



THE SUNDAY TIMES

The Sunday Times December 13, 2020

HOW I MADE IT FRANK BROOKS

I pushed digital solution for legal papers past trial stage

Few sectors are as ripe for digital disruption as the law, as Frank Brooks discovered when he went looking for a new business opportunity last year.

The Blackrock man, 49, studied electrical engineering in University College Dublin before winning a green card through the visa lottery and heading off to America.

The plan was to visit Florida and move on. Work in the Sunshine State went well for him, with a series of roles working on IT systems across an array of sectors, including power stations, telecoms and consumer goods.

As he progressed to the level of chief technology officer, he became increasingly drawn to start-ups. "I found it an exciting space," he says. "You can have an impact in a small company; in a small company everybody is important."

He was an early remote worker, still employed by Florida companies after returning to Ireland 10 years ago, with his American wife, to raise their three children here. His typical schedule saw him spend a week in Florida every four to six weeks – a burst of winter sunshine he misses.

While he was busy working as chief technology officer for a Florida provider of supply-chain technology, barrister Stephen Dowling, unknown to Brooks at this stage, was working in Ireland on filling a gap in the market for a digital solution to the reams of paper documents associated



Brooks's LegalView enables access to court documents

with court cases. TrialView was founded in 2014, yet its progress was slow – the legal fraternity was in no hurry to change its ways of working.

TrialView had not yet gained significant traction when, in 2019, a chance conversation with a mutual acquaintance put Brooks – who was looking for a new challenge and keen to move back into an entrepreneurial space – in touch with Dowling.

Though it had been around for a while, TrialView was still very much in start-up mode. "I had always had a very strong desire to have my own company," says Brooks.

The two men struck up a rapport, yet it was Dowling's "passion for the idea" that really sold him.

Brooks quit his job, became a shareholder and took over as chief technology officer of TrialView, transforming its capabilities.

"As someone from the non-legal world, I'll never forget the shock of visiting my first court room, and seeing box after box after box being wheeled into court," says Brooks, who likens it to something from Dickens.

The need to digitise had been flagged more than two decades ago but change was hindered by "massive resistance" from a profession that is cautious by nature and simply used to doing things a particular way.

"The pandemic has upended that," says Brooks.

The team had added a

video function to the product, which enabled remote hearing of legal cases and tribunals. This feature proved timely in a way none of them could have foreseen. TrialView became the preferred software for large Irish court cases during the pandemic.

It was used in the recent case between publicans and insurance company FBD, for example. The attorney general recently directed that TrialView be used for the Leaving Cert appeal cases, too. Last year it was used in the case between IBRC and the Quinn family.

Brooks's focus on user experience has been key to the success of TrialView. It takes just minutes to train up even the least tech-savvy legal eagle to use it. New functionality allows all those involved in a trial to see what's going on at the same time from their own devices, enabling both remote and "hybrid" trials and tribunals, which combine remote and courtroom-based activities.

"There's a realisation that not everybody needs to be in the same room in cases and hearings," says Brooks. "People see that in a way they wouldn't have a year ago."

Once Covid travel restrictions are lifted, the plan is to drive growth of the product worldwide. With a team of just five, it'll be all hands on deck to do it, which is exactly what appeals to Brooks. "It's a rollercoaster – but I like that," he says.

Sandra O'Connell