

The recent coming together of Comtec and Esys, which saw founder Simon Powell instated as chief executive, means the firm now offers three separate technology products.

Comtec is focusing solely on Travelink, the widely used tour operating system that provides dynamic packaging capabilities for mainstream holidays, tours, groups and tailor-made trips.

Legacy technology, now redeveloped on a modern platform, it has been built for use by high street agents, call centres and online retailers and has been a mainstay of the UK travel sector for more than two decades.

Esys's Holistic system includes four core products: a front-end Content Management System (CMS); a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system; a personalisation engine; and an automated paid search marketing platform.

It uses machine learning to match product attributes supplied by third parties to known preferences of customers and generate



marketing specific to them.

The third plank of Comtec's technology is Highway, a next-generation travel component caching technology created from a mixture of new and existing Comtec systems.

Esys and Comtec remain separate businesses but now have a single support desk, a single sales and account management team and single service-level agreement (SLA).

Comtec is currently building a new platform for a Canadian customer combining Holistic, Travelink and Highway, which it will then introduce to the UK as the "next generation retail selling system".

Powell added: "The selling experience has not advanced very much in the past five years. I see the coming together of Esys and Comtec as harmonising the customer experience."

timeline

Comtec timeline

- 1995:** Comtec is formed. Initial products are EasyComm and EasySearch
- 1999:** Comtec launches EasySell for travel agents
- 2003:** Comtec wins Queen's Award for Enterprise & Innovation
- 2005:** Comtec acquires Travelink Systems for £2 million
- 2006:** First international customer, Tourinter of France, is won
- 2008:** Wins first major US tour operator customer, Travel Impressions
- 2010:** Simon Powell and management team leave the business
- 2014:** Powell reacquires the business, backed by Finance Wales
- 2015:** The company returns to profitability, reporting an EBITDA of £1 million

Esys timeline

- 2012:** Esys Limited is formed; all of the original Comtec management team are involved
- 2013:** The company secures its first international client, Adriatica, and a prestigious grant to support its research and development work
- 2014:** The company secures a major new client, Feefo, to develop its new platform
- 2015:** The business acquires PPC agency Bloc Marketing, and is listed as the 12th-fastest-growing business in Wales in the FastTrack 50



supporters of


comtec

esys

TRAVOLUTION
@10



SIMON POWELL
chief executive

Q. What or who has been the biggest disruptive influence in travel over the past decade?

A. The internet has played a huge part in the disruption of the travel industry. This has affected almost everything within the travel process, from the way we browse holidays to booking and managing flights, all the way through to check-in and beyond. And with our phones we are always connected to the process.

Q. What or who do you think will be the biggest disruptive influence in travel in the coming decade?

A. The introduction of machine learning into the technology sector is beginning to play a major role in the travel industry. This enables highly tailor-made browsing experiences for potential buyers, manipulating the content they see to suit their wants and needs. And over the next 10 years, the amount of information that could potentially be tapped into will have a big impact, including browsing habits from a variety of

different resources, including social media. We as an industry need to give the consumer 'smart results', not 1,000s of results.

Q. What in the travel industry today surprises you most, given predictions made about what we should expect 10 years ago?

A. Firstly, the fact that travel agents are still around and in many cases doing much better than we thought they may have done. Secondly, how the low-cost carriers changed our industry for the better from a standing start about 10 years ago. And finally, how poorly served our industry is on the technical front in many cases, and how much opportunity this still leaves us to embrace over the coming years.

Q. Do you think the pace of change will quicken in the coming decade compared with what we saw in the past 10 years, and what will influence the speed of change?

A. The speed of change is often underestimated – when we take a look at the past 10 years it has been quite incredible. However, with the continued developments in technology and infrastructure, we can only expect extended rapid development in the next 10 years. Things will become more effective, streamlined and efficient; the next decade will make the past feel like we were standing still.

Q. How do you think travel rates against other areas of business and commerce in terms of how it has met the challenges of the digital era?

A. With both Eysys and Comtec

being in the travel technology sector, it is perhaps no surprise that I think the travel industry has welcomed the digital era. A large number of companies have invested heavily in their tech offering, grabbing the opportunity with both hands. There are, however, a number that have been left behind, and they are the ones who are now struggling to reach their full potential. For both Eysys and Comtec, we continue to aim to be at the cutting edge of technology, supplying the industry with the very best products and services to let travel companies stay ahead of the game.

Q. Do you think travel is well placed to meet the challenges of the coming decade? If yes, what gives you that confidence? If no, why?

A. Like many industries, we have been able to adapt, and online for our sector is just another distribution channel. As we have already changed so much, I have no reason to think that this will not continue to be the path that we take. As more technologies emerge and become mainstream, such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence, our industry will have to adapt or be overtaken.

Q. What has been the most disappointing aspect of the travel industry for you over the past 10 years?

A. Disappointing is a strong word for me, because generally I feel our industry has adapted well to all that gets thrown at it. Most disappointing for me personally would be where I have seen large amounts of money thrown away on technology projects

that had very little chance of success from the outset. However, I suppose this happens in all sectors and is not unique to travel. Secondly, and again not unique to travel, is the value Google and other search engines have been allowed to extract from the industry.

Q. What has excited you most about the industry over the past 10 years?

A. The way in which the industry has utilised technology to reach new audiences, improve the buying process and enhance the overall experience has been incredibly exciting. There's been some difficult times when the industry was put under strain, but it has been impressive to witness the investment in digital technology, with companies clearly seeing the influence it has on their business.

Q. Has the internet proved to be a broadly positive force for travel intermediaries or are the forces of disintermediation still at work?

A. In my opinion, the internet has been massively positive for our industry and, most importantly, for the consumer. Buying and managing travel has changed forever, but this is only the start. It provides the foundation to allow even more choice in the way we buy, manage and interact with our travel journey. Disintermediation is still at work and always will be as long as the sites that disintermediate add value in some way – which in most cases they do, so they survive.

Q. If you were given £1 million to invest in a travel start-up today, what would you look for?

A. The hardest question last. I really don't know, because to find something unique at this time in our sector is hard, and £1 million in the online world could seem like a great deal of money, but as we know, if you have to buy traffic it can be spent quickly. So I would build the technology and partner with someone who has the traffic.

10s WITH SIMON

Apple or PC? PC

Which of your gadgets do you most worry about losing? Phone

How many Twitter followers do you have? Not many

What was your first online travel purchase? Flight

Who makes the best smartphones?

Apple

Atari or Sinclair Spectrum?

Neither – Commodore

What's your favourite travel app?

Trainline

How many travel apps do you have

downloaded on your phone? 10

Who has made the biggest impact on

travel in the past decade? OTAs

What was the last Instagram picture

you posted? I've never posted one

With the continued developments in technology and infrastructure, things will become more streamlined and efficient. The next decade will make the past feel like we were standing still.