

Young Petroleum Professional Becomes Own Boss



DownUnder GeoSolutions' Principal Geophysicist Troy Thompson.

Becoming your own boss is a dream for many working professionals, but more often than not that's all it ever is: a dream. So the thought of a post-graduate, fresh out of university, going into a partnership and becoming their own boss is unimaginable to most. But for DownUnder GeoSolutions' (DuGeo) Principal Geophysicist, Troy Thompson, the unimaginable became a reality.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Science (Hons) degree from Curtin University in 1998, and receiving numerous industry awards including the Dean's Prize for the most outstanding third year student in the Faculty of Science and The Royal Society of WA Universities Science Medal, Thompson met Matt Lamont (DuGeo Managing Director) who had the vision of starting his own geoservices company.

The two hit it off when Lamont became an associate professor and mentor during Thompson's PhD studies at Curtin. During his time at university Thompson was also awarded the 2001 PESA Post Graduate Scholarship, a MERIWA Supplementary Scholarship and the John Curtin Postgraduate Scholarship.

It's no surprise that the high performer made an impression on Lamont, who was working for BHP Billiton during Thompson's PhD research. Back then the budding geophysicist didn't have any concrete plans for his career, other than going to work for a 'big' oil company, so

hearing Lamont's grand plan provided a unique career path and adventure to think about. "I'm always up for an adventure and a challenge", Thompson said.

"Matt told me about his plans to one day start his own company and it sounded pretty cool to me, and over time somehow it became 'our' plan. I had nothing to lose – it sounded exciting to do your own thing, and to be in control of your own destiny."

A year after those first discussions about going into business together, the boys' destinies led them to Lamont's back shed where DuGeo was born in 2003. "It's been a roller coaster ever since, but we have gone from strength to strength", he said.

"I was responsible for developing the QI side of the business and Matt, although he has a great deal of knowledge about QI as well, was more focussed on processing and imaging. I went to Houston very early on, for a year, and worked my 'you know what's off' over there to understand QI and came back here to apply that knowledge."

From very early on the boys realised the need to develop their own software, assembling a R&D group which has grown steadily ever since. Thompson is now more involved in that side of the business, looking after geophysical technicalities and implementing new opportunities that can grow the company further.

"I'm still involved in the QI service work because of my experience in the company and that area", he said. "It's been great being able to focus on the geophysical details of our software. Matt and I had always done that in the past but were never able to devote as much time to it as we wanted."

By 2009 the company received many requests from clients to purchase their in-house software product that they decided to commercialise and release it for sale. DUG Software was an instant success and orders began coming in from all over the world.

"People are becoming more and more interested in what we do because we're able to implement things pretty quickly and listen to what our clients want", Thompson said. "We never intended to sell software in the beginning, we just developed it for internal use but when our clients saw it they said 'we wouldn't mind having a go with that as well', so we've been almost forced to sell it."

To address the growing demand for its software, DuGeo has hired high-achieving software engineering professionals to help develop a cutting edge product because, Thompson said, it's one thing to have technically sound software that can be used in-house and another thing to sell software to the industry as a whole.

The initial sales of DUG Software have been positive. "We have great plans for where we want to take the software", he said. "The to do list is always going to be long but the feedback has been great."

Despite the company competing market share with bigger industry players, Lamont and Thompson have pushed cutting edge technology for its competitive advantage. "We've been very aggressive as a company and tried to take on the big guys, so if we didn't have something, we'd work out how to do it or write software to do it better", Thompson said. "Matt and I always bounce ideas off each other and the combination of both of us ends up being a pretty good mix for the right way forward."

Currently DuGeo has about 75 employees worldwide, with its biggest offices in Perth and Kuala Lumpur, and smaller ones in Jakarta, Houston, Singapore, Brisbane, and Toronto. The company's looking to expand by establishing offices in Europe and the Americas, however, Thompson said it depends on whether they can find the right people to do so. Right now the immediate plan for DuGeo is to further develop its software and service business.

There's no doubt that DuGeo, with Thompson's youthful drive and attention to detail, will continue going from strength to strength in the years to come. ■