




TRANSPORTATION & TECH

Jensen
Werley

 JWERLEY@BIZJOURNALS.COM

 904-265-2234

 @JBWERLEY

TRADE

The reality of doing business overseas

It's a simple bargain APR Energy operates under: They supply you with power, and you pay them.

The Jacksonville-based fast-track power supply company takes that model seriously, especially given the fact that they provide power plants to countries like Yemen, Libya and Myanmar.

But APR Energy CEO John Campion made it clear at the World Affairs Council luncheon on Tuesday that you don't want to be the type of customer that doesn't follow the bargain.

PLN, the utility company for Indonesia, tried to not pay. After a year of sophisticated ways of not paying – saying they were doing an audit, bouncing back invoices – Campion had enough.

So he shut off their power.

To be more specific, he shut off the power to the island of Nias, which has about 800,000 people, for 12 days.

"After a lot of drama, ultimately, they paid their bill," Campion said. "We get paid because they know we'll turn the electricity off. They need to know you've got firmness of resolve."

That firmness of resolve is how Campion, a proud Irishman who never went to college and is pretty sure he didn't graduate high school, is able to do international business.

When the country of Angola tried to

"The state department, ambassadors, commerce department, I can't speak highly enough of them. They will literally get in the ditch with you."

JOHN CAMPION,
APR Energy CEO

not pay for their power, Campion sent them the headlines of how Nias was without electricity for 12 days.

"Turning off Nias gets me paid in Angola," he said.

Because the company provides mobile power, it's able to extract its capital if things do go wrong, he said. For example, in Libya, after the Gadhafi regime fell, the company was able to extract about 95 percent of its capital out of the country, with the help of the U.S. embassy and Libyan locals the company had relationships with.

"The state department, ambassadors, commerce department, I can't speak highly enough of them," Campion said. "They will literally get in the ditch with you."

There are a few other tricks that Campion has. The company was taken

private earlier this year by a consortium that includes Albright Capital Management and other equity funds.

But the situation in Libya led to the privatization of APR, Campion said at the end of the speech.

When a member of the World Affairs Council audience asked what happened to the people on the island of Nias after he shut the power off, Campion answered by saying what happened to the company after it dealt with a similar situation.

APR Energy was a public company, traded on the London exchange. When Libya was having issues with paying for its power, the company's board was opposed to a "shut off the power" sort of solution.

"I wanted to force the issue and get them to fall in line," Campion said. "But the board said that would not read well. The can was kicked, it destroyed \$1.2 billion in shareholder value because they wanted to protect their job. Our stock dropped to 50 pence [50¢] per share."

Before that, the stock was about \$15 to \$18 per share.

That situation, Campion said, led to the private equity buyout.

"I fired my board," he said, "took the company private and fixed the situation."

▶ APP SPOTLIGHT

STANDUP BOT

Founder: Corey Grusden, CEO of software company So Fetch

What it is: A plug-in for Slack channels where companies can have an automated check-in meeting

How it works: Office managers can schedule a time for standup meetings held on Slack, and rather than have to type the same questions every day, the bot automatically asks team members questions like "what did you accomplish yesterday?" and "what do you plan to accomplish today?"

Platforms: Slack, soon to be available through email and SMS

Price: After a free 14-day trial, companies pay \$20 to \$50 per month for the plug-in

Notable customers: American Airlines, Microsoft and Marriott

What's next: So Fetch is adding more customization options to messages.

"There's a huge benefit of knowing what employees are working on day-to-day, in a non-micromanaging way," Grusden said. "It's worth the money per month to have the meetings in the same place the teams currently have their meetings anyway."

