

Project VIA – Valuing Intellectual Assets in Renewables Companies in the Highlands and Islands

Company Profile



Aquatera joined Project VIA in 2009, having previously worked briefly with the Intellectual Assets Centre (IA Centre) and [Jackie Maguire of Collier IP Management](#), to determine its Intellectual Assets. In short, Aquatera comprised a loyal and dedicated team of highly skilled environmentalists who were engaged in a lifestyle business delivering productised services solutions for environmental problems or for environmentally-related operational problems. These were:

- **Integrated Support for renewable energy projects**

Aquatera provides full lifecycle support for renewables, wider energy and other industrial projects, from initial concepts through to decommissioning. It differentiates itself by focusing the outputs on providing a source of information not just on the specific project but also on the locality and for the regionalised community.

- **Environmental Assessment and Surveying**

Aquatera provides the standard range of EIAs, risk assessments, assistance with environmental and physical surveys etc available from many of its competitors. It does, however, provide a full 360° assessment to enable full investigation of the potential impacts of a project on the environment and of the environment on the project. It also differentiates itself in the innovative display of complex data and results.

- **Strategic Planning**

Aquatera's services address strategic and project planning issues at the international, national and local level, which when coupled with the other service offerings, provide a differentiated product.

- **Communications**

Aquatera differentiates itself from many other environmental consultancies by its ability to facilitate and deliver environment-related communication, training and education initiatives. Aquatera designs and develops environmental awareness materials, goods and gifts, that enhance the reputation of its clients in addition to providing environmental information services and products through e-commerce and digital communications technology.

The productised services had been honed through experience since the company was formed in 2000. However, whilst the individual elements of human capital within Aquatera were strong and the services were being delivered, there was little structural capital in place in the form of a long term business plan, firm

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contractual agreements or intellectual property (IP) that would lead to the long term stability and growth for the business.

During the past year, Aquatera has therefore focused and consolidated one of its key products and intellectual assets (IA), RadMapp™, which is an excellent tool for consultation of map-based data, needing no installation, external helpers or training. The relationship capital built with one of its clients for RadMapp™, the State of Oregon, in the USA, has led to the development of an integrated system for use by the State in making Renewable Energy Deployment Decisions.

Oregon is a major surf centre within the Pacific, it is no surprise therefore that the State is also a focus for potential wave energy developments. The relatively uniform near-shore sandy seabed is ideal for placing wave energy devices. There are however important existing uses made of the coastal seas especially for fishing but also shipping and recreation. These also need to be considered in parallel with a number of the world's leading wave technology developers pursuing project opportunities in Oregon. Grid infrastructure along the coast is relatively strong and although there are a number of ports along the coast, many have a limited draft for vessel access and the port entrances face the full fury of the Pacific Ocean. Aquatera has therefore forged strong links with Parametrix Inc, to collect and display the necessary decision making data, which also has the benefit of strengthening Aquatera's relationship capital. The two companies have now signed Heads of Terms to work together on a number of strategic environmental projects, taking Aquatera's IA and structural capital to the next level.

Throughout Aquatera's development, it has generated many new ideas and innovative solutions to deploying Renewable Energy Technology, particularly in the harsh marine environment found around its home in the Orkney waters. Gareth Davies, Aquatera's MD, has recognised however, that the company's growth will require a new long term business plan if these ideas are to be properly exploited. With the support of his team and with guidance from the IA Centre through Jackie Maguire of Collier IP Management, he set about restructuring the business to achieve a 6 fold increase in turnover over 5 years. During the past year, Aquatera has already achieved revenue growth of 20% during difficult economic times, leading to 2 new full time jobs for its consultants.

Aquatera has also decided on a completely new business structure: it is forming the Aquatera Foundation, which will carry out R&D and foster the creation of new spin out companies to take protect and exploit the intellectual property arising from Aquatera's inventions. The Foundation has already started 2 new fledgling companies with a third under consideration. As an additional bonus, Aquatera has also benefited from the Government's R&D tax credit scheme, which has improved profitability.

With a view to building up its relationship capital, Aquatera has implemented a plan of some 21 commercialisation activities over the course of Project VIA, including forming strategic partnerships, producing publicity material, promoting its Weather Forecast and Operational Support Modules for Orkney, Oregon,

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Shetland and the Western Isles and submitting commercial proposals.

The Outlook for Aquatera in the implementation of its plans is good for those working in the company. Gareth is currently recruiting staff into senior management roles to help with the growth of the business and to release some of his own time to strengthen its human capital further. There have also been opportunities for more experienced staff to take on project manager roles as Gareth moves to take a more strategic role. The plan is for the core business of Aquatera to migrate to an employee owned consultancy with a longer term buy back plan from its employees and for there to be an ongoing strategic relationship with the Aquatera Foundation in the creation of new innovative solutions for renewable energy deployment.

With a long term business plan now being implemented there is much for Aquatera to do to continue to build a brand that is commercial and remains true to the staff's belief in integrity, breadth of understanding, pro-activity, creativity, commitment, pioneering and community focus. As far as Gareth is concerned his next stage of development is to do just that.

“In a small business making time to deal with issues such IA is a real challenge, yet the IA that you have created may be the key to unlocking a huge potential for growth and success in the business. Our work with the IA Centre helped us keep a focus on our IA, to recognize their merits and work towards realizing their value. It hasn't been easy – but if it was easy everyone would be doing it! What has been of key help has been the one to one mentoring by expert professionals who appreciate the challenges faced by a small business.” Gareth Davies, MD, Aquatera.