



THE EU-FUNDED PROJECT ITHACA HAS HELPED TO POSITION in4tek AND ITS PARIS PRODUCTS IN A MARKET POTENTIALLY WORTH £100M A YEAR IN THE UK ALONE

International networking with partners and trialists in 26 countries has strengthened the company's position even further

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Changing technology is just one threat to a well-established line of business for providers of information systems. The other is change in the marketplace, such as the effect that the UK government's modernisation agenda is having within the NHS and social services. The largest information systems supplier to the NHS in the 1990s was the Health & Social Care Division of Systems Team plc, which was subject to a management buy-out in 2000 and is now known as in4tek. Through participation in ITHACA, a collaborative European research project, they have risen to the modernisation challenge with PARIS, a fully integrated client-centred suite of applications for primary, social and community care.

The starting point was an approach from SEBT, the Trust set up to manage health and social care services in South & East Belfast. They wanted to develop a common community-care framework that would allow service-providers to share information about clients. The opportunity of working in a collaborative consortium initially had three attractions for Tom Nawojczyk, in4tek's MD. It would help underwrite some of the cost of re-engineering their existing legacy systems. These had been built up over a ten-year period covering areas such as children's health, mental health and community nursing. More importantly, if the project addressed the needs of a range of community-care services, the new systems would have additional markets beyond the NHS. Then, since the work was going to be developed for four very different user-sites (Belfast, Oporto, Seville and Turku) those markets would potentially extend beyond the UK.

As is often the case, negotiations with the Commission and the consortium partners prior to the launch of the project led to several of the initial assumptions being re-thought. It became clear that the budget would not be sufficient to make a significant contribution to the development of new software - one of the original attractions of participation.

The company's primary responsibility within the consortium was for the development of a demonstrator application for mental health and the elderly in Belfast and this would be where the bulk of their revised funding of just over €100k would have to be committed. Tom had to decide whether or not to continue with the project in its modified form. EC collaborations of this kind are inevitably high-risk and this one would require the commitment of significant additional company resources to the project with no guarantee that the results would be important strategically. Two key factors swayed the argument.

Firstly, this was not research for research's sake. The consortium represented a commercial supply chain containing real users (health-care providers), systems developers and researchers. Several of the partners had worked together before, providing the project with a solid baseline. During the life of the project, replication sites were added in Greece, Italy, Sweden, Ireland, France and Canada, expanding the consortium to twenty-six partners

and providing access to a truly international market.

Secondly, the risk was manageable because ITHACA's generic framework was based on five processes common to all areas of care (referral, assessment, care planning, activity recording and review and discharge). This model was highly relevant to the development of the new generation of software and the company would have been able to justify completing its work on PARIS even if the project itself failed.



In the event, the project has positioned in4tek and its products in an expanded marketplace and validated the integrated approach to information handling. The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, for example, have recently concluded a \$2.2m contract for PARIS. By the time the product was launched in 2001, in4tek's total investment had reached some £2m. Tom is confident of recouping this many times over; estimating that the UK market alone is potentially worth £100m a year.