and going in the same direction. We promote teamwork religiously and, apart from the group corporate events which are organised two to three times a year, each office is encouraged to close for at least one day in every quarter to organise their team-building events.

At Alliance, part of our training schedule includes Dynamite Sessions where our people gain active learning

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Tea**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**

Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**

Books or television? **TV**

Working alone or in a team? **Team**

Summer or winter? **Summer**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **City breaks**

Home cooking or dining out? **Dining out**

opportunities on topics such as customer care, sales techniques, photography and marketing, self-motivation, and financial planning for advisors. This is done because we feel that self-improvement is one of the most important components in promoting individual wellbeing.

#### WHAT ARE YOUR KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THE COMPANY OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

We are committed to making Alliance the go-to brand for the best real estate deals and jobs, and one of our key objectives is to sustain our organic growth with more mergers and acquisitions. Whilst we are working to create the best onboarding experience and support for our new franchisees, we are also expanding into new verticals with a strong property management offering. Meanwhile, we are continually exploring all-new technology routes to build relationships with our clients. At the same time, we are looking at improving efficiencies to reduce our carbon footprint and promote a greener mindset throughout the organisation. Our CSR objectives are also becoming more definite as we are reducing some sponsorships of commercial activities in favour of supporting of worthy causes.

One of our main aims when we set up the new Alliance brand was to put our clients firmly at the forefront of all our activities, and this is what is driving us forward to achieve these goals.

#### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR 18-YEAR-OLD SELF?

I would only tell myself: “Go for it, Mike!”

#### LOOKING BACK ON YOUR CAREER SO FAR, IS THERE SOMETHING THAT YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

That's a hard question to answer as I don't regret much of what I've done. I realise that I may have dedicated too much of my time to my work instead of myself and my family, and I suppose I may have procrastinated more than I should have on certain matters. I could answer “doing things better and sooner” as this may have led to better outcomes, but you can't really tell, can you?

#### WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ACTIVITY TO DO FOR FUN?

Relaxing with my family and friends is an activity that I insist on making time for in my weekly schedule. My calendar is always packed with back-to-back work meetings and it's just a question of being organised and insistent with the value of your time to be able to cope with all the commitments. **M+S**






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# THE **PO**PEO



In 1998 a new player in the pharmacy sector entered the scene to shake up Malta's healthcare industry landscape, which until then was dominated by a handful of long-established importers and distributors. CEO and co-founder of Brown's Pharmacy, Alexander Fenech, tells Carla Zahra how his people-first approach has led to the company's success.

BY CARLA ZAHRA



# POWER OF A PEOPLE-FIRST CULTURE

**O**ver the past 24 years, one name in the local healthcare sector has stood out against the rest. With its orange-accented logos popping up in different localities, Brown's has become synonymous with pharmacies across the Maltese Islands, revolutionising a market that was previously dominated by a handful of long-established businesses. Co-founded by CEO Alexander Fenech and Robert Spiteri – long-time friends, fellow pharmacists and MBA graduates – the fresh, vibrant and innovative brand has set new standards for local businesses operating in the healthcare industry, and they don't plan on slowing down any time soon.

Driven by the motivation to create something impactful, they decided to launch their own venture. Initially, the duo started dabbling in importation, but very quickly realised that it would be close to impossible to take-on long established industry leaders by playing the same game. Differentiation through disruption of the existing value chain was clearly the way forward. Combining their industry expertise and business acumen, the duo recognised an opportunity in the consolidation of the then largely ignored and fragmented

retail pharmacy sector. In 1998 the first pharmacy was acquired, and Brown's Pharma was born.

"We acquired our first pharmacy in Qormi in 1998 and immediately saw the value in having direct access to consumers. Robert and I both share a passion for customer service. The retail environment provided us with an opportunity to play our strengths. In a matter of months, we doubled the sales of our first pharmacy. It was clear to us that that we had a good thing going here."

So, what's the secret?

"Our company is completely people-centric. Whether you are our customer, colleague, or supplier, we put people at the core of what we do, there is no other way to deliver the high level of customer experiences we aspire to," he explains.

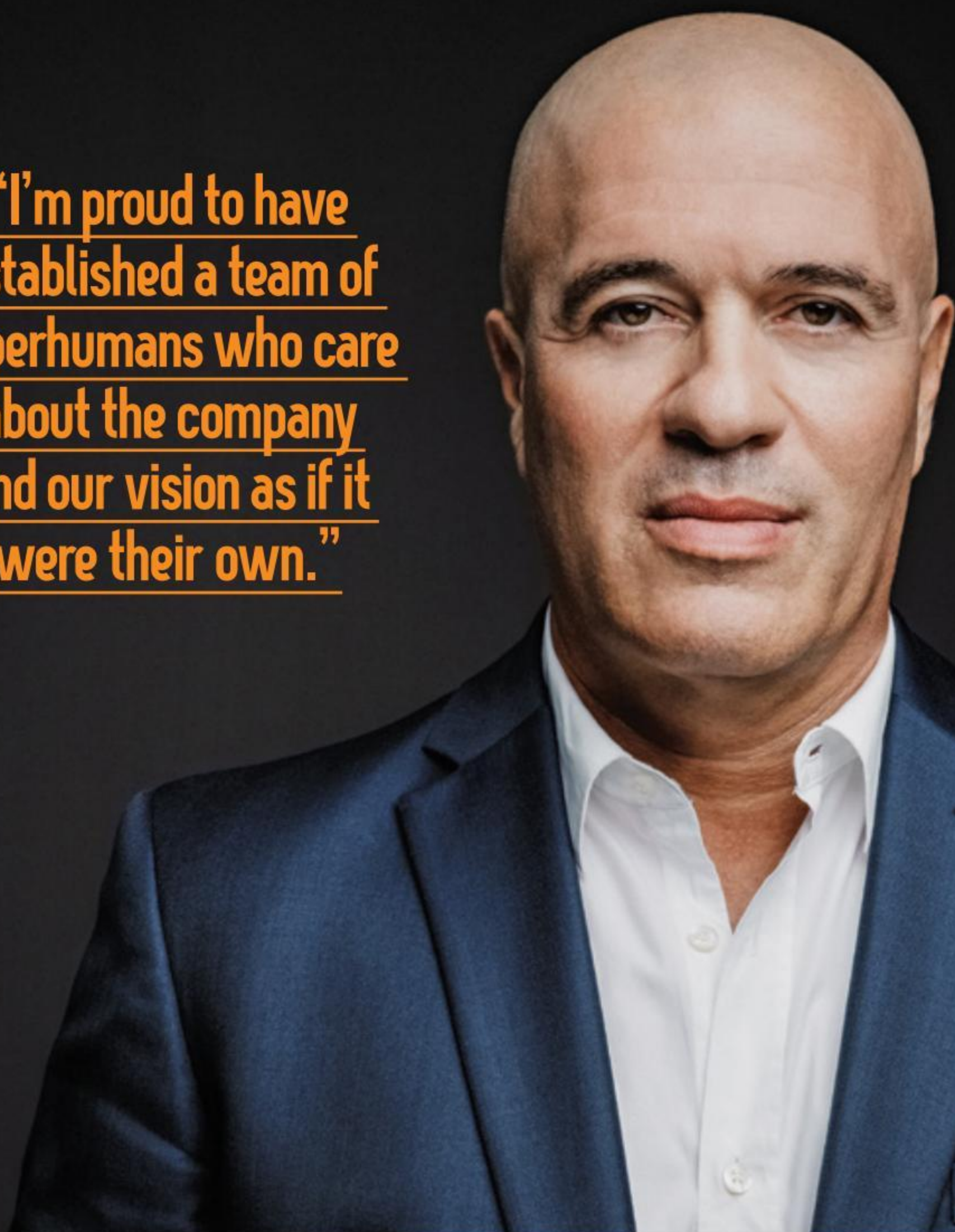
Both on a personal and professional level, Alexander believes in treating people the way he would like to be treated. From the shop floor to the head office, he believes that people need to be empowered in order to actually deliver the desired levels of customer service.

"It sounds like a cliché, but it works!", he asserts. "I'm proud to have established a team of superhumans who care about the company and our vision as if it were their own." ►

**"Our company is completely people-centric. From our suppliers to our colleagues to our customers, we put people at the core of what we do."**



**“I’m proud to have established a team of superhumans who care about the company and our vision as if it were their own.”**



One of the most important steps taken by the company to ensure the well-being of their colleagues was introducing a three-day working week. Two years ago, Brown’s Pharmacy took the decision to extend its opening hours to enable client-facing staff to work 12-hour shifts, three times a week, with a long weekend every fortnight. This positioned the company ahead of the curve in helping its team members maintain a positive work-life balance, ensuring that their personal lives are not being overshadowed by their careers. This move has already helped in improving staff retention, which will be an important factor as the company heads towards its next chapter.

“We believe that continuous improvements through innovation is the key to maintaining our competitive edge as other companies attempt to follow in our footsteps, often by attempting to replicate, or should I say copy, what we do. When speaking about innovation, we don’t only look at what similar companies are doing abroad, but also at how other industries are using technology to develop their businesses,” says Alexander.

Alexander is innately curious and drawn towards innovation. His interest in international business trends and developments has been one of the major driving factors in his success, but the quest for improvement has no end. “Ultimately, our strength lies in having a solid understanding of what our customers want, which is always shifting as times evolve.”

In July 2021, Brown’s Pharma Holdings became a public company after it issued its first bond offering. This had an immensely positive impact on the company and re-enforced the strong governance that was already in place. Now, their sights are set on 2025, when company shares will be made public.

While focusing on keeping Brown’s Pharmacy on its impressive growth trajectory, Alexander also finds time to enjoy the finer things

in life, balancing work and play to tackle each day as best as he can. A normal working day would see Alexander waking up at 5 am and stepping into the gym – he fits in morning sessions at Vitera Gym four times a week – for a group session by 6 am. “There’s no better feeling than starting the day on a high and team training helps set me up for the day,” he says.

Later, he drops his children off at school and heads to work until early afternoon, picks up his children from school and spends the afternoon reading a book (about finance, preferably). When asked where he finds the motivation to keep up with all his interests, both personal and professional, he credits his mother for giving him his drive to succeed, author Michael Porter for his strategic business insights, and Derek Trotter, better known as Del Boy in the British sitcom *Only Fools and Horses*, for his general optimism and confidence, even if things don’t always go to plan.

Still, establishing Brown’s Pharmacy as the market leader in the Maltese pharmacy sector is only one part of Alexander’s journey. Simultaneously, he is following his dream of becoming a venture capitalist, with a few recent successes under his belt and an appearance as one of the investors on the first season of *Shark Tank Malta*.

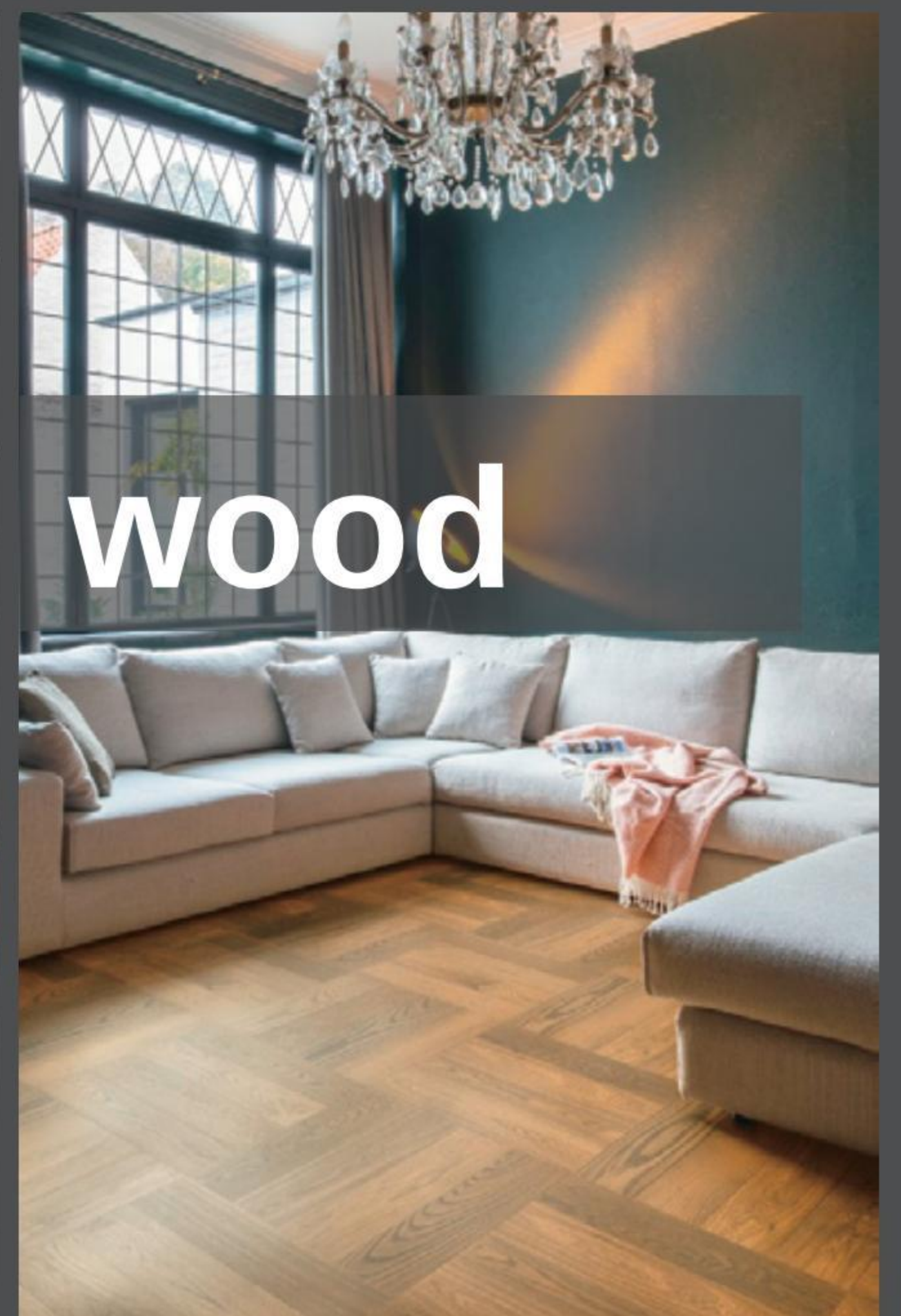
“It’s only onwards and upwards from here as we continue to grow locally and soon, internationally,” he concludes. **M+S**

## Quickfire Questions

- Tea or coffee? **Tea**
- Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**
- Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**
- Books or television? **Books**
- Working alone or in a team? **Team**
- Summer or winter? **Summer**
- Android or iOS? **iOS**
- City breaks or country holidays? **City**
- Home cooking or dining out? **Dining out**



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# HUMILITY TAKES YOU FAR

When joining a new industry at a young age with no previous experience, it's almost certain that one would feel like the underdog. This was the reality of David Abela, who joined the leading freight forwarding company, EuroBridge, in 1998 and soon climbed the career ladder to become Managing Director. More recently, David moved into a new role as Director after 21 years, sharing leadership responsibilities with new CEO Robert Cassar.

BY CARLA ZAHRA

**D**avid grew up in a humble family and was given the opportunity to join EuroBridge – which would later become his second family – as a youth. Although the odds were initially against him, he persevered and learned from his mistakes, not allowing setbacks to demotivate him. Over the past decade alone, the company grew by almost 400% under David's leadership as Managing Director, following years of focus, dedication and innovation going on behind the scenes.

"Throughout every success, it is important for us to remain humble and focus on giving our customers the best possible service, while taking care of our own employees first and foremost," says David.

In 2021, the company brought on board a new CEO, Robert Cassar, to help transform the ever-growing company as David moved into a new role as Company Director. In this role, David is focusing on the financial and business development aspects of the company.

"It used to be extremely challenging balancing all duties before, but now Robert and I are already bringing in results, new deals and better options for our customers," says David. "We were always brave and prepared to anticipate future challenges, starting off by investing in our networks, then in high-quality equipment, to provide excellent value to our customers. Our new office and warehouse, in which we invested heavily to create a state-of-the-art logistics centre, soon followed."

Moreover, EuroBridge has shifted to paperless operations, while also revolutionising how the company moves goods from all over Europe into Malta and vice-versa.







“It is our belief that the happier the employee is, the better the service they give to our customers!”





**“Throughout every success, it is important for us to remain humble and focus on giving our customers the best possible service, while taking care of our own employees first and foremost.”**

“Our main business remains groupage cargo from Europe into Malta, though exports are growing fast too. The way we handle this type of cargo is very unique to EuroBridge, mainly because our communications are all handled locally. We have eliminated foreign agents so that we can offer our customers immediate replies and updates at cheaper rates. Thanks to our network, we can then consolidate all cargo in Milan making sure we always provide the fastest and most cost-effective route for our customers,” he explains.

Since joining the company, David has lived by his mantra of being different to the competition. “We are disrupters and are still nowhere near where we want to be,” he says. Still, David recognises the strengths that have shaped EuroBridge into the industry leader it is today, including its hardworking team, high-quality service, efficient administration and cutting-edge technology. Last but certainly not least, David believes that their prices offer a major advantage to customers within this highly competitive market.

“We have fantastic team members who stick together through thick and thin,” says David. “We value good communication and it’s important that our colleagues speak to one another constantly so that any issues can be solved quickly. Although it’s a demanding job, you can always hear laughter within the offices even while they are working hard! They take on everything that comes their way as a challenge... and they all do love a challenge.”

Indeed, the last two years have not been short of challenges across the sector. “With the ‘excuse’ of COVID instability, shipping lines have increased ocean freight rates exponentially especially to and from the

Far East,” he explains. “These increases are also being felt in Europe where, apart from the lack of drivers which has been persisting for years, we now have to contend with the war in Ukraine and its consequences.”

On a local level, David believes that legal changes need to be implemented in the Maltese Customs system to accommodate for a cheaper and greener way of handling logistics. “I have been fighting this fight for 18 years and will not be stopping now. Hopefully, someday we

can see a revolution in this sector which will help Malta become competitive again,” he says.

Meanwhile, EuroBridge is proceeding to enhance its offering and invest in new technology, with some exciting projects in the pipeline for later this year. The company is also investing in space to accommodate for a growing need for storage. They are also continuing to invest in their personnel through training, office ambience and enhanced workflows. Moreover, David believes in doing everything

they can to support well-being at work, from making offices more comfortable to organising staff events. “It is our belief that the happier the employee is, the better the service they give to our customers!” **M+S**

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Coffee**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**

Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**

Books or television? **Books**

Working alone or in a team? **Team**

Summer or winter? **Summer**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **City**

Home cooking or dining out? **Dining out**



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# SUCCESS COLLEGE





# LIES IN THE CUTLINE

What does it take to lead a team at one of Malta's most innovative and young institutions? The CEO of the Malta Digital Innovation Authority shares how he plans to achieve success during his tenure.

BY CARLA ZAHRA

**L** leading the Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA) is just one of the greatest achievements of CEO and Doctorate student Kenneth Brincat's career. Many more milestones, he believes, are yet to be reached. A self-professed 'people person', Kenneth took on the role of CEO in October 2021 and has since focused on setting the tone for his tenure as he plans on taking the MDIA to new heights. The soft skills he picked up through previous roles – from being a clerk to taking on a Local Council Executive Secretary position – have all shaped the person he is today and prepared him for the journey of a lifetime.

"During these first few months in my role as CEO, I have been focusing on establishing a new vision for the Authority and working hard to get everyone on board. There are many mini-goals that I believe I have accomplished so far, but I am convinced that my biggest achievement is still in the making," says Kenneth.

The MDIA was set up in 2018 to initiate a proactive shift in the national approach to digital innovation. It aims to certify, supervise, facilitate, and promote the digital innovation industry in Malta while developing the roadmap to achieve three high-level objectives, namely: to build trust through Assurance Assessment Frameworks, to promote digital innovation through incentives, and to facilitate innovative technological arrangements for start-ups.

In order to achieve these objectives, a new legislative framework needs to be set up. This will enable the MDIA to provide technological assurance certification to a wider spectrum of technologies. Since the MDIA is the national Authority recognised by the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, Kenneth is responsible for leading the team to successfully implement the new legislative and operational set-ups required. Meanwhile, works are underway to launch the MDIA's new website and a promotional campaign to foster, promote and facilitate the advancement and utilisation of innovative technology arrangements, their design and uses.

**"Everyday success comes from being able to perform at your highest level in all your life roles, whether they be that of a student, a father, or an employee."**



“There are many mini-goals that I believe I have accomplished so far, but I am convinced that my biggest achievement is still in the making.”



To an outsider, it would appear that Kenneth has reached the pinnacle of his career. From his perspective, however, success simply stems from his innate ability to get along with other people on a personal level. Kenneth consistently works towards bettering himself on a professional and personal level and is currently reading for a Doctorate Degree in Business Administration. He credits his ability to establish good working relationships to his engaging personality and his effective communication skills, but also acknowledges that his personal success is rooted in the efforts of his team.

“Everyday success comes from being able to perform at your highest level in all your life roles, whether they be that of a student, a father, or an employee. I believe that I have been successful in finding my place in life and that I have performed well, both as a leader and as a father,” says Kenneth. “Still, I feel that it is necessary for the team to fulfil both individual and collective objectives in order for me to be deemed successful.”

The road to achieving the MDIA’s goals may not be smooth, but Kenneth is keen on approaching obstacles head-on. “The satisfaction of overcoming an obstacle is my greatest motivator. Knowing that my leadership, hard work and perseverance will help Malta to consolidate its forefront position in the digital innovation regulatory functions worldwide helps me to keep pushing towards achieving my professional goals. I feel that aligning the Authority’s vision and values with the National Government strategy is one way to achieve that,” he says.

If a leader’s success is testament to the performance of their team, then knowing the strengths and motivating factors of every individual is crucial. Reflecting on what makes his team members strive to go the extra mile, Kenneth admits that every employee is driven by different motivators. “The first and most important function of a leader is to determine what makes each team member tick, in order to bring out the best in everyone,” he explains.

“This could mean giving credit where credit is due, being fair and consistent, listening more than you talk or simply connecting with the employee on a more personal level. All of these factors are important, but some may be more significant than others depending on the individual,” says Kenneth.

Nonetheless, in a period of just over six months, Kenneth has already recognised the strengths of his team. “In my opinion, teamwork and diversity are our two biggest superpowers. Each person possesses varied skills and knowledge, which contributes to our flexibility and productivity as tasks can be assigned to different team members based on their individual strengths. My team members are always willing to help each other out when someone needs assistance with their tasks,” he says.

Having established a good synergy with his team, Kenneth has set his sights on achieving a number of targets before the year’s end. Firstly, the Authority will work on enhancing the MDIA’s Technology Assurance Sandbox. This aims to allow start-ups and smaller operations to provide assurance to stakeholders, help them onboard consumers and investors by lowering certain inherent risks, and facilitate the existing residency program. Apart from finalising the new legislative framework, Kenneth is also looking forward to launching the ‘Mind the Gap’ project, which will identify gaps in cybersecurity to build trust in e-commerce platforms. **M+S**

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Black Coffee, made with passion**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**

Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**

Books or television? **TV**

Working alone or in a team? **Job - Working**

**in a team. Study - Working alone**

Summer or winter? **Summer**

Android or iOS? **Android**

City breaks or country holidays? **City**

Home cooking or dining out? **Dining out**





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# CONFIDENCE & LEADERSHIP THE KEYS TO SUCCESS

Dawn Camilleri's career started with an internship position in one of the Big 4 accounting firms. After graduating with a Master's in Accountancy, the company offered her a full-time position as an audit associate. After a year, she decided to move to a smaller practice, and five years later she moved to PKF Malta where she is Deputy Audit Manager.

BY CORYSE BORG

**B**eing a mid-tier audit firm that provides services to a list of prestigious clients, and a firm that has a huge amount to offer when it comes to career options and professional development, Ms Camilleri says that PKF Malta was the perfect fit for her experience and abilities.

"Over the years, I have gained exposure to an array of sectors and industries, whilst also developing deep networks of long-lasting quality. Ultimately, forming good relationships, making meaningful connections with fellow team members, and seeking feedback are important, as they are the people you will learn from," she says.

As Deputy Audit Manager, Ms Camilleri reports to the directors and works as part of a team of problem solvers with extensive industry experience. Helping clients solve complex business issues from strategy to execution is surely another main responsibility.

She is also responsible for a number of other tasks, such as the coaching and development of team members reporting to her; keeping up to date with local and national business and economic issues; assisting in managing and delivering large projects, ensuring that key deadlines are met; developing strategies to solve complex technical challenges and contributing to the development of her own and her team's technical acumen; and identifying and researching opportunities on new and existing clients along with building and maintaining strong relationships with clients.

Given that Ms Camilleri started working with PKF Malta during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the office was working remotely... and not meeting them in person at times made things a bit difficult.

"Obviously, when joining a new company, getting to know your colleagues is important, as they have been through the same learning process and they can help you navigate the workplace," she explains, "In addition, as a new audit manager, it was difficult to come into the position and enact change right off the bat. It was therefore even more crucial to get to know the team and the company's processes before implementing any changes."

However, the fact that the company had and still have a weekly audit team meeting helped in obtaining a better sense of the audit team as a whole.

"Looking at recent audits, the role everyone played in those audits and how the audits are documented, helped in assessing the audit team's individual skills and started building relationships. This process gave me a better idea of what needed to be improved and what was already working," she states.

A lot of the work PKF Malta does has to be done under strict deadlines. How does Ms Camilleri and the rest of the PKF Malta team deal with them?

"External auditors deal with deadlines daily, and they have become more or less commonplace. With time deadlines, you have to execute and deliver on that plan. You have to balance the objectivity of reporting items you find with the fairness of reporting them in the right way. That becomes challenging early on in your career," Ms Camilleri says.







**“Forming good relationships, making meaningful connections with fellow team members, and seeking feedback are important, as they are the people you will learn from.”**



Teamwork, thorough planning, and frequent communication are key in these situations. Ms Camilleri and her team break down all large tasks into smaller manageable chunks, and they all make sure to attach milestone deadlines to each task. Matching sections of the work with milestone deadlines help them to eventually meet the final deadline right on time. If at any stage in the process they foresee delays or obstacles, they communicate immediately as a team and develop a contingency plan. In addition, during the audit team meeting they discuss and organise our weekly audit plan. They then re-shuffle their priorities according to audit urgencies.

“Ultimately having a good start to the week is critical in achieving better results!” she says, “PKF Malta’s message is: ‘Our success is dependent on the strength of good teamwork, and we also take pride in championing individual capabilities. We are firm believers in setting the scene for an opportunity, allowing careers to naturally branch out while nurturing them.’ We all crave challenging and meaningful work, while wanting to learn and grow professionally.”

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Tea**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**

Sweet or savoury? **Sweet**

Books or television? **TV**

Working alone or in a team? **In a team**

Summer or winter? **Summer**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **Country**

Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**

She emphasises that PKF Malta’s strong infrastructure supports its employees’ growth. The company provides continual development and highly encourages educational pursuits in and out of the workplace. In addition, PKF Malta embraces diversity in hiring, diversity in thought and diversity in approaches. PKF Malta’s workplace unites employees from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and experiences, and together they breed a more productive environment.

Ms Camilleri cites her mother and father as being two of the reasons that she has been so successful in her chosen career.

“Growing up, my parents were excellent mentors,” she smiles, “I was raised to be an empathetic and emotionally present individual. This was key in developing a strong foundation of confidence and natural leadership. Also, I have wholeheartedly embraced personal accountability.”

She goes on to say that she believes that genuine leaders and managers who can make an impact are people who hold themselves accountable for errors, and who are not shy to ask the same of others. As a result, she has learned to trust her decisions and remain responsible for the choices that she makes.

“If I were to give some advice to my 18-year-old self, I would say: whatever means you have to travel, whatever budget – just go. The world is your oyster. Chase your dreams, nothing is impossible! Choose how you want to live your life and do not be scared to run after it. In the greatest depths that the world and the mind can offer, light is on its way. Hold on tight and breathe. You’ll be okay.” **M+S**





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# SUC



“When you view failure as an opportunity for growth, virtually every wrong step you take can help you put your best foot forward the next time around.”



# THE FORMULA FOR A CIRCLES STORY

The origins of Circle Group Company Limited date back to 1960. Until recently, the various facets of the business operated independently from one another, although each maintained family values and approaches at the core of all their processes. In 2008, however, the family decided that a healthier approach could be affected through the formation of a group of companies, in line with modern corporate governance and in view of ever-changing customer requirements.

BY CORYSE BORG

**A**lthough the structure of the company has changed, Circle Group Company Limited remains a family-owned organisation. CEO and Group Strategy Director Tonio Ciantar explains that it is run by a small, knowledgeable, dedicated, and motivated management team which is the driving force behind it.

Simultaneously, it is fully committed to its well-trained and loyal team of employees who together strive to continue to position themselves within the Group's forward-looking philosophy that blends traditional values with dynamic achievement.

Today the Group has managed to diversify into various sectors and is trading through six companies: Spells Ltd, MBM (Modern Building Methods) Ltd, Unistores Services Ltd, Medi Terra Ltd, First Choice Ltd and Food Store Ltd.

"Our priority is to provide our customers with a vast range of options, products and services, across all the sectors, backed up by a genuine customer service which thrives to always exceed our customers' expectations," Mr Ciantar attests.

On the road to customer satisfaction, the company's biggest challenges have included keeping up with the market, planning ahead, and identifying the right skills and attitudes to back up the managing team, according to Mr Ciantar.

"We had to learn to grow from a one family show to a larger professional managing team. Entrepreneurs are the driving force behind creating and growing new businesses. However, to grow our business, we had to change our philosophy and learn to delegate properly, trusting our management team and giving up day-to-





day control of every detail,” he adds. “Welcoming change and accepting challenges in order to metamorphosise and grow has been the biggest challenge so far. Complacency can be a huge threat to a growing business. You can never assume that the group will continue to be successful simply because you have been successful in the past.”

Growing up in a family business, Mr Ciantar’s first inspiration was his father, who started his entrepreneurial endeavour by importing food items.

He understood that even though this was a strong on-going business, he still ventured into other sectors including food manufacturing and importation and manufacturing of aluminium products. Notwithstanding the stability in his sectors, he understood the need for diversity.

As for his own work ethic, Mr Ciantar is a strong believer in being ambitious and passionate about what you do, if you are to have any success.

“I believe that intelligence can only get you so far, but without ambition and passion, intelligence gets you nowhere. If you want something, you need to work harder to achieve it. You cannot sit down and wait for things to fall into your lap. What can be done today should not be left for tomorrow,” he says, “It is very important to get your hands dirty and do the job yourself. Knowing what each part of the process entails will allow you to be in a position to discuss with your staff and get a job done more efficiently.”

Mr Ciantar says that shifting from a family business to a professional group has taught him to be a better listener, and learn and realise that inclusivity and diversity are the focal point of the Circle Group. Each member of the team comes from a different background and building on the experiences of each other is the right formula for a successful story, he states.

He stresses that their endeavours have not been easy, but they are determined to continue rising up to the numerous challenges in order to achieve their objectives.

“Throughout this venture, we have never lost sight of our goals and we are proud of the new standards achieved throughout most of the sectors within which we operate. The experience based on many years in the business and our expertise from the combined efforts of our highly skilled professional team makes us the perfect choice for all your needs. We respect our future generations and sustainability features in all our decisions. We are proud of our determination, diversity, and stability, while introducing innovation and retaining our traditional values at the same time.”

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Neither is my favourite**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**

Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**

Books or television? **TV**

Working alone or in a team? **Depends what I am working on**

Summer or winter? **Summer**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **City break**

Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**

In hindsight, what advice would Mr Ciantar give to his younger self?

“Dream big but start acting – you have to maintain an open mind and must not be afraid to learn. The only limitation to a successful business is a lack of imagination and the nature of the barriers you create yourself. It’s all about perception. When you view failure as an opportunity for growth, virtually every wrong step you take can help you put your best foot forward the next time around.”

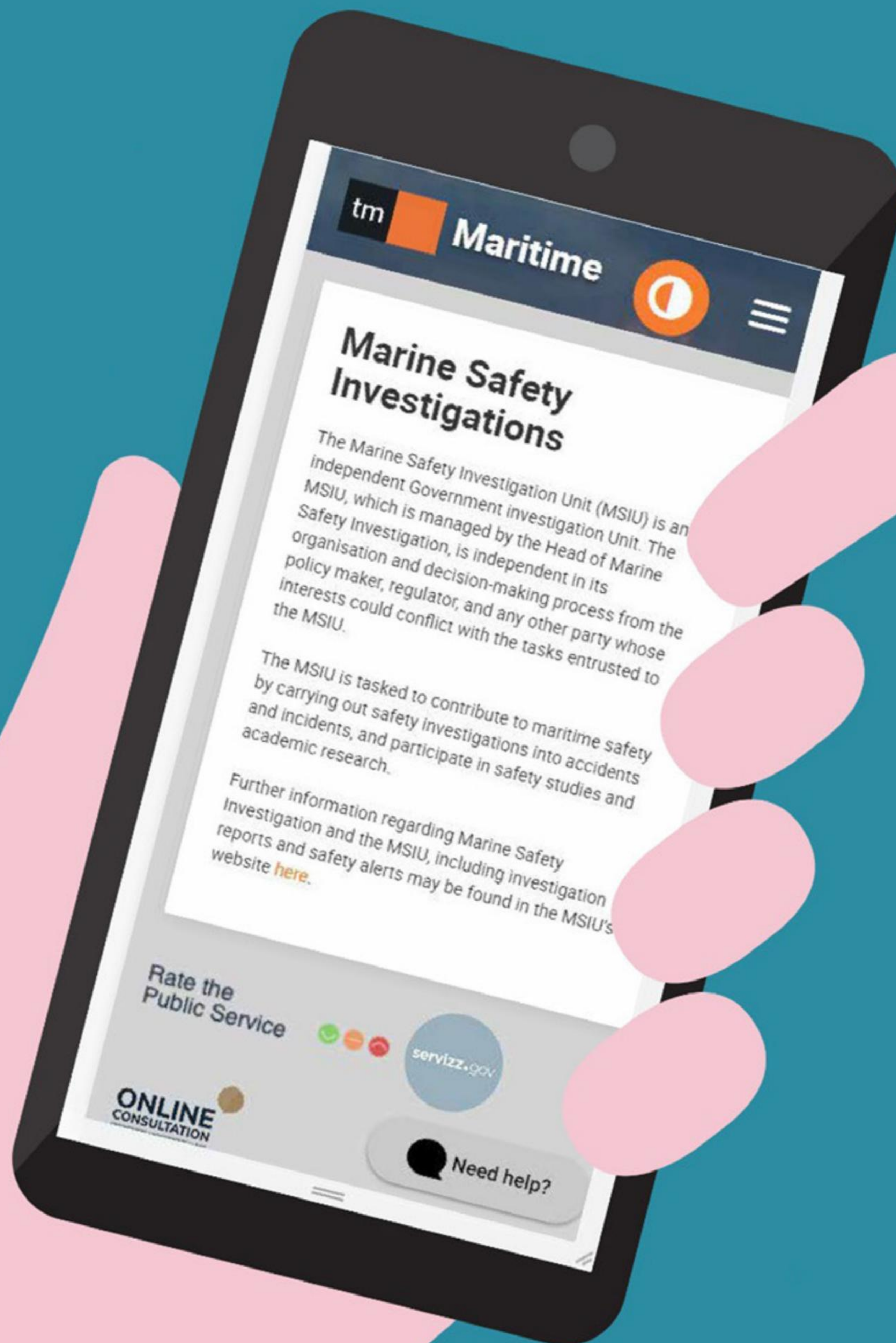
Through the Group’s proactive approach and far-reaching ongoing global network of contacts

he says that they can continue to offer their clients the best products and services from around the world. This, he says, is thanks to the Group’s memberships to several key international organisations, as well as its regular participation in local and international events whether for the consumer at large or for a niche market.

“We put ourselves out there in order to grow, learn and develop, and the success of this is evident through our vast and varied portfolio.” **M+S**



# Iċċekja l-avviżi għall-baħħara qabel ma' tbaħħar







ENVIRONMENTAL  
SUSTAINABILITY



# WHERE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY MEET

As founder and CEO of T4B Services, Patrick Spiteri Staines is helping Malta to become more sustainable, resulting in both economic and environmental benefits for all.

BY CARLA ZAHRA

**W**ith a background in engineering, Ing. Spiteri Staines has gained the facility to apply logic and discipline in his profession, enabling him to achieve his targets and set challenging goals. But it was through his studies for a Master's in Sustainable Energy that his eyes were truly opened to the importance of energy in today's society and how it underpins all economic activity. This led him to providing energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions to help Malta become more sustainable through his company, T4B Services.

"Since setting up T4B Services, I've seen the organisation grow consistently from just an idea into a major respected player within the sector. Witnessing the individuals who form part of our team come together to strive for the same objectives and help each other to achieve these goals gives me great satisfaction," he explains.

Now, he is recreating this in the Energy Efficiency and Renewables sector with increased vigour and ambition.

"Our Energy Efficiency and Renewable solutions have a direct influence on our customers' economic viability, as well as on environmental sustainability. The result of this is very positive for society as it makes organisations more sustainable in the long-term and helps to reduce pollution and global warming, while improving our quality of life," says Ing. Spiteri Staines.

**"It is necessary to adopt the right approach and help the authorities develop policy in the right direction that is for the benefit of all stakeholders."**

"Sustainability is the cornerstone of everything that we strive for. The development of both economic and environmental sustainability has become fundamental in the current economic turmoil that we are witnessing. It has direct implications on company growth and development, as well as on our environment," he says.

Having recently joined the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Committee within The Malta Chamber, Ing. Spiteri Staines has taken on a role that is fundamental to help policy development both for the Chamber and more so to help lobby policy development with the authorities and the Government.

"It is necessary to adopt the right approach and help the authorities to develop policy in the right direction that is for the benefit of all stakeholders. This is fundamental because, as an important stakeholder, we have an important part to play in moulding the way our country forges ahead in these difficult times," he says.

As global challenges unfold, Ing. Spiteri Staines envisages future difficulties related to rising energy costs, logistics and the supply of raw materials. "The current situation developing around us leads us to believe that there are some very tough challenges ahead. The increase in energy costs, which has doubled in some of our neighbouring countries, are likely to eventually hit us here in Malta and we need to be prepared for this, otherwise the consequences could be disastrous," he says. **M+S**

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Coffee**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**

Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**

Books or television? **Books**

Working alone or in a team? **In a team**

Summer or winter? **Summer**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **Both**

Home cooking or dining out? **Both**







BRANCHING OUT: HOW A  
**FAMILY-LED  
 BUSINESS REMAINS  
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 TO ITS  
 ROOTS**

Founded in 1996, OZO Group is one of the largest group of companies operating in Malta with over 3,000 employees across the board. CEO Fabio Luca Muscat explains how prioritising employees helps them remain true to their family values.

BY CARLA ZAHRA

**N**ot every family-run business aspires to expand internationally. And not all those who do plan on growing are successful. In just over 25 years, OZO Group has defied the odds and opened its first international branch in Hungary, after already establishing itself as one of the strongest businesses operating in Malta. As leaders in the field of outsourcing personnel, the company has grown exponentially during the past quarter of a century, but its core values of remaining committed to clients, employees and society, remain unchanged.

“There have been many changes unfolding in our company since we began operations, and this is evident through our diversified portfolio of services,” explains Mr Muscat. “During the early days of the company, we were more focused on offering cleaning services, but now we have successfully tapped into various niches such as the outsourcing and hospitality sectors, as well as expanded our business overseas.”

“Human resources are the best asset we have both as a company and as a country.”





**“Our success has always been powered by our core family values, rooted in prioritising our employees and our clients.”**



Indeed, OZO Group now offers a wide range of services revolving around outsourcing personnel to industries such as hospitality, care, manufacturing, and security industries, as well as specialised cleaning services for aircraft and hospitals. This includes providing key staff to fulfil roles that are essential for many businesses, such as housekeepers, front of house staff, childminders, food and beverage servers, and many more. This diversification was one of the main priorities for Mr Muscat when taking on the role of CEO in 2016. Apart from expanding the group's business activities, he also increased the number of administrative employees to cater for the expected growth. It was also becoming apparent that the group needed to transform from a family business into a more corporate structure. He says:

“Our success has always been powered by our core family values, rooted in prioritising our employees and our clients. I am surrounded by a very good team who go the extra mile to deliver excellent service to our clients, and collectively work to fulfil our company goals.

“The piece of advice which has struck me the most in my career is to have the ability to understand my weaknesses and to make sure I surround myself with people who can do what I can't,” he adds.

Being focused on outsourcing human resources means that the company is highly reliant on its people. As a team, OZO Group is capable of working together to understand and identify challenges to find solutions. “Challenging periods such as COVID-19 led us to discover new skills in our team, which have helped us to communicate better. These will remain with us long after the pandemic,” he adds.

To enhance its offering, the group set up a fully-certified training centre, the OZO Academy, in 2014. Through the academy, they offer a wide variety of courses conducted by internationally-trained tutors to provide the industry with qualified personnel. The courses being offered include Housekeeping, Food and Beverage training, Communication Skills for Hospitality, Culture and Integration and Customer Care. Upon completion of each course, students receive a certificate that is recognised by Malta's National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE).

In 2019, the OZO Academy began welcoming students from outside of the company too, equipping third-party employers and private individuals with skills training to improve not only the standard of service offered to their clients, but also the quality of the industry as a whole.

“Human resources are the best asset we have both as a company and as a country. Our employees are also unionised, in a move towards the

Group's commitment to raising employment standards,” says Mr Muscat.

Over the next few years, OZO Group is aiming to consolidate its business and establish itself worldwide. This journey has already begun, with the first international branch opened in Hungary in January 2022 already employing 25 people.

“Our strategy is to continue looking into several countries to continue our expansion,” he concludes. **M+S**

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Coffee**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**

Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**

Books or television? **TV**

Working alone or in a team? **Definitely In a team**

Summer or winter? **Winter**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **City Breaks**

Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**



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# DIGITAL





# KEEPING CULTURE ALIVE

Digital-first life insurance company IVALIFE has just celebrated its first anniversary. Chief Executive Officer Reuben Zammit speaks about the best achievements of this year and where he expects the company's future to take them.

BY CORYSE BORG

**A** confident and versatile executive with far-reaching and extensive knowledge and skills, Reuben Zammit is admired as being highly focused and committed, able to develop and maintain strong working relationships at all levels of seniority, both with external organisations and internal personnel, and to successfully deliver strategic goals.

Exceedingly resourceful, with a proven track record of business enhancement, he demonstrates a specific and detailed understanding of developing, nurturing, and driving profitable results and business defining projects. He is gifted with a natural talent for blending both people and results, displaying maturity, balance, creativity, and innovative thinking, while fostering a truly inspiring work ethic.

When asked to list the most important highlights of IVALIFE's first year of operations, Mr Zammit says that there were quite a few, especially when one considers the firm's humble beginnings and great ambitions.

"Our clients and business partners recognise us as a trustworthy life insurance provider able to offer simple and affordable products through a paperless platform. Moreover, the company's shareholders and board of directors' conviction in management helps us exceed our internally set objectives. These two factors rank among our most notable accomplishments," he says.

Other focal points of the first year also include setting up their team, introducing new distribution lines and achieving their targeted business volumes, all while managing expectations, staying true to their roots and remaining faithful to all stakeholders.

And what about the challenges of this founding year?

"Our biggest challenge overall is to keep our digital culture alive within the whole operation of the organisation," Mr Zammit muses. "To be truly digital, the organisation needs to think and operate digitally. IVALIFE has the advantage of not having to experience a digital transformation exercise, because we can build our operations to be inherently digital 'by design.'"



**“We are working towards our primary goal of being customer-centric through a zero-tolerance approach to delays in servicing customer requests. It is embedded within IVALIFE’s culture to be proactive, timely and clear in our communication. That’s who we are and what we stand for.”**



In his current role, Mr Zammit’s main tasks include everything from goal setting to recruiting the right team that is best positioned to execute the strategy. He is responsible for steering the team in the right direction, providing both autonomy and assistance as the team runs into challenges (or, where the goals show they are off course, setting them back on track). Lastly, he monitors their progress and periodically reassesses the two initial building blocks – the set strategy and the support team. Crucially, he works on having the perseverance to adjust accordingly and begin the cycle again.

One of the characteristics that Mr Zammit attributes to him being a success in his chosen role is his positive mindset. He believes that individuals can do things together to succeed as a collective.

“Success is achieved through building a great supportive team, a team that complements you, leverages your strengths and adds skills where you are not as strong or experienced. Shaping interactions with the team is just as important as the team itself. Mutual trust and respect of the team members is a key element for any high-performing team,” he stresses.

He also extolls the virtues of time management, calling it “the most valuable resource. Finding the right time allocation between strategies, employees, customers, operational performance, suppliers, and board members is vital. No matter how many hours you work, you will run out of time if you don’t rigorously apply solid time management protocol.”

Mr Zammit says that it is also important to be bold and take risks – and not underestimate the team’s readiness for change.

“Communication is the starting point of results. It is essential to thoroughly digest all inputs and listen. Clarity is essential in making sure the message is constantly reinforced across the different channels, translated and re-shared. This is key to driving success,” he says, “We are working towards our primary goal of being customer-centric through a zero-tolerance approach to delays in servicing customer requests. It is embedded within IVALIFE’s culture to be proactive, timely and clear in our communication. That’s who we are and what we stand for.”

In recent years, he says, consumer behaviour has shifted in relation to buying life insurance.

“Clients do shop around, they conduct their research, they compare product options, pricing and read the information given,” Mr Zammit attests. “While pricing is important, clients also weigh in on the availability of the future support of the life insurance undertaking, seeing that life insurance product offerings are long term. They also demand a professional approach from any life insurance provider with documentation which is easy to comprehend, moving away from the small print that one struggles to understand. Our approach in this regard is being simple, professional, and direct by providing documentation which is easy to understand.”

According to Mr Zammit, one reason that IVALIFE will still be standing where others have fallen is because it emphasises a clear focus on the customer by maintaining a flat hierarchy with a flexible and dynamic approach. This creates a working environment where

everyone feels appreciated and is willing to contribute towards the company’s successes.

This attitude is very much in keeping with the teachings of one of Mr Zammit’s inspirations in life – the leader of the Roman Catholic church, Pope Francis, born in Argentina as Jorge Mario Bergoglio, whose default setting is to include and encourage rather than exclude and condemn.

Looking forward, what does Mr Zammit think will be the key enablers for driving more innovation and adaptability within life insurance?

“Portals with a user-friendly approach, offering clearly understandable information to guide the clients through the insurance journey are essential,” he states. “Additionally, a quick turnaround when attending to customer needs, and the proportionality of regulation, taking cognizance of the substance of the products being offered is also very important.”

In the future, Mr Zammit envisions the insurance sector evolving to provide better services by offering more automation and less human interaction.

“In essence, this means web portals with artificial intelligence assistance to attend to clients’ real time queries, offering immediate, clear, and understandable information which is supplemented by professional human support depending on the detailed needs. Innovation, being digital and providing online customer support is the way forward,” he concludes. **M+S**

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Coffee**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**

Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**

Books or television? **Books**

Working alone or in a team?

**Working alone (to focus better)**

Summer or winter? **Winter**

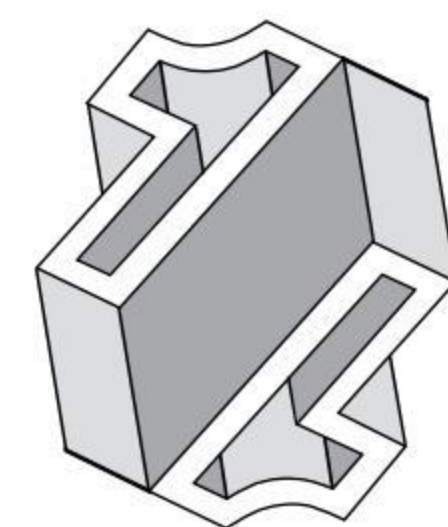
Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays?

**Country holidays**

Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**





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# MAYPOLE

## NOT JUST ANOTHER SHOP!



The old business adage tells us that the 'Customer is king'. The use of this phrase in marketing campaigns over the years has rendered it pretty much a cliché but, in reality, this reduces nothing from the principle from which it is coined.



## Maypole shops have practically become landmarks, due to the wide distribution of their distinctive, inviting green signs.

**A**t Maypole, we go beyond this, since we consider our customers to be our partners, and therefore direct all our efforts towards them. We work to make sure that the service we give to all our clients is of the highest standard, and that the quality of our product is maintained at the levels that they have come to expect.

However, that is not enough. We currently have 27 retail outlets in Malta (with another one to open imminently in I-Ibraġġ), two in Gozo and two 'Nenu the Artisan Baker' restaurants serving traditional Maltese baked cuisine. Our staff receive constant training on how to make every patron who walks through our doors feel welcome and appreciated.

Our constant efforts were rewarded and recognised when, in our first participation last year, Maypole won First Prize in 'The Supermarkets and Mini Markets' category of the *Servizz bi Tbissima* (Service with a Smile) Award organised by the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA).

It is pertinent to underline the fact that the selection of the winners was through a process of voting by the general public that took place between the 23 July and the 20 August 2021. This means a lot to us, because it is not an award that is chosen top down, but bottom up, and it therefore reflects how we are perceived by the thousands of our regular clients who visit Maypole outlets on a daily basis.

However, we do not intend to rest on our laurels. Complacency kills, and this recognition of our efforts and investments in 360° customer satisfaction has placed a bigger burden on our shoulders by establishing a higher bar that we now need - and want - to maintain.

Our 'customer first' philosophy is not only implemented through the high quality and freshness of our products, and by our professional and welcoming staff. In establishing our outlets, we start first by selecting our locations. We have carefully sited our shops either in town or village cores, or else on thoroughfares, keeping in mind that our clients need to have their shopping experience to be as convenient and easy as possible, especially if doing last-minute shopping for daily essentials when driving back home after a long day's work. Maypole shops have practically become landmarks, due to the wide distribution of their distinctive, inviting green signs.

Having established our locations - an ongoing process as evidenced by some recent relocations and our plans for future shops - we take great care in stocking as wide a range of products as possible, aiming to make it easier for our clients to use Maypole outlets as a one-stop-shop for all their requirements. However, keeping our clients' best interests at heart, there were some choices that had to be made.

We believe that there is nothing as welcoming as the smell of freshly-baked bread. This is so much so that, in other countries, many shops that sell bread go to the trouble of acquiring and using sprays to create this smell artificially. Having said that, we stress that we are primarily bakers, and therefore the smell in our shops is genuine, and really comes from freshly-baked and delivered bread, and not out of a spray can.



Sebastian Debono, Maypole Director receiving the award Servizz bi Tbissima from MCCAA after classifying first in the category of Supermarkets and Mini Markets.

This meant that we had to avoid stocking, in any large quantity if at all, certain toiletries, soaps and detergents with an overpowering smell. Such a smell would not only have impacted negatively on the homely, warm character provided by the smell of freshly-baked bread, but would also create the undesirable risk of this smell pervading and permeating other products. We made this choice consciously, fully aware that this was an area where respect for our consumers had to come first, like they had placed us first in their assessment for the MCCAA award. We really and truly consider our clients to be our partners, and their satisfaction is our satisfaction.

We shall continue implementing our doctrine of strict controls on quality, hygiene, and pleasant service, keeping our customers' interests always first and foremost. Maypole is a family concern catering for families on the Maltese Islands.

We are not, and never will be, just another shop. **M•S**



# A Success Built Around LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

By implementing a customer-centric strategy backed by the shareholders and driven by a dedicated workforce, BNF is today a household name and enjoys the reputation of a bank with excellent customer service.

**F**rom the outset, the Bank stood out and distinguished itself through its highly recognisable brand, its strong personal relationships with customers, its business agility, and its innovative products – with customers remaining at the heart of BNF’s client-centric operations.

All these factors contributed to the Bank quickly carving out its own niche in the local financial services landscape, as it established itself with a number of branches forming its retail network covering Malta and Gozo. Together with a business centre offering a suite of products and tailor-made, personalised solutions to personal and business clients from start-ups to large corporates, BNF Bank offers straightforward and relevant products for one’s phases during the life journey.

In recognising the generational shift in the way clients bank and do business, and by acknowledging that customer experience needs to be refreshed often and regularly, BNF Bank has long launched its strategy for digital transformation. This technological drive enabled the implementation of new or upgraded digital customer interfaces, including contactless debit and credit cards, express deposit machines, a new internet banking platform and the BNF mobile app amongst others. Together with these enhanced services, there was significant investment behind the scenes in preparation for the next phases of development.

With an outlook towards digitisation and the implementation of innovative processes and services to the benefits of its customers,



Temenos Transact and Infinity - considered as one of the most successful and widely used digital core banking solution in the world - was selected for the Bank’s core banking transformation.

“Our digital transformation process is based on developing strategic nodes that are scalable with customer-focused designs,” said Michael Collis, BNF’s Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director. “We are adding new capabilities to ultimately take our service offering to higher levels, while ensuring sustainable growth. Automation and personalisation have become key to the customer journey, and our team remains focused on achieving and maintaining results that make a tangible difference to our clients.”

The Bank will continue to invest in technology, in its branch network and in its people, while expanding its activities and client base, to become the bank of choice in Malta for families and family business. BNF’s efforts and results have been recognised by international reputable institutions such as The Banker publication, by the Financial Times bestowing the Bank with accolades including the Bank of the Year award in 2020 and 2021 respectively.

By adopting a customer-first attitude in its operations, the team at BNF focuses on personal relationships with its customers based on listening, trust, transparency and loyalty. These relationships make the most of open conversations through which the team strives to understand client aspirations and life plans.

The Bank has announced a robust performance for 2021, registering the strongest annual financial results ever in the history of the bank with a resultant growth in its total assets by over 11 per cent over the previous year, hitting the €1bn mark.

The net operational income also increased due to growth in loans and advances to customers, while the liquidity position and capital adequacy remained strong through effective capital planning. Aligned to the security framework expected now in Malta and the EU, the Bank further continued to strengthen its regulatory and compliance functions that ensure sound corporate governance and robust risk mitigation when onboarding new clients.

“Alongside a team of dedicated professionals, BNF’s Vision 2023 lays out strategic pillars for taking the Bank forward”, stated Collis. “We continue to work relentlessly towards our long-term and sustainable objectives of growth, internationalisation and technology transformation. Our core aim remains to keep our customers at the centre of everything we do, while providing a competitive suite of products delivered through an omnichannel approach. Our stance remains proactive to anticipate trends and remain a step ahead of both planned and unexpected change.” **M•S**



“We are adding new capabilities to ultimately take our service offering to higher levels, while ensuring sustainable growth. Automation and personalisation have become key to the customer journey, and our team remains focused on achieving and maintaining results that make a tangible difference to our clients.”





**Thallix id-dgħajsa fihom  
bla bżonn biex ikun jista'  
jinqeda kulhadd.**





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**LAURA SUE MALLIA, DIRECTOR RISK MANAGEMENT, POLICY AND EU AFFAIRS, TRANSPORT MALTA**

**S**ustainability is the recent buzzword that we have all come to be familiar with and which has penetrated almost all aspects of our life. While many are ready to embrace a more sustainable way of living, this concept may still seem abstract to some. Putting this in the local transport context, there is scope for a shift to the benefit of the environment, citizens and future generations. Transport Malta is continuously striving to promote, implement and encourage the uptake of cleaner transport with initiatives being in line with the latest technologies and research.

The latest National Household Travel Survey carried out in November 2021 showed that close to 75% of all trips are carried out using the private car and as the driver. Furthermore, a good share of the trips carried out by the sample population were for work purposes. This indicates that addressing transport to and from work has the potential of positively impacting our transport system both in terms of traffic flow where congestion is decreased and, also in terms of emissions and a better quality of life.

One of the most effective ways of reducing transport related emissions is through the electrification of the vehicle fleet. In 2022, 20 million has been allocated to promote the purchase of cleaner modes of transport including Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV), Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles and Range Extender Electric Vehicles with grants available both for registering a new or a used vehicle. While the greatest focus has been on encouraging the electrification of private vehicles, the logistics industry and heavier vehicles are increasingly targeted. This is supported with micro mobility solutions which are low-cost and highly energy efficient. These include bicycles, pedelecs (electric bicycles where the rider's pedalling is assisted) and e-kick scooters. While this form of mobility is a relatively new element to the Maltese Islands, it is proving its potential to penetrate through transport problems such as

congestion especially in those areas which are prone to congestion and lack parking availability. Transport Malta embraces such new forms of alternative transport, understands the potential and takes an active role through stakeholder consultation and regularising.

Furthermore, Green Travel Plans have been found to have many benefits and on various levels. In a nutshell, both the business owners and the employees benefit from significant savings in terms of rising costs owning and maintaining a private vehicle. On the other hand, the community benefits from less congestion, time saving and improved air quality. In view of the current common practice of single user car travel for work purposes, businesses should seek to better understand the benefits of developing and implementing Green Travel Plans both as part of their corporate social responsibility efforts but also for the health and well being of their workforce. Whilst individuals might be interested in travelling more actively and sustainably, a lack of facilities such as for example showers, charging facilities and safe bicycle parking discourages such practices. In having a workplace which supports employees by providing such facilities there is increased benefit for all and further promotes alternative modes to the private car for the other employees who are hesitant making the shift. Other considerations may be remote working or hybrid solutions and the introduction of flexible working hours which enables employees to avoid travelling in peak hours.

Transport Malta, as the Authority responsible for all transport related matters, is available to support such initiatives through the sharing of knowledge and, also through grants which are available from time to time. This is the time to initiate change and companies are encouraged to take the lead and actively support their workforce in becoming more sustainable. No matter how small, each step towards the right direction is welcomed by the users, society, and our planet. **M+S**



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MINISTER FOR ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND ENTERPRISE, MIRIAM DALLI

# GROW TO PROSPER

Your vision, much like ours, is a forward-looking one. For the success of any business depends on its ability to regenerate itself, retain its relevance in an ever-developing economy as it firmly cements its reputation for one that can deliver.



**T**he country is eyeing a modern, fairer, and greener economic model. A stronger economy that targets not only growth, but better prosperity and an improved quality of life. A sustainable economy which helps our country reduce its emissions and transition towards a net-zero climate.

A key component of this is the transition towards a circular economy, a transition that thrives on innovation, research, and development.

Realistically, how do we achieve this and why should efforts be shifted in this direction?

By targeting the very initial stages of how products are designed, before they are launched on the market, businesses would be able to prevent waste generation and promote the reuse of such products in different forms. In this way, one can fully optimise the use of resources and materials which are retained in the economy while increasing project longevity for as long as possible.

In 2020, as part of the plans for continued sustainable growth, the European Commission adopted the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) with the aim of reducing environmental pressures and creating more green jobs, in an effort to strengthen our economy.

This is indeed one of the main building blocks of the European Green Deal, Europe's new agenda for sustainable growth.

The Green Deal will have an enormously positive effect, beyond merely the environment. It will modernise industry, improve social inclusion and create green and blue jobs. One of the most fundamental conditions that I deem important is that people are equipped with the skills required for the green transition. To remain competitive and provide quality careers, businesses need realistic targets, planning, security, and flexibility when new measures to mitigate climate change are adopted.

That is why we felt it was ever so important to keep on supporting businesses even during the most challenging times.

With the goal of ensuring better wellbeing and a higher quality of life in our modern societies, we must assess the full life cycle of products on the market, consumption patterns as well as foster systemic change. By design, the concept of having a circular economy is regenerative; ensuring that all the energy and materials injected in the economic system respect the environment with the least possible impact – in what we now call 'eco-design'.

While still supporting the notion of recycling, it is important to understand that circular economy does not necessarily push this forward, but rather, it has to do with how waste management investments and policy actions are designed to influence a more sustainable market for a greener and more circular economy. This ultimately leads to the longevity of products and, importantly, investment.

Sustainable production and consumer choices in the circular economy hold a key to addressing this growing problem. How?

This can be done by making more efficient use of secondary and critical raw materials, creating jobs in new sectors where waste is now a resource, educating consumers of all ages on how to generate less waste and stimulating demand for circular products through public procurement and economic incentives.

The development of sustainable products must become the norm so that opting for sustainable materials and products becomes the default choice. The list of sectors which can greatly influence this transition is endless, which makes collaboration and a joined-up approach pivotal.

We have achieved a lot, but we will need to do much more for our country to truly lead the national transition towards a circular economy, especially in the sectors of waste and buildings.

If we want change, we need to start by being the change and source, and produce and dispose with circularity in mind. Ultimately, our very own choices will not be solely safeguarding our environment but our own economy and longevity. **M+S**



A COLLECTIVE DRIVE TO  
**MAKE**  
THINGS  
**BETTER**

Christabelle Camilleri, CEO of V&C Group, believes that striving for improvement is the best route to success. She speaks to The Malta Chamber about how the Group is living up to its new tagline of 'Making Things Better'.





**G**lobal Citizen Advocate, Ambassador for Mental Health in Malta and volunteer for the environmental organisation Din L-Art Helwa are just three of the roles that Christabelle has taken on to help bring positive change to her home country. Her passion and drive for Malta and its citizens also extends through her role as CEO of V&C Group, a structure of 34 companies operating across multiple sectors including development, retail, education, health, real estate and hospitality, among others.

After graduating with a B.Commerce degree from the University of Malta, Christabelle read for a Masters of Accountancy degree from the same institution – where she won the RSM Best Dissertation Award – and later became a Senior Associate at PWC Malta. She then joined one of the companies within V&C Group as a finance manager before progressing to her current role as CEO. As a young and driven leader, it is evident that Christabelle’s hard work has paid off. Some may say that being a woman makes her success even more impressive, but she is hopeful that this differentiator will soon become irrelevant.

“Call me an optimist, but I think that we are moving in the right direction. Having said that men and women are equal, does not mean that they are identical. They bring different perspectives to the table and I consider that to be a good thing,” she says.

As a firm believer in leading by example, Christabelle emphasises that actions are always more valuable than words. She maintains an open-door policy for everyone in the Group, insisting that this is the best way for everyone to feel connected to their outfit and, by extension, remain loyal to it.

For Christabelle, inspirational figures tend to have a mutual ability to make things happen by sticking to their path. She notes that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is currently top of her list.

**“Having said that men and women are equal, does not mean that they are identical. They bring different perspectives to the table and I consider that to be a good thing.”**

“Here’s a 44-year-old leader, entertainer and actor who inspired his fellow citizens enough to trust him to run their country. He has now taken this massive achievement to another level. Precisely when Ukraine’s fate is in the balance, he has moved his people to defend it with their lives and passionately gathered all the people of good will around the globe behind him.”

Since becoming CEO and CFO, Christabelle has achieved a number of feats, including increasing profit margins, productivity and revenue through implementing cost-saving initiatives, targeted acquisitions and a lean management system. She has also spearheaded the expansion and diversification of the Group into the different areas of business and operations – specifically education, hospitality, manufacturing, health and retail.

Christabelle manages the operations of the HR and Accounting teams to sustain growth and recruit top talent and she has also implemented a new, more efficient and accurate cloud-based accountancy software. Furthermore, she streamlined the Group’s financial planning and management and implemented internal audit procedures, while securing numerous industry awards in all the market sectors in which the Group operates.

With all of this under her belt, what would a normal working day look like for this bright CEO?

“I wish I knew myself! But, honestly, there is no such thing as a typical day and that is part of the joy and satisfaction of my work. Business diversification has meant that I live my day in chunks which very often have nothing to do with each other. I just love the rush of shifting from full-on concentration on construction one hour and then switching to equally complete concentration on retail the next,” says Christabelle.

V&C Group has become a trailblazer of positive change in Malta. This, according to Christabelle, boils down to the ability to constantly look to the future while keeping both feet firmly planted on the ground, investing back into its companies as well as in its employees’ training. She says:





**“In today’s business world innovation is the daily light shed on the future of one’s business. Dim that light and the businesses grope in dark. Make it brighter and the future looks clearer and more promising.”**

“In today’s business world, innovation is the daily light shed on the future of one’s business. Dim that light and the businesses grope in dark. Make it brighter and the future looks clearer and more promising.

“Bo Bennett, the famous author and social scientist, once said, ‘success is not what you have, but who you are.’ Without knowing it, this dictum inspired our Group from its inception. We grew and became market leaders in various sectors because we pursued success,” she adds.

“Being in such different markets means that the overall Group oversight has to be versatile, visionary, fact-based and driven by timely performance reporting,” she explains.

“The changing needs of clients vary by sector. For instance, some are impacted by rapid technological change more than others. Some require more client contact than others. Conscious of this diversity, we are managerially set up to smoothly switch gears in each company according to market trends.”

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Neither**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**

Sweet or savoury? **Sweet**

Books or television? **Books**

Working alone or in a team? **In a team**

Summer or winter? **Winter**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **City breaks**

Home cooking or dining out? **Dining out**

As a result, the groups’ responsiveness to clients is constantly being recalibrated according to their changing needs and preferences, living up to the new tagline of ‘Making things better’.

“This word is at the heart and soul of the V&C Group. We are passionate about doing things better, because we want to make our country, and our planet, a better place,” she adds.

To reduce the Group’s carbon footprint, a solar farm powers the company offices, as well as other offices and households. A reverse osmosis system is used to service all the companies and the 3 Rs – reduce, reuse and recycle – are practised widely.

“We believe that we borrow this country and this planet from our forefathers and hold it in trust until we bequeath it to future generations. Through the latest specialised technologies and skill sets, we are determined to deliver the best goods and services to our clients. We are equally determined to use the same tools to respect our country’s environment and that of our planet,” she adds.

To conclude, Christabelle notes that the Group brand has branched out and flourished due to the strongly rooted belief in making things better.

“We don’t want to grow the company by rote, and stay inside the box. ‘Better’ was the only route ahead to grow, professionalise and diversify. With this vision, we can dream big, such as by exploring foreign markets, while ensuring that such dreams come true,” she says. **M+S**



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# CONTINUING A LEGACY

# 40

# YEARS ON

Thomas Curmi and Joseph Tabone both took on the role of director at Ta' Frenč in 2020, but the start of their relationship with the restaurant can be traced back to a much earlier date. Having been a core part of the team for decades, the two new leaders are determined to continue pushing boundaries.

BY CARLA ZAHRA







**S**ituated in an old farmhouse in the quaint town of Xaghra, Gozo, Ta' Frenċ promises a unique experience for every diner. Although the team is incredibly passionate about their food, they strive to deliver a holistic experience in which high-quality service and a beautiful environment complement the cuisine. Shifting the public perspective that Ta' Frenċ is simply a place to celebrate a special occasion, the team are now working to bring the concept of celebration into the everyday, creating a space where people can gather to enjoy exquisite food, a wide variety of wines and excellent service.

"Our restaurant is like a theatre, and we ensure that our visitors enjoy the show," says Thomas. Complete with a wine cellar stocked with over 400 labels, as well as a fresh herb garden where guests can relax and unwind, the setting is bound to exceed first-time visitors' expectations. They have even created their own brand of champagne, bottled in France, exclusively for Ta' Frenċ.

Since its establishment in 1982, Ta' Frenċ has set the standard for exquisite dining in Gozo. This year marks the restaurant's 40th anniversary, but in spite of having new leadership, the core values of the business remain the same. Thomas and Joseph describe themselves as opposites – Thomas's nervous personality contrasts with Joseph's calmness – but their shared passion for catering and the Ta' Frenċ name, in particular, have led them to the same path.

Following the untimely passing of the two original founders, Ino Attard and Lino Cefai, the duo was determined to continue building upon the restaurant's legacy and raising the bar for the industry as a whole.

"When we first told Lino about our intentions to take over the business, he welcomed the idea," says Thomas. This seal of approval paved the way for the next chapter for Ta' Frenċ.



**"Our restaurant is like a theatre, and we ensure that our visitors enjoy the show"**

THOMAS





## Quickfire Questions

### Thomas

- Tea or coffee? **Coffee**
- Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**
- Sweet or savoury? **Sweet**
- Books or television? **Books**
- Working alone or in a team? **Both!**
- Summer or winter? **Winter**
- Android or iOS? **iOS**
- City breaks or country holidays? **Country**
- Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**

### Joseph

- Tea or coffee? **Tea**
- Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**
- Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**
- Books or television? **TV**
- Working alone or in a team? **Team, definitely**
- Summer or winter? **Winter**
- Android or iOS? **Android**
- City breaks or country holidays? **Country**
- Home cooking or dining out? **Home for every day, dining out for days off**

## “We’re always trying to be the pioneering force in our industry”

JOSEPH

Thomas and Joseph have a long history of working together, as well as with the other members of the team. Their experiences within the company give them an in-depth understanding of how every aspect of the business works, from the kitchen all the way to the back office. Having joined the team as a head waiter 27 years ago, later becoming a food and beverage manager, Joseph knows exactly what it takes to provide great service. Thomas’ experiences, on the other hand, have equipped him with the knowledge it takes to run a successful restaurant behind-the-scenes. He first got involved in the administration of the company’s farmhouses and restaurant in 2002, visiting the restaurant only twice a week before taking on a full-time position to manage the company’s accounts.

By 2020, both Thomas and Joseph had become a core part of the business. Their transition from employees to directors, however, was not an easy one. Rather, they would describe it as a ‘baptism of fire’, coinciding with the beginning of the pandemic.

“Within our first year of operations, we needed to close for three-month stretches, twice,” explains Joseph. “It was also difficult to retain our employees who had grown alongside us for so many years, but we managed to find a formula that worked.”

At the time, the restaurant building needed to undergo some maintenance work. So, the leadership team decided to employ its own staff to carry out the repairs, keeping them motivated, energetic for when they re-open their doors.

“We may be directors, but we see ourselves on the same level as our colleagues,” says Thomas. “The most important thing for us is to maintain trust and respect between every member of our team.”

In order to keep the synchronicity going, Thomas emphasises the need to give the team enough space to grow and work autonomously, while being there to guide them when needed and continuing to be involved in the operations.

In 2020, the restaurant also put Gozo on the Michelin map, making the cut in the Michelin guide for the Maltese Islands. In spite of rising prices and a shortage of skilled workers, Ta’ Frenċ is on its way to achieving its next goal of becoming the first Michelin star restaurant in Gozo.

“We’re always trying to be the pioneering force in our industry,” says Joseph. “During the quieter season, we explore different restaurants abroad to experience the latest trends that are unfolding on an international scale – such as during our recent trip to the Champagne region in France – and implement them in our own way back home.”

“As you can see, we never have a day off!” says Thomas, smiling. “But when we do, I like to spend most of my free time with family, swimming and enjoying countryside walks with my wife and our dog. We also love to travel during long weekends, especially to Ireland and Sicily.”

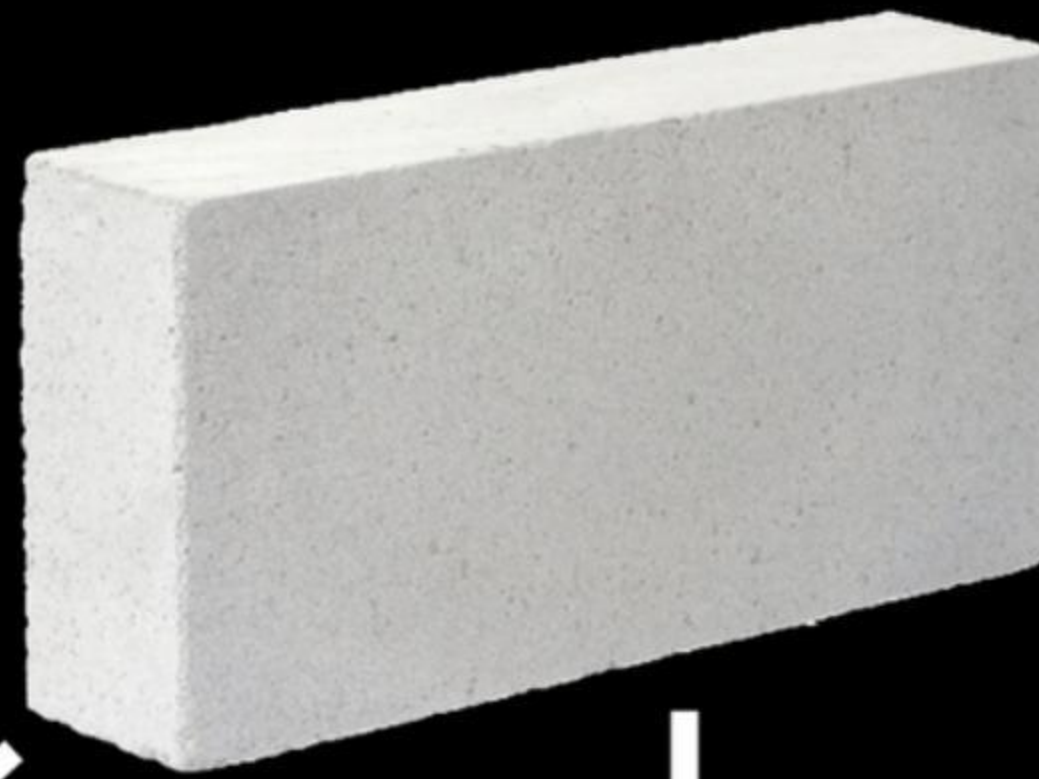
“You can usually find me by the sea, I jump in at the first chance I get,” says Joseph. “I also love travelling to Ireland the north of Italy in particular.” **M+S**



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DELIVERING

TRUL

“ We are very optimistic that we are providing a portfolio of products of the highest quality, designed to engage the market, especially those niches that have felt disenchanted by the previous offering.”



Chief Commercial Officer of National Lottery plc, Franco De Gabriele, gives a first glimpse of what the company is preparing for the upcoming takeover of the national lottery of Malta on 5th July 2022.

# A NATIONAL LOTTERY SERVICE THAT IS WHOLLY MALTESE

**B**ased at the Portomaso Tower, the National Lottery team exudes a sense of energy, pride, and dedication to the task at hand. It's no secret that this is a monumental project that will see, for the first time, a wholly-owned Maltese company operating what is essentially the most important and valuable gaming operation in Malta. National Lottery plc will be taking over the operations of National Lottery from Maltco Lotteries, which has been at the helm of the lottery since 2004.

## WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE NATIONAL LOTTERY PROJECT AND HOW THE COMPANY PREPARED ITSELF FOR SUCH A DEFINING VENTURE?

National Lottery plc is a subsidiary of the largest land-based gaming operator in Malta, the IZI Group. The idea to venture into the operations of the national lottery started more than 10 years ago in 2012, when the Group had joined forces with International Gaming Technology (IGT) to bid for the concession of the national lottery. At the time, we had just missed out on our bid to operate the national lottery. However, that did not deter us from trying again.

We continued to focus on the project and, a decade later, we successfully earned the right to operate the national lottery after the successful conclusion of the Request for Proposals (RFP) process that was undertaken by the Privatisation Unit (PU) on behalf of the Government of Malta.

The operation of the national lottery was the only missing business vertical for the Group. Adding the national lottery to the established operations that the Group has nurtured over the years – namely the Dragonara Casino and the IZIBET retail network – gives us a great sense of pride in being able to provide the market with a holistic service across the gaming spectrum.

Preparations for the project started over two years ago and were crystallised in November 2021 when National Lottery plc was declared as the preferred bidder to take over the national lottery by the Privatisation Unit. Our commitment to the project was clear and unequivocal; this is the largest investment undertaken in the gaming industry in Malta, and one of the largest concession fees paid for a public concession, a total of €125M over the next 10 years.





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### YOU RECENTLY UNVEILED THE NATIONAL LOTTERY BRAND IN A SYMBOLIC EVENT IN MDINA. HOW DOES THIS CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF YOUR PROJECT, A NATIONAL LOTTERY SERVICE THAT IS TRULY MALTESE?

The lottery market in Malta has a long tradition in the Maltese grassroots. The first Lotto draw was undertaken in 1923, nearly a hundred years ago and before that, the Maltese participated in the German and Sicilian lotto. Ever since we commenced our preparations for this project, we were driven by the notion to give back to the Maltese a national lottery that belongs to them and their heritage. For the last 18 years, the lottery has been run by a subsidiary of the Greek group Intralot, which decided to do away with the term National Lottery. Our first decision was to bring back the National Lottery as the brand under which all other product brands will co-exist under one ecosystem.

The choice of name was not coincidental. We undertook thorough market research to determine what the market truly wants, and this marketing effort has enabled us to come up with the core requisites which we believe will make this project successful.

### ARE WE TO EXPECT MAJOR CHANGES TO THE PRODUCT PORTFOLIO OF THE NATIONAL LOTTERY?

I wouldn't categorise the changes to be undertaken as revolutionary in nature, but yes, we will undertake changes that we feel will continue to grow the inherent demand for draw-based games such as Lotto and Super 5. Our main philosophy is to make the games more engaging, to make the games easier to access and to ensure that all the products are delivered in a safe and responsible manner.

We will be including a second draw for Lotto which, for 100 years, was always drawn on Saturday. Now, from 9th July onwards, a second draw will be organised every Tuesday evening. Capping on wins is being eliminated and we are improving pay-outs to make the games more engaging. The envisaged changes will improve the popularity of the games that already enjoy a strong inherent demand locally.

We will also be introducing new games that have performed very well in similar markets to Malta. We are excited to see how these new games, such as the PICK 3, will perform.

### WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS THAT WILL DRIVE THE BUSINESS OF THE NATIONAL LOTTERY?

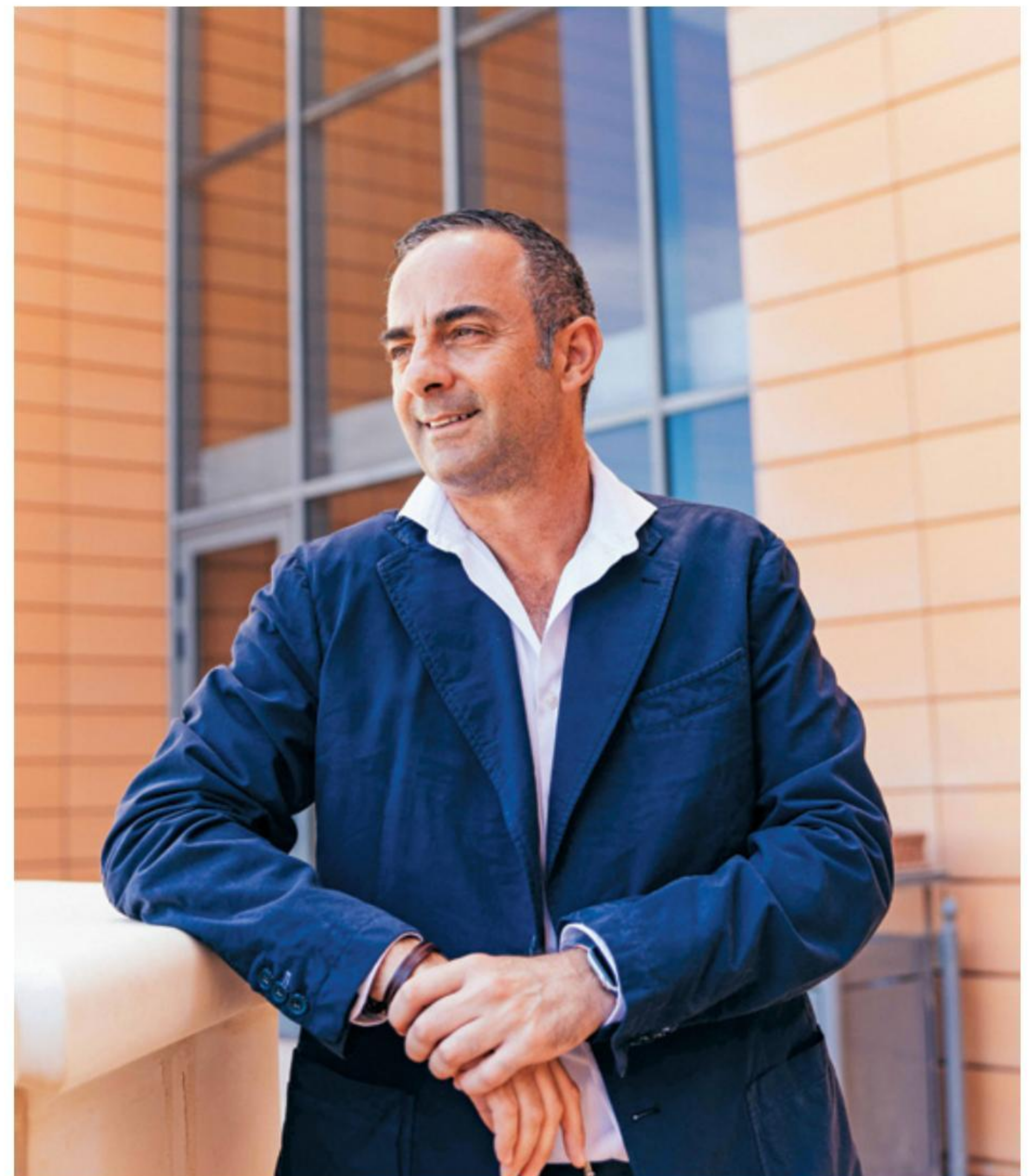
From day one we knew that to deliver a strong business proposition in this sector we needed four very important factors.

The first is a strong product portfolio that the market can relate to, which is being brought about through the changes to existing games that I explained earlier. After considerable research with all market stakeholders, we are very optimistic that we are providing a portfolio of products of the highest quality, designed to engage the market, especially those niches that have felt disenchanted by the previous offering.

Second, but equally important, is the distribution and accessibility of the product. After months of discussions with the representatives of the national lottery agents, we have concluded an agency agreement that is forward-looking and that fulfils the requirements of all stakeholders over time. Product accessibility, work practices and service levels are essential elements of our offering.

The third is the trust factor, which can only be attained if the market truly believes in our service offering and how we are delivering it. All our services are offered in a safe and responsible manner in full compliance with the regulations governing this sector. We have ample experience in this area, having delivered a vast array of other gaming products in the market for over 20 years.

Finally, we made sure that the innovative aspects of the business are well taken care of, by teaming up with the largest lottery technology provider in the world, namely International Gaming Technology (IGT). IGT provides us with the right infrastructure to deliver a world-class lottery product throughout the term of the concession.



### FINALLY, WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES THAT LIE AHEAD IN THIS VENTURE?

The most essential element in any business is to build a work culture that is based on core fundamentals. The people across the Group need to be like-minded and have the passion to succeed. We have managed to find the right people to form part of what I consider to be a formidable team, with most of the senior executives having been with the Group for nearly 10 years. We are always on the lookout for the right talent to fulfil the roles that continue to assist our growth. The overall objective is to improve the collective learning process of the Group and to build knowledge across all the facets of the business. The opportunities that lie ahead are all a function of our ability to understand the market and deliver the experiences that the market is looking for.

In terms of challenges, the gaming industry has evolved over time and through this evolution, new challenges emerge. The single most important challenge that we face is that of meeting customer expectations in such a dynamic and evolving market. Our philosophy has always been built on the premise of offering gaming experiences in

a responsible, fair, and transparent manner. This dictates a zero-tolerance policy for financial crime and compliance culture that is ingrained in our operation. In many ways, we consider ourselves role model operators and are proud of our unblemished track record in terms of compliance. This drive towards transparency and fairness is highly appreciated by our customers and is the main reason why we continue to be a trusted operator by thousands of customers who regularly visit our establishments. **M+S**

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Coffee**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**

Sweet or savoury? **Sweet**

Books or television? **TV**

Working alone or in a team? **In a team**

Summer or winter? **Winter**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **City Breaks**

Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**



# BAD BOY CLEANERS FIVE INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

Offering janitorial services for domestic and industrial buildings, Bad Boy Cleaners has managed to establish itself as a market leader within an industry that is heavily impacted by difficult labour conditions and high employee turnover. Director Claudine Ellul Sullivan explains the five key ingredients of Bad Boy's strategy, which she believes have helped the company achieve its current success and will continue helping them flourish in the future.







**“By investing in our staff, we invest in our business as our people are the brand and our service promise is based on their abilities.”**

## **1 RESPECT FOR PEOPLE**

As a service business, the quality that Bad Boy Cleaners provides its customers is fully dependent on the people who carry out the work. Therefore, keeping employees motivated is key. In reality, not many people dream about becoming cleaners, since it's not an easy or glamorous job. This does not mean, however, that employees don't deserve to be happy or feel respected at work. Bad Boy Cleaners pride themselves on having a very high employee retention rate as they prioritise their satisfaction and strive to find and retain the best people. This reduces employee turnover and, in turn, enables them to provide their clients with a high-quality and consistent service that is attributable to their motivated and experienced staff pool.

Their focus on employee welfare, well-being and satisfaction enabled Bad Boy Cleaners to achieve the 'Employer of the Year Award' in 2021, which was a great achievement for them and the industry as a whole. It shows that even in a difficult, labour intensive and highly competitive industry, focusing on employees is still critical and worthwhile.

“We have a deep appreciation for each employee's contribution, whether they are managers, window cleaners, drivers or employees who provide janitorial services; we believe we are all unique, and indispensable, and that we all have something to contribute to the company's success,” says Claudine.

## **2 INVESTMENT IN STAFF**

Bad Boy Cleaners continuously invests in its team members, irrespective of their position or duties within the company. “We ensure that all employees are in a position to perform, so we give all our staff a thorough induction programme and hold regular refresher training sessions during the year to ensure that everyone feels confident in their work and abilities,” explains Claudine.

Moreover, they believe that, apart from teaching new skills, training is ultimately about upgrading mindsets; turning their cleaning staff into customer-service specialists. Claudine adds: “Our aim at Bad Boy is to have staff members who use their brains as well as their hands. We trust their judgement and, through training, we support them to make the right choices. By investing in our staff, we invest in our business as our people are the brand and our service promise is based on their abilities.”



“We don’t think that the journey will be easy, but we’re up for the challenge and believe that as a team we’ve got all it takes to succeed!”



### 3 FOCUS ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction has always been the key to Bad Boy Cleaners’ success. The team tries to go above and beyond to make sure that customers are satisfied with the work they provide them with. However, cleaning is not an exact science.

“Sometimes, we do get clients telling us that they expected a different result from the cleaning service than what was delivered,” admits Claudine. “We take this feedback as an opportunity to engage with the client and to explain our approach and the results obtained. If needed, we offer other remedies.”

They also try to educate the customer and create a relationship based on mutual understanding and respect. This philosophy has enabled the company to attract and retain its largest customers despite growing competition.

### 4 IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY

Quality is something that Bad Boy Cleaners strive to achieve each time they fulfil a task. Several measures have been adopted to ensure that the service they deliver meets expectations. This includes the use of innovative mechanised equipment, quality cleaning products, and quality human resources.

“We do not just say it, we also measure it,” explains Claudine. Bad Boy collects cleaning metrics and audits its cleaning activities to make sure that the service provided is consistent each time. They are also investing in obtaining ISO9001:2015 quality management system certification. This is part of their efforts to demonstrate their commitment and ability to consistently provide services that meet customer requirements and pre-set standards. The company has also started its journey to obtain ISO14001:2015 and ISO45001:2018.

### 5 TECHNOLOGY-BASED SERVICE

It might be difficult to imagine how cleaning services could be impacted by technology, but at Bad Boy Cleaners, it plays an important part in introducing and maintaining efficiency. Apart from the various types of equipment that they use, they also work with software that integrates their full suite of operations and streamlines their internal processes – from recruitment, to payroll and cleaning audits. Using dashboards, Bad Boy’s management team can track the performance of the company and its progress over time. This enables them to efficiently deploy all necessary resources – including staff, equipment and materials – in line with the requirements, and to plan ahead to avoid any deployment issues. The company believes that technology will become even more prevalent in the industry and will prove to be a real game-changer for Bad Boy Cleaners.

With the company having achieved already excellent results, what does the future look like for Bad Boy?

“For now, we intend to continue focusing on Bad Boy and growing the reputation of the brand and our ability to retain our position as a market leader,” says Claudine. “Following our successful stint in Libya in the past years, we have restarted our internationalisation focus as we onboarded several international clients that we’re servicing overseas. We don’t think that the journey will be easy, but we’re up for the challenge and believe that as a team we’ve got all it takes to succeed!” **M+S**

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Tea in the morning,**

**coffee throughout the day**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**

Sweet or savoury? **Savoury**

Books or television? **Both**

Working alone or in a team? **In a team**

Summer or winter? **Winter**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **Country**

Home cooking or dining out? **Both, but I**

**would have to say my husband’s**

**home cooked meals are my favourite**





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# LEADING

## BY EXAMPLE

With a career of over 30 years in the banking sector, Joyce Grech is setting the precedent for women aspiring to balance professional success and personal fulfilment. When Joyce's father – the only breadwinner of the family – retired due to illness when she was just 17, the headstrong woman was smart enough to handle the cards she was dealt in the best way that she could. Looking back, she would only tell her younger self to be more confident in embracing the person she was becoming.

BY CARLA ZAHRA

**T**hat person is now leading a highly successful team at one of Malta's top banks. Having joined the Trade and Commercial Banking team at HSBC Malta in 1996, Joyce has since worked in a range of roles within the Risk area of the bank (most recently as Chief Risk Officer) and in the Retail area of the business, gaining skills and perspectives that continue to help her in her current position. She has now come full circle as Head of Commercial Banking, a role that she describes as 'going back to her roots'.

"I am a firm believer that many skills are transferable and that one benefits greatly from having experience working in a wide range of roles. This gives you a deep understanding of the organisation, its key dependencies and linkages, risks, and the impact of policy decisions on our customers," says Joyce.

Timing, however, was not in her favour; Joyce took on her current role at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the focus shifted towards supporting customers through unprecedented challenges and managing remote teams for the first time, her responsibilities grew. Nonetheless, customer feedback gathered through online surveys showed a consistent increase in satisfaction levels compared to the previous eight years. HSBC Malta was also named Market Leader for Trade Finance in Malta in Euromoney's 2021 Trade Finance Survey, and won the 'Market Leader' and 'Best for Service' titles in the Euromoney Cash Management Awards.

Joyce considers this recognition received from their customers for the level of service that was provided as her team's biggest achievement to date.

"I'm immensely proud to be leading this team," she says. "Whenever I meet a customer and I see how we are supporting them to grow and achieve their plans, I am encouraged and re-energised."

For Joyce, the most interesting aspect of every role she has occupied at HSBC was learning how to lead teams of various sizes and dynamics. Having learned from line managers, senior executives, mentors, peers and role models, Joyce was always encouraged to aim high in her career. Now, she hopes that her success encourages young women in the organisation to break down mental barriers stifling their own achievements.

"My daughter and young women in the organisation inspire me daily. I want to show them that, as a woman, you can have a fulfilling career. Work and family are not mutually exclusive," says Joyce.

"To me, success is managing to find the right balance between work and personal growth. It's about having a fulfilling career that gives you purpose and enables you to reach your potential, without feeling pressured to sacrifice who you are in order to fit into a mould of what the corporate world expects you to be," she continues.

Leading by example, Joyce believes that high-level positions carry the responsibility of creating the right environment for people to thrive and speak out when issues arise.



HSBC  Malta

“I want to show them  
that, as a woman, you can  
have a fulfilling career.  
Work and family are not  
mutually exclusive.”





**“You can’t burn yourself out while promoting employee wellbeing.”**

“Today’s workplace is challenging, so being able to speak up is vital. You can’t just sweep issues under the carpet and let them fester. Personally, I prefer to address issues head-on, no matter how uncomfortable the conversation may be,” she explains.

Apart from the ‘traditional’ support provided by HSBC, such as training and flexible working, Joyce commends the organisation’s strong Employee Assistance Programme, which is managed by an external entity to allow employees to feel safe to share any concerns they may have. Internally, they also have employee resource groups where staff can join and connect with other employees across the group to receive support on different topics such as diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

“As leaders, we need to set an example by what we do. If we work late consistently and ignore our own personal wellbeing, others will feel that that is what’s expected of them. I take that seriously and I make sure that people in my team see me leaving the office at a decent

## Quickfire Questions

**Tea or coffee? Coffee**

**Sunrise or sunset? Both, but if I have to choose it would be sunrise as I love new beginnings.**

**Sweet or savoury? Sweet, but only once a month!**

**Books or television? Television (my eyes need the break).**

**Working alone or in a team? Definitely as a team**

**Summer or winter? I enjoy change and love all seasons, but I’d have to pick summer since I go out more and meet more people!**

**Android or iOS? iOS**

**City breaks or country holidays? I love the buzz of cities but also enjoy relaxing country holidays. Having gone on the Camino twice already and considering my third, I would have to say country holidays, at the present time.**

**Home cooking or dining out? Again, I enjoy both, but I would have to choose dining out due to the variety of foods on offer. I like trying different cuisines, especially when I’m abroad.**

time and dedicating time to my hobbies and activities. You can’t burn yourself out while promoting employee wellbeing,” says Joyce.

“I go to the gym regularly, I practice yoga and Pilates, I walk, I meet friends, travel and visit museums and art galleries. I prioritise physical activity in my routine, as I honestly feel I wouldn’t be able to be productive and effective in my professional life without it. If you enjoy what you’re doing and have a purpose for it, you’ll find the time,” she says.

Apart from enjoying activities outside of work, Joyce also recommends seeking varied fulfilling experiences through one’s career. As an international organisation, HSBC operates in different countries and Joyce doesn’t rule out exploring opportunities outside of Malta in the future. Having spent six months working in London, she encourages her daughter and other young people to broaden their horizons, enrich their experiences and expand their potential through pursuing international opportunities. **M+S**





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Founder and Chief Visionary Officer of NOUV  
Mark Aquilina established the firm in 2008. How  
has the firm grown over the past 14 years?

BY CORYSE BORG

**N**OUV was initially founded to provide traditional business support services to micro and small enterprises, especially start-ups. As its clients grew and their needs became more sophisticated and complex, the company also evolved and expanded its range of services accordingly.

Today, NOUV has established itself as a multidisciplinary firm that provides management and financial consulting, business support and assurance services. Moreover, it is constantly plugging in more services and solutions in its offerings to continue assisting its clients more holistically on their business journey.

Growing from a team of 25 people in an office in St Julian's, today NOUV's workforce is made up of almost 60 professionals, six of whom are partners. Last year, they moved to their new and larger premises in Żebbuġ.

Mr Aquilina's primary role at NOUV has always been to steer the firm throughout its journey by liaising with his fellow partners and their growing team of professionals.

"Together with my team and in line with the value of good governance, we recently reorganised our operations and redefined the partners' role. After all, it would be pointless for an enterprise like ours to advocate for good governance if we do not put into practice what we advocate for," he says. "Therefore, my role today is that of Chief Visionary Officer, responsible for leading the firm, capabilities building, strategising, annual planning, and supporting innovation."

Mr Aquilina said that his biggest challenge so far has been managing the sudden growth of the firm, especially when one must merge so much talent under one roof.





**“I always had a deep-felt sense of wanting to assist others. NOUV became the right vehicle for this, and every day, I feel that, together with my colleagues, we bring positive changes in people’s lives by helping their businesses grow or get in shape.”**

“Our greatest strength lies in being a firm that offers multi-disciplinary solutions through a down-to-earth approach. Our people bring an exciting blend of industry experience, which allows us to provide every client with a holistic outlook,” he says.

In December 2020, the company acquired Tuning Fork, a company specialising in assisting organisations to ensure that their business practices are economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable.

“Embracing a new company with a new team with different backgrounds and aspirations was easy because we both have the same ambitions. What was challenging was streamlining ourselves on an operational level. To date, I feel we’re doing great,” he states. “Honestly, and I say this with utmost humility, I do not think there is any other mid-tier firm like NOUV. What differentiates us most from other mid-tier firms in our sector is the diversity of services we offer and the mixture of skillset within the firm, which gives us a distinct advantage in viewing a business in its totality.”

The past few years have shown how crucial governance and sustainability are within the business dimension and across the board, including legislators, policymakers, and citizens.

“We believe that upholding and implementing the values of good corporate governance and a more sustainable way of operating and everyday living would solve so many of today’s problems. When it comes to governance, we set up our ‘GetGovernanz’ brand to promote the importance of reinstating the culture of good governance across the board. Sustainability is also a crucial value that we believe in, especially today when leading

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Most definitely, coffee**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**

Sweet or savoury? **Both - can't say no to food!**

Books or television? **TV**

Working alone or in a team? **I would need to do both; however, something tells me that having five partners makes me more of a team player.**

Summer or winter? **Summer and all year long if possible!**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays?

**Both, depending**

**on the mood; however, I love skyscrapers.**

Home cooking or dining out? **Dining out**

investors are increasingly looking at those companies that achieve sustainable growth and success,” he asserts.

This, he says, is one reason why NOUV acquired Tuning Fork to assist their clients in aligning with international best practices in more sustainable operations.

Mr Aquilina says that he draws his inspiration from his colleagues, clients, entrepreneurs’ stories, and motivational speakers. He is also an avid reader of financial journals, from which he also gets his fair share of inspiration.

“I always had a deep-felt sense of wanting to assist others. NOUV became the right vehicle for this, and every day, I feel that, together with my colleagues, we bring positive changes in people’s lives by helping their businesses grow or get in shape. As Simon Sinek says: ‘If you want to feel happy, do something for yourself. If you want to feel fulfilled, do something for someone else.’ We are also a growing firm with all its pains, and this fact sensitises us to what other business leaders experience daily,” he adds. We can relate to them, but we are also very relatable. Prospective clients see how uniquely positioned we are to leverage industry connections to help them embrace new perspectives and make better business decisions.”

The biggest lessons that Mr Aquilina has learnt in his time as Founder and CVO have been: believe in yourself and what you have to offer before selling it to others, that everyone has something to offer, to surround yourself with the right people that bring no drama, no negativity, no hidden agendas, that there are always two sides to a coin so be patient, listen a lot and build meaningful relationships based on openness, trust and transparency. And finally to have enough courage to take calculated risks that bring lasting change.

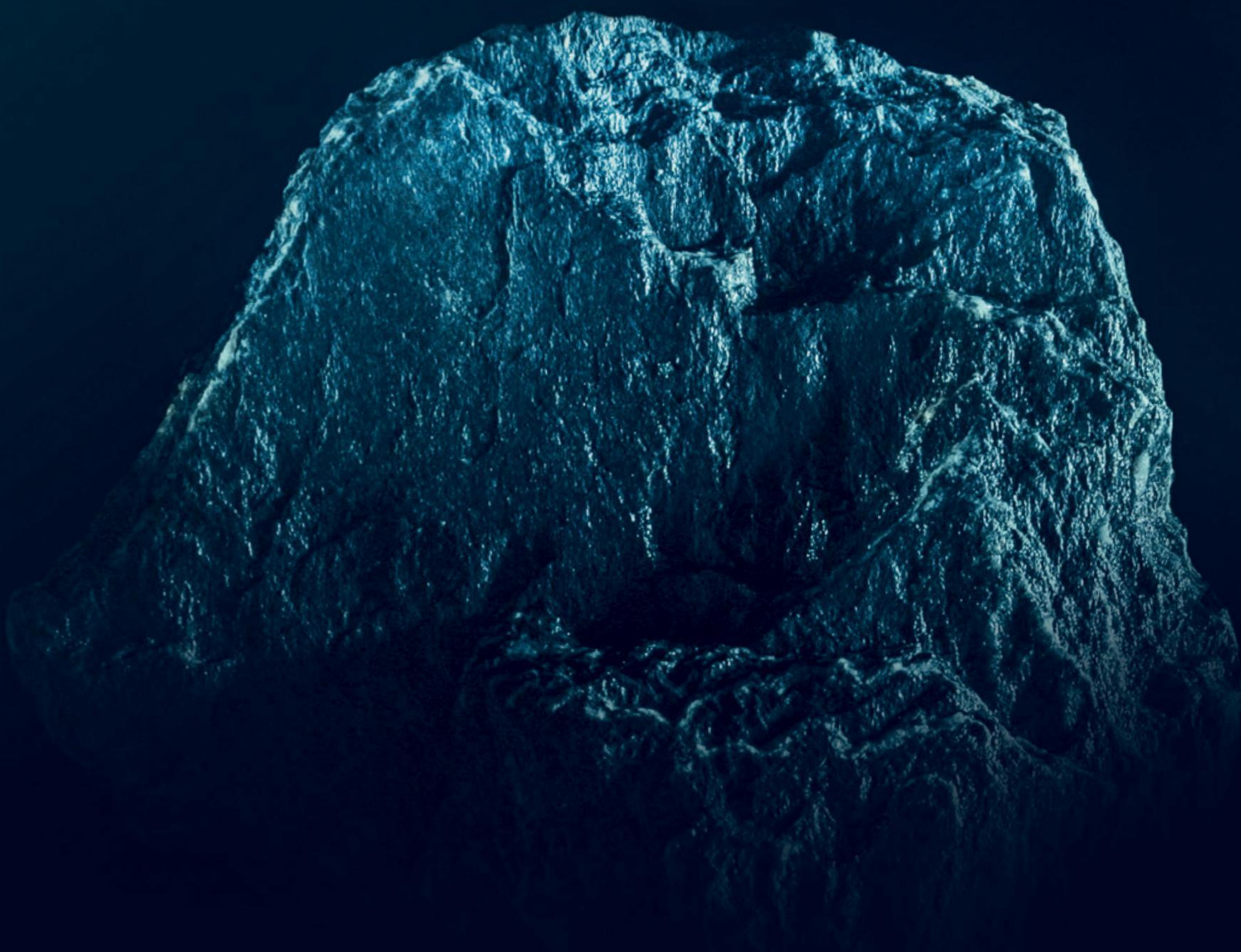
As for where he sees the firm going over the next few years, Mr Aquilina’s prime aim is to see NOUV become one of the leading consulting firms on the islands.

“I want to drive more growth through more acquisitions and mergers, allowing us to move into other areas that are peripheral to our industry. However, perhaps my biggest target remains giving NOUV the international dimension it deserves by establishing our presence outside Malta. Till we get there, we shall keep cementing our firm’s fundamentals to ensure that NOUV will continue to support future generations of entrepreneurs.” **M+S**



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PN SHADOW MINISTER FOR ENERGY, MARK ANTHONY SAMMUT

# Energy Island



I accepted with pleasure the Malta Chamber's invitation to contribute to this publication. Having a direct and open channel of communication with entrepreneurs is indispensable to me as the new Nationalist Party's spokesperson for Energy and Enterprise I look forward to us keeping a close link during this legislature.

The Malta Chamber is one of the most respected and professionally-run bodies in the country. Recently it has become a key player in the development with well-researched national proposals and policy positions. It was not accidental that the first door I knocked on after my appointment was The Malta Chamber's.

Today more than ever, energy is the driving force behind all aspects of socioeconomic life, from hangar to home. Energy drives our mobile, the food you cook, the clothes you wash, your car, the production line at work and all the technological architecture running a corporate office. Energy is truly oxygen of our economy and modern life need to breathe.

For these and ancillary reasons the PN, even from the opposition, has put this sector at the heart of its vision for Malta in the future. We no longer have the choice to firefight with just short term proposals. Our country and our planet are asking for a holistic vision with 2030 as the first checkpoint and 2050 as the next one.

As a party we are committed to continue building and enhancing this vision as a stable and sustainable energy future and flourishing economic growth. Firefighting in energy and climate policy will only produce actual fires as we've see around the world recently.

A sound energy vision rests on three pillars: security of supply at the cheapest possible price, lower emissions, and better jobs. Quite simply, that is what our energy policy is based upon.

A second interconnector and a hydrogen-ready gas pipeline are essential to the first pillar and have been an integral part of our energy policy for over a decade. In the context of the war in Ukraine, and Europe's drive to reduce its dependence on Russian and foreign fossil fuels, investing in renewables has become a major policy pillar not just to reduce emissions but also to improve security of supply itself.

As a party we always believed that evolving offshore wind farm technology should remain on the national table. Today, offshore deep-sea technology has reached its commercial maturity and feasibility, and consequently is a major priority in our energy policy.

Framed properly, wind energy will not only be a major contributor to our renewable energy targets, but it will also drive employment and tourism. Such installations can be a major attraction, especially since there is only one other

such facility in the Mediterranean. Taking this route will not only create directly-related technical, operational and administrative green jobs, but will also have a ripple effect on other sectors. In other countries, for instance, fishermen are contracted to transport visitors view windfarms, providing the former with somewhat of a financial cushion during the lean fishing months.

To capitalise on these initiatives we need to have a proper long-term and well-regulated strategy with input from all stakeholders. Such a known and agreed framework is the only way to attract private investment in this sector.

The Minister responsible for Energy has repeatedly signalled an offshore floating wind-farm by 2030 as one of her main targets. Yet our 2030 National Energy and Climate Plan, which the European Commission characterised as "unambitious", still says that "floating offshore wind does not constitute a viable short- or medium-term option for Malta" and "neither onshore nor offshore wind energy are included as a viable renewable technology option contributing to Malta's renewable energy objectives for the EU's 2030 target".

The contradiction is clear enough. How can government be coordinated in its efforts to implement what the Minister is claiming if its own national plan says otherwise?

In parallel, we need to incentivise industry to make the required shift for Malta to become carbon-neutral by 2050. Investments to improve the distribution network, schemes to incentivise efficiency, battery and energy storage, and the switch to an electrified transport fleet are sorely needed.

On our part, will do our utmost to fulfil our constitutional role, that is to hold government to account based on its electoral promises and Malta's energy targets. There is a lot of common ground on which to find agreement on developing a long-term energy plan for Malta. Simultaneously, we will keep fine-tuning our energy policy to provide a viable alternative for the future. **M-S**

**"Our country and our planet are asking for a holistic vision with 2030 as the first checkpoint and 2050 as the next one."**





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# MOVING ON... DOING BETTER

Christopher Vassallo Cesareo is an accomplished business leader who has served as Managing Director of Domestica Ltd since 1993. He graduated with a degree in Marketing and Psychology from Boston University. He has been a Council member of The Malta Chamber since 2013 and was appointed Deputy President in April 2021. He is also currently Chairperson of JA Malta.

BY CORYSE BORG

**T**he global pandemic has shaped and changed all aspects of our lives, including our spending habits. With restrictions being lifted and people getting used to living in the 'new normal', there is a positivity in the air which perhaps we did not feel a year or two ago.

But, according to Domestica Managing Director Christopher Vassallo Cesareo, this does not mean that we can rest on our laurels.

"Anyone thinking that we can go back to the way things were before the arrival of COVID-19 into the world, is very mistaken. However, seeing things from a positive perspective, we have discovered how resilient we are. Humankind bounces back from adversity. Far from giving up, we – as business owners and consumers – have found ways to deal with the pandemic and move on, rather than remain stagnant," he says.

According to many surveys, one thing that has changed is that consumers now place more value on quality.

"Now more than ever, quality – of time, product and experience – has become an essential factor in choosing what to purchase," he states, "Customers do not want to waste time. Efficiency is expected – even demanded – from businesses if they are to receive repeat custom. Digital has become the norm. Companies who are not online will suffer and are currently suffering. Consumers want to be able to seamlessly move back and forth from the physical to the digital channel of a company. Business owners must realise that it is essential that they invest in the technologies that will make them a part of their consumers' lives."







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**“It is my belief that you are not born an entrepreneur but made one. The support of youth entrepreneurship programmes is an investment that yields vast returns, not just for the young people themselves, but for the entire community.”**

Moreover, he continues, consumers will go for brands and businesses that make their lives easier. They require personalised experiences from companies that they can trust, that actually keep their promises.

“With the current relentless inflation being what it is, people are thinking more carefully about how they spend their money. Consumers are shying away from exorbitant costs. Most people now want to consume better, not purchase more. As consumers move on to their own ‘new normal’, businesses must do the same, to form a new future for their organisation. And they can start to do this by understanding what this new kind of consumer wants,” he says.

Mr Vassallo Cesareo is a vociferous champion of young entrepreneurs. As Chairman of JAYE Malta, he wanted to give something back through his background and expertise by helping up-and-coming entrepreneurs.

“It is my belief that you are not born an entrepreneur but made one. The support of youth entrepreneurship programmes is an investment that yields vast returns, not just for the young people themselves, but for the entire community,” he states, “Throughout my career, I have always been involved in helping up-and-coming youngsters. And in turn, I have been impressed by their thoughts, resilience, and innovative solutions. They deserve an opportunity to be heard and put their ideas into practice.”

According to the UN, today, there are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24, making this the largest generation of youth throughout history.

“Never before have there been so many young people. This creates the unparalleled possibility for economic and social progress. Young people want to - and already do - contribute to their communities. However, if they are given certain additional skills and opportunities, youths can do even more to improve the lives of people and the wellbeing of the planet. They have the potential to be the catalysts to make the world a better place,” he asserts.

Mr Vassallo Cesareo firmly believes that, although entrepreneurship can be taught, it is also important to have solid values and principles. Core values need to be instilled from a very young age to shape one’s character and values, he stresses.

He has some words of wisdom for those youngsters who want to make a mark on the business world:

“Making the first step means grasping the opportunities offered to you and making them work to your advantage. Make sure your strategic plans are up-to-scratch. Good connections are essential and approaching the right investors or mentors is imperative. You need to use your relationship-building ability to the max. You need to decide on your priorities and allocate the relevant energy and time to the more important ones.”

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Coffee**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunrise**

Sweet or savoury? **Sweet**

Books or television? **Books**

Working alone or in a team? **In a team**

Summer or winter? **Summer**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **Country**

Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**

Moreover, he says, it is also important for youths to get out of their comfort zones and accept that sometimes, for something to work, changes need to be made.

“Plan strategically to stay one step ahead of the competition in the midst of turbulent changes in the business environment by seeking and applying the right mix of knowledge and skills. Knowledge of your business, abilities, interests, strengths, weaknesses, and traits is crucial as it will give you an edge over the competition. Finally, you must realise that the acquisition of

knowledge and skills of entrepreneurship is a life-long experience. It’s not only just what you learn at school. Life-long learning has become absolutely vital to continued success. You need to continue gaining knowledge and avoid thinking like you are already an expert.” **M+S**





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# GOING

How is TradeMalta





# GLOBAL

## helping Maltese Businesses Internationalise?

TradeMalta CEO Anton Buttigieg is passionate about helping Malta-based businesses fulfil their potential beyond Maltese shores. But what makes a company ready for internationalisation?

BY CARLA ZAHRA

**E**stablished in 2014 as a joint-venture between the Government of Malta and The Malta Chamber, TradeMalta offers a bespoke service to support Malta-based companies throughout their internationalisation process. Of course, a highly competitive market does exist locally for business owners, but venturing outside of Malta provides unparalleled opportunities for growth. As the first CEO of the organisation, Anton is targeting new markets that would be well-suited for local companies, mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Within these markets, TradeMalta has identified growth opportunities for businesses operating in the medical fields, aquaculture, agribusiness and specialised manufacturing, among others.

When it comes to business, there is no universal language. Rather, says Anton, each region has its own culture and way of doing things. This is why exploring new markets in person and building relationships face-to-face is crucial in order to develop a solid foundation for business relationships to thrive. Having international representation is another important factor needed to facilitate the process.

“When we identified the Sub-Saharan markets as a good opportunity for Maltese businesses to venture into, we approached the Maltese government and worked together to open our first two diplomatic representations in Ghana and Ethiopia,” explains Anton. “We promote these markets and the surrounding regions actively and have found the local business community to be very responsive to the idea of expanding into these emerging markets.”

So far, TradeMalta has already registered multiple success stories such as aiding the wholesale distribution company, Salvo Grima, and the Biometrics & Data protection start-up, Trust Stamp, to launch operations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Both companies opened a base in Rwanda, enabling them to focus on growing demand for their services in the region. In addition to providing market research and guidance, TradeMalta also supports companies through financial grants and institutional introductions.

Naturally, travel restrictions due to COVID-19 were a major setback for businesses seeking to internationalise. Although the team members had all the tools they needed for remote working already in place, they were not able to reach out to companies to discuss opportunities face-to-face. Moreover, not being able to travel meant that the team had to press pause on several market visits.

**“Human interaction is crucial for relationship building, no matter how prevalent digital communication becomes.”**



**“We now believe that Malta needs to build new relationships at an international level. There is talk about deglobalisation and ‘on-shoring’, but this will not happen overnight and it will come at an increased cost.”**



“We could only adapt to a certain extent, by providing online services and helping companies shift towards the digital space,” says Anton. “But the physical element in what we do cannot be replaced.”

“Human interaction is crucial for relationship building, no matter how prevalent digital communication becomes. There’s a limit to how successful you can be in a market without being physically present,” he adds.

In spite of these challenges, the TradeMalta team remain motivated to continue giving companies what they truly need in today’s business environment. Each individual shares a common drive to help local businesses and, by keeping things in perspective, they are able to recognise the important function that they contribute to society.

“Every day is different, and we’re constantly looking for new companies to support. It’s a continuous learning process, so we are always inspired to do more,” he says.

“Still, we’re not immune to what’s happening around us. Across the board, companies are struggling to secure raw materials at a competitive price, while shipping costs for remain high. This was already a problem during the pandemic, but on top of very expensive freight costs we are now experiencing issues of scarcity and the increased cost of raw materials,” continues Anton.

Indeed, several countries have closed their economies to protect their internal markets and are no longer exporting their own raw materials, which poses serious threats to business on a local and international scale.

“Instability is the enemy of every business,” he adds. “But every challenge comes with an opportunity, and companies are recalibrating their business models and looking for new business partners, which is where we can help.”

According to Anton, the biggest challenges in internationalisation are understanding where you should be going with your product or service, finding the best partners and choosing your best routes of entry. Since many businesses have not previously expanded

## Quickfire Questions

Tea or coffee? **Tea**

Sunrise or sunset? **Sunset**

Sweet or savoury? **Sweet**

Books or television? **Books**

Working alone or in a team? **Team**

Summer or winter? **Winter**

Android or iOS? **iOS**

City breaks or country holidays? **Country**

Home cooking or dining out? **Home cooking**

internationally, TradeMalta aims to smoothen the transition by doing all the groundwork, such as learning how to conduct business in particular jurisdictions and arranging meetings.

“We now believe that Malta needs to build new relationships at an international level. There is talk about deglobalisation and ‘on-shoring’, but this will not happen overnight and it will come at an increased cost. This is why we need to seek new international partners and to widen our business networks,” explains Anton. “It takes

time to see the benefits of our work, as we diversify our approach to international business. We cannot put all our eggs in one basket, but we also cannot overstretch ourselves.”

Most often, TradeMalta initiates discussions with local businesses in which they identify potential for internationalisation. But what is the main thing they look for when choosing who to contact?

“What we want to see in the companies we help is commitment. If a company has a team or at least one person in charge of handling their internationalisation process, then we can tell that they are more focused to take this new challenge on board. If they have a single person in charge of Maltese operations and internationalisation, then we know that the chances of success are going to be slim,” he concludes.



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# TUNISIAN COMPANY

## Mission To Malta

The Malta Chamber together with CONECT International (Tunisia) and Malta Enterprise in partnership with the Embassy of Malta in Tunisia and the Embassy of Tunisia in Malta organised a Tunisian Company Mission to Malta on the 23rd of May 2022.



A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between The Malta Chamber and CONECT to further solidify the drive toward creating business opportunities between Malta and Tunisia.

The mission was aimed at SMEs seeking to initiate various types of alliances and strategic partnerships in Malta. Following key speeches to highlight economic exchanges and investment between Malta and Tunisia, one-to-one networking meetings were held.

George Debono, Chief Commercial Officer and Jordy McKay, Head of Corporate Banking at BNF Bank plc, bronze sponsors of The Malta Chamber, gave a presentation titled 'Malta's Banking System – facilitating ease of doing business in Malta.' The Tunisian delegation was also given the opportunity to visit IBG Automation Malta Ltd., members of The Malta Chamber.





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