



Since breaking free, ex-Swan roams free

Florence Chong

FORMER Sydney Swans footballer Tony Smith, who made \$65 million last year from the sale of BreakFree Resorts, has started a tourism accommodation business.

Mr Smith said yesterday that his new venture, called Roamfree, could quickly take the company international.

After selling his interests in Breakfree, which was taken over by Queensland fund manager MFS, Mr Smith began a company with \$50 million raised from a private syndicate.

Roamfree's first purchase was a central inventory management system called Last Minute Manager, bought for \$5.5 million from a company known as Res-on-line.

Mr Smith then convinced founding partners Bryan Frawley, David Oliver and Darren Fryer to join Roamfree.

"We started with five people and now employ 77," he said.

"Unlike Breakfree, which operates domestically, I am working on opportunities on the internet that offer the opportunity to grow without boundaries.

"The minute we are able to handle different languages and currencies, our customer base will grow exponentially. Our focus initially is in Australia, but we already have many inquiries for our product from overseas. It is a question of how quickly we can convert it into other languages and currencies."

He expected the conversion would be completed within two years.

More than 200 accommodation operators use the technology, but it is hoped this will grow to more than 2000 within the next

18 to 24 months.

Mr Smith said Roamfree would acquire more technologies in coming months.

The Last Minute Manager program automatically updates details on room availability, rates and extras on "last-minute" websites from a central location.

Mr Smith said until recently all hotels managed their reservations manually, but by using a central inventory management system, hotels could sell unsold rooms in several sites simultaneously.

"That's why the Last Minute Manager technology is so appealing," he said. "It allows the accommodation managers to update all the last-minute sites at once, while maximising income with a few simple clicks."