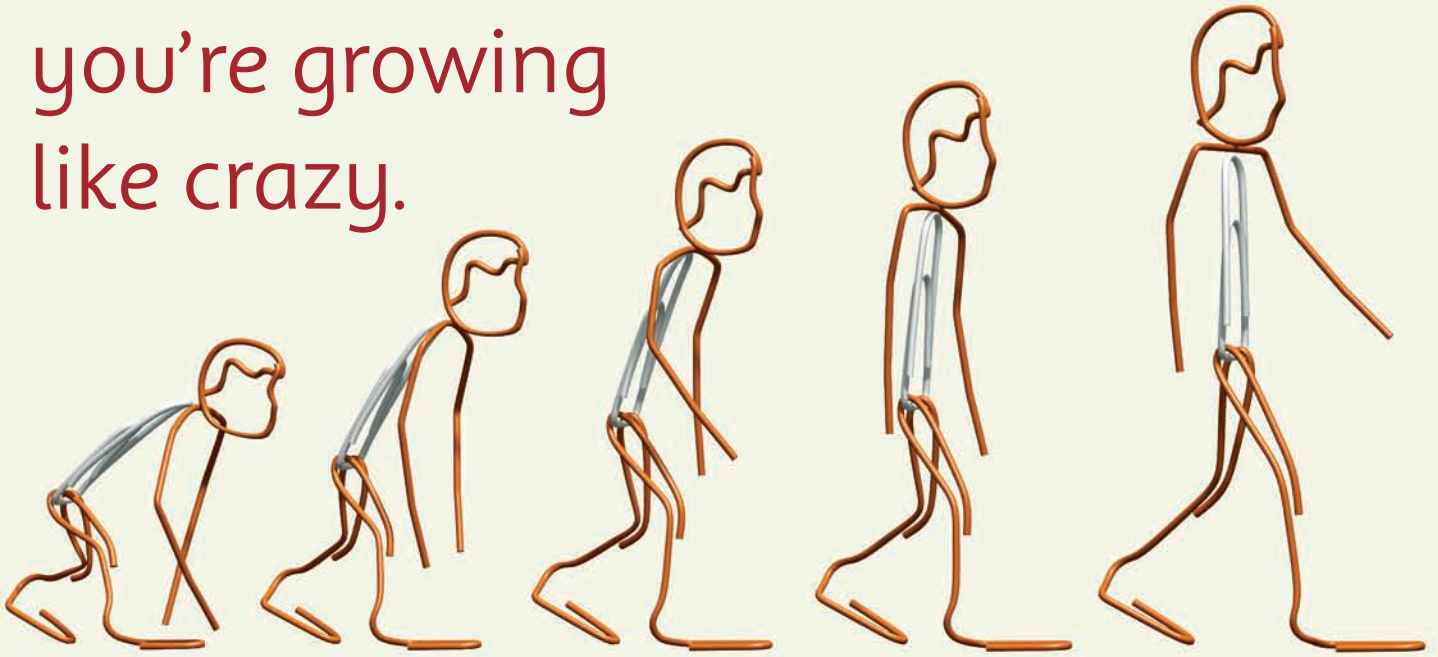


# Staying sane when you're growing like crazy.



The need for growth is tattooed on the bones of every business, but no one has embraced the idea quite as profoundly as Christchurch company, DataCol. Annual growth figures of 324% or 568% seem unreal to most of us, but these are the figures that have earned DataCol a place in the Deloitte Fast 50 three years running.

By their own admission, this rapid expansion has given staff and management no shortage of nervous moments and sleepless nights, but confidence and a crystal clear vision has helped them face the challenges. At TelstraClear we've been delighted to play some small part in helping them manage it.

## A new industry and a new kind of company

The business was formed in 1999 in the wake of electricity industry deregulation. Grant Thomson, a former Business Development Manager with SouthPower, tendered for a meter reading contract with that company's new owners, TransAlta. He won, and with 15 readers and a supervisor, DataCol was born.

With a deregulated industry looking to outsource meter reading and DataCol's growing reputation for accuracy, security and a high standard of service, new contracts came quickly. Grant worked under remarkable pressure to make sure DataCol delivered, but it was plain he needed help.

In 2001, Grant recruited some professional managers, and took the business into the Canterbury Innovation Incubator, to lift Datacol to the next level. The objective was to move beyond the leg-work of meter reading toward taking control of the systems and technology.

## Using technology to change the game

Grant and his team had a vision of transforming their business by arming staff with low-cost, intelligent handheld units that would update the system directly as they went on their rounds. A single reader could work for multiple companies and handle power, water,

- Client** DataCol International Ltd ([www.datacolinternational.co.nz](http://www.datacolinternational.co.nz))
- Business** Collecting, processing and presenting essential data for businesses.
- Problem** Unprecedented growth requires systems that can adapt with a rapidly expanding and diversifying organisation.
- Solution** A dedicated Private IP network over Ethernet that's fully scalable. Circuits have increased from 200kbps up to 2Mbps.
- Outcome** DataCol's information systems can keep pace with the tremendous demands placed on them. The way is clear for future expansion.



gas, anything that was required. The readings would be returned live to DataCol with a complete set of data forwarded to the client before the end of the day.

With that idea, DataCol the meter-reading company also became DataCol the software company. Their solution, SevenX, came out of the Incubator after two years of development, going live in March 2002. It helped DataCol increase their productivity and slash their operating costs, while enabling their clients to improve customer service.

### TelstraClear comes on the journey

SevenX is a reflection of DataCol's central philosophy – to make companies more efficient by streamlining, automating and integrating information from the field. It's a philosophy that sits very well with TelstraClear, the company's fixed line communications partner.

TelstraClear were able to offer DataCol a Private IP network delivered over Ethernet interface which allows 100Mb access to all their sites. Circuits have increased from 200kbps up to 1Mbps or 2Mb across the whole network. Most importantly, scalability is built in to the solution, allowing the system to keep pace with an expanding business both here and in Australia.

"We had a lot of frustrations with the first telecommunications provider we contacted", explains Grant. "They couldn't get their other departments or their higher-ups to focus on us. It was a completely different experience when we spoke to TelstraClear. They were much more responsive. Our roll-out period posed challenges, but with everything installed we haven't had any problems."

Being DataCol, there's a philosophical angle too. Grant elucidates: "As long as the pricing is right, the attitude is more important to us. We liked the innovative, hungry, customer-focused, take-on-the-big-boys view of TelstraClear. They have the same focus as us. Their relationship with Vodafone, our mobility supplier, was a real plus too."

### Growing beyond New Zealand

Grant has plans for streamlining, automating and integrating more than just New Zealand power companies. For example, DataCol has developed a leading edge farm management package called FarmHQ. It integrates farm production, stock transactions and finances, utilising a ruggedised PDA for mobile input in the field and has Radio Frequency ID (RFID) scanning for electronic individual identification and traceability.

"A fundamental shift is underway in how businesses are using mobile information and the DataCol group wants to be at the forefront", says Grant. "Computers might be great tools in a comfortable office environment, but outside - on the factory floor, on the street, in the fields - it is dirty and difficult. But that is where the business activity is and the ways we collect and process information are still pretty basic. Because of this many companies are operating in the dark."

With its experience and technology, the DataCol group can do everything from physically collecting data to providing computer hardware and software systems to record, process, present and integrate the information with other computer systems. "We can bring light to a company's business activity, no matter where it is happening."

"The companies that make it a priority to collect and present essential business data for management to make intelligent business decisions quicker, better and more cost effectively than competitors, will win in the coming decade."

"Helping companies achieve that winning edge is the future of the DataCol group."



**For more information, call us on 0508 55 66 00 or visit [www.telstraclear.co.nz](http://www.telstraclear.co.nz)**

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