

Featured Family Business: Datascan Document Services



Datascan Document Services is a family owned and operated outsourced document and information processing organisation. Located just off the M50 in Finglas, it employs 50 staff in a variety of full and part time positions. Datascan works with some of Ireland's leading companies for information processing and has a wealth of experience in Document Services and Medical Records Processing. Since 1993, the company has been processing sale or return information for the print media industry. More recently, Datascan has established a video Redaction bureau which provides CCTV enhancement and blurring services. Taking information security very seriously, Datascan is accredited to both ISO9001 and ISO27001 standards.

In this interview we speak to Founder and Chairman of Datascan, Padraic Cafferty, and Director of Datascan, Orla Cafferty.

Padraic: I've been in the security business all my life. In 1970 I joined Securicor, a multinational at the time. They later became the S in the G4S group. That was totally unforeseen by business, because they were cutthroat competitors during their reign and the private security business was expanding across the world. We never thought that would happen. But it was history as far as I was concerned because I had actually left in '79 to go on to another multinational company Purolator who had divested themselves of their European operation, and I became security manager there. Then in '84 I set up my own company, Securi-Force. On reflection, that was sort of a crazy decision – I had little or no resources behind me, I had four young kids and I gave up a nice job at the time and better prospects for the new company. So, I sacrificed all of that. I felt that it was timely to get away from the multinational influence - I didn't like the way decisions were made there, because everything

was very corporate and most small decisions had to go back to London and by the time the decision was made, it was almost irrelevant. At the outset of setting up my own business I knew that I could work with people, could engender team spirit and I knew employees liked working *with* me rather than *for* me. I considered this a privilege and a huge strength for the future. Setting out on the unknown was the cause of a lot of discussion with Patricia, my wife,



but she was also sneakily confident that I could make it and I drew confidence from this. From the outset, despite her apprehension and having the responsibilities of four young children, she took on payroll management in the new company and as an equal shareholding director she continued to manage this up until we had 500 employees. This proved to be of vital

importance, as she interacted with employees in a very humane way and commanded their trust right up to the sale of the company in 1998.

Like all things in life one needs to share some luck, particularly at vulnerable times, and I was fortunate to have some contracts coming up for review at the same time and I was able to take advantage of these by offering a more personal and more effective service.

We started off with one contract and four people employed. It was in the midst of a recession in '84, and it did seem crazy to be doing it but I never looked back.

Gradually, the contacts that I had relationships with came on board. We used to provide security to all the prominent events, like the Eurovision Song Contest, the opening of the K Club, and all the major events that took place in Ireland. These would be very significant and much sought after contracts by the multinational companies who would have loved to have had them under their belt - but we turned out the right people, and we trained them well. At

“If you are building a business with a workforce involved, you need to start from a position of liking people, trusting them, sharing their concerns, motivating them and building a strong, likeminded and committed management team who will buy into your vision and ensure that your philosophy will be filtered down to every grade within your organisation.”

the end of these events whether it was in Killarney or Mill Street, we would always have a good get together afterwards. That was hugely positive in terms of bonding.

Then in 1998 the company was bought out by Chubb International – we had 650 employees at that stage and attached to that was this Returns scanning business. It was very much in its exploratory stage. After three months they came back to me to see if I would take back the Newspaper Returns scanning end of things, because it was not their forte at all. After we bought back the scanning business I decided that I wasn't going to sit back on my laurels, so we developed the business and put serious effort into making it what it is today. An early client, Independent News Media who I had a relationship with, asked me to do a trial scanning their newspaper unsold returns. After that proved to be successful they asked us to take on the whole contract, and we took it from there, and we have been working with INM/Newsprint since.

Orla became involved in 2001. She was working for a multinational group at the time. One evening I popped the question to her about joining the business - and she said yes.

Orla: I was working in HR in a company that is now known as RR Donnelly. I had a very young family myself, so there was the attraction of a bit of flexibility with the family business. While you do have to work very hard in a family business, there is an understanding that when things go wrong – as they do when you've got young children and crèches and so on – it's not so much a requirement to book holidays if you need time off. So it worked very well from that point of view. It was very attractive for me.



DataScan HQ in Finglas

Padraic is the only one of his family who stayed at home in Ireland for his entire life, whereas his brothers and sisters all moved to the States at different times. All entrepreneurs. Padraic is involved in a few other businesses as well, he's a serial entrepreneur. To be working in a company that's transferring Returns data on a live basis to the main newspapers in Ireland, it's



something you couldn't have thought of 50 years ago. In the early days, barcodes were cut out of the newspapers and sent to us. They were counting them using an electronic wand reader. Then as the technology developed it became the barcode scanners that you see in supermarkets. In fact, in 1998 there weren't machine readable barcodes on everything –

newspapers were amongst the first products to get them.

“Then the “polluter pays” principle came in; the EU decided that the publishers of the newspapers were responsible for the recycling of waste newspapers. That meant going from small barcodes in an envelope to facilitating the intake of full newspapers that hadn't been sold.”

We had to go from a very small premises to this large one that you're in today, and we were very busy for a number of years. But then the financial crisis happened which resulted in a dramatic downturn in so many

businesses, but roughly a 45% reduction in newspaper volume. Gone were the days where people used to buy all the Sunday newspapers. As a business, we had to look at other things to do, which led us to document services. It was a service that was already allied to our in-house skillset and the infrastructure that we had, so we set up the document services bureau.

We initially thought that anyone who had paper can become our customer, anyone who wants to get paper digitised can become our customer. Of course, because our message was so broad, we didn't get any traction at all. But we had an idea.

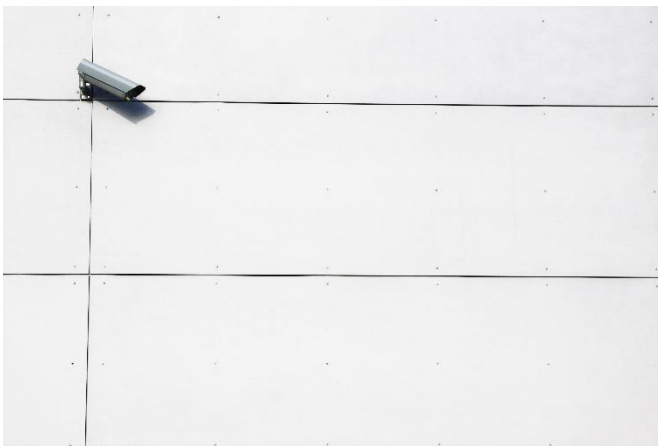
We rang around to the GP practices to find out if they were using any document software, and we found that there was only four or five patient management packages being used in the entire country. We wrote to a load of GPs and got an immediate response. So, it was decided

for us that we were going to specialise in the provision of medical records scanning. Now, we're the partner of choice for the main software packages.

On your website you have three values listed: quality, security, and partnership. Where did they come from?

P: I think it was always our natural instinct. We always make sure that the customer is getting the service that he or she demands and that we're contracted to deliver. When you have that frame of mind yourself, it does spread out around you. We've always aspired to do very well and it's built into us at this stage.

O: The likes of Newsread/INM, Irish Times, The Examiner and so on, they won't work with people who are not going to work *with* them. The same with our clients in medical records. We always do our best to make sure that there's nothing hidden, that it works and that it's seen to be taken seriously. With both us having experience in the multinational environment we see the value that they put on things like ISO accreditations, and as a small business we've tried our best to get the quality accreditations that we do have. The ISO27001 Information Security one is critical and it took us a long time to get it. But it's something that we value.



[We're also the first company](#) in Ireland to offer a CCTV redaction service accredited to the ISO27001 standard, which is the blurring of CCTV footage. Under the GDPR, if you're a shop owner and you have an incident with one perpetrator in the footage, it's your responsibility to remove the imagery of the other individuals from that footage before handing it into court –

otherwise you're breaching their privacy. So we're hoping this service will take off under these new regulations.

The kind of industry you're in is prone to change, for example the GDPR. How has that affected your business?

O: The GDPR is a great opportunity for us to be honest, because in the document services bureau we already strive to operate to those kind of standards. It's all around data protection. It made us very busy for a while because everybody was kind of panicking. We actually took on a lot of DCU students during the summer and they all worked out very well – we still have a few of them working with us, which is great. When you're in a small business in the

information sector, you have to be able to move. And because we're small and owner led with a small management team, it can be easier to make changes than in a multinational where the decision making process can be a lot longer and more onerous.

P: The GDPR is going to be a big part of our lives, it'll be up there with industrial relations and in every walk of life. People are more conscious of who is watching them. It really hasn't kicked in at all yet. There's going to be some significant court cases coming down the track. That's what's going to drive it. And they'll go after the big targets first, the big organisations, utility companies for example.



But they'll also go for smaller companies as well. I think if you're in a family run business or your own business, you have to be constantly learning about what is out there. You have to, because otherwise you're not going to be up to speed and you're going to be left behind. And I wouldn't always rely on the multinationals to show you their formula for the future.

“We're trying to be one step ahead. If you're in this type of business, a service orientated business, you have a short window – even if it is a great idea – you have a short window of opportunity.”

What are the dynamics of working as father and daughter in a business?

O: We've always been very respectful at work. Initially we were extremely formal, whereas now we're much more comfortable. We've evolved over the years and found our mojo working together. The issue at the start was that we were trying to pretend that we were just people, colleagues, as opposed to family members working together. We also have our succession plan taken care of. Once that plan was implemented and all the family got on board with it, it cleared things up which was very good to see.

Do you have formalised roles?

O: Myself and Padraic wouldn't have formalised roles as such, but everyone else does, very much so.

P: It's an understanding throughout the company that things have to be formal. Perhaps this

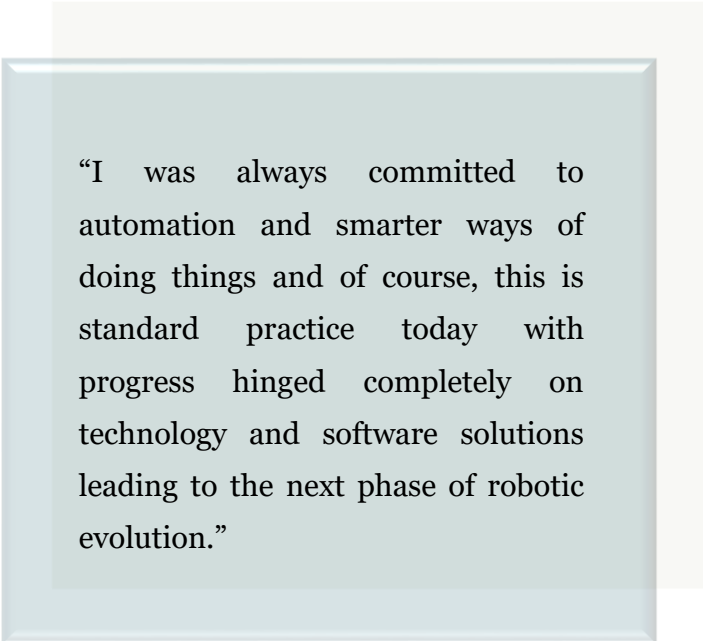
is one of the areas that I found difficult to get right at the start when Orla came on board. I was 'business, business, business' and I would take the business into Orla's house and into her family. We could be having great fun at a birthday party and suddenly I would throw business into it.

O: Padraic is a proper entrepreneur, always full of ideas.

P: It's a load to carry because sometimes it keeps you awake at night. I've had challenges in business, but I don't lose sleep over the day-to-day. I'd lose more sleep over trying to do something different, to do things better and faster. New ideas. And much to the disgust of the people around me. But I have learned to switch off in recent years – and I'm playing better golf now.

Do you think your entrepreneurial flair was something that was passed down to you?

P: I think so. It was handed down to me and I think we passed it on. I came from a small farm and my father worked extremely hard and diligently. Both my mother and father



“I was always committed to automation and smarter ways of doing things and of course, this is standard practice today with progress hinged completely on technology and software solutions leading to the next phase of robotic evolution.”

worked, as they had to in rural Ireland and especially in the west of Ireland where survival was a big challenge. That's why kids were flying out of Shannon at 18 years of age. My father was very physically and mentally strong, but that was the only occasion that I ever saw him cry, at Shannon airport waving goodbye from the balcony. I made up my mind there and then, because I couldn't see my father go through that again. And things were changing, things were improving.

Where would you like to see Datascan in the next ten years?

O: Certainly, we would like to become the number one choice for medical records scanning and processing in Ireland. We have excellent relationships with the software houses and thankfully very good partnerships with some of the big medical groups. We would also like

to broaden our range of services, which in the document information sector takes big investment. And looking at other options as well. When the papers and magazines were going down, we set up a new company called [M50 Webstore](#), which acts as a warehouse fulfilment facility for smaller companies, whereby we take in smaller products and then ship them to their end user customer. Of course, we are always open to looking at merging with other companies.

P: Bringing in expertise onto the board as well, non-executive directors. That's something that we're considering at the moment. We're looking for forward thinking people who can bring something new to the board.

Datascan website: datascan.ie

Twitter: [@datascandoc](https://twitter.com/datascandoc)

LinkedIn: [Datascan Document Services](#)



Padraic Caffery is the Founder and Chairman of Datascan, Executive Chairman at Northwood Technology Ltd, and Proprietor at Westpoint Business Centre and Sigmund Business Centre, Glasnevin, Dublin. Padraic is a member of the Institute of Directors and Past President of the Irish Security Industry Association. Padraic serves as a non-executive director of the Private Security Authority and the Housing Finance Agency.



Orla Cafferty is a Director of Datascan having worked with the company since 2001. She is also co-owner of Executive Interiors Ltd an office furniture supply company founded with her husband John in 2004. Orla established the document services bureau at Datascan in 2007 and has extensive experience in handling medical, financial and commercial digitisation projects and is certified as a data protection practitioner.