

Desktop Engineering Ltd – a historical perspective

History – early years

The company was founded on **6 February 1986**, initially called **Oxford Technical Software Ltd**, by Dr William Trinder and **Mr Geoffrey Haines**. Both founders were then working at **Oxford Magnet Technology**, the developer and manufacturer of superconducting magnets for NMR scanners.

At the time, Dr Trinder was Marketing Manager, and Mr Haines was Technical Manager to their principle customer Siemens Healthcare. During a trip to Germany in 1985, they both discussed the emerging power and capability of Personal Computers (PC) and how this would change the way engineers design products. The initial vision, *to write engineering design software for PC's then took form*.



First Exhibition 1986: Geoffrey Haines & Dr Richard Trinder

Working on early microprocessor computers, initial prototype analysis software was commenced in order to formulate interfaces and capabilities. However, it became apparent that in order to catch the wave of new software emanating from the USA they decided to acquire UK distribution rights for selected applications. The first product acquired was a **finite element analysis** (FEA) program from Algor Inc – one of the first FEA applications available on IBM PC's running MS-DOS. **The company started trading formally on 1 July 1986.**

Desktop Engineering Ltd.

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Rapid Market Development

During the first year of trading, it became apparent that this emerging new software market was being driven by US-based software houses, and new products and rapid growth meant that the company needed to broaden its reach in the markets it operated. Consequently, the company became a distributor for Computervision Inc of Boston MA, one of the first **CAD** companies, reselling their new PC based 3D design software. Integrated with a new **FEA** application from Structural Analysis Research Corporation of Santa Monica CA, the company renamed itself to **Desktop Engineering Ltd – coining the then-current term “desktop publishing”** created by Apple Inc, to describe the similar activity engineers would do on desktop computers.

During the ensuing 4 to 5 years the company grew rapidly, being recognised as offering **highly technical applications** with a **high level of training and support** activity.

Software Development

In 1989, the company acquired a small specialist software developer based in Milton Keynes, UK. This company had written a 2D mechanism analysis program, founded on the work of Professor S. Molian of Cranfield University. The company continued this development and released the program **DE/MEC** – a unique Windows 2 based mechanism analysis program. Distributors and agents were acquired in the US, Europe and Australasia. The development activity then expanded into creating a drawing office management solution, which in modern terms would be called a ‘**PDM solution**’.

Rationalisation

In 1991, it became apparent that the company needed to refocus the various activities and hence Mr Haines acquired Dr Tinder’s shareholding in **Desktop Engineering Ltd** and then sold off the software development to Dr Trinder. Thus the company could focus on the software and systems activity.



Exhibition 1994

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Growth into High End

In 1991, Computervision Inc allowed its partners to resell the new high-end CAD application **CADD5**. This new feature-based parametric solid modeller was Computervision's response to the new application from PTC Pro/Engineer.

The company eagerly took on board the skills and capability for this application and became the first company worldwide to sell this new application – to a subsidiary of **British Gas**.

The ensuing 7 or 8 years saw **Desktop Engineering** grow becoming the leading reseller for Computervision in the UK.

Acquisition by Cenit AG

In 1999, the German publicly quoted company **Cenit Ag Systemhaus**, acquired **Desktop Engineering Ltd** as part of their rapid worldwide growth strategy. In 3 months, Cenit doubled its size through acquisitions in France and the USA. As part of this group, **Desktop Engineering** continued to trade in the UK and retrained its workforce in the products of **Dassault Systèmes**, then marketed by IBM worldwide. Dassault Systèmes had developed **CATIA**, the leading CAD application for the automotive and aerospace markets.

Management Buy Out

In September 2001, the board of directors of **Cenit Ag** took the view to reduce its exposure to the UK market and offered an option for Mr Haines to buy back the UK operation of **Cenit** in the UK. Mr Haines completed this in December 2001.

Consolidation and Expansion

During the ensuing 10 years, the company has continued to lead the expansion and vision of delivering technical software applications to engineers desktops. Typical areas of expansion have included addressing the architectural market with a customised version of **CATIA developed by Frank Gehry – the world-renowned architect**. The first users in this market included **ArupSport** who designed the **Beijing Olympic Stadium** in CATIA.

Other areas of focus include **motorsport**, where the company has delivered value to many of the F1 racing teams. The company signed a distribution agreement with **MSC Software** to meet the needs of the **aerospace** market.

Next Generation

More recently the company has identified **Cloud-based applications** as the next direction that the market will head. The lower cost of infrastructure and greater flexibility in working patterns all give this way of delivering design capabilities many advantages. Based on that vision, the company has heavily invested time and energy in marketing and supporting the **On Cloud 3DEXPERIENCE platform**.

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This has resulted in the company being awarded **Dassault's Top Cloud Business Partner in EuroNorth 4** times in the last 5 years. Growth in this segment is strong confirming these early predictions.

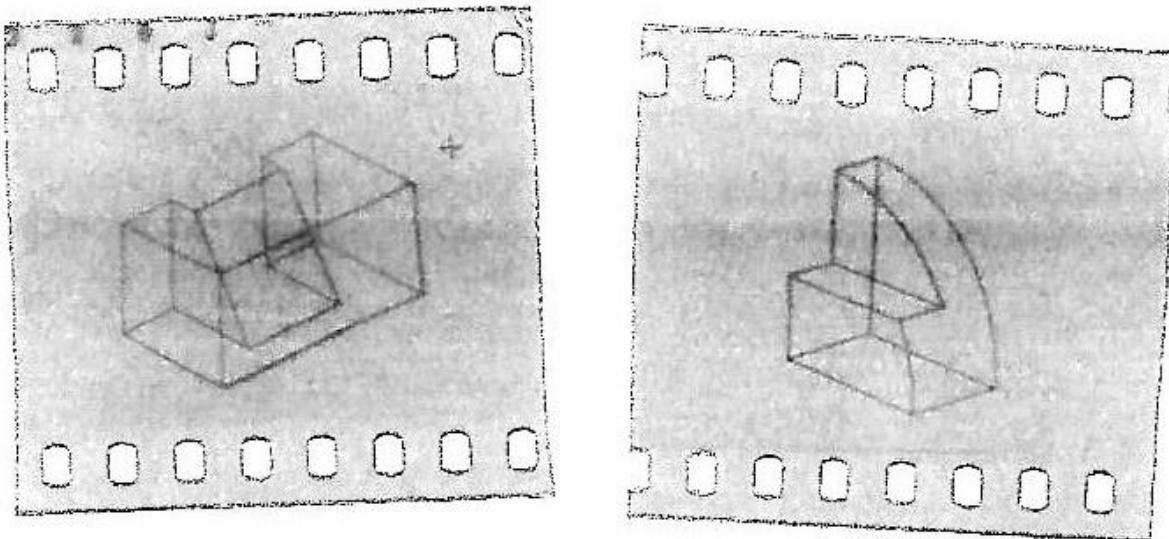
The company continues to look to the future in how new products will be designed and how manufacturing can make improvements using software technology.

Reflections – Geoffrey Haines

*Who would have thought that my early attempts of writing software in 1969 on an ICL Computer at Middlesbrough Polytechnic during school computer club would have ended where I am 50 years later? I remember it was a game, landing a spaceship on the moon, typing in rocket thrust values on a teletype – clearly topical at that time. A further 6 years later, I was writing **3D CAD** software on a PDP 11 – **images I have shared before as below**.*

At one point, we owned a software house developing mechanism analysis code together with early PDM software. However, all along it has been about interest in things **technical**, and how computers can make **design and collaboration easier**.

Along the way it's all been done with the help and similar enthusiasms of the people around me.



3D CAD in 1976 – software written to create model by Geoff Haines

[Read the Press Release >>](#)

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