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People Profiles

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Alex Jurshevski CEO, Recovery Partners

Alex Jurshevski, co-founder and CEO of London-based specialist investment firm Recovery Partners, is no stranger to turnarounds. This, after all, is the Canadian-born investment banker who was headhunted from Wood Gundy's Tokyo office in 1993 to sort out New Zealand's finances. The country's foreign currency borrowing binge of the 1970s and early 1980s had brought the economy to its knees and triggered a crisis. As head of portfolio management in the finance ministry's debt management office, Jurshevski and his colleagues set about restructuring public-sector finances. Three years later, the job was done: New Zealand had no foreign-currency debt, huge financial savings had been made, the credit rating was up two notches and the currency was rock solid. Things have changed a bit. "We used to talk about the NZ dollar as being the Swiss franc South," says Jurshevski. "Recently it's been more like the South Pacific peso, although it has improved a fair bit this year."

Now Jurshevski is back in the turnaround game, running a firm specializing in distressed and technology situations with four main colleagues. Of these, John Zohrab is a former chairman of Warburg in New Zealand, was the inaugural head of the New Zealand DMO and has been an adviser to Merrill Lynch in non-Japan Asia. Graeme Bister is a lawyer who spent 20 years with Linklaters and was then managing partner of Pinsent Curtis. Elbert Ashbaugh III ("Ash") supplies the Silicon Valley know-how, having spent 25 years in the hi-tech world. The fourth member is Jean François Gauthier, a Québécois compatriot of Jurshevski.

Recovery has been involved in several turnarounds and advisory situations over the past three years and is now embroiled in its first real battle: a struggle for control of wannabe internet bank e-primefinancial. Thirty months on from listing on Aim, London's junior market, e-prime has still to receive regulatory approval to start its planned US banking business and is effectively a £17.5 million cash shell. Recovery, which says it has the support of a "significant" proportion of e-prime shareholders, wants to implement a revised business strategy, including injecting new technology and intellectual property rights acquired through other investments. Since this strategy also involves removing the board and management - to be replaced by a new team led by former Liffe chairman Jack Wigglesworth - it has been rejected by e-prime's board. "Our approach has been friendly but we're not going to go away," says Jurshevski. "We know we've got enough votes to win."

Jurshevski's role at Recovery gives him an opportunity to employ the skills he has honed during 20-odd years in financial markets. He joined Bank of Montreal in his home town as a financial economist in 1981, quickly moving over to trading before joining Wood Gundy. By 1990 he was bound for Tokyo - to run capital markets. Three years later the headhunter called. In 1996 he left New Zealand for London, returning to investment banking as managing director in charge of portfolio risk management and investment banking at Nomura International. From Nomura he moved to Bankers Trust as a managing director. But almost immediately BT was taken over by Deutsche Bank. Jurshevski - like most of the BT staff - was dismissed.

The outcome of the e-prime "fireworks", to use Jurshevski's word, is anyone's guess. But it would be a brave punter who bet against this combative and capable Canadian.

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