

A life in RECRUITMENT

Entrepreneur **Ross Porter** began his career in the recruitment sector in 1998 when he started work as a consultant.

A year later he took the plunge, sold all of his personal possessions and used what little savings he had to raise the funds to start **Draig Personnel** in Blackwood.

Ross grew the business into a recognised name in the recruitment sector which, at its peak, had six branches.

He sold it in 2011 for an undisclosed sum to Newport-based Acorn Recruitment.

Father-of-two Ross, a former South Wales Argus Gwent Young Entrepreneur of the Year, went on to set up Caerphilly-based **Clear Sky Recruitment**, and now, 20 years after first setting up in business, he reflects on his success.

He said: "I knew from an early age that I was destined to work for myself.

"Having been a temporary worker on £3.20p/hr for a number of months, I remember going into the Acorn Recruitment branch on Bridge Street in Newport in 1995 to hand my weekly timesheet in and thinking about how the temporary worker supply process must work.

"The idea of one day being sat across the other side of the recruitment desk and earning more instantly appealed to me. I continued to work on numerous temporary assignments until a good friend of mine offered me a permanent role to generate sales for his start-up family business in the training sector in 1996.

"I really appreciated the opportunity, however, I knew deep inside me that it was in the recruitment sector where I belonged.

"So, I handed in my company BMW, quit my job and sold all my personal belongings. Then I went cap in hand to the bank manager to raise the money to take a punt at a new recruitment venture.

"To say I set the recruitment business in 1999 up on a shoestring would not be an exaggeration. I risked it all at the age of 27, but I had no fear of failure.

"On November 1, 1999, the doors

opened to Caerphilly's first ever recruitment agency, Draig Personnel. I remember sitting in the dingy little office above a travel agent shop on Cardiff Road with Claire, my girlfriend at the time (who went on to become my wife) being excited as someone had posted our first CV through the letterbox. The rest as they say is history.

"The recruitment sector has almost reached saturation point with start-ups popping up here, there and everywhere.

"I think it is easier to set up in business today than ever before, however, I think lots of people these days have this romantic idea of how lovely it is running your own business. Sometimes, the reality can be a lot different and it really is tough.

"I have always been a 'people person' and I just knew that the recruitment sector would allow me to utilise my people skills and that it would give me a platform to better my standard of living and to give a little back to those who have cared for me during my early years."

So, what does Ross see as his greatest achievement in business over the 20 years?

He said: "I am not one for thinking about what I have or have not achieved. Some may say that having ranked in the top 50 fastest growing businesses in Wales (Wales Fast Grow 50) three times may be an achievement worth mentioning, but I guess it would have to be still enjoying what I do now as I did back in 1999."

He said that the internet and technology has changed the business world beyond belief over the last 20 years.

"When I first started we had one PC with the internet on but it was hardly used. I had a pager, a fax machine and a telephone. Our database was a handwritten card system. It's a world apart from the candidate / client CRM system we use today which cost more than £10k.

"There is now much more data available online that recruiters can take into consideration, including previous job roles, and even social media



presence.

Rather than focus on just a written application, more recruiters look through a candidate's social media presence than ever before.

"Technology is even changing the interview process, with Skype interviews becoming much more commonplace.

"We are already using a form of artificial intelligence within our hiring process, from automated text messages or emails being sent out confirming interviews, to communicating basic requirements and information (such as start date and salary) via instant messaging systems.

"It's not just recruiters which are benefiting from technology when it comes to new jobs; those looking for work can now connect with hiring managers directly through platforms such as LinkedIn, or even online forums for industry experts.

"These platforms have made it much easier for recruiters and job seekers to connect directly, rather than go through recruitment agencies, and makes communication much easier.

"The rise in technology has also widened the talent pool, as candidates can apply internationally, providing they are willing to relocate, or are able to work remotely."

Ross said: "If someone wants to set up a business, they have to have a vision of what they would like to achieve and to remain focused on the cause. They must understand that every action results in a reaction, they must take calculated risks and they must be brave and grab opportunities when they appear.

"I would do it all again. It has been a real rollercoaster of a ride but I've stayed on the rollercoaster and I have enjoyed every moment (almost)."