

CONTINUAL EVOLUTION

ANY BUSINESS THAT HAS CLOCKED UP OVER 40 YEARS OF OPERATION, OVERCOMING THE TROUGHS AND NOT GETTING CARRIED AWAY BY THE PEAKS, HAS OBVIOUSLY BEEN ADEPT AT MOVING WITH THE TIMES. THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT SHOPFITTING SPECIALISTS, HARTE, HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE SINCE ITS CREATION. WHAT'S MORE, ITS FLAIR FOR EVOLUTION IS CONTINUING AS IT BEGINS TO WRITE THE NEXT CHAPTER IN ITS ALREADY IMPRESSIVE HISTORY.



"These are exciting times for the business as we have recently restructured the sales department, which is now known as the commercial team," explains Fraser Thomson, who as Commercial Director heads up a team comprising of sales and design members. "We have had a number of people retire from the sales

team and in their place we have injected a substantial amount of young blood, promoting both internally and recruiting externally.

Our team has a fantastic balance between experience and innovation which is now driving the business forward. I'm always keen to listen to the thoughts of our most talented

youngsters, because they are the people most in touch with the realities of today and the prospects for tomorrow. Mix this with our experienced team members who offer a fantastic amount of industry and product knowledge to give the ultimate package for our clients."

It has not only been within recruitment where Harte has

been proactive as the West Yorkshire-based company has also invested substantially in new technology in the last 12 months. It has bought another state-of-the-art CNC machine, bringing its overall total up to seven, while it has also purchased two vacuum forming machines and another laser etching machine.



In addition, Harte has invested heavily in a new Javelin ordering system that is being implemented throughout the company. It is hoped that the system will be fully operational by the end of the year, transforming the business into a completely paperless concern with all operations being conducted through tablets. When an order is placed it will be able to tracked throughout the factory at every step of the process.

Also from a software perspective, Harte is currently implementing SolidWorks,

which is providing the business with a whole new dimension from a design perspective, speeding up the entire process, improving efficiencies and giving the opportunity to provide photorealistic 3D renders without the need for bolt-on packs. Having purchased a large warehousing and manufacturing facility adjacent to its existing site, the company also has the capacity to develop further when needed.

The Harte showroom has under gone a major refit and now shows off a selection of

Harte products in their full glory! "Being able to show our customers a snippet of what we can do for them is invaluable. Our quality is market leading and this is apparent when showing new and existing customers our products. Our showroom has proven to be a real success and certainly helps to reassure customers of their expectations."

After firmly putting its money where its mouth is – close to £1m has been invested in the past 18 months alone – Harte is now primed to use its strengthened infrastructure as a

springboard for further growth.

"Having invested so significantly in the business for the pure reason that customers appear to be spending with more confidence again, we have all the tools we need moving forward," adds Mr Thomson. "We weathered the recession very well in the end and as a result have strengthened our business and market share. We're certainly not resting on our laurels, however, and are instead committed to taking the business forward in the long term, not in just the next five years but in the next 15.

"With this in mind we have a growing customer portfolio that has expanded dramatically in recent years, particularly within cosmetics. We are also now increasingly present within the discount marketplace, the high street and the petrol forecourts, while food remains very much our bread and butter.

We have no single customer now with more than 12 per cent of our annual turnover. We've been able to move away from having one or two large customers taking the majority of our turnover, thereby putting us in a much stronger position to continue our progression and also give our customers a real confidence that Harte are here for the long term."

Supporting the internal investment and recruitment that Harte has seen, the company has also updated its website and brochures to better reflect the changes that are ongoing and those that have been completed already.



"I came into the business ten years ago and the transformation that the company has undergone in this period has been staggering," says Mr Thomson. "We're a far better business because the risk isn't there. We have a fantastic foundation on which to build and the skills and expertise to operate in a wide variety of different sectors.

"Naturally there was some reticence to the changes at first within the business. Over a very short period of time, however,

they realised that the process is much more enjoyable now and less complicated than they perhaps first thought. Thankfully everyone is fully on-board and we're all pushing forward in the same direction. We also have great relationships with our strong supply chains that have been built up over several years, these relationships are invaluable for making sure tight deadlines are kept to.

"There's nothing I hate more than complacency as it leaves you at risk of being left behind. The service has consistently been fantastic at Harte, which is why we've always enjoyed excellent repeat business and customer retention levels, but trying new approaches and initiatives has perhaps not been the company's strong point. This has certainly been rectified now and the new people that we've brought in, in conjunction with our graduate scheme, has ensured that we have a young and fresh dynamic within the business."

Even with the investment that has been made already, Harte is constantly looking to keep reinvesting. "We always look to put a sizeable set percentage of our profits back into the company's development. We're by no means a business that's out to make a quick buck, we're looking to build the company for the long-term. We're a family-owned business and we have no plans to change that. There are lots of family

members within the company with many fathers and sons, fathers and daughters. It's a great firm to work for and there's a lovely collective team-working spirit ingrained as a result.

"We have between 105 and 110 full-time employees at the moment and this is expanding on a weekly basis as we continue to build the team. We also enjoy a very low staff turnover rate and this is generally only because of retirement, which certainly tells a story. This allows us to instil a strong company ethos within the workforce that means we can develop our people to their full potential. We have been able to remove a lot of unnecessary costs within the business by becoming much more efficient, and this in turn has enabled us to ramp up the recruitment process even further."

Eager to make the most of its ever-strengthening team and infrastructure, Harte is now looking to the future with confidence. "We're in a fantastic position and what's all the more encouraging is that our existing customer base are all looking to increase their own businesses by between ten and 20 per cent, so we'll be able to grow naturally with them," concludes Mr Thomson. "On top of the growth generated by our long-established customers, we've also got a number of new customers that are expanding too, further supplementing our existing sales in the process. We're certainly enjoying the fruits of a growing reputation, particularly as we move into new sectors within the marketplace, which in turn opens new doors for us."

With so much to be positive about, it is clear that Harte's faith in continual investment is proving well-founded as it further cements its enviable position within the marketplace.



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