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Simwood

STRAIGHT-TALKING FORWARD-THINKING®

There's no such thing
as a pretty good
crocodile wrestler



COVER STORY
PG 16-17

The croc only has to win once,
the wrestler has to win every time.
30 years on, we're still fighting.

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landscape in 2026

10 years ahead. Still building.



BY SIMON WOODHEAD

It is hard to believe that it was 30 years ago that I was up all night around my finance job developing eSMS – the world’s first global gateway between the Internet and mobile phones. I thought both would catch on and converge, and they did.

We were the first SMS aggregator and brought email to ordinary mobile phones, as well as SMS between networks which wasn’t possible at the time. Several mobile operators wanted to acquire us; all subsequently copied what we did.

Voice followed, experimenting with this crazy idea called VoIP. It was essentially voice over data which itself was over voice. Daft idea in that form but the writing was on the wall for data to become a first class citizen on access networks, and everything converging to be over that channel. VoIP made so much sense in that paradigm, and it felt like a paradigm shift we (the Royal ‘we’ then!) could be a part of, and Simwood as you see it today was born.

We spent many years doing what I refer to as ‘climbing the greasy pole’ both in IP terms and in terms of regulatory position in voice. Essentially, we needed to turn suppliers into peers in order to access ground floor economics and compete on an equal footing at the lowest level. Suppliers don’t want to cease being suppliers, and they certainly don’t want to spend money the other way, but thankfully we did it.

Our platform and network were a combination of the best of open-source, and our own secret sauce. There is little value in reinventing the wheel, but a wheel on its own doesn’t get you very far – you need the car around it. Building that was a huge learning journey and one I was fortunate to approach both clueless and penniless. Complete naivety can be a gift, because you solve problems in the best way possible at the time, not the way somebody else did years before. It goes hand in hand with knowing you’re naive of course – it’s whatever the opposite of the Dunning Kruger effect is called. Having no money to waste also focuses the mind on the most efficient solution when the temptation of expensive magic boxes and corporate shortcuts rear their heads.

As a wise man once said, if you do what everyone else does, you’ll get the same results everyone else did. How does a field progress that way? Maybe when a magic box vendor wants to sell a new version? By contrast, original thought results in best practice and invention. That pushes things forward and has been part of our DNA even when naivety and poverty waned.

“There is little value in reinventing the wheel, but a wheel on its own doesn’t get you very far – you need the car around it.”

Over 30 years we have continually developed our stack. That hasn’t been a series of 5 year projects but rather a day-in day-out continual development. There is barely a day goes by when there isn’t new code going through now very established testing and automated deployment. There have of course been evolutions of underlying architecture – router vendors, or the stack on which we run our software. We run our network differently to anyone on earth except Spotify, and have done for a decade – giving massive capacity, low latency and unparalleled uptime. We evolved from physical servers, to virtualisation, then to containerisation. Yes, as others in the industry push to virtualise to save money, we left virtualisation behind over 10 years ago.

That is a theme. There are features in the Simwood stack that have been there since day one – APIs, global load balancing, free encryption, wideband codecs. Others offer them as an expensive upsell because they have to buy a magic-box license, or they have run multi-year projects to partially replicate them. Only this week I saw fanfair from a certain purple dinosaur who had enabled fully-qualified domain-names after many years ‘building’. I’d love to welcome them to a standard written in 1983, codified with most relevance in 1996, and present in the Simwood stack for 30 years. There are many lessons to follow which I hope they’re ready for – it is easy to see a feature and replicate the feature; it is a bit harder to know the unknowns and the learning that went on behind the scenes.

I’m reminded of a leadership exercise. Everyone holds onto a long rope and the person at the front walks around a large open space. Everyone else holding the rope has no choice but to follow, whether they’re bigger, cleverer or wealthier. The further from the leader someone is, the more prone they are to being flung around – it isn’t like everyone follows the same path, there is a whip effect. Those at the back are flung around quite violently, while the leader walks calmly in the direction of his or her choosing.

And so here we are in 2026 and at Simwood we’re able to focus on 2026 challenges and opportunities, like the maturity of telephony but the rebirth of voice. Emergent channels like WhatsApp Calling and game-changing opportunities like Conversational AI. Meanwhile, those further down the rope simply cannot, they’re too busy trying to maintain uptime, virtualise their SBCs or replicate features that are literally 30 years old here.

To my mind, that raises an interesting question for those who base their own business and prosperity on a carrier. Do you want to sell the same as everyone else, selling solutions to 2015’s problems, or do you want to sell 2026 solutions to 2026 customers? We’re blessed with customers who see things differently and based on M&A, that has clearly rewarded them. Most importantly though, it has benefitted the end-users whose own livelihood depends on having tools which are fit for purpose and fit for the modern age.

In other news, and rather appropriately given everything above, we’ve just announced that Raj Dass is joining as our first CRO. Thirty years of building the best network in the industry apparently warrants someone whose actual job it is to make sure more people know it.



See what we’re building next.

+44 (0)330 120 1313



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