



OFFSHORE SUCCESS

THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR BEING THERE

To build a good offshore relationship you have to travel. Not only for meeting, greeting and being a 'presence', but also in getting to know the people that you are working with.

PMC operates an India-based subsidiary PMC India (PMC-I), to offer medium-sized UK retailers an offshore service without the problems and inefficiencies of traditional offshore solutions. Paul Mason, CEO of PMC believes that part of its success is PMC's emphasis on 'being there'.

Mason states: "I think 'being there' pays you back in spades. You can't put a human-based business relationship in a box and expect it to work – it needs to be nourished and nurtured. When you're dealing with a different country thousands of miles away, and a different, often alien culture, you have some learning to do. And the learning is not one-way – they must understand you too. At the outset, ask your offshore provider about cultural education. If they don't offer it or they're negative about the need for it then question their understanding of off shoring."

"It doesn't matter where, with another culture you have to understand what people mean when they speak, and how they operate. Ask how they work, about their expectations, how they expect to be trained, and about their career structure. This is important because these issues will be in the background of your relationship so you had better understand it."

Visit the offshore operation and talk to the people that do the work

Any outsourcing relationship will (or should) end with more structure around it than an in-house service. With an in-house service it's likely there will be people in the business that were there when the system was brought in or developed. Even if processes are poorly documented or out-of-date, those people will have an accumulated pool of knowledge about the system – and companies rely on those people.

Unfortunately, few companies have robust documentation with processes clearly laid out, and well-structured training courses for people joining the development or support team. Some do but they are the minority. Too many depend on that 'accumulated knowledge'. With offshore solutions that 'knowledge' is missing.

Go and see the offshore operation and talk to the people that do the work. Visit regularly to check progress and ensure they buy in to your plans. And ensure the offshore team visits your company. Cycle the team through your business so they understand what it's about. It's possible that some members of that team will have no idea what a western retailing operation looks like – let them 'touch it and feel it' - it's the only way to succeed.

Retailing in India - totally different to the UK

"It's hard for Indians to conceptualise UK retailing – because it's different in India. That means the people developing your systems can't understand the experience you are trying to deliver to your customers." Mason states.

"There are over 10 million 'Mum and Pop' stores across India. Large, principally self-service environments alien to most Indians. UK retailers that have set up in India use a different staffing structure. Consider a retail environment based largely on a catalogue. In the UK you have staff at the till or the service counter but none front of house. No one in the UK expects help to look through a catalogue before they buy or to examine the product. In India it's different. Customers expect staff front of house to help them. They will want to see and feel the goods they purchase."

Mason believes this understanding is vital to create an offshore development service focused on the needs of the UK retail industry. If the offshore team doesn't understand what they're dealing with then there is little chance that you will be happy with the work they produce.

Mason closes: "We bring people from our Indian team to the UK and send them shopping. We take them to a shopping centre, give them a list of our clients, tell them to find those shops and buy things. It helps them understand the UK customer experience."

"We then take them deeper into the retail environment. For example, few of the team initially have any idea of what a 'sku' is, how we define a 'sale', what a 'void' is, what makes up a sale, a part sale or an exchange. Building a successful offshore team demands understanding. Help them to feel they are adding value to your business and they will."

To find out more about PMC's Offshore Solutions and Services please visit www.paulmasonconsulting.co.uk or contact PMC on 01235 521900