



■ FLYING high with Thomas Cook... BlueSky chief Steve Driscoll (inset) says the contract will boost jobs

# BlueSky's £20m Thomas Cook deal

A FASTexpanding technology company has won a £20m deal with European travel giant Thomas Cook, which will create 40 new jobs in Greater Manchester.

BlueSky Travel Systems, which provides state-of-the-art software for holiday companies, has been appointed by the German-owned company to enhance its tour reservations system and implement it in 11 locations throughout Europe.

The Oracle-based technology is designed to help make booking all types of holiday packages easier. The three year implementation is expected to see turnover at BlueSky rocket from £1m to £9m in three years, with headcount increasing from 40 to 80 by the end of the year. As part of its expansion,

## BY CHRIS BARRY

the Company will double the size of its offices at Exchange Quay, Salford.

BlueSky was launched by chairman John Walsh and managing director Steve Driscoll in 2002.

John, Steve and sales director Nick Fowler successfully built up and then sold Wilmslow-based local government software supplier, First Software.

The company was sold in 2000 for £50m.

Mr Driscoll, 41, said today: "The holiday market has shifted tremendously in recent years with people increasingly wanting to choose their flights, hotels, hire

car and other related products and services, separately.

"This change presents a major challenge to tour operators and means that it's essential they have the right technology in place in order to cope with the flexibility required. Thomas Cook has been one of the first to act in this area and we look forward to working with them in the UK and abroad.

"Winning the contract is fantastic news for Manchester, and we aim to carry on expanding the business.

"We are not looking for a quick win, but to build a significant software business.

"The contract with Thomas Cook is the culmination of our vision to create a 'new world' tour operator reservation system.

Thomas Cook has recognised the superiority of our technology and its flexibility enabling them to take the business to the next generation."

Reinhard Eschbach, chief information officer of Thomas Cook AG, added: "BlueSky offers a pioneering core system that will meet and exceed the challenges of the future.

"Consumer demand dictates that we must offer new types of holidays, product and services in an efficient manner and the only way to do that was to develop a new pan-European reservation system."

The Manchester office of Lloyds TSB Corporate Markets is working with BlueSky in its expansion programme.