

# GIS People

## After flirting with collapse, a sharp turn led to success

It's not unusual to see services firms develop their own intellectual property. But for Queensland-based specialist GIS People, an event that nearly ended the company was a catalyst to focus on building its own products.

GIS People started in 2010 as a professional services firm focused on delivering geospatial consulting, software development and training services to the booming mining, oil and gas sectors, and to government clients. Within three years the company had reached 30 staff.

"It was just fantastic - the money was flowing in," founder and chief executive Igor Stjepanovic says. "However, within six months of hitting the peak we were almost bankrupt."

Thanks to the mining investment downturn, the company lost several major clients in a matter of weeks, and within four months had shrunk back to just two people.

"That was really hard for us," Stjepanovic says. "What was necessary at that time was to refocus the business, because professional services was basically dead in Brisbane."

So Stjepanovic entered a software contest run by PwC and

### FACT FILE

**Founded** 2010

**Key executives**  
Igor Stjepanovic,  
Chris Green

**HQ** Brisbane

**Growth** 147.69%

**2017 revenue**  
\$3.55 million

**Top vendors**  
Microsoft, SAP,  
Mapbox



the Queensland government and used his software and GIS knowledge to create a solution for graffiti management.

That idea beat out entries from Google, Telstra and several universities, and went on to become GIS People's first product, an Azure-based tool called Gruntify. That led to a subsequent contract with the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. And when Cyclone Debbie went through Queensland, Gruntify was used to collect 60,000 reports with photos and videos. It also caught the attention of Microsoft, which used it as a case study at its worldwide partner event, Inspire.

A subsequent inquiry from the state government set GIS People on the path to developing its second tool - a system for managing the real-time disclosure of political donations called Open Declare, which is also gaining attention around the country and from overseas.

Stjepanovic could not be happier with the sharp turn in the company's direction, achieving 148 percent growth in the past year.

"We have gone from a professional services company to a product company where now more than 90 percent of our income is derived from our products," Stjepanovic says.

"So whereas in the past we had consultants and cartographers in our office, these days we have software developers, testers, app designers, and those kinds of people.

"We have changed our focus, and we now firmly believe in developing our own intellectual property and solving problems that have global market potential. That's what we want to be known as."

Today the company employs 20 people, and is building out relationships with key supplier Microsoft across the US, as well as newer partners SAP and Mapbox.

Stjepanovic says he is keen to see his people exploring new ideas.

"Cashflow is always something we have to keep an eye on, but we have been growing organically and in a controlled fashion, and have taken no external investment," he says. "You never know what tomorrow holds." ■

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Igor Stjepanovic founder/chief executive, GIS People