

# California dreams come true for Stoke IT firm

A Nelson technology company which developed a leading United States' online real estate sales system has rebranded and opened an office in California.

FuseIT, formerly known as PolyMedia, was started by Richard and Delece Clarke and employs 12 people at its base in Forest Rd, Stoke.

For more than 10 years the company has been delivering Internet-enabled applications to corporations, mostly in the US but also in New Zealand.

Its work has attracted various accolades, including being named as the 24th fastest growing company in New Zealand two years ago and picking up two Nelson Tasman business awards for exporting and innovation.

Clarke spent five years working in Deloitte's London auditing department before deciding in 1992 that it was possible to run a



## Down to Business

Karen Goodger

company from anywhere in the world and shifting to Nelson with his wife.

Their company started off focusing on multimedia developments. It generated a range of encyclopaedia and map products on CDs and DVDs which were sold in stores throughout the country.

That continued till about 1996 when the Internet "really took off" and they decided to change tack to capitalise on changing trends.

PolyMedia's biggest and most successful project was the design and development of SureClose, the US's leading online transaction

management system for the real estate industry.

It is owned and operated by the Houston-based multinational company Stewart Title, which has been contracting the Clarkes' company for several years to deliver services related to the system.

Clarke says SureClose was the first web application in the US to transact a real estate sale 100 per cent electronically using digital signatures and has since processed more than a million sales.

Back home, PolyMedia's growth and progression has been inconsistent. In early 2000, 98 per cent of its work came from the US and it was employing up to 24 staff.

It was forced to halve its operation when an increased exchange rate made it less competitive.

About 40 per cent of its business is now based in New Zealand and Clarke is hopeful business may start growing again with the



**EXPANDING OFFSHORE:** Richard Clarke of FuseIT has rebranded his technology company and opened an office in California. PHOTO/MARTIN DE RUYTER

exchange rate drifting downward.

He says the overseas focus hasn't been a deliberate attempt to shun local markets.

"Nelson is known for fishing,

farming and forestry – that's the perception. I don't think New Zealand is particularly good at trusting remote organisations to do things."

Being a small company wanting to grow, it makes sense to use its limited resources where work opportunities are greatest and for FuseIT that's in California.

A few months ago it opened an office there employing one marketing/salesperson.

Clarke has spent two stints of up to eight months each in the US and believes this has paid huge dividends in gaining work there, though many of his work relationships can also be traced back to his time at Deloitte in London.

Clarke says his company's most recent initiative, rebranding as FuseIT, was an overdue move to better reflect its focus on providing an interface between corporations and their customers.

One of its new developments involves helping a US client print on-demand software, enabling companies to order customised stationary and marketing material

online. It is due to be launched in San Francisco next month.

Clarke would like to see his company return to making its own products rather than just being the "technology brains for US entrepreneurs".

"We've never managed to get back to that in the Internet world".

The global downturn isn't a great concern to him as he says there are still plenty of successful companies in the US that understand the need to deliver improved quality and service.

"When the economy becomes tough, business becomes smarter. It doesn't daunt us at all because that's where our company is focused.

"We're excited about the thought of bringing more products to the market."

□ *Down to Business will resume after the general election.*