



In the 26 years since Trident Trust was established in Cyprus, financial service providers have seen traditional models of working and business disrupted by fast-changing technology, a new breed of agile, tech-driven startups and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. What are the trends/challenges that you expect to dominate the industry over the next decade?

Indeed, Trident and the professional services industry have seen a lot of change over the years and trying to predict what lies ahead for the industry in the medium/long term is very difficult indeed. What is certain is that change is coming, and it is something that has been accelerated by the pandemic and the need for the industry to diversify its product offering. COVID-19 forced us all, both personally and as companies, to adapt the way we work and embrace technology much faster than anyone could have predicted. The model for Cyprus as an international business centre has also changed, with clients becoming far more demanding on a technological front and additional incentives being offered to attract more high-tech companies and startups to the island. One of the main challenges that this brings is, of course, a growing demand for staff with the appropriate skills to service their needs. Gone are the days where the role of the professional service provider was merely administrative. In today's environment, the role of the service provider is far more crucial and comes with higher expectations. Cyprus is already

known for its high level of professional services and talented workforce but, with this increasing demand, the question arises whether Cyprus can continue to retain its professional workforce and, at the same time, continue to attract new talent from abroad.

How would you assess Cyprus' position in the financial services sector and how does the island compare with the rest of the EU? Which other country would you propose as a role model for Cyprus in this regard?

Over the years, Cyprus has gone from strength to strength in terms of the quality of services offered as well as their range and depth. Cyprus has succeeded, mainly due to its ability to adapt to ever-changing market conditions. If we look back at how the industry was 10 years ago, it is almost unrecognisable today. Yes, we all vividly remember the events of 2013 and the challenges they brought. However, not only did Cyprus come out of the crisis stronger but it was able to face all the subsequent challenges, since we all had to learn how to adapt quickly to change. Cyprus is unique in terms of its service offering compared to the rest of Europe. Yes, for the big-ticket items, Cyprus cannot really be a match for the likes of Germany, Ireland or Luxembourg but for small to medium size pieces of work, Cyprus really has no equal. Its geographical location and the increased mobility of staff brought about by technological advancements have further boosted the country's attractiveness. In today's ever-changing environment and with an increasing need for

transparency and substance, far more companies typically structured offshore are now seeking to transfer onshore and have a European base. Cyprus is ideal for such cases and many companies have sought this EU route. Malta may have many similarities to Cyprus but, when the benefits of Cyprus are considered in their entirety, Cyprus will always come out on top. I would not say Cyprus has a role model. What Cyprus always does well is to consider what other jurisdictions have to offer and then devise its own offering just as – or even more – competitive.

How has technology transformed the sector and its operations? How has Trident Trust responded to the dramatic advances in technology?

Technology has certainly transformed the way we work. Whilst this was already happening within the sector, the pandemic definitely helped its advancement. Most companies in the industry are now relatively paperless, with contracts signed electronically and transactions executed online or via smart devices. Trident had already adopted the electronic signature prior to the pandemic and this obviously proved very useful due to the lockdowns and remote working. Whilst this is becoming more common within the industry, the public sector unfortunately still has a long way to go in adopting this or even accepting documents bearing an electronic signature. Another change due to the pandemic has been in the method by which we communicate. Virtual calls have become the new norm, replacing the typical phone call and sometimes the need for a

physical meeting. While physical meetings will always be necessary, the use of virtual ones has helped streamline processes and made communication more personal with face-to-face calls. Even the way we verify a client's data has changed. Mobile applications now provide clients with a quicker and more secure way of sharing their personal details. There have also been advancements in the public sector in this regard with more and more processes moving online, thus removing a lot of the red tape historically associated with them.

How has the financial services sector been affected by the war in Ukraine? Are there any new opportunities arising from this unfortunate situation?

Whilst the extent may vary, all service providers have been impacted by the war in Ukraine. Cyprus was – and some say, it will remain – a popular jurisdiction for both Russian and Ukrainian business. Some service providers have gradually been diversifying their portfolios since 2013 and may not be affected as much but those that have remained heavily dependent will obviously feel the impact to a greater extent. As regards Ukrainian business, one could say that this is currently "on hold" as there will come a time when much of Ukraine will have to be rebuilt and business will gradually return. The situation at present is not easy due to the complexity of sanctions and uncertainly as to what the future holds. For Cyprus, it has been something of a wake-up call since many knew the risks of being too dependent on specific jurisdictions and, unfortunately, the war has merely highlighted this fact. Since the war began, there has been an influx of busi-

nesses and people relocating from both Russia and Ukraine to Cyprus. One could say this is positive for Cyprus as the efforts of the jurisdiction over the past few years have been aimed at attracting more businesses and talented staff to the island. Under the present unfortunate circumstances, Cyprus has a role to play in assisting individuals and businesses as far as possible. The industry continues to gain from these arrivals, as does the real estate sector, through the provision of offices and accommodation to those relocating. At the same time, Cyprus must continue to develop other markets and products. In fact, in many cases it is not a matter of developing new markets but simply further developing existing ones. Many markets that have been using Cyprus and its services have not yet been exploited to their full potential.

What does Limassol have to offer companies operating in the financial services industry that other cities don't?

In terms of the services industry, it does not really matter what part of Cyprus you receive these services from. Limassol has just benefited over the years from the highest concentration of foreign investment, mainly due to the option of beachfront property. This investment has meant that a greater number of businesses are concentrated in Limassol and some have relocated over the years. With Cyprus now attracting more and more foreign companies to relocate together with their employees, one could say they are choosing Limassol due to its offering of high-end facilities in terms of both work and the attraction of beachfront properties for their staff to live in.

FAST FORWARD INTO A NEW ERA

THE FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR IS CURRENTLY OPERATING IN A FAST-CHANGING WORLD. ANDREAS MERCOURI, GENERAL MANAGER OF TRIDENT TRUST, TALKS ABOUT THE POST-PANDEMIC FINANCIAL SERVICES LANDSCAPE, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE FUTURE OF THIS KEY INDUSTRY.

Over the years, Cyprus has gone from strength to strength in terms of the quality of services offered as well as their range and depth