

Firm keeps footy fans informed

Joshua Gliddon

It was on a monthly bicycling trip with Ian Gardiner, chief executive of video-streaming company Viocorp, that investor Peter Holmes à Court learned about how video could transform the way his new football team, the South Sydney Rabbitohs, could communicate with its fans.

“It’s all about sound and moving pictures,” said Mr Holmes à Court, simplifying the technology that lets his team stream video interviews, outtakes and other materials to its loyal fans.

Mr Holmes à Court subsequently became a 10 per cent shareholder in Viocorp through his investment vehicle, The Passionate Group.

Initially, the Rabbitohs tried to do video themselves, but it didn’t work out. “If people have a bad

experience, they don’t go back,” said Mr Gardiner. “The whole culture at Souths is new, and their mantra was that they had to do something, that action is better than inaction. And that’s something I live by too.”

Viocorp provides the back end that lets companies stream video to any internet connection. They don’t get involved in the player software, because, according to Mr Gardiner, you need deep pockets and lots of courage to compete with Real, QuickTime and Windows Media Player. “And we don’t have deep pockets, nor the necessary courage.”

Viocorp is his second start-up. Back during the dotcom boom, the Scottish national started an online bottle shop. It attracted investors, but the customers weren’t exactly queuing up to buy alcohol online.

“Like all dotcom companies, the punchline was that we built a supply chain but there was no demand for it,” he said. “So it put an arrow in my quiver. I was 28, 29. It was crazy at the time — you think you have the midas touch. It is remarkable how many smart people could be so blinded by greed.



Ian Gardiner . . . ‘We make it easy to do online video.’

Photo: JIM RICE

“I remember thinking at the time it was like the emperor’s new clothes. And looking back, I didn’t have the courage to think that it was not a great business model, and we convinced ourselves and the investors that it was. So there were great things to be learned from it.”

The start-up, Last Orders, went bust in 2001. Mr Gardiner had married an Australian and they decided to move to Australia.

He met Ron McCulloch, owner of Home Nightclub, and got a job helping develop a technology that Mr McCulloch wanted to use to stitch together a network of clubs around the world. Each club would have a video kiosk, and people could send video notes to their friends — something like a video hotmail, said Mr Gardiner.

“It didn’t work for a number of reasons, and we probably should have said it was not working and moved on,” he said.

One of the company’s clients, Vodafone, approached them about doing video of the chief executive

talking to staff, and suddenly they found themselves in the video production business.

“We went looking for software that could do post-production and preparation for the web, and there was nothing but multimillion-dollar broadcast systems available,” he said.

So they decided to build their own. “We launched in 2004. We kept adding features, and then we had our first sale in 2006,” he said.

Austereo launched an online video site and wanted a server-side video solution. The call to Viocorp came out of the blue.

“We make it easy to do online video,” said Mr Gardiner. “We are the content broker between the producers and the viewers.”

The company is profitable, and Mr Gardiner said his options for the future were open. The idea of getting bought by a multinational doesn’t turn him off, nor does the potential that The Passionate Group may float one day and open up another avenue of capital.