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NETWORK**
where leaders connect

Survive and Prosper

That exclusive club of top British chairmen and top business thinkers known as The Chairman's Network have been quizzed about the challenges and opportunities they foresee for the next 12 months. Here they reveal some of the pearls of wisdom, advice and pragmatic tips that have worked for them ...

'Maintaining revenue in a downturn and ensuring scarce resources are deployed to best effect' was a widely-held view put forward by Mike Fish of Home Run Ventures. 'The big challenge will be execution while sentiment is

that you always saw as critical to your business and therefore to customer service,' he explained, 'you must somehow maintain the equilibrium of the organisation, whilst also retaining your engagement with your customers.'

failing to grow. There are significant opportunities if we are realistic and know what has been a differentiator – not by locking down the hatches and waiting for the storm to pass,' said Mr Brennan.

"10% unemployment means 90% of people are still working, so keep positive"

forecasting doom', opined Steve Purdham, we7.com 'but that's an opportunity as well!'

Camco International's David Potter was blunt: "Many smaller public companies are trading on AIM at lower market cap than their cash. Some of these are profitable, there will be some terrific buying opportunities.'

Nicholas Barber of Bolero, agreed. 'The main opportunity will be to exploit any competitors who are more weakened by events than your own company. And, once you're confident of more than just surviving, take the opportunity to invest ahead of the curve including hiring some of the outstanding talent that's coming onto the market.'

Martyn Hope, Web Repair Services: 'When shedding roles and people

'Spend more time with your customers' implored Peter Waller of Corero, 'so that you know about what opportunities do exist.

Form strong relationships. And as times improve, you will be in pole position to take advantage!'

Michael Hunt of Silaris International spoke of the need to deliver fresh strategies, leadership and organizational capacity and change; and he suggested that the outcome may even be to create a sustainable and somewhat more equitable world....

Zeus Technology's Paul Brennan, a father for the first time at 45, was facing up to some personal challenges as well as those in business, but his advice was to continue to develop opportunities and grow while others around are only looking for the reasons for

'Horde cash, stay alive and keep the core business intact,' says financier Paul Frew of Elderstreet Capital'. 'Win business from competitors, focus on products and services with a strong business case.'

Jon Richards, Aria Networks, isn't at all negative: 'For businesses without debt on their balance sheets there should be some very attractive acquisition opportunities. Also where competitors fail there will be real chances to grow market share.'

'Use the sense of crisis to achieve those radical internal changes (structures, processes, systems) which the organisation resisted during the Goldilocks period,' advises Nicholas Barber.

Tina Rogers of Thesaurus stresses the importance of keeping confidence & optimism high. 'It is too easy to talk yourself down', she cautions. 'One of the chairman's roles is to keep the board confident, whilst maintaining a very tight control on costs & cash.'

"Take the opportunity to invest ahead of the curve"

“Spend more time with your customers so that you know about what opportunities do exist. Form strong relationships. And as times improve, you will be in pole position to take advantage!”

Advice

The Chairman’s Network represents hundreds of years of experience. And that means plenty of problems will have been tackled and overcome. Mistakes will have been made, lessons learned. What good hard pragmatic advice can we take away from this privileged insight into the ‘Brains Trust’?

Martin Jervis, Blackbaud Europe, is straight in: ‘Panic early, do more than you think necessary.’

‘**Be focussed,**’ says Steve Purdham. ‘**Look for the positive. And more than ever, cash is king!**’

Ken Olisa, Restoration Partners: ‘Managers are those who can tell the difference between threats and opportunities and can reduce the threats to a minimum. Entrepreneurs are alchemists who can turn threats into opportunities. 2009 is a year where threats and opportunities rain thick and fast – deciding whether you are a manager or an entrepreneur is a vital prerequisite for surviving the year ahead.’

“There are significant opportunities if we’re realistic”

As a restructuring and turnaround specialist, Nigel Southon has sound advice: ‘10% unemployment means 90% of people are still working, so keep positive.’

What comes across time and again is, Take Action! These people have obviously achieved success in bad times as well as good, by refusing to be dictated to or blown off course.

‘**Hope is not a strategy**’ says Michael Hunt. ‘In adversity there is opportunity, all competitors face the same issues. Be bold in change and lead the way.’

‘Bad times favour well run companies that offer value to easily accessed customers and have their costs under control’ says Nigel Southon of VentureGrowth. ‘If you’re one of these, you can improve competitive advantage while the other players fall by the wayside.’

“Continue to develop opportunities and grow while others around are only looking for the reasons for failing to grow”

‘Chairmen need to really listen to their CEO & boards if they are to understand the real issues,’ adds Tina Rogers, ‘And also never say “in my day” or “I remember when”.’

Jon Richards has another pearl of wisdom: ‘Try to avoid too much long term planning. Having worked as a CEO through the early 90’s I learnt to take things one month at a time.’

And if your business is not a big one, don’t worry - ‘Never be afraid to be insignificant’ adds

Paul Brennan. ‘**Leadership is about consistently achieving results beyond expectations by creating a climate in which others can shine.**’

‘Try and keep debt below 30% of equity,’ says George Ryder.

‘Monitor where investors are buying / divesting for your industry on the stock market. And monitor competitor activity

closely, especially entry into new or complimentary markets. Avoid eroding business critical skills unless absolutely necessary. Improve relationships with stakeholders, especially suppliers and investors.’

Simon Orme has some sound advice concerning product and market analysis: ‘Products and services for which there is a demand in an expansive economy quickly wither and die when the economy turns colder. Equally some market sectors will

weather the downturn in better condition than others. The strategy is to analyse the offer portfolio and market sectors served and identify which will continue to be viable in the new market conditions.’

‘2009 offers opportunities,’ says Mike Fish, ‘for companies which seek them out and can take a risk to grasp them. Never forget – your customers have to continue their business in the hard times. If you can offer them something that is of more value than the saving from doing nothing, and that sustains and advances their business – then they will buy. This requires a relentless focus on change.’

The final word goes to Peter Waller: **If you have to cut back – cut deep. And cut once’**

“Try to avoid too much long term planning. Having worked as a CEO through the early 90’s I learnt to take things one month at a time”



Mike Fish

Mike is Founder & Director of Home Run Ventures – suppliers of growth and investment solutions for technology businesses. He is also Non-Executive Director of Executive Grapevine - independent business publishing and information services for the executive talent management sector. Formerly a Director at Interregnum plc - a London quoted technology venture capital firm - Mike was also Chairman of grid software company Scali.



Steve Purdham

CEO and Co-Founder of we7.com - an innovative, free service offering ad-funded music downloads, Steve was also Co-Founder and former CEO of

SurfControl and was formerly Chairman of Identum - email encryption software.



Peter Waller

Peter is Non-Executive Chairman of Rocela, Oracle specialists and Executive Chairman of Corero - software for financial institutions. He was formerly Chairman of MI International.



Michael Hunt

Chairman of Silaris International Ltd - a provider of Electronic Signature Process Management solutions. Michael is also a strategic advisor to the board of Nstein Inc-a world leader of web based solutions that assist publishers to move from print to internet based publishing.

Michael has 30 years experience in setting up and managing international software companies.



Nicholas Barber

Nicholas Barber CBE is Chairman of Bolero International - a web-based platform enabling paperless trading between buyers, sellers, and their logistics service and bank partners. He is also Director of Fidelity Japanese Values, Chairman of Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), Director of Hult International Business School, and Member of Executive Committee NIESR. His former posts include CEO Ocean Group, Chairman Orion Publishing, Dep. Chairman Royal Insurance, Dep. Chairman Bank of Ireland UK, Director The Maersk Company, Trustee British Museum, Governor London Business School.



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David Potter

David Potter is Chairman and Non-Executive

Director of Camco International, a leading carbon asset developer and environmental consultant and Quercus Publishing. David has been the chairman and non-executive director of several listed companies including Solar Integrated Technologies and Spark Ventures. Prior to "going plural" he worked in the finance sector for 35 years with Investec, Guinness Mahon, Midland Bank, Samuel Montagu and CSFB



Martyn Hope

Martyn is Founder and CEO of Web Repair Services. He is a

consistently successful business leader with over 25 years experience of general management, marketing and sales management within the software and services industries. He has worked with industry leaders including SAP, i2 and Marconi, and within a variety of market sectors.



Paul Brennan

Paul is Chairman and CEO of Zeus Technology (Cloud

Computing Infrastructure) and has been Chairman of Apptix, VisionOSS, Trustix, Xtractor and CEO of Metamerge.



Paul Frew

Paul Frew is the Managing Partner of Elderstreet Capital

Partners, a venture capital fund investing in European software. Prior to joining Elderstreet, Paul was Managing Director of Softwright Systems Limited; an IT consulting company which was acquired by Chicago based System Software Associates in 1996. Paul is also on the board of a number

of high growth companies including AngloINFO.com, Caplin Systems, Galore Park Publishing, Interquest Group Plc, Vordel and Wecomm.



Jon Richards

Jon is Chairman of Aria Networks, Comtec, CSC,

Lowcosttravel and Testplant. His former roles include Chairman of RedSky IT and CEO of Anite Plc.



Tina Rogers

Chairman of Thesaurus Computer Services, Tina has

been in the Software Industry for over 35 years having held positions from programmer to Managing Director of her own software house which she acquired through an MBO and sold to Misys. Tina was subsequently a Managing Director in Misys for a further two years. Since that time and over the last 10 years Tina has held multiple Chairmanships and specializes in leading the growth of software companies, both organically and by acquisition. Her experience ranges from a Software Gaming start-up to the largest UK Software Distributor.



Ken Olisa

former Founder, Chairman and CEO of Interregnum plc.

Ken is Chairman of boutique technology merchant bank - Restoration Partners.

Ken founded Interregnum, the technology merchant bank in 1992 and floated it on AIM in 2000. His current FTSE100 Directorships include Thomson Reuters and ENRC. He is a director of, or advisor to, several innovative companies Sorriso, BioWisdom, Metapraxis and Previx. Ken is a Freeman of the City of London, Warden and Liveryman

of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, a Vice President of the British Computer Society and Chairman of Thames Reach, a charity working to shelter and resettle the homeless in London. Until May 2004 he was an inaugural Postal Services Commissioner and he serves on the Government's Women's Enterprise Task Force.



Martin Jervis

Martin is Vice President and Managing Director of

Blackbaud Europe, a leading provider of CRM software and services for not-for-profit organisations. Now in the 30th year of his career, Martin has provided executive leadership for technology and services companies including senior positions in UK, European and International operations. Martin has lived in England, France, Germany and South Africa, and worked in most major European territories. He holds an Honours Degree from the University of Lancaster



Simon Orme

Managing Partner Simon Orme & Associates and

Chairman of SkillsEdge Limited.

Simon is Director of a number of technology companies and an investor in specialist situations and new enterprises. He is also Freeman – Worshipful Company of Information Technologists.



Nigel Southon

Managing Director of VentureGrowth Associates – specialists

in restructuring for competitive advantage, M&A and Non Exec services. He is currently Non Exec Chairman of Saber Analytics (financial forecasting software) and Non Exec Chair of She

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Software (health & safety software). He has been Non Exec Chair of InTouch with Health (patient information systems) and Non Exec Chairman of Dhaliwal Brown (research in wireless comms) and Chairman of NavaraSoft (Mobile Data)



George Ryder

Managing Director of 1stAdvisory Ltd - Outsourcing and

Technology, Business Development and Operations specialists.



Peter Waller

Executive Chairman of Corero plc - which consists of two

divisions; software for streamlining business processes in financial institutions; and software for accounting and student records systems in the education sector. Peter Waller has

been in the IT industry since its early days and has over 20 years senior executive experience with companies including IBM, Hitachi and Spring Group plc. In the past 10 years he has held a variety of non-executive appointments with private and public software and IT services companies. These currently include Chairman of Keypoint Technologies, Rocela Limited and Willoughby Limited.



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