

JOHN DELAHUNTY

TAKING ON THE BIG BOYS

Mackay is on the cutting of a new technology that is set to revolutionise the telecommunications industry. Forget about telephone lines, because VoIP is the telephone call of the future and it's coming to Mackay. Dave Westman chats with Mackay Computer Services (MCS) founder John Delahunty, the man about to take on Telstra and the telecommunication giants with wireless technology. Photography by Dean Whitling.

It just goes to show, you shouldn't make assumptions. Just because you're meeting the founder of a computer business who wrote his first computer program at the age of 13, doesn't mean he is a geek. At least not in the traditional sense.

Trying to make John Delahunty fit the "nerd" mould would be like forcing an elephant into a wetsuit. He doesn't wear glasses, he plays sport, loves the outdoors, and he can actually communicate with other humans. As he leans back and recalls his first computer (a Tandy TRS-80) and his time in the 'TRS-80 Club', John proves that he at least has some qualifications for 'geekdom'.

His passion in the 1980s may have been for programming, but life was full of traditionally non-geek activities; rugby league, basketball, and surf lifesaving. At one stage, he was ranked sixth in Australia for beach sprinting. In fact, John, now 39, was an athlete first and computers simply helped him to over-achieve in other areas.

"What computers did for me was take me from an average student to an above-average student," he recalls. "I was a self-taught programmer, reverse engineering software for the Apples at school so I could use them on the Tandy at home."

Even though John still works on research and development for his Mackay company MCS, the call of the wild is still strong. "Dad was a mad-keen fisherman. For as far back as I can remember, we always had boats in our family. It's only the last couple of years that I haven't had a boat. I started scuba diving in 2002 and sold the boat not long after." That should be all about to change soon with the long-awaited arrival of a new Meridian Powercat.

What's more, he should soon find the time to use it, after a hectic year that saw MCS move to new premises on Milton Street and build a platform to take Mackay to the cutting edge of technology.

John was the first to bring internet broadband to Mackay and now, with a staff of 22, provides the first serious wireless broadband network in the region. His Redfox network has required a massive investment but John can see the big picture.

The wireless technology opens up viable alternatives to traditional telephone lines. To a layman, the VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) system is somewhat like talking over the internet instead of through a copper telephone line. The service links directly from a lounge room to the network through wireless technology.

"People don't expect Mackay to have its own telecommunications carrier but people like us will revolutionise the industry because you don't have to pay line rental," he enthuses. "It will be the biggest revolution since 1991 when PCs were released to the general market."

Taking Mackay to the cutting edge is just the beginning, as one of John's goals is to bring the same technology to the disenfranchised on a wider scale – to the north, the south, and west. All that, of course, involves a lot of time and effort, but it's amazing how much you can fit when you work up to 18 hours a day for weeks on end.

Not that he misses out on family time with his wife, Evita, and four children. "A lot of the long hours I do from home." That time spent with Medeleine, 11, Brigitte, 9, Jessica, 2, and Marcus, born in May, will allow John to pass on the same work ethic instilled in him by his father, Barry. His father also taught him

the number one mantra at MCS – "there's a customer at the end of all this".

"My father played a big part in my upbringing. He was a huge influence on me business-wise and is a partner in MCS. He started REB Engineering about 18 years ago, having left ANI Engineering a year before the branch was closed. That was the first company I ever wrote software for. Not too many people were writing their own software at 13 and 14. It's more common these days because kids are exposed to computers from the age of two."

John's investment in the region is significant, particularly with business people who are relying more on more on electrical communication. To many locals, he will be a technical savior. CL

