

## Partnerships

### Steve Cutbush and Rory Holburn

The duo behind Openwide International explain why they chose to be both consultants and operators in the leisure and tourism industry and discuss their plans to expand the business

#### Vital stats

**Founded** 1992  
**Industry** Consultancy, leisure and tourism  
**Staff** 33 full-time, 120 seasonal  
**Offices** Bournemouth and Lighthouse Point, Florida  
**Turnover** £3.4m in 2014, with £4.7m forecast for 2015  
**Investment** Since 2007 Openwide has invested over £3.3m in Bournemouth Pier

**Steve Cutbush** Adam Wide and I founded Openwide International as a consultancy in 1992, advising customers in the leisure industry. We realised that [what our clients did] was something we could do ourselves, so we got into operations. Adam left the business to pursue his own interests and the company went on to take over the operation of Cromer Pier and Bournemouth Pier.

**Rory Holburn** I joined in 2000. I had been working on a project in Leavesden, Hertfordshire, to develop a £400m theme park – but UK planning slightly frustrated that at the time. The project came to an end and I was looking for something new. Cromer Pier was our first project. We won the tender to manage the pier in 2006, which now has the only end-of-pier show of its kind in Europe.

**Steve Cutbush** We then took on Bournemouth Pier and, in 2014, opened RockReef – an indoor, all-weather adventure sports centre – and PierZip. Both were regeneration projects – we were brought in to rebuild and modernise them. Rory's background is theme parks and attractions, mine is travel, tourism and entertainment. So the pairing worked because we have complementary skills. I tend to look after the business development and marketing side. Rory looks after the operations, the development and consultancy on the attraction side of the business.

**Rory Holburn** If a tourism job comes up Steve will deal with it because that's his expertise, but we'll work together. We did a job for Virgin in Barbados where we were commissioned to look at revitalising a resort. Steve decided that a more active and entertaining

offer was needed and that there was potential for a visitor attraction to be added alongside one of their feature hotels, so I joined in on that one. But in our own operations the split is often [based on] who's closest – it's sometimes about physical location.

**Steve Cutbush** We are very good friends and actually we enjoy each other's company, can spend time together as friends, and it works. We don't row, we just get on with it. We disagree on certain issues but it's just worked out.

**Rory Holburn** Steve goes mad at some of my presentation and spelling every now and again, because when I'm working on

**What's our advice to entrepreneurs? Allow doses of realism but have belief, passion and commitment in yourself and your idea"**  
**Steve Cutbush**

concept ideas I don't type very well. I find it impossible to proofread something when I'm still trying to get the message out. As soon as I've sent it, I can re-read and see all the mistakes. Steve sees them straight away. He gets my draft document and then polishes it and makes it presentable to the outside world. There are a number of balances whereby we have different strengths and weaknesses.

**Steve Cutbush** When looking for funding for RockReef we went to various investors with the concept who all said 'We don't get it, we've never seen one before, show us'. We then went to the banks and, luckily, we got great support from them

[£900,000 from NatWest]. They really did back us and helped us to build it.

**Rory Holburn** Now we've got the hard-proven product that people can come and see. The way the attractions and leisure industry is evolving so rapidly, there was a real opportunity for us to roll out – so now what we want to do is talk to the investment community to help us evolve to the next stage. We'd like to expand, within the next two years, we'd like to open at least three sites in the UK, one in the Middle East and we're exploring options in Florida because we have an existing infrastructure there.

**Steve Cutbush** Our advice to entrepreneurs is: you have to have utter belief and try to ignore those who will talk you down. Allow doses of realism but at the same time you've got to have belief, passion and commitment – in yourself and your idea. If we had a pound for everyone who said that RockReef wouldn't work here, we wouldn't have needed to borrow money. With PierZip [the world's first pier-to-shore zip wire] we were told, 'it won't work' or 'no one is interested'... it's not true. It's now packed, it achieves its price targets, and it's highly popular.

**Rory Holburn** We would like there to be a RockReef in every major city in the UK and we would like to make sure that it is making a big contribution to getting young people active again. **D**

To find out more about Openwide International, visit [openwideinternational.com](http://openwideinternational.com)

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Steve Cutbush and Rory Holburn are both members of IoD London



High ambition: Rory Holburn, left, and Steve Cutbush inside the RockReef activity centre on Bournemouth Pier