

How I Made It: Pac-Man paved the way for OSSM Cloud founder Ray Ryan



Ryan: an eye for latest trend

Ray Ryan studied marketing in the 1970s, a time when “there were no real marketing jobs”. His parents urged him to study by night and get a job by day instead, so he did, working in the warehouse of an electronics company. “I was always interested in technology, even though, at the time, technology meant microwave ovens.”

At weekends he opened a stall in Dublin’s Dandelion market, stocked with leftover promotion items that his employer was discarding.

In time he changed jobs and moved into electronic games. The early Pac-Man and Space Invaders games in his attic are collectors’ items. When Atari moved into home computers, so did he.

His employer by that stage held the agency for Atari in Ireland, which landed him in his first proper marketing role. “It was my first experience outside of ‘stock it high’ and I liked it.”

Increasingly, customers were asking about things such as accounting packages and databases, and his interest in computers for business developed.

He joined the sales and marketing team at Memory, Ireland's first quoted technology company. "I was very comfortable going into warehouses because I knew what a delivery docket was. All my previous experience stood to me."

Back then, businesses could get grants for IT to help them automate their processes, which helped. "You were going into businesses where everything was done with pen and ink," he said. "I loved those years."

Memory went into receivership and he became a shareholder in the Unix part of the business which came out of it, called Premier Information Systems.

When a newsletter landed on his desk reporting that a small UK accounting software company called Sage had bought Multisoft, he had to look the company up in the Golden Pages to find out who they were.

He called Sage's UK sales director and told him how to improve its Ireland strategy. That resulted in an invitation to the UK for a meeting. "When the taxi driver said he knew where Sage's office was, I knew I was in trouble: Sage obviously wasn't four guys operating out of an attic. I had to eat humble pie."

At that meeting, he learnt the move was on from Unix to Windows. "I went back to my Unix guys and said we need to move to Windows and they said, 'Don't worry, we'll just get the Unix to do what the Windows does,' which was exactly what I had heard the mainframe guys say about Unix back in the day."

He left to set up his own Sage business in 1998. "Y2K was coming, the euro was happening, Windows was being pushed and I could see PC networking was coming. It was a time of change and Sage was embracing that change. It also had the money, and that was key to me, because I reckoned it would be around for the next 20 years."

He set up his Sage business in the spare room of a friend's office with just a desk and a phone. The business grew but in 2003, when Sage opened its own distribution office in Dublin, he had to change tack. He set up Advent Processing Solutions with a determination to be a solutions provider rather than a box distributor. Having seen so many shifts in the market, when the move to the cloud began he was quick to recognise its importance.

Five years ago, Ryan, 59, merged Advent Processing Solutions with ADP Business Solutions, another Sage business, to become Envisage Cloud.

To ensure he could offer a choice, he also set up OSSM Cloud Solutions, an accredited Oracle NetSuite partner. Today OSSM Cloud has 27 employees, annual turnover of €2.9m and last year recorded growth of 34%. His ambition is to take it to €10m. “Timing is the most important thing. Spotting the trend and knowing when to jump, that’s the key.”