

ADAM INTERNET | Founder still enjoys the ride

A digital hobbyhorse



DOWN THE LINE: Greg Hicks and son Scott, who is now managing director of the company.

Picture: DEAN MARTIN

AFTER more than 20 years, Adam Internet chairman Greg Hicks retains his passion for the hobby he turned into a successful business.

It began in the early 1980s when Mr Hicks turned his home into a buzzing hub for bulletin boards – a precursor to the internet.

“Anyone on a local phone call could ring in and be part of a meeting place, like the chatrooms you see today,” he said.

As use of the bulletin boards increased, so did Mr Hicks’ commitment to his hobby.

By 1982, the family home in Flagstaff Hill was connected to almost 300 phone lines and had satellite dishes on the roof.

Mr Hicks’ son, Scott, who is now managing director of the company,

the interview

FRANCES STEWART

said his school friends thought the house looked like it was part of the space race.

“Most of my friends described my house as the NASA satellite launch centre,” Scott said.

Mr Hicks soon realised his hobby had reached the limits of the technology available at his home.

“I had every spare phone line that was available from the Coromandel exchange at the time,” he said.

To reclaim telephone lines in the area, Telstra offered to connect Mr Hicks’ house to digital technology in return for getting its copper cables back.

It was around this time he turned

his hobby into a thriving business. “It was never the plan to make it a business,” he said. “It was always more of a passion.”

But at every step of his company’s advancement, Mr Hicks has faced hurdles. Recently, these have included High Court challenges to Telstra’s control over access to telephone lines.

After each obstacle is overcome, a new five-year plan is made and invariably, a new challenge found.

These are the challenges that engage Mr Hicks’ passion for his work. “We’ve had some kind of road block come along every five years or so,” he said. “But you can hit a road block and diversify around it.”

During these challenges, Mr Hicks focuses on building other

areas of the business while waiting on the outcome.

“While we’re in this mode, our cash flow is diverted into developing our people skills,” he said.

“In the meanwhile, we’re sitting here with a monster in idle, just waiting to put it back into gear.”

With Scott taking on the role of managing director in recent years, Mr Hicks has more time to focus on other aspects of his life.

He has a farm at Oakbank, where he and wife Keren keep farm animals and train race horses.

But retirement still holds little appeal for the man with a passion for business. “The company is doing everything I want to do,” he said.

“It’s going to be pretty hard to get my jollies from anything else.”