

Centuries-old textile firm Clark to 'Fuel up' IT systems

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IN A marriage connecting two businesses at the ultimate age extremes, a 270-year-old Co Derry firm has turned to a relatively new Craigavon software company to revamp its IT systems and take it to the next level of its growth.

William Clark, situated in the rural village of Upperlands at the foot of the Sperrin Mountains and which has specialised in the manufacture of traditional fabrics since 1736, has awarded the contract for its enterprise resource planning (ERP) services to IT infrastructure specialists Fuel.

William Clark has been operating a semi-bespoke financial/manufacturing software for more than 15 years but the system has outgrown its functionality as the result of the continual growth by the company.

At the heart of a three-year business plan at Clark, it needed to put in place an ERP solution that could develop as the company continues to grow and reach its target of increasing in turnover by 60 per cent and bringing staffing levels from 35 to 50.



Kevin Devlin, production director at William Clark, said: "We have set enterprising growth targets for the next few years and needed a stable IT Infrastructure platform. "Managing and keeping con-

control of that growth is key to the company's success and therefore great emphasis was put on the management to find the best IT infrastructure and software management solution to deliver the re-

quired results.

"And Fuel, in our opinion, was the company that demonstrated to us the required expertise, tenacity and determination to partner us on our journey."

■ BUSINESS PLAN:

Announcing the IT tie-up are, from left, Paul Trouton, chief executive of Fuel, Kevin Devlin, production director at William Clark and Joe Walsh, director and SAP associate at Fuel

Following a rigorous assessment of the top ERP solutions in the market, the directors awarded Fuel the contract to implement a complete IT infrastructure refresh including a new cutting edge server running the SAP Business One software.

Fuel director Joe Walsh said: "I'm delighted, having embarked on this journey with William Clark, that Fuel and the SAP Business One solution has been recognised as the solution best suited to support the directors and management team plan and build for the future of the company."

Whereas William Clark has been around for the best part of three centuries, Fuel ((www.itfuel.com) was only formally incorporated in 2014 after it was rebranded from its previous incarnation of Micro Computer Solutions (MCS), founded by computer science graduate Paul Trouton in the early 1990s.

IN BRIEF

Kainos opens office in Poland

BELFAST-based IT services provider Kainos has opened a new office in Gdansk as it expands its development and support capability for global customers. Rapid growth in the volume of global projects has resulted in the expansion of the Polish team and it has now acquired a flagship development hub to accommodate this growth. The new office provides capacity for 500 staff, more than double the present headcount. Teams currently operating from the hub have significant expertise in software development and operation, and include programmers, testers, webops specialists, infrastructure experts, consultants and scrum masters.

Last call for awards entries

BUSINESSES in the north west have been urged to submit their applications for the North West Business Awards, sponsored by Bank of Ireland UK, ahead of the closing date of next Monday. Winners have a unique opportunity to market the quality of their businesses on the back of titles, including Business of the Year and Entrepreneur of the Year. Many of the north west's best known and most successful businesses are past award winners.

The North West Business Awards, organised and hosted by the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce and City Centre Initiative, are free to enter. They are open to all businesses and organisations in the north west region. Successful applicants will be honoured at the prestigious awards ceremony on Friday May 13 at the City Hotel in Derry.

Latest arrival at Lisburn Sq

AWARD-winning hairdresser the Shane Bennett Salon has become the latest high-profile arrival at Lisburn Square, just weeks after popular Italian restaurant Alfredo's signed up. The unit taken by the salon occupies a prominent location within the Square, adjacent to Argos, Next and Square Bistro. It has already been fitted out with quality finishes, including 12 salon chairs and three shampoo stations. Belfast based commercial property consultants CBRE secured the letting.

Belfast's oldest menswear retailer is ready to strike a stylish note in France

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HOLDING court in his Belfast shop – a listed building dating back to 1810 and featuring an original Belfast brick interior wall – John Keenan, managing director of Bogart menswear, is, as you would expect, perfectly turned out.

Having just celebrated his 60th birthday, the dapper Bogart boss is in fine form, wearing a neatly tailored suit with matching waistcoat and red silk tie.

He is the ideal advertisement for his menswear business which will be operating in Belfast's Ann Street for 37 years this September – although he has promised to cut back to five days a week behind the counter and (maybe) stay at home of a Thursday evening.

Whether his intentions become reality or not is open to question because he is buzzing with new business plans for all three shops (the others are in Belfast's Callender Street and Canal Court, Newry) and is particularly ex-



■ TAILOR-MADE:

Oonagh O'Reilly, Irish FA sales and marketing director, joins John Keenan, managing director of Bogart, right, and his son Gary to announce the new deal as the Northern Ireland football team's official suit partner

cited about a pending expansion to facilities in Ann Street.

Having recently stopped the rental side of wedding suits in favour of selling his own – made-to-measure and ready-made from Italian cloth – he is creating a bespoke room dedicated to couples who want privacy when matching up a wedding dress with a suit for the groom.

It is a follow-on from the popular corporate evenings he introduced over a year ago, allowing customers to avail

of a special 'package' and enjoy a few nibbles and drinks at the same time.

Now, there is extra reason to celebrate with news that Bogart has been appointed by the Irish Football Association as Northern Ireland's official suit partner.

"This is a special period in the history of Northern Ireland football and it's a huge honour for Bogart, as Belfast city centre's oldest menswear retailer, to work with the Irish FA as its official suit sponsor," John said.

"The eyes of the world will be on our players and team officials, both on and off the pitch in France, and we feel it's fitting that they will be wearing suits designed and supplied by a retailer which is so strongly committed to the local market.

"We are providing 120 tailor-made suits by lifestyle brand Herbie Frogg and these will be manufactured and distributed by Newtownards-based company AF White.

"Needless to say, they will be the best possible design and style – and will definitely look better than the English suits."

Despite the continual squeeze on independents by multinationals Bogart grew its overall staff numbers to 20 this year, with contracts from Belfast businesses and various government bodies helping the company "survive the lean times".

"I think personal service has also helped us stay in business during the difficult years," John added.

"We are a family business, with my three sons working alongside me, and I think people appreciate that."

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