

How we did it: travel upstart Locomote picks up speed

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What began as a simple plan to streamline in-house travel bookings is fast becoming one of Philip Weinman's most successful start-up ventures.

By CAMERON COOPER

Serial tech entrepreneur Philip Weinman has a typical approach with his start-ups – launch them, grow them, sell them and walk away. This time it is different.

Fresh from signing a deal that gives New York Stock Exchange-listed travel commerce platform Travelport a majority 55 per cent stake in his latest success story, [Locomote](#), Weinman wants to stay part of the action. Why?

"It's a global business. There are no borders with this technology," says Weinman, who has started or acquired numerous enterprises since launching software and hardware solutions business HiSoft in 1983.

"Most of my previous companies were Australia-centric."

Established almost three years ago and run out of Melbourne, Locomote is an online corporate travel and expenses platform that has quickly won over a stellar client list, including ANZ, Allen & Overy, World Vision and Medibank. It features new digital and mobile services and lifts efficiency, automates travel management and saves companies up to 35 per cent on costs.

Locomote started as an in-house idea by Weinman, Dr Clive Sher and technology experts Ross and David Fastuca. The initial aim was to streamline bookings and reduce expenses for Weinman's own company, Deasil Management Group, but it has now become a core business in its own right – one that is shaking up the travel management sector.

Locomote's "agnostic" model lets companies manage all aspects of their business travel – rather than ceding control to a travel management company – while choosing from any suppliers offering services as booking engines, budget and expense management and authorisation.

As part of the Travelport deal, respected industry executive Sandra McLeod takes over as Locomote's chief executive, replacing Weinman, who is vice-chairman. Normal reticence about handing over a start-up is not a factor this time for Weinman, given that he will remain an integral part of Locomote's international expansion plans. His partners Dr Sher, Dean Weinman and Locomote's co-founders, the Fastuca cousins, will also stay involved.

“We brought disruption to the industry,” says Weinman, adding that since launching, “what we’ve got is a global partnership with a global player, and everybody is staying on, which is really unusual”.

Striking the deal with **Travelport** president Gordon Wilson was relatively easy, because “he bought the idea from day one” after a 30-minute meeting in New York with Weinman and Sher.

In 2014, Travelport secured a 49 per cent stake in Locomote as the latter developed its culture, content and clients. However, to fast-track international aspirations, an additional 6 per cent stake has been granted to take advantage of Travelport’s presence in more than 170 countries.

Weinman explains the rationale behind choosing Travelport as a partner: “[Wilson] gave us one word that convinced us to go with Travelport and that’s ‘global’. Travelport has direct relations with every airline on the planet, with every global travel management company ... so it was a very easy sell in this case to join forces.”

Weinman loves the thrill of new ideas and opportunities that launching a start-up brings.

“It keeps me young and on my toes,” he says. “I can’t afford to sit back and enjoy what we’ve built. You can always do better.”

One piece of advice

For other start-ups, seasoned entrepreneur Philip Weinman suggests promoting the following:

Loyalty: “I’ll pick loyalty over ability. Once people are loyal to the family, the business just grows. We can always train people, but loyalty is something that can’t be taught.”

Fun: “If you get up in the morning and you don’t want to go to work, you’re not going to be successful. You have to have a workplace where everyone buys into the vision.”

Passion: “This must permeate to everyone in the team; from sales to IT and from reception to management.”

Positivity: “In our company, there are two words that you can never say – ‘no’ and ‘but’. ‘But’ becomes ‘and’, and ‘no’ becomes ‘yes’.”and on my toes,” he says.

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