

[ROLE MODEL]

Giles Smith
(left) and
Tony Brand



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that they are highly motivated. Above all, he has set objectives for the company and manages the business accordingly.”

Giles values the relationship: “Tony has

always helped us to understand our business in much greater detail. I operate the financial controls and I use him as a sounding board for our ideas.

“He is an adviser but he’s much more than that. He is frank. Whether an idea is daft, sensible or needs more work, he will be honest with me.

“I’ve learned the complexities of financial accounting from Tony but he has never bombarded me with too much at once. He understands the way we think.”

With Tony’s help, GForces has developed a clever business strategy that helps make the company financially secure. Rather than depend upon capital funding, Giles explains: “We started spreading contracts over two years when the market was buoyant, effectively sharing the risk using a budgetary rather than a capital model.

“That has meant that when the recession came along we were in a very strong position and much less vulnerable than our competitors. We had an established income stream.

The automotive business has very low margins and you can be very vulnerable if one of the top 200 businesses collapses.

“In fact, that did happen but because of our business model, the impact was fairly marginal. If we had been reliant on capital invoicing, that would have been much harder to manage.

“Tony has shown me that if you actually spend time planning and genuinely understanding financials, then you can predict pretty accurately what will happen.

“Providing you have the time, resolve and commitment to drive forwards, you can achieve things. We have that plan and we believe we are going to be a great company.” **HW**

FACT FILE

Issue: Growth

Sector: Web

Location: Kent

www.gforces.co.uk

Driving force

Spotting opportunities for growth and with a natural flair for business, Giles Smith, MD of GForces, has overseen a success story.

At the crux of most successful growth lies a distinct shift. An entrepreneur or inventor recognises that current methods are soon going out of date and they find a cheaper or more effective way of doing things. For example, Hoover vacuum cleaners began with cloth bags, moved on to paper ones and then were overtaken by Dyson with no bags at all.

One company that saw a distinct shift and has exploited it very successfully is GForces, founded and led by Giles Smith. The Maidstone-based operation was set up in 1999 with a £12,000 private loan. Its turnover is now £7.6m and the firm currently employs around 150 people providing web management services to the UK’s top

automotive dealer groups. Its sophisticated software helps dealers to turn their websites into key sales and lead generating tools.

The digital armoury involved is no longer just about a static website. To stay ahead of the race, dealers need to know more about their potential customers and how to use that information to secure sales. Social media like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are offering direct access to customers. It’s the successful dealers who know how to use these platforms effectively.

Giles realised that traditional advertising platforms such as newspapers and glossy magazines were being relegated as the Internet surged forward. People started buying cars online. He spotted an opportunity.