

Business studies

At a time of fast and significant growth for the wind industry, how can businesses navigate the landscape and convince potential customers that what they offer is tangible? Is it time to call in the experts to help really get to grips with your business development, to cut through the noise and devise effective marketing strategies, investment, operations and sales processes that stand out from the crowd? PES sat down with Jamie Allan, Founder and CEO of Allan Panthera, to get his view.

PES: Hi Jamie, it's good to talk to you. Could you introduce your business to readers who might not know Allan Panthera?

Jamie Allan: Likewise, great to speak to you too. Allan Panthera is a global, award winning, independent, multi-disciplinary commercial consultancy. What that means is we provide a range of services which fall into different disciplines and offer these across a variety of business sectors based on our inherent expertise.

Our ethos is one of confidentiality, integrity, and mutual trust and respect.

We have offices in the UK, Middle East and North America, with our core sectors including energy, marine, disruptive technology, drones/UAVs, legal, and professional sport.

Within the energy sector, on and offshore wind is one of our strongest due to our experience of not only winning blue-chip, award-winning service contracts, but also project managing them. Our full range of services is available via our website, but includes everything required under commercial strategy and business growth, contracts management, senior leadership training, competitive benchmarking, impact networking, the list goes on.

We've consulted for the likes of Deloitte and McKinsey and have been called a 'master of all trades, jack of none', which is a very nice compliment to receive.

PES: As you are business growth specialists perhaps an appropriate place to begin would be to ask, how's business? The energy sector is fast-paced, how have you seen it developing over the past 12 months or so?

JA: It's been good, thanks. What we've experienced is the market recognition of utilising specialists such as ourselves to navigate the tough times, and the many opportunities that Covid-19 has brought.

For example, identifying ways of diversifying; establishing and leveraging USPs in a more crowded market; tightening up liabilities and reviewing existing contracts; assessing the health of a business and contingency planning. There is never a quiet spell.

A big lesson I learned many years ago was if something is outside your skillset, outsource it because the time benefit saved versus the cost, allowing you to focus on what you're good at, makes it so worthwhile.

Undoubtedly however, the next challenge is geo political given the situation in Europe, and we're starting to see movement towards protecting businesses from that fallout.

PES: Commercially, the wind industry presents some unique challenges for businesses, doesn't it?

JA: Yes, and we exist to make sure businesses are equipped for lasting success and are ready for the challenges on the horizon, and in that respect the wind industry isn't that different to many others.

However, one of the unique challenges for companies in the wind industry is the effective messaging of their business. That includes its brand, its vision and mission, its services etc, in a very busy market under intense scrutiny to consistently show its value and benefit in this time of climate crisis.

People are worried about rising energy bills and want to make green and sustainable choices in as much of their life as possible. So how do businesses demonstrate that what they're doing is tangible? How do they engage effectively with communities, physically and online? How do they show that wind power and the pros and cons of creating a wind farm are going to bring results, that it's future proofed, that it's truly clean or they're transitioning to net zero, etc?

All of this in the shadow of COP26, of the view that oil and gas is a more secure energy source, of buzzwords and finding a compelling, relevant space when everyone is trying to do good. There's a lot of noise to cut through and everything I've just said can be applied to a marketing strategy, never mind investment, operations, sales, etc.

PES: How have these changed over the years, as the energy sector has shifted from oil and gas to more of a focus on offshore wind power and renewables?

JA: Following on from what I've said, people, customers, end users of the energy, they're

all more conscious and aware than ever before. Disinformation and protest groups can create negative news and the impact can be very real, sometimes involving human life or livelihoods.

Businesses are under a microscope like they have never been and are sometimes operating with finer margins. Cancel culture and speed of remedial action are expectations that need to be managed, whilst business continuity, security and contingency are greater requirements than in previous generations.

You can see that businesses want to be more transparent, but are struggling in how to control the narrative. Ultimately, it boils down to survival and complacency is deadlier, but quicker, nowadays. Are you creating sustainable operations within your business? Are you positioning your commercial model for success? Are you transitioning from oil and gas to renewables effectively? Are you too busy firefighting to prepare for future challenges, macro and micro?

Innovation and disruption are now the norm for most businesses operating in wind. The big oil and gas companies are moving, but it's their supply chain which hasn't adapted as quickly for renewables, and I think they need to move quicker.



Jamie Allan



PES: Do such challenges affect large corporations in different ways to smaller SMEs and start-ups?

JA: I touched upon big oil and gas companies managing the transition better. Mainly this is due to their financial clout to enter the wind market as they like and their transferable operational expertise. They also have established brand presence over the years, but conversely, an established 'dirty' reputation.

Smaller SMEs and start-ups, mainly in the supply chain, are more agile and can be quicker to identify and exploit opportunities, and without the negative perceptions from customers. But I've seen that many face the dilemma of what to pick

from a big menu; that is where to play in the market.

Clearly each organisation has its own unique strengths and they need to execute their business around that, and they have unique challenges. That's why you can't, and we don't apply a one size fits all approach to support them.

But commonly, every business will face the same challenges from things outside their control, such as Covid-19 or regional conflicts. It's how prepared they are that will determine if they sink, tread water, or swim.

PES: The flipside of course is that the growing market for renewable energy such as wind and solar presents enormous and

exciting opportunities for business development too, doesn't it?

JA: Absolutely. There are huge opportunities for business development in renewables, but only if you plan and execute effectively. Too many try to force a product or service into an industry without conducting proper research with stakeholders to find out if the market requires it.

But the opportunity is global. There's a huge space to play in, dependent on what your solution is, and I wouldn't say that any part of the wind or solar sector is saturated or free from the risk of a disruptor. And you don't have to be small to be a disruptor, we've seen that with larger companies who are completely new in the market or who have transitioned from other industries.

There is still quite a bit of movement towards mergers and acquisitions too, as expected, and that can present exciting opportunities to leverage complementary offerings to the market.

PES: How do you think SMEs and start-ups can take advantage of this opportunity?

JA: Don't dive in too quickly thinking renewables is the next gold rush. Prepare effectively, because once you're out there you can lose traction quite quickly. The sector is still relatively small in that a bad reputation can spread quite fast too.

Additionally, sometimes investors demand results too quickly, without understanding the industry and its unique challenges, so if you're at the stage of fundraising, make sure you select the right investors for your journey.

But one thing I'd recommend is networking at the many excellent industry events, which have also been so valuable in creating prospects and gaining insight into particular customers. Also, utilise organisations such as ORE Catapult, who can really open doors and provide tremendous credibility and backing for your solution to the market.

PES: It's important to have a plan isn't it, to stand out and be noticed, above the noise and competition?

JA: Indeed, as I said it's all about preparation. You want to have sustained success, not just a flash in the pan. There are ways and means to cut through the noise and rise above competitors, but it's doing it in a way which stays true to your values too. Customers, end users, they're all much more wary of cowboys these days.

Furthermore, behind all of the sales, marketing and business development, the plan should embrace the future and be ready for inevitable change and threats down the line. We have our own CHALLENGE™ and Disrupterprise® models which help achieve market prominence and commercial success.

PES: This must be a tricky thing to navigate for non-native English speaking businesses looking to target English speaking customers with their marketing. How can they avoid the message getting lost in translation?

JA: For these businesses, we're definitely seeing an increase in using native English speakers to create compelling and clear marketing. Unfortunately, it cannot be overstated how important it is for credibility, as well as clear articulation of your company's products and services, to have perfect English.

Especially in a global industry with global players, being able to position yourself well with not only excellent and understandable marketing, but also customer service, contracts, websites, literature etc all in English as the global language of business, can make the difference between winning and losing work.



PES: There must be times too when opportunities present themselves but smaller businesses might not have the skillset in-house to win a tender. In that scenario is it just a case of losing out to the bigger players or is there a way of hiring in this support?

JA: No not at all, there is always a chance no matter what size of business you are. As I mentioned before, it's important to recognise your limitations and not let them impact your chances of success.

Yes, there is the argument of only being able to learn by giving something a try, but when it comes to tenders, certainly for the first couple of times to ensure the best chance of winning I would recommend outsourcing. But also, at some point ensure they take you through the process and pass on the skills and tips if you want to do it yourself in the future.

Indeed, you can also receive training in how to work through and respond to a tender. We frequently provide support to renewables clients who are faced with tenders, based on our previous experience of winning tenders and contracts with the likes of SSE, GE and Equinor. We can provide dedicated support for specific bids, campaigns or projects on a case by case basis as well as provide a wider range of services under a retainer or longer term service agreement.

PES: Is there anything you'd like to add?

JA: We're really excited to support companies, as they manoeuvre in the wind industry and we offer a free business health check for new clients, so if your readers have any questions at all it would be a pleasure to help, just get in touch!

www.allanpanthera.com