

Not doing tech by numbers

Tom Martin's early years as a studio session musician, then a Norwegian-based chief sound engineer, seems to be at odds with his early recruitment into the business that would become Kinly. **Clive Couldwell** finds Martin utilising Kinly's integrator legacy and technology expertise to service the new post-pandemic workplace and its remote audience.

Tom Martin's initial interest in the AV industry was undoubtedly more geared toward the audio than the visual, studying Sound Engineering and Music Technology in Dublin, while moonlighting as a studio session musician.

"My heart's always been set on music from an early age," he says. "When I graduated from Dublin I had a great apprenticeship opportunity in LA I was looking forward to. I still had six months to fill with something before starting the apprenticeship, and I felt like making the most of it.

"I decided to spend the time in Norway. I had a passion for Norwegian black metal and wanted to see if I could use the opportunity to work with a local recording studio before beginning the apprenticeship in LA," he recalls.

Four months later, Martin took over the studio and started working as its chief sound engineer. He managed to postpone the apprenticeship for six months, but eventually ended up staying in Stavanger for three years before he moved back to Ireland with his Norwegian girlfriend for her studies. In Ireland the couple had a son, and they moved back to Norway. A recruitment agency told him about a service coordinator opportunity in Infoteknikk, a place where he hoped at some stage he would be able to use his background and education within music.

In fact, the story of Tom Martin and Kinly go hand-in-hand. The company Infoteknikk was founded around a kitchen table in Rogaland 24 years ago and has since grown to become a top-three global AV systems integrator and remote collaboration specialist.

Indeed, Kinly's story is one of innovation. It all began in 1998, where a rising market for 3D technology was one of the core reasons Infoteknikk was founded. After a merger with Nor Communication, the company's brand was reformed and, in 2007, Viju burst into life. Ten years later, Avedon Capital acquisitioned Viju and the Dutch VisionsConnected. Together they became Kinly. The following year, Kinly acquired MK2, before acquiring AVMI in 2019. Today, Kinly has 1,200 employees worldwide and a turnover of more than 300 million euros.

You are number 27

Martin joined Infoteknikk as employee number 27. "Obviously, as a system integrator, Infoteknikk worked with audio, but this had no relevance whatsoever to what I ended up doing at Kinly.

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Tom Martin

Maybe, I was slightly disappointed to begin with but that disappointment turned quickly," says Martin. "There were just so many opportunities to innovate and differentiate in our market, and I wanted to take part in shaping that journey. It was clear to me that the true value was in services that enabled people to fully utilise the technology, ensuring it is always readily available to them when and where they needed it".

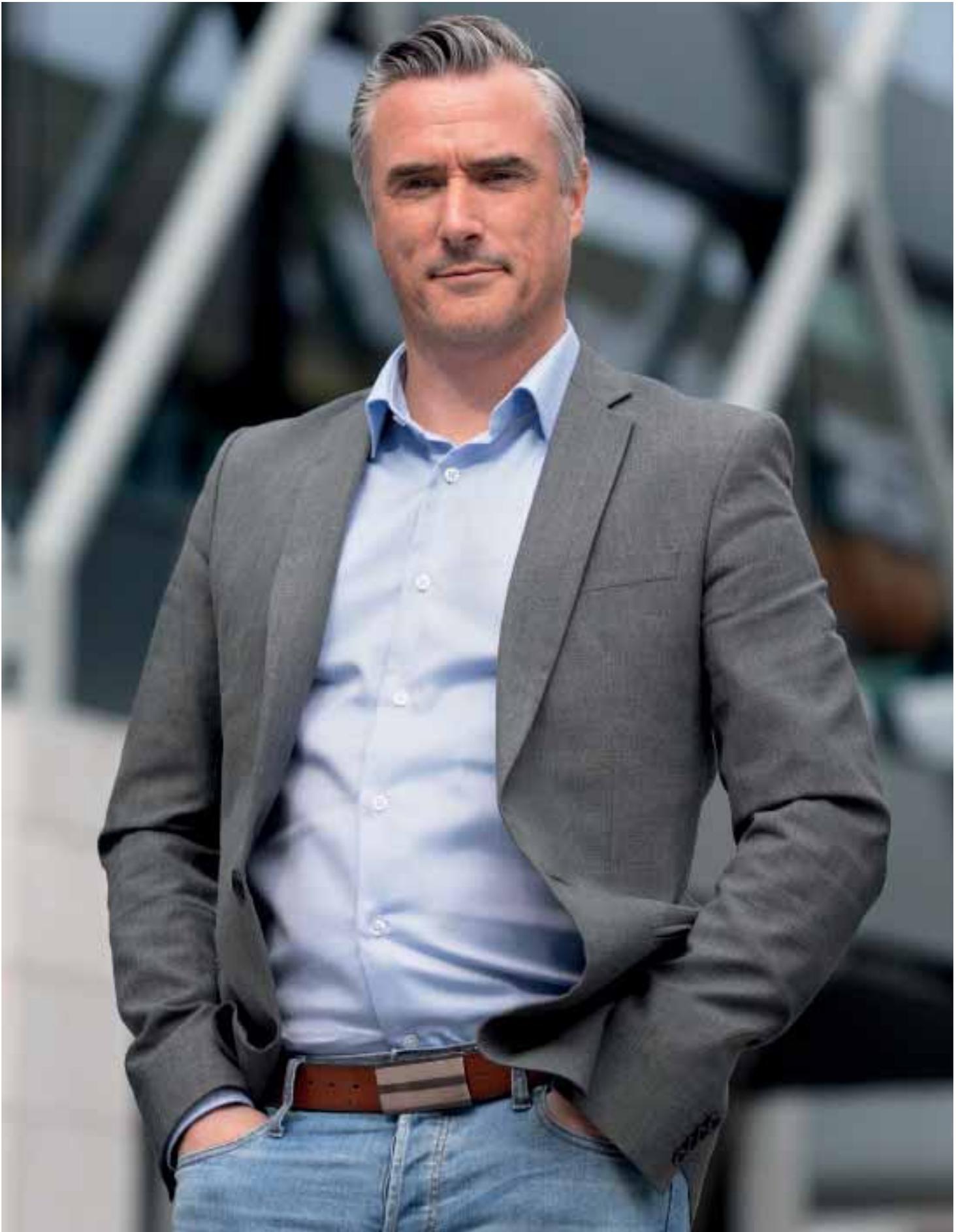
After almost 15 years in the industry, Martin has noticed an increasing need for businesses like Kinly to deliver services that go beyond merely the technology. "With a myriad of products to choose from and the convergence of AV into IT and UC, we often find ourselves influencing our customers' overall collaboration strategy," he says.

"Many customers find it challenging to navigate the rapid expanse of technology and solutions. Choosing the wrong path is easy. The need for good advice has become essential. We find the best solutions based on what they need, and then set it all up for them and train their people to use it properly."

The opportunity to grow and develop personally was also something that motivated the young Martin to stay at Kinly. "If you had good ideas, stood out and wanted something for the business, it was easy to develop. These are qualities I've admired in people at Kinly from day one and am passionate about maintaining within the company," he says.

Tom has had several pivotal career moves at Kinly.

It's certainly paid off. Martin first made his way up the ladder in Norway through customer-orientated service and support positions, then head of



operations before being appointed as managing director for Norway.

In 2020, his career took a step further, as Martin became responsible for overseeing the company's operational capabilities across the UK and Ireland (as well as the Nordics), as managing director of Northern Europe. During this time, he was accountable for leading the integrations after the acquisition of AVMI by Kinly in 2020, and two years later he stepped in as acting CEO for Kinly worldwide (now CEO as of May 2022).

The new workplace

As hybrid working becomes commonplace, the need for the technology to keep pace with increasing demand and expectations is vital. But, the ability to support hybrid working transcends the technology

"Technology is only ever part of the solution - the Rol is in how the technology is adopted by people into their ways of working. Whereas before it was about the people in the meeting room, it's now more about the people not in the room - and ensuring that the remote experience is seamless," says Martin. "Our customers see the value in what we do to ensure the right technology is properly integrated, managed, utilised and monitored (often at scale) within their business."

Certainly, coming out of Covid remote working has become the single most important change. "This impacts people's perceptions of the workplace. It's now a place where people want to spend time, a place that offers an alternative experience to working from home," says Martin.

"We've always been a leader in promoting the hybrid workplace at Kinly and have been talking about video enabling every meeting room, solutions-as-a-service and just overnight we skipped five years and it became a reality. But, what we couldn't have predicted is the number of people wanting to work this way. Where we thought people would come back to the office once restrictions allowed it, they've become comfortable with working from home. This means offices now have to take on a new purpose to attract people back."

Which leads us nicely to asking if Martin had to pick the single most important technology investment that companies could be making this year, what would he choose?

"We need to embrace a hybrid workforce and facilitate for it. Investing in technology that truly helps businesses deliver a visual collaboration service for employees wherever they may be and to integrate the technology into company

processes, in a secure, reliable and user-friendly way, is my recommendation.

"That could mean a range of technologies, depending on the type of business and their workflows. If I were to add on to this, I would say the role of the office is rapidly changing, and securing smart software and technology to truly secure space utilisation, support and maintenance, as well as to drive insights to help them with future decisions and investments, would be one I would recommend as well," he adds.

So, are we making the right assumptions about how our workspaces should look and function?

"There's been a huge shift in emphasis from designing spaces for people in a meeting room to now designing for those who aren't in the room. Gartner suggests that sixty per cent of people are now connecting to meetings remotely, so businesses need to think differently about how meeting rooms are set up and deployed. People now need a reason to come back to the office - they want to use offices for activities and as a collaborative space," he says.

Sales strategy

What emerging markets are you keeping an eye on? "I'm particularly excited about our geographical expansion with new offices in Switzerland and Germany off the back of growth and demand across the DACH region. Also, our vertical focus on highly referenceable sectors like education, government and corporates (local and global). These, generally, are big AV adoption industries where digital transformation is highest," says Martin.

"The biggest opportunity for Kinly right now is around smart buildings and office optimisation -

monitoring how spaces are being used.

"We are also only seeing the very beginning of how and what the metaverse expansion on the application of AV technologies could mean for the industry going forward.

"Virtual reality, augmented reality and other conferencing and collaboration tools support the ability to be fully immersed in a 3D environment, so there's loads of interesting and valuable applications for these technologies that we have not fully explored yet," he says.

"Combine that then with the fact that more employees than ever are working remotely, yet physical spaces are still essential to enable effective collaboration and empower hybrid teams."

Another area Martin notes that has really gathered momentum post-pandemic is content production and streaming of live events. "The management and delivery of event/webcast and creative media services for both internal and external requirements is only continuing to gather pace as companies strive to find ways of informing and engaging a more largely remote audience. This is an area we are undoubtedly working more with and increasing our skills within than ever before," he adds

What challenges, technology or otherwise, does Kinly and the AV industry face over the next year or so?

"Generally speaking I would say meeting increased demand against the backdrop of global supply shortages and therefore longer lead times. This is where having standardised, readily available services and solutions is going to be key to Kinly's and the industry's success over the next twelve to eighteen months." ■



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