

Geoff's mod-ern security!

A version of the following story appeared in the January issue of 'Kent Business' magazine.



I don't suppose my customers will be aware that I was once a parka-clad lad, cruising down Southend seafront on a Vespa, when Mods and our foes the Rockers regularly made Bank Holiday headlines back in the '60s.

But that was my *modus operandi* before I left Southend High School to enrol at Hatfield Poly, and gave up my beloved Vespa for the more serious pursuit of business studies.

My economics lecturer encouraged my interest in marketing, which was good advice because I was accepted as a graduate trainee at the Knightsbridge headquarters of Bowater, the international paper products company.

My commercial baptism was as a sales rep, endeavouring to persuade reluctant factory managers to buy our new, soft toilet rolls in place of traditional, hard Bronco-style paper. They said that staff would be tempted to nick this new luxury stuff!

Soon afterwards, I was appointed an overseas marketing executive, which entailed visiting territory managers in Ireland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Exciting, but a lot of travel and I wanted to learn more about marketing.

So in 1976 I moved to Kent with Susan, my new wife, and joined Kimberly-Clark as a brand manager, working on sales campaigns and product development, and dealing with top London marketing agencies.

It was great experience, but after three years I decided I'd like to run a marketing department of my own, which was an offer made by shop-fitting specialists Baxter-Fell in Northfleet.

The company did well during the retail revolution, but in the late '80s it was taken over. And again. And again – we had five new owners in six years!

By 1994 I was a divisional managing director, running three companies for Rubicon, the latest owners, but seemed to be spending more time writing and presenting strategic papers and making presentations to pension funds and investors than actually managing the business.

That wasn't really what I wanted to do, so when the company was taken over yet again, I was delighted when the new owners offered me redundancy.

It meant I had the finance to start up on my own, and the security industry seemed interesting because it was growing fast, and seemed relatively recession-proof – businesses always need to keep themselves safe, regardless of the economic climate.

To learn the ropes, I initially ran a project for a company called Modern Alarms, trialling a new franchise concept selling burglar alarms to domestic customers, and setting up shop in Victoria Road, Ashford with a staff of four.

As it turned out, Modern Alarms decided not to progress the franchise project and, in any event, by then I'd already decided that the fast-growing CCTV sector represented a more lucrative side to the security business.

That opportunity was provided by a new CCTV franchise called Eye-Spy, and in 1996 I launched a branch from my Victoria Road offices. Soon after, John Jameson, who was running another Eye-Spy franchise in Dartford, joined forces with me.

But we realised the security market was broadening beyond alarms and CCTV so we relinquished the franchise, and launched Kent & Sussex security, widening our product range to include access control, automatic gates, vehicle barriers and other forms of electronic security.

It also meant we had a bigger market to aim at – local authorities, schools, hospitals, public attractions and private business throughout Kent, Sussex and London.

We've enjoyed strong growth, and have a super client list – for example, we've installed CCTV and security systems for customers as diverse as Rochester Cathedral, Benenden Hospital, Shepherd Neame, Thames Luxury Charters and schools and property developments throughout the region.

Turnover has now hit the £1 million plus mark, and we have been assiduous in earning the right industry accreditations and quality marks. Without them, you can't get on the tender list for the public sector or the bigger private sector clients.

Like everyone else, the recession has made us step back and think hard about the company - business has become lot tougher. So we're glad we broadened our product offering and client base, and we work hard on our marketing, not just the website and corporate literature, but also through networking, and I'm a member of both the Wealden Business Group and Ashford Chamber of Commerce.

Away from work, I try to keep personally fit and active – I race a Flying 15 sailing boat at Bewl Valley every weekend, play racquet ball at Biddenden Squash Club, and also golf at Hemsted Forest.

But I still miss that Vespa!

Kent& Sussex Security Ltd, The Old Bakehouse, Forge Lane, Ashford. Tel: 01233 622025.
Website: www.kentandsussexsecurity.com

January, 2012