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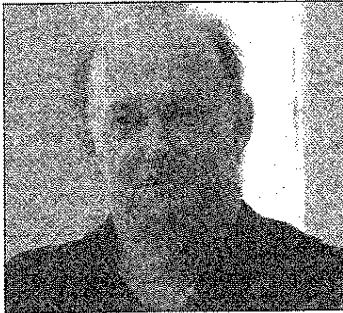
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A matter of timing

Pillar To Post

**By Craig Westcott**

It must have been around the year 2000 or so that I noticed John Roth on the cover of a national business magazine with a headline that championed him as the greatest business leader in the world, or some such thing.

I remember thinking that such a claim was tempting fate, even if Nortel stock had gone from pennies to well over \$100 a share, mostly under the leadership of the then president and CEO. True enough, the stock soon went bust and Roth himself was out, leaving a legacy of too many acquisitions, too much debt, and tangled accounting practices that some experts are probably still trying to figure out.

I was reminded of all that again recently when the news broke that Newfoundland Refining Corporation Limited was seeking court protection from one of its creditors.

The announcement came on the heels, literally, of a presentation to the Newfoundland Oil and Gas Industries Association by NLRC's president, Brian Dalton, who told delegates at the annual oil show that the company was still looking for financial backing for the \$5 billion project.

Just a month or two earlier, Dalton, who is also the president of Altius Minerals, perhaps the most successful junior company in the history of the province, along with Altius vice president Roland Butler were hailed as Entrepreneurs of the Year by Memorial University's Faculty of Business. It was a high point indeed to

what are a pair of spectacular careers so far.

So the timing of the court activity seemed particularly ironic.

But that's where the similarities with Roth end.

John Roth was brash, over-confident and perhaps not a little vain. He took big chances that brought big risks, all the while trying to bluff the market about what a great buy Nortel was. Dalton and Butler, on the other hand, are humble, quiet, diligent and loathe to court media attention, even when it's positive.

That's why if this oil refinery project has a chance of being saved at all, it rests largely on the strength of the characters of two good men.

It's worth remembering too that this refinery really is a mega project, nearly as expensive as the proposed Lower Churchill hydroelectric project. The last

time someone tried building a refinery in Newfoundland, it led to the largest bankruptcy in the history of the Japanese banking system. Not that a refinery wasn't a good idea. The Come By Chance facility now hums along nicely and employs, profitably, hundreds of Newfoundlanders. The point is that it's an extremely big and complicated endeavour. There hasn't been a new oil refinery built in North America in some 30 years.

So this project was bound to hit a hitch or two. In this case, it was a matter of timing. It just so happened that as the company was nearing the financing stage, capital markets in the United States started acting like Warton Willy after he has seen his shadow. Financiers were heading for cover and look-

ing for ways to cope with staggering losses due to the sub-prime mortgage crisis. Not the best moment to hit up the American capital markets for a few billion.

And so it's off to India and the Middle East for Dalton to find money. With the world becoming more dependent on heavy oil and refined diesel, the fundamentals of the project continue to appear to be strong.

Like I said, if anyone can pull this off, it's Dalton and Butler, neither one of whom is a John Roth. If you recall, Roth pocketed

a fortune in performance bonuses before exiting Nortel. Dalton and Butler are businessmen of substance and are in Newfoundland for the long haul. Even if this thing doesn't fly, they're still winners in my book.

Anniversary time

The publication of our edition at the start of the NOIA conference last month marked the second anniversary of *The Business Post* and the beginning of our third year.

It's been a hectic pace. We published 18 editions in year one and 18 more in year two, making us the largest circulation and most frequently published business publication in the province, perhaps in Atlantic Canada. We now publish twice a month and recently launched a second newspaper, the *Irish Loop Post*, which serves the Goulds, the Southern Shore and communities on the eastern side of St. Mary's Bay.

June was particularly busy with three papers going to press and three major trade shows to cover. In the middle of all that, the hard drive on my laptop crashed, wiping out all the information on it, including the accounting records of the business. Fortunately, I had paper records of everything. Unfortunately, I hadn't backed up all the information in an electronic format, which would make the job of restoring everything a lot easier.

But those are the trials of running a small business.

I hope you will continue to support us in year three with both your readership and your advertising. The newspaper business is a business and we can't survive without readers and advertisers. I'm confident that if you do advertise with us, you will see results. *The Business Post* reaches more business owners, managers and government leaders with business specific information than any other publication or media in the province, bar none. We distribute our paper at more national trade shows and conferences than any other publication. And our rates are the most cost-effective in the province. We work hard to deliver a quality product. Advertising with us is a good investment in your own business.

Starting later this month, we plan on making even more circulation enhancements that will position us to offer the most effective and affordable employment ads in the province, both for employers and employees. Look too later this summer for major improvements to our website.

Here's wishing each and every one of you an invigorating and safe summer.

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