Wollongong fertile ground for iTree to grow

Specialist software development company iTree considers Wollongong an ideal location for its main office and development centre, even though it doesn't have any customers in the city.

iTree Business Solutions Director Frank Marzano and Project Director Hengki Widjaja at the company's headquarters at the Innovation Campus.

iTree specialises in developing software for regulation, compliance and enforcement. Its customers are government agencies and public and private sector transport operators in Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific.

And while it now has offices in Sydney and New Zealand, its main office – and most of its 45-stong workforce – is at the University of Wollongong's Innovation Campus.

iTree Business Solutions Director Frank Marzano, one of the firm's principals, says Wollongong has many advantages for a technology-based company like iTree.

"Wollongong is a great location for a business like ours," Mr Marzano said. "For staff, it offers a better work-life balance, as most of our staff live between five and 15 minutes from work. Our people like living and working here, so we have very low staff turnover and thus a very stable workforce, which is important for retaining skills and corporate knowledge.

"And yet we're only an hour from Sydney Airport if we need to go interstate or overseas to support our customers."

Like software businesses the world over, iTree had small beginnings, starting in 1996 with just three people and one contract – developing and supporting software for a network of traffic cameras operated by a lead road agency.

The company began in a small office on the campus of the University of Wollongong (UOW), which has one of the largest university-based information technology teaching and research centres in Australia. iTree has been able to tap into a steady supply of well-trained graduates ever since, as the company has grown organically in its niche market.

"Having access to UOW graduates has definitely been important for our growth," Mr Marzano said. "I remember when Hengki Widjaja started as one of our first software developers. He started as a casual and was able to develop his career and ultimately become a principal of the company.

"Traditionally we have employed IT and computer science graduates, but in recent years we have also recruited graphic designers, and in the future we will broaden to other disciplines."

iTree was one of the first tenants to move to the Innovation Campus when it opened in 2008. Designed as the University's research and development precinct, the Innovation Campus was established so that commercial tenants like iTree could co-locate on a campus with some of the University's key research institutes, to foster a spirit of cooperation and partnership.

Mr Marzano said being based on the Innovation Campus was good for the company's profile, while having access to UOW experts had given the company a strong competitive advantage in bidding for contracts.

"For example, we tendered for domestic and international projects supplying software in maritime and fisheries. We were able to tap into specialist expertise at ANCORS (the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources) on the Innovation Campus. ANCORS were able to advise us and ran professional short courses from which our staff gained critical knowledge."

Supported by this expertise, iTree is now developing software to enable fisheries officers to carry out inspections, collect intelligence and determine relevant action if an offence is detected – all using the latest smart phone technology.

This fisheries compliance solution is based on itree's RegulationWorks® platform, an innovative suite of plug-n-play modules to enable government regulators to automate their business processes in:

- Field-based compliance inspections
- Offence and prosecution management
- On-line self-service portals
- Case management
- Time and asset management
- Risk Identification and targeting
- Business workflow applications

"We have always had a strong focus on customer requirements, and that has allowed us to provide turnkey solutions for regulators operating in different fields, based on common concepts that all our customers need," Mr Marzano said.

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