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Online exclusive: TMTI

Crispin Thomas is living proof that things do not always turn out as expected. When he drew up the business plan for Talk Me Through It (TMTI), little did he imagine the way his idea would evolve and the new revenue streams that would emerge.

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Shortly after Mr Thomas launched TMTI, a call-centre-based helpline for consumers struggling with their mobile phone handsets, he thought of creating a web-based product that would allow them to work through their problems.

"It wasn't part of the original business plan but we developed the software for a product called Simulex, which helps customers by showing them how to operate certain functions on their handsets," explains Mr Thomas. "We obtained the patent for the web."

TMTI Simulex is a range of interactive virtual mobile phone handsets, which walks users through the 10 most-used functions. "We licence the product to mobile phone companies, such as Vodafone and Samsung, which put it on their websites," explains Mr Thomas. "It is all about saving costs. When

companies introduce Simulex, it cuts calls to their call centres by an average 11pc. In the future, customer service will only be web based."

Mr Thomas, who set up TMTI with his own funds and an investment from his brother, adds: "We charge an annual licence fee for Simulex. It is not dependent on usage. We are interested in quality of earnings rather than quantity."

Simulex is now one of the most profitable parts of Mr Thomas's business empire. "I have had a lot of luck and good fortune," he says. When Bluetooth was launching in the UK, TMTI saw an opportunity for testing its compatibility with different handsets. Mr Thomas signed a partnership agreement Cambridge Silicon Radio, the leading Bluetooth chip set provider, to create a quality assurance hologram. "We were then elected to join the Usability Expert Group, alongside Nokia, Ericsson and Motorola," he adds.

The Usability Expert Group is one of only two expert groups for the Bluetooth Special Interest Group (SIG), the body that oversees the development and licensing of Bluetooth technology. "We are growing up as a business," adds Mr Thomas. "We now help manufacturers." TMTI currently tests more than 70 handsets with every Bluetooth accessory to check its compatibility.

Similarly, the initial business plan did not include the Gadget Helpline which, with 80,000 paying customers, now brings in revenues worth around £240,000 per month. It has been operational for just over a year. "We employ about 100 young people, with an average age of 24, who are very bright and just love gadgets," says Mr Thomas. "But it's not like a typical call centre where you aren't allowed to walk into certain parts. We offer good pay, a free gym and nice funky offices."

His latest venture, www.insuregadgets.com, is also a departure from the business plan. "It's a one stop insurance plan," says Mr Thomas. "I worked closely with Lloyd's of London underwriters to develop it. And if you check the Financial Services Authority website, you'll find me under registered individuals."

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