A Successful IT Start-up

A talk for the Adstock Science Club on 19th April, 2018 by Mr Phil Neal

Up to now the Science Club has concentrated on providing purely scientifically orientated talks, as a bit of a change April's talk traced the development from its inception, to the current day, of a key bit of technology; how and why it was conceived and the path it's development and marketing had to take to make it a world leader in its field.
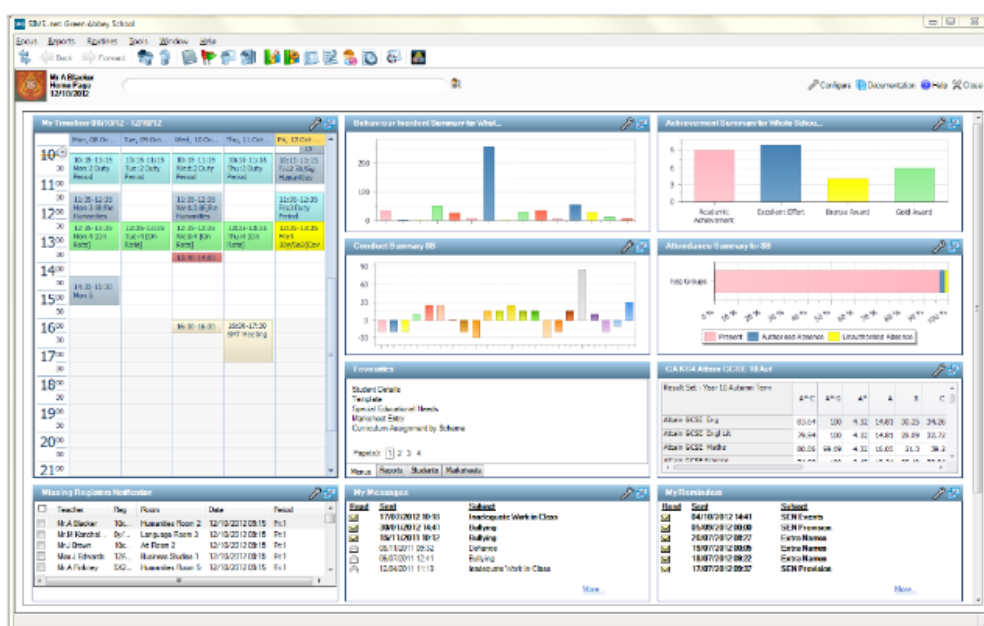

Phil Neal was the original creator of what has become a widely used, versatile, and essential bit of technology called SIMs. This stands for School Information Management System and basically handles the management of all Student information. Phil wrote the original code on early computers (380Z and Sirius) from his kitchen table.

After obtaining a Science and Maths degree at London University Phil taught for around ten years and in 1982 the school he was at got hold of an RM 3807 computer running Basic and Wordstar. It was during his time as a teacher, when he had to write many student reports, that he noticed most teachers tended to use the same phrases time and time again in their write ups. This gave him the idea of developing software that would contain a database of most of these preferred phrases which then could be called up relatively easily, speeding up the report writing process considerably. Using Basic he was able to create a database and mail merge program to create testimonials and reports.

Around 1982 SIMs was taken up by some schools to help them manage their student records. He found that using Basic was cumbersome and started using dBase which made life a lot easier in storing, finding, filing and indexing files. He explained how he was able to migrate, over time, from less efficient data base engines to more efficient ones and some of the problems that he had to overcome along the way, especially with the introduction of Microsoft Windows and later developments. Bedfordshire Education Authority got interested in his work and started using his system throughout the county. By now SIMS was also getting interest from other LEAs and he had to start expanding his business. In 1994 he sold SIMs to Capita who put further investment into the project.

Now over 83% of schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are using SIMs as their main management system and it is also currently being used in over 45 countries. There have been many twists in the creation of this software and over 650 people now work on creating and supporting it.

Marius Stuart

SIMs Desktop Control panel