

# Touchstone steers expansion course in Asia for its NavOne wealth management software

Touchstone is a leading supplier of business administration and accounting software and the associated consultancy for the wealth management sector and the Jersey-headquartered firm is now enthusiastically building out its Asian business. Touchstone has a sizeable operation in Sydney and has opened a new office in Singapore as its central base for further expansion in the region, which is fast becoming the growth engine for the firm. Hubbis recently met with three of Touchstone's leading APAC-based officers to discuss the company's offering and its strategic direction for the region.



## Executive summary

Touchstone supplies specialist administration and accounting software for the wealth management industry and is on an expansion drive in the Asia region, which itself is enjoying robust economic and personal wealth growth. Hubbis recently met with three of Touchstone's top APAC-based executives to learn why they believe the company's proprietary NavOne software will convert many new clients and why they are focusing so much energy on the Asia region.

Touchstone has hitherto been servicing Asia from both Jersey and Sydney but has now opened a Singapore office with a view to building out its presence there and in Hong Kong, the company's two key target Asian markets for the foreseeable future. Expansion to other Asian jurisdictions is also on the agenda as opportunities arise.

The expansion comes as rationalisation takes place in the global trustee market, which is the source of much of Touchstone's clientele. Many of the smaller trust firms are struggling with the twin demands of global and local regulatory tightening and the need to professionalise their administration, accounting systems and processes. Moreover, private equity firms around the world are buying up trust firms to consolidate smaller businesses into a larger, more cohesive and competitive whole. Additionally, many European wealth management firms are migrating management decisions to Asia to help them capture more of the region's often dramatic growth.

In all these cases, Touchstone believes its NavOne software will help clients to professionalise their offerings, become more competitive and enhance their regulatory compliance protocols.

Touchstone's immediate missions are to expand brand awareness, provide local representation and support to existing clients and to win new clients around the region.



## TOUCHSTONE PROMOTES ITSELF AS A GLOBAL LEADER IN PROVIDING END-TO-END TRUST AND

### FIDUCIARY ADMINISTRATION

**SOFTWARE**, with more than 70 clients globally, including many global name banks, and over 6,000 licensed users of the flagship product NavOne. Touchstone's administrative platform is used by trustees and other wealth management organisations, by family offices and by private banks to manage the assets of their clients.

Hubbis met with Greg Coppel, General Manager for APAC, Paul Tran, Head of Consultancy for the region and Michael Kerr, Regional Head of Sales. Each had their particular insights into the key attributes of the software the company sells and of the firm's character and strategic objectives, especially focusing on the markets Touchstone is aiming to capture in the fast-growth Asia Pacific region.

**“We are aiming to expand rapidly in the Asia region, leveraging our Sydney operation and building our new Singapore base.”**

### A long history and deep expertise

Kerr explains that Touchstone Group was founded in 1982 and has a turnover of around GBP23 million (SGD41 million). The Wealth Management division employs a team of roughly 60 people across Sydney, Jersey and Singapore,” he reports. “We are aiming to expand rapidly in the Asia region, leveraging our Sydney operation and building our new Singapore base.”



GREG COPPELL  
Touchstone

Touchstone's Wealth Management division is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Touchstone Group, one of the largest UK suppliers of business software and consultancy services to mid-sized organisations. The Wealth Management business sells NavOne, an enterprise-wide software system that supports wealth management providers' business in multiple jurisdictions, with the flexibility to grow with the Touchstone client firms as they expand.

### A dynamic offering

“We believe Touchstone should be considered the provider of choice for global wealth management administration and accounting systems,” says Tran. “We specialise in Microsoft's Dynamics NAV technology, consultancy and development and NavOne is used by many trust and fund administration companies, family offices and professional advisory firms in over 28 global jurisdictions. NavOne delivers the enhanced operational efficiencies and reduced administration costs required in today's marketplace, as well as helping firms comply with all regulatory requirements, reporting and audits.”

### Key Priorities

Touchstone is expanding its brand name, presence and client base in the rapidly growing Asian wealth management market. The firm's key executives in the region have set themselves three key priorities for the next two years.

Touchstone's GM for the region, Greg Coppel, told Hubbis how the firm will approach the challenge of building the firm's business. “We first need to build our brand recognition,” he explains. “Secondly, we need to maintain and expand the support our existing clients and support their growth and acquisition strategy. Finally, we need to build our new business relationships in Singapore, Hong Kong and other Asian jurisdictions as appropriate.”

Tran explains that Touchstone's project teams have a proven track record of implementing the NavOne wealth management system in over 28 global jurisdictions, to more than 70 customers worldwide and to more than 6000 users. “We have dedicated teams of business, technical, support and training personnel providing software and consultancy services to businesses across the industry worldwide,” he adds.

Coppel points to the firm's long experience in the finance industry. “We have a deep understanding of the regulatory, business and IT trends that are affecting the wealth management industry and have recently been accepted as members of the Singapore and Hong Kong Trustee Associations. With offices in Jersey, the Channel Islands, Sydney and now





PAUL TRAN  
Touchstone

Singapore we are becoming ever more global in our activities, with the Asia Pacific region as a key growth market.”

### Building on relationships

Kerr also highlights the importance of building long-lasting relationships with its clients. “We go far beyond selling software, we always work to ensure that clients achieve the optimal results and value from the software,” he explains. “We always offer a dedicated relationship manager and support person for technical help to ensure they get the full benefits of upgrading to our software, and to help the clients adapt as their business needs evolve.”

Touchstone is a Microsoft Partner with Gold Competencies in Enterprise Resource Planning and Customer Relationship Management. “Our relationship with Microsoft means that our clients benefit from the highest level of innovation and a deep understanding of the Microsoft roadmap, as well as the support of Microsoft’s considerable R&D commitment to future-proof the technology,” Tran explains.

### Getting Personal

The three Touchstone executives Hubbis interviewed all hail from different backgrounds and birthplaces.

Kerr was born in Melbourne and was educated at Monash University, studying science and statistics. His career has spanned IT, eCommerce and other technology related roles on behalf of financial services companies. “I now find myself on the other side of the equation,” he notes, “working for a vendor. I must say I am thoroughly enjoying the challenges and our successes. There is a great deal of integrity in this organisation and a lot of good client relationships, with genuine trust in our brand and our services.”

Kerr has three grown-up children and when not working enjoys playing and listening to music as well as watching or participating in a wide range of sports. He is also an avid supporter of Aussie Rules team Melbourne Demons, which plays in the Australian Football League (AFL). “We won a lot of trophies many decades ago,” he quips, “but nowadays being a supporter is based more on the love of the game and the club and the eternal hope of winning the premiership in my life time.”

Coppell was born and educated in Jersey in the Channel Islands. His working life has been mostly at Touchstone, where he has worked for more than 20 years. He moved to Australia over 10 years ago to establish the APAC office in Sydney and has overseen rapid growth in this region. “The growth in the region has been very satisfying and our future prospects are exciting.” Married with two children, Coppell enjoys deep sea fishing for tuna and snapper, and generally, as he says, ‘messaging around on boats’.

Tran was born in Vietnam before moving to Hong Kong and then to Sydney, Australia at the age of six. After a boarding school outside Sydney that was as well-known for its devotion to rugby as its academic success, his further education was at Macquarie University, where he qualified with a degree in accounting and commerce. He has worked since then in the field of accounting, banking and finance from international to domestic blue-chip financial service organisations.

Married with three young children, Tran enjoys plenty of sports and other outdoor activities with the children. One major hobby is family biking outings around Sydney. “With my school having been so passionate about rugby,” he says, “it is still very much in my blood; one of my sons plays for a local rugby team and I am also assistant coach of the West Junior Rugby under 10s team.”

The backbone of the NavOne solution is Microsoft Dynamics NAV, an enterprise application used by over 100,000 organisations globally.

Touchstone developed the unique NavOne application to

address the business requirements of the fiduciary industry harnessing the underlying accounting engine in the Microsoft Dynamics NAV platform, and Touchstone continues to invest in industry specific functionality in concert with



Microsoft's multi-million-dollar annual investment in the Microsoft Dynamics NAV platform.

Touchstone's NavOne customers benefit from the latest technology developments by Microsoft and are assured that the NavOne solution will be supported well into the future by both Touchstone and Microsoft.

**“NavOne provides a huge step-up in capability and efficacy; the automation and operational efficiency allow these smaller firms to scale up their business and to be more profitable and more competitive as a result.”**

Our clients tell us the global might of Microsoft combined with Touchstone's extensive experience in the fiduciary industry expertise provided by Touchstone were the key influencers in choosing NavOne as an administration platform to take their business forward in an increasingly digital business environment.

Tran explained in more detail how NavOne is built on a foundation

of Microsoft Dynamics NAV.

Adding further insight to the practical applications of the NavOne offering, Kerr gives the hypothetical example of a trustee firm managing the assets of high-net-worth-individuals (HNWIs) through a trust structure.

“In this case,” he elucidates, “NavOne software handles all

the client accounting, all the relationship management for those assets, and then depending on what jurisdiction those assets are in, or where the trust is located, NavOne also deals with the required regulatory reporting. We also deliver FATCA and CRS capabilities for reporting purposes through NavOne. We consider that we have only two key competitors; we firmly believe that NavOne

offers the best outcomes and when we compete “head to head” with those competitors we generally win the deal.”

### **Professionalising the trustee industry**

Kerr also explains that some of the smaller client companies might, prior to buying NavOne, have been handling the administration requirements in their businesses via manual processes or Excel spreadsheet or other means. “But,” he explains, “NavOne provides a huge step-up in capability and efficacy; the automation and operational efficiency allow these smaller firms to scale up their business and to be more profitable and more competitive as a result.”

Kerr adds that NavOne is one complete system. “We offer a corporate general ledger that the client business can run, and we also incorporate the various client general ledgers, which are associated with the different trusts and vehicles that are set up to manage the assets.”

Tran maintains NavOne's



MICHAEL KERR  
Touchstone

potential is expanding due to industry trends. “There are many small to medium-sized enterprises and service providers in Europe and in this region, that are at the point where they need to further professionalise their offerings, especially in the new age of regulatory rectitude and transparency; they need modern, efficient systems for tracking every transaction, for proper management reporting and accurate audit trails. NavOne offers “end-to-end” enterprise solutions, handling all the client management, fiduciary management and corporate services management, right up to the billing of the end-clients and full corporate accounting.”

### **Regulatory demands require administration investment**

Tran adds that the global regulatory environment imposes an ever-heavier burden on intermediaries, trustees and other asset managers. “Taking this increasingly heavy workload off the service providers with an end-to-end system that automates almost all of the processes required is an immense advantage.”

Coppell adds another perspective. “Most of our clients are becoming multi-jurisdictional with offices in many locations, so they are seeking an enterprise-wide system that allows them to create centres of excellence, in order that they can use their resources in a more sophisticated manner across different markets and different client bases. We are therefore seeing a strong trend towards purchasing a single system across multiple jurisdictions, which again plays to NavOne’s core expertise. Moreover, as there is consolidation within the global fiduciary services business, NavOne’s ability to offer cross-border total enterprise solutions via a global platform is ideal.”

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Coppell also observes that there is the migration of decision-making responsibilities from Europe to Asia. “We are seeing this with some of our existing major clients and we expect this to be an ongoing trend,” he reports. “This means that we see more opportunity with siloed totally standalone trust companies, rather than the previous norm of the European head office with satellite offices out of Southeast Asia. With more and more decisions taken in this region, it has shifted our core focus out here.”

### **Singapore and Hong Kong twin priorities**

Coppell explains that Singapore and Hong Kong are key markets for the firm’s operations

for the foreseeable future. “These markets offer plenty of opportunity for us right now, whilst we are also watching developments in other countries in the region,” he reports.

Touchstone opened its Singapore office in September 2017. “This has greatly enhanced our capabilities in the region,” says Tran, “as well as giving us a face to service the existing and target local client base. We have already secured a considerable number of clients and it is important that when they need assistance they can contact us locally, as committed after-sales service is vital to us and to the clients.”

Coppell adds that a key potential area of expansion will inevitably be related to consolidation in the industry. “We

are witnessing increasing activity by private equity firms buying up the smaller trustee companies to create the consolidated business,” he reports. “NavOne offers them a great opportunity to professionalise and scale up.”

Kerr closed the discussion by highlighting the competitive advantages that Touchstone offers clients. “We speak the language of our clients,” he comments. “A key strength is that many of the Touchstone employees are ex-industry, so we have a deep understanding of the processes and the challenges the trustees are faced with every day. We build credibility, we implement on time and on budget and we strive to build genuine relationships with our clients.” ■