Technology plays a growing part in the operation of CIG’s diversified business including its two pelagic factory trawlers, the Norðborg and the Christian í Grótinum—the former remaining one of the world’s most advanced.

WHAT WAS until a few years ago a fishing company run by Kristian Martin Rasmussen in Klaksvik and his three sons Jón, Bogi and Eyðun, has transformed itself in recent years into a highly successful and multi-layered operation with both processing and fishing interests, a business increasingly built on information technology.

Through the group of companies known as Christian í Grótinum (CIG), the Rasmussen family appears to have an almost uncanny knack of keeping its finger on the pulse of the fishing industry, able to maneuver, invest and innovate at the right moments, with enterprises extending to shore-based activities including overseas operations.

A series of innovative pelagic vessels has culminated in the present two: Norðborg, built in Chile and designed from the keel up to fillet or whole freeze pelagic species as well as being able to hold fish in bulk in its RSW tanks, and to act as Norðborg’s pair partner at certain times of the year.

According to Jón Rasmussen, who skippers the Norðborg and is one of the company’s non-executive directors, keeping track of technological developments is key. The wheelhouse bristles with the latest in digital equipment and practically all communications to and from the trawler is now done online.

“There has been steady yet accelerating movement in this direction for some years,” he said, “and things are now much faster and more convenient compared to earlier.”

The speed and reliability of communication is crucial as the two vessels work on fishing grounds across a variety of trawler fisheries, while also making it possible to maintain close contact with sales teams ashore—a necessity in today’s competitive environment.

HARDLY CHALLENGED
IT systems not only handle communications but also track every carton of fish that comes out of the freezers to be stacked in the fishroom. Every haul is registered and tracked, and every carton can be traced, while the office in Klaksvik is able to know precisely what is going to be landed at the next call in port, with full information on species and grades, as well as the catching position, allowing them to keep customers up-to-date with the same information.

By the time Norðborg or Christian í Grótinum dock to land their catches into the waiting cold stores, arrangements have already been made with buyers for the frozen cartons as the fork lifts shuttle the pallets the boxes were stacked on in the fishroom into the depths of the dockside refrigerators. By the time this happens, customers already know exactly what they can expect to take delivery of, and have already been made aware of any hitches or developments.

The internet has become vital to the way the vessels operate in today’s environment, so much so that on board the Norðborg they have just increased the number of IP addresses through which the trawler communicates online to 200.

Meanwhile, as partner and managing director Eyðun Rasmussen pointed out, “In effect this is a new industry in the Faroes,” he said. “Remember, only a few years ago there were no processing facilities for pelagic food fish on shore.”

CIG invested in the Pelagos factory in Fuglafjørður together with Framherrí and Havsbrún, seeing it as an opportunity to make their activities even more versatile with access to shore-based production.

A recent sidestep deeper into the processing side of the business took place more than a year ago as CIG purchased the shares of Germany’s Larsen Seafood, a producer of convenience dishes, pâtés and spreads. Species handled at its Flensburg factory, capable of producing 80 million cans annually, include mackerel, herring, sprat, trout, salmon, saithe, mussels, and much else.

While most of the products are aimed at consumers through supermarkets and retail chains, there is also a food services market in demand of larger units for other uses, such as sandwich preparation. As well as activities in Flensburg, Larsen Seafood has a Bremerhaven plant with an annual output in the region of 3,000 tonnes, working largely with saithe and Alaska pollock.

The business of catching fish, however, remains central to what CIG does. Seven years after Norðborg emerged from the yard at Talcahuano in Chile for the long delivery trip to the Faroe Islands, the ship’s position as one of the world’s most sophisticated of its kind has hardly been challenged.