

I was recently looking back at my Rogue's Gallery article and I thought I needed to update it. Then I thought, no, why not simply add to it as perhaps some people might be interested in a "then and now" story. So the original article written in September 2001 can still be found below this article. Things seem to have moved very fast in a very short period of time. To be quite honest after a couple of months here, I was getting restless. I am not a beach person, I cannot sunbathe, I had caught up on all my e-mails and I only had a very slow dial-up account for the internet. The house was always immaculate and for the first time in my life I was getting bored. We had deliberately chosen to go into rental accommodation so there was nothing to do around the house and in any case I am the world's worst handyman. I'd struggle changing a light bulb. I'd been elected as chairman of the "No Smoking Club" but that was only one morning a week and was the only real entry in my diary. By chance, I ended up talking about the failings of Telefónica with a club member and she told me about a telephone company she had been using. She recommended it to all her friends and they were all delighted. She had no knowledge about my background until I explained I had been involved in Least Cost Routing (low cost call services) since the UK government de-regulated in 1994. She suggested I ring the company if I was interested in knowing more. Christine was, to say the least, not happy. She saw me driving all over Spain and effectively giving up everything we had worked so hard for. We talked a lot and eventually agreed it could not do any harm to contact the company. To her dismay, I was invited to the UK to meet their board of directors. We had two days of meetings and I could feel the adrenalin flow again. That's when the reality of Spain kicked in. The salary package I was offered was less than half what I could have demanded in the UK. "OK, I said this is the deal. I'll be self-employed, I'll set a distributor team up for you, it'll take three months and if we're still happy with each other by Christmas, we'll renegotiate. If either party isn't happy we shake hands and move on." I called Christine to explain the deal. Everyone was happy. So since then I've built a team of some 450 guys offering a LCR service and am still self-employed. Why? As I went along I found other products and services that I can offer to the distributors and I could not see myself being tied to one company. My guys can now offer LCR, A/C, alarms, a virtual estate agency and a number of other products. They are all self-employed so can focus on what they enjoy or are most happy with. No pressure for them or me. They can also work the hours THEY want. What else do I do? Well, I recognised that there was a gap in the exhibition market. I now organise "Living in Spain Exhibitions" and last year we had five very successful exhibitions up and down the coast. There are three planned for this year but all in Torrevieja. Why? Simply that now I have re-claimed my life I quite bluntly do what I want and in reality it's easier and more fun to work here than schlepping everything up to Valencia or Alicante. We also stage musical events and golf competitions. I have promoted the Neil Diamond Tribute show and am now working with Ricky Vallance. This Easter I am presenting a four day "International Music and Dance Festival" which should be a lot of fun. I'd like to turn this into an annual event. I suppose what I am most proud of is the setting up of the "Newcomers Club." This is a club for people in their first few months in Spain. We try to help them settle in and are able to give advice or contact details about most things that somebody freshly arrived in Spain would need to know. Whether it is insurance, legal or fiscal affairs, questions about security, telephony, health care, importing cars or whatever we have people who can help. We have a weekly meeting where we invite guest speakers from a wide range of organisations such as Help Torrevieja, Caring Together, Age Concern, Torrevieja Neighbourhood Watch, solicitors, accountants, financial advisors and

alternative health practitioners. After a social break we then have an hour of Survival Spanish. This has become something of a phenomenon and we regularly get 150 guests for an afternoon of fun and support. All welcome. I mentioned Neighbourhood Watch and this is now taking up a lot of my time. Crime is a real challenge in Torrevieja. Having said that, a lot is avoidable and with the NW we try to show people how to deter opportunist thieves and how to make a denuncia. We are not vigilantes and do not prowl the streets with baseball bats. What we do is watch, listen and report any suspicious activity. I am proud to say that in the areas where NW is active in Torrevieja we have reduced the incidence of crime by up to 42% according to the town hall. I have been appointed the Press Liaison Officer for TNW and as such I am aware of the scale of the problem here. My job is to try to get people to become more conscious of the need for personal, car and home security. Along the way, we have become involved in other projects. We have recently started an Enterprise Development Forum for English speaking entrepreneurs and I also write for two of the local newspapers. This brought me in contact with a newly formed youth football club, Torrevieja United F.C. and I help raise money for them. Good to be back involved with football. I have two fledgling web sites to try to help people who are moving or thinking of moving to Spain and I also do the "What's On" for the local commercial web site. As for Christine, she deals with most of the day to day issues with the distributors and interviews most of the applicants. We try to give everyone a chance and I tend only to get involved in the interview process if there is an exceptional applicant. She is much more a person's person than I am. I'm quite happy finding contacts and doing deals from my PC she's happier pressing the flesh. Her Spanish has come along fantastically well. After eighteen months it was still very poor but for the past four months she has been going to intensive Spanish classes every day and the leap from struggling to being comfortable has been as fast as it is encouraging. She now also has a big circle of French speaking friends. As most of them are not involved in any of our business activities, it's a great way for us to relax. She still loves her jogging and gym and one of the reasons we decided upon the villa we moved into last year was that it is 100m away from the lake which has a great running path alongside it. The future? I recently acquired the local newspaper which had not been printed for 12 months and I'm looking forward to developing that. I am also seriously thinking about standing as a local councillor on a single issue ticket – "Zero Tolerance to Crime." I am looking to develop a European team of distributors from my own home office. Tiscali are already the number 3 ISP in Europe and they will shortly launch a Pan-European network of independent distributors to offer telephony and internet solutions. That is a very exciting opportunity. I am working hard to progress the www.thisisspain.info site and want to continue with the www.thisistorrevieja.info site. Finally and in some ways most importantly I look forward to helping people in their first few months in Spain. It is very rewarding to see someone develop from a rather bewildered newcomer to somebody who feels at home in his/her new environment.

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Sept 2001 So, This is Spain!! - Steve 45, Christine 41. I am English, a rugby and soccer fan whilst Christine is French from Roanne, La Loire. We moved to Torrevieja only two months ago although I have been a regular visitor for over 20 years. So, why Torrevieja? Well, it was always a place I felt comfortable in and although it is Spanglish it still retains some of its original charm. It is also one of the first places on

the long journey South from the French border where the locals speak Spanish as opposed to a regional dialect or language. One of my main reasons for being here is to perfect my Spanish and I did not want to live in an area where Catalan or even Valenciano was the language in the street. Sure I speak English, French and Spanish every day but I often have the chance to practice my German and Swedish too. As a linguist, Torrevieja is a dream location. We have settled wonderfully in Ciudad Jardin just outside Torrevieja and enjoy what for us is an idyllic lifestyle. I have spent nearly 25 years in direct sales and we came over here to semi-retire. Although we are involved in offering low cost phone services and setting up a network of distributors for debit cards, I believe that we have reclaimed our lives. No longer do I have the responsibility of looking after up to 2,500 distributors. I no longer have to worry about the clock in the way I used to. I am now enjoying teaching Spanish to beginners and am involved in raising funds for various charities. Christine adores the sun and her daily jogging - now she can only complain about the heat and not the rain/snow/hail/sleet/wind/fog etc etc!! I also know I am the fittest and healthiest I have been for years. Sure, like everybody I guess, we were nervous about moving lock, stock and barrel but as I drove out of London I realised I never ever once looked back. As we boarded the Eurostar, I even remarked to Christine that we had not even looked over our shoulders to the suburbs or the metropolis. I have not even bought an English newspaper since we arrived. As for the future, well, we are looking around for somewhere to buy as we rent long-term at the moment. We have seen some wonderful properties but will not rush in until we find something that is right for us. If it takes 6 months - fine. If it takes 12 months -equally fine. The most important thing for us is to find something that we both believe is where we would be happy to settle. I have spent nearly 25 years driving on average 50,000 miles per annum. Those days are over. Christine's only slight disappointment is not having met more French people but she loves practising her Spanish, her outdoor swims and her jogging. She also says that she loves the fact that when the phone rings it is a friend and not a business call!! Do I regret anything? Well, maybe we should have moved here earlier. Maybe I should have improved my Spanish. Maybe I should..... No, as a certain famous French singer once sung "Jamais je ne regrette rien" Enjoy! Steve and Christine