

# CEO Of The Year 2016 in Commodity Trading and Risk Management

Aspect is the leading global provider of multi-commodity trade, risk and operations management solutions (E/CTRM) delivered Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) in the cloud. With more than 487 customers in 86 countries, it's one of the fastest growing solutions with rapid deployment, affordable subscriptions, and immediate ROI for all size companies. Commodities support includes oil, petroleum products, metals, biofuels, coal and petrochemicals.

AspectCTRM is a full-featured E/CTRM suite for front, middle and back office with support for financial and physical trade activity. It's available in three editions: Lite, Standard and Enterprise, expanding in functionality according to the needs and budgets of clients. Aspect is the only E/CTRM solutions provider with market data and analytics tools delivered with its trade and risk functions on the same platform, for convenient price uploads to CTRM.

Because AspectCTRM resides in the cloud, there are no software, hardware or IT investments required by clients. On premise installations are also available. Clients are able to trial AspectCTRM before investing in a system, which removes significant financial risks.

Aspect solutions are available on desktop, tablets and mobile devices and through its Aspect Partner Program (APP). Aspect was incorporated in 2000 and so this is our 16th year. Aspect has offices in Houston, New York, London, Moscow, Bengaluru and Singapore

Aspect aggregates data from commodity exchanges and commodity-related news sources in real time to allow commodity trading firms to understand how the market is moving now and in the future. This information is used to make important decisions concerning the buying and selling of commodities such as oil and oil-related products, precious metals, base metals, concentrates, coal, agricultural products, food products and many other commodities.

Once such buy/sell decisions are made and executed, the AspectCTRM solution helps trading firms to manage their profit and loss, and perhaps more importantly, market risk. Every trade can be managed from trade execution and capture, through P&L and risk management, on to mid-office functions such as management of logistics and storage, right through to back-office functions such as cash management and payment reconciliation.

Aspect's latest product, AspectSTP, allows direct and seamless integration between commodity exchanges where the trading is executed and its AspectCTRM solution. Straight-through processing is critical for trades to be efficiently processed throughout the supply chain with no re-entry which causes costly mistakes.

Aspect differentiates from the pack by providing all of its solutions via the cloud meaning clients do not need any hardware, software or IT expertise to successfully operate Aspect's solutions. The only thing required is an Internet connection and a browser such as Explorer, Safari, Firefox, etc. With this, Aspect's solutions may be implemented in record time, perhaps 4 to 6 weeks, rather than the very lengthy timeframes experience with using older technologies.

#### **On being awarded Business Elite CEO of the Year 2016**

Frankly, I am very flattered and deeply honoured to be recognised in this way. This is especially rewarding as individuals cannot apply for the award, a research team has to 'discover' the candidates based on their work and success. Winning any such award always depends on a team of people and the team at Aspect is the best I have worked with over more than 30 years of managing companies. Their motivation, dedication and expertise makes it easy for any CEO to manage a business.

#### **The challenges at the helm of the business**

Aspect started as a 'cloud' company some 16 years ago. Way back, few understood the benefits but over the last 3 or 4 years, this has changed.



The fear, uncertainty and doubt associated with new ways of doing things has evaporated and there's an overwhelming acceptance of cloud solutions and the benefits they bring. This has led to Aspect's astonishing success with an increase in contracts for its AspectCTRM solution growing by 71% in 2015 over the prior year. The main challenge here is to maintain the momentum and continue this level of organic growth.

The second area is the development and exploitation of indirect channels to market. Many solution providers have partnerships but none, other than Aspect, are able to train others to sell and implement its solutions without the help of the vendor. Aspect has achieved this by deskilling the implementation process and thus shorting the time needed (and the costs) to implement what are very complex systems.

The final challenge concerns inorganic growth. Aspect has a program of planned acquisitions in the coming years and this will test the corporation's ability to rapidly absorb new entities and technologies. And so, we have spent the past quarter reorganising to ensure we are 'acquisition ready'.

#### **Prior career background**

I started in the IT industry back in 1979 and spent the first 11 years at the National Computing Centre (now NCC). I refer to this part of my career as my apprenticeship and I did computer operations, programming, systems analysis and design, project management and eventually I managed two of their business units. From here, I joined a series of US-based firms in senior management positions – Legent Corporation (systems management), Seer Technologies (application development environment), Point Information Systems (customer relationship management) and Youcentric (customer relationship management). I then joined Carnegie Information Systems (customer relationship management) as CEO. Almost all of these firms bought other firms and/or were sold and I gained a lot of experience in mergers and acquisitions. I joined Aspect in 2005 as CEO. Aspect is the toughest job I have had, but it's also the best job I ever had. I think it was Confucius that said, 'Find a job you love and you will never work another day in your life'. Many at Aspect feel the same way.

#### **Clients**

Aspect and its solutions appeal to commodity trading firms of all sizes but that wasn't always the case. Aspect's approach was to 'avoid' tier-1 clients – the large integrated majors, global trading firms and national energy companies. Why? Because each already had a solution and business there was drying up for the market leaders. Aspect focused on mid-tier clients where often the only 'system' in place was spreadsheets, very complex, easily-broken spreadsheets. A rich functional capability coupled with delivery via the cloud was perfect for such firms especially as lines of credit were increasingly difficult to secure and new regulations meant spreadsheets were no longer acceptable. This has now changed in the last two years as tier-1 firms are now turning to Aspect as its reputation grows for massively reducing the cost of commodity trading and risk management systems; hence, firms such as Sumitomo, Mitsubishi, Trafigura, BP, Hess, Aegean, Klesch and Gulf are now Aspect clients

#### **Challenges in 2016 as a CEO of the company**

As CEO, my main challenges concern our outsourcing program and ensuring we are 'acquisition ready'.

Aspect is constantly changing and the changes are often fundamental. In Q1 2016, Aspect outsourced all of its product development, infrastructure and quality assurance to India having spent many years with its development centre in Russia. The migration has just been completed but we have a challenge ahead to stabilise the processes, improve productivity, quality and provide more flexibility. The management team understands the challenge and I'm confident we will see it through.

Coupled with this, Aspect has just undergone a major reorganisation starting with the management team but effecting just about every team member. This was done to ensure that Aspect can quickly and effectively absorb new firms under our acquisitions programme, codenamed, 'Project Acorn'. It means the roles and responsibilities have changed for many people at Aspect and, whilst this can be challenging, I am confident that each will 'step up to the plate' and succeed. Aspect has won many awards for its technology and innovative solutions. This all comes down to the team and I know how readily each will embrace the changes.

#### **Industry based challenges and future plans**

Not really. The commodity trading industry is under tremendous pressure right now with shrinking lines of credit, regulatory changes and the ultra-low price of many commodities. However, each of these pressures drive new clients to Aspect's solutions. We are in the right place at the right time... by design.

This falls in line with my thoughts above concerning the challenges at Aspect, namely, continuing our exceptional organic growth through direct and, more recently, indirect sales channels plus driving our acquisitions program

#### **Concluding remarks**

It's difficult to explain to others about life at Aspect but employees often use the word 'family'. Aspect people feel like part of a family and Aspect always puts family first ... even when some employees forget that their immediate family is more important than their 'Aspect family'. We do things differently but that's beyond the scope of this article. We run a meritocracy. Aspect is blind to gender, race, creed or colour. Three of the four members of the Executive Management team are women – no 'glass ceiling' here – and this balance continues throughout the company. The London office has 22 members of staff with 12 countries of origin represented and more than 12 languages spoken. Aspect only 'sees' contribution and capability in people and that drives all of us forward.

**Aspect**   
**CLOUD: Transform for Advantage**

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