



CREDIBILITY: Tom Acworth (left) has lunch with the *Post*'s Marcus Boocock POSTPHOTO C040407DL5-01

Curriculum Vitae

Tom Acworth

Born: 1968, Taunton, Somerset.

Education: King's College, Somerset 1976-86; University of Edinburgh engineering degree 1987-91.

Career: Served in the Army with the Queen's Royal Irish Hussars 1991-97; communications officer with HSBC in London 1997-99; project/product manager at Capital One 1999-2001; client director at Creative Financial Services, Solihull, 2001-04.

Best moment in business: "I think the best thing I have done would have to be resigning from my previous job and starting up PHF."

Worst moment in business: "There is just a lot of difficulties that are associated with setting up a small business. At times you do wonder how you are going to progress to the next stage and they can be difficult."

By **MARCUS BOOCOCK**

NO challenge is too tough for Tom Acworth when it comes to running a business. The sky is the limit as far as the 38-year-old and his team at PHF are concerned.

Tom set up the firm with Marc Rickard three years ago. They act as a centralised management for the private work done by medical consultants.

They started out with just three members of staff including themselves and no clients.

But now, after laying the groundwork for their business, they employ 24 people and have 109 clients on their books.

When I met Tom for lunch at the Canalhouse in Nottingham, it was clear that he is not a man who will rest on his laurels.

He says he has an open run in the market as there are no other companies who are set up to do the same thing.

"At the moment there is no one else who offers the services we do," he said.

"This may well change, which may not necessarily be a bad thing because the more people who are doing it the more consultants will think it is a good thing.

"But as we stand we are looking to make the most of being the only firm

and gain an advantage over any possible competition in the future."

Before setting up the company, Tom had served a spell in the Army with the Queen's Royal Irish Hussars.

He then worked for HSBC in London and as a project and product manager with Capital One before being a client director with Creative Financial Services in Solihull.

But he really wanted to start up his own business and, after extensive research, he identified that consultants needed help with administration.

"At first I thought there was an opportunity to provide finance for private healthcare patients," said Tom.

"But after researching this, it became clear that this wasn't the real opportunity.

"Instead we saw that we could provide a management service for consultants. We could take care of their administration.

"Obviously there were difficulties in getting started up. You have to manage your cash flow even though you have

ambition. And you have to gain credibility."

PHF has a number of functions, including appointment making, managing consultants' diaries, billing, and typing up notes.

Tom added: "Basically if a patient needs an appointment making with one of our consultants we take over.

"We will make the appointment for them which is convenient, and we also type up their dictated notes from the consultant.

"The patients gain from this because

Taking care of administration for consultants

it is more efficient and the consultants can dedicate more time for them."

The company works on a nine-to-five basis, though Tom finds himself putting in more hours.

But he makes find time to spend with his wife Jayne and their three children.

"I do have people I can trust to leave in charge so I can be with the family," he said. "Having a young family it is important to be with them.

"My wife has been very supportive, which has been a help."

His working hours don't look likely to decrease in the future as he looks to expand his business into the public sector.

By the end of the year, Tom hopes to be employing up to 40 staff and he says they may be looking to find new premises to replace their current home in Castle Cavendish Works in Radford.

"The next stage is to hopefully move into the NHS," he said.

"For the NHS to take this on there will have to be changes to the way the administration side is run.

"But I am encouraged by the fact that the hospitals in Nottingham do seem to be interested in changes.

"At the end of the day we are a Nottingham company who are providing services nationally.

"Who knows what the future could hold."