

# Wired for success



When Henry Wild joined Java messaging vendor Softwired in 1999, his mandate was to develop a marketing strategy for the one-product firm. Three years on he has secured financial backing and expanded its offerings to three

**H**enry Wild's background is in finance. He has spent many years as a financial consultant and private client investment adviser in Switzerland, during which time he also covered business planning and marketing for several technology start-ups. On the basis of this experience, Wild was brought on board as a financial consultant at Softwired in October 1999 to design and implement a marketing strategy, and to bring business sense to a company that had so far been run by technology specialists. Shortly after this, Wild also brought in Softwired's main investor – venture capitalist firm Prime High-tech Holdings. It was partly on the back of this that he was made chief executive officer and chief financial officer in late 2000.

The transition from consultant to chief executive officer was not difficult, says Wild, although he had to develop a greater awareness of employee related issues as well as a keener focus on strategy.

Wild has been developing a number of key strategies for Softwired. One is to explore the potential of linking up with a bigger partner with a presence in the communication or finance field, so he has placed a particular focus on promoting the firm to the chief executive officers of target companies. "These are ongoing investigations, we're in discussion with all the leading players in one form or another, at a technology, strategic or investment level." Discussions have already been held with BEA Systems and Tibco about the possibility of integrating their technology with Softwired's mobile product (ibus//mobile). Although both firms have financial customers, neither has developed the ability to push financial data to mobile devices. Wild is also no stranger to bringing companies to an IPO, and that is another potential route for Softwired.

Softwired offers message-oriented middleware solutions based on the Java Message Service (JMS). They are generically termed ibus ('information bus') to denote their basis in application-to-application communication. This is designed to allow real-time communication.

The products are used in a variety of verticals including finance, insurance, information technology, transportation and tourism, with clients such as: UBS Warburg, San Jose-based auction

site eBay and Deutsche Investment Trust, a member of the Dresdner Bank Group.

Wild declined to give exact customer numbers, but says about 20% of Softwired's customers are from the finance sector. Finance is a key market, but its offerings in this sector need to be coupled with mobile functionality, says Wild. This is because there are many rival firms that can provide real-time data communication in financial markets, and while Softwired technology can also do this, Wild sees taking that content mobile as having the most potential in the finance sector. "The finance sector must realise that wireless adds another layer of complexity to IT systems which is outside the core competencies of most

been to target rich applications on mobile devices, but we have noticed two things: the Java devices have been slow in coming onto the market and the GPRS and 3G networks have also been slow in roll-out," explains Wild. So Softwired has incorporated the ability to handle the high-end of the market, but has enabled the same software to communicate on SMS and browser-based technology. It primarily targets devices such as Compaq iPaq and Hewlett Packard's Jornada, which include a Java virtual machine and high-processing power, so are capable of handling a large number of transactions and rich applications on the device itself.

Similarly, a year ago Softwired's positioning would have been a solution for Java in competi-

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finance IT departments," he says. "As a result many systems will be partly or wholly hosted by carriers or wireless application service providers." He therefore sees issues such as privacy and security of data as vital to gain the custom of financial institutions. Softwired recently teamed up with Swiss-based security software firm MediaCrypt for this purpose.

## First mover

In his two years at the helm of Softwired, Wild feels his main achievement has been implementing a strategy to be the first mover in wireless JMS. "We have a very stable product and we're getting recognition for that across a number of verticals."

But his tenure has not been without challenges – one of the major hurdles he constantly has to manage is change. "In the software industry you always develop against a moving target," he says. "Even as you try and judge the market and develop to it, it moves on. So we have to factor in this constant change into Softwired's product development."

These adaptations tend to revolve around new technology, for example the choice of mobile device. "Our first development strategy has always

tion with Microsoft's .Net platform. But now it can accommodate both technologies. "Our software can now deal with the Microsoft and Java world. So a user can take Windows e-mail, calendar, Excel spreadsheets and so on, and can now have interoperability with our software," says Wild. "This is a neat shift in meeting what we see as a challenge from Microsoft to the Java space."

Looking forward, Wild's immediate focus is to concentrate on gaining clients in Europe and the US. He is also in the process of raising additional funds from other venture capital firms for product development and expansion into these target markets. His ultimate aim is to see Softwired become a global company in the software communications business with a distinct focus on mobile communications.

Founded in 1997, Softwired is based in Zurich, Switzerland. It supplies JMS technology for the intranet, extranet and internet as well as for wireless and embedded solutions. It currently has just under 40 employees, an increase from 10 since Wild joined in 1999. The team is expected to expand further as the market develops and finances allow.

- Sophie Brown