

REDPACK PUSHING THE ENVELOPE



WE LEARN HOW A FAMILY FIRM IS AT THE VANGUARD OF THE PACKAGING INDUSTRY.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

PROJECT MANAGED BY: RHYS COUSINS

Redpack's main office is based in Norwich in the UK, for over 40 years the firm has established a presence in 37 different countries with a staff of 90+ people.

“We have low staff turnover, people enjoy what they're doing and our culture,” points Gary Howard, General Manager of the company.

Redpack has also established offices in Germany to handle the European side of the business, an office that has since become Redpack Europe with the advent of Brexit.

As a manufacturing and engineering company specialised in packaging machines and equipment, Redpack's focus has been less on volume than it has been on high quality, as Gary points out.

“We are not in business to roll multiple machines off a production line,” he tells us. “We have five models and within those models, we have multiple



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Gary Howard,
General Manager
of Redpack.

variations to meet or exceed the customers' requirements. The machines and equipment are all hand-built in the UK and bespoke, built by engineers who are proud of their work- not mass-produced. Rather than trying to sell a packaging machine, we sell customers a solution that meets their needs.”

Redpack is a family-run business wholly owned by the Briston family, with two brothers, Stuart, and Jeremy Briston, guiding the firm as Directors while other sons, cousins and uncles work in various roles throughout the company.

“That theme goes through the entire workshop. We are all treated like family, treated with respect, treated properly, and this is reciprocated by our team.” Gary insists.

Maintaining that family atmosphere has become a challenge as the company has grown, but it is one that Redpack has embraced.

“It gets harder as the company has grown. When I started six years ago, we had 40-or-so people in our team, since then we have over doubled in size,” Gary says. “It is more of a challenge to know everyone personally, know what they're doing, what their family is doing. It takes a while, but it reaps benefits.”

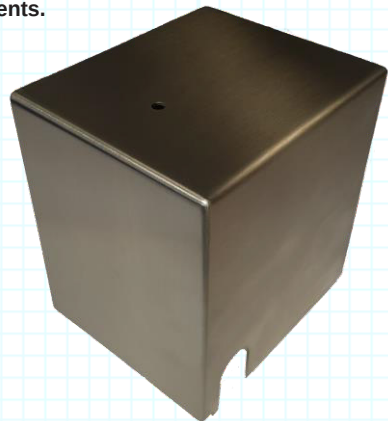
That does not mean that Redpack is shying away from further growth, however. The company is looking to break into the US market. Gary tells us there were ambitious plans for a US expansion in 2020, although these have been slowed down by the advent of the Covid pandemic. >>



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But whatever challenges Redpack has faced, its core offering has remained the same.

PROVIDING WHAT YOU NEED

Gary argues that what sets Redpack apart from the industry is the level of service it provides, particularly in after-care.

"It's how we provide customers with what they need. Our machines are there to pack products. If they are not packing products, our customers cannot sell products but also, they have staff there standing idle and costing money," Gary explains. "So, if there is a problem, we get it solved soon as possible. We offer telephone support; we have a technical support team here and a lot of time things are resolved over the phone. We also have service engineers on the road constantly, and offer out of hours support. If you call before noon we will get to you the same day, after 12 if we cannot do the same day, it will be early the next day." We are also trialling on how technology can help with the IoT, VR & AR.

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Redpack's commitment to this level of service is absolute- if engineers are busy, the company directors aren't above coming in at a weekend to fetch parts and deliver them personally. But perhaps what makes Redpack unique is the way this attitude is extended up and down the supply chain.

"Service is not only where we traditionally look after customers. It is in how we provide service to our customers, suppliers and each other," Gary says.

Redpack serves a wide variety of customers, each in their own industry sector, which means Redpack needs to extend that understanding still further. It is not enough for the company to know its own market- Redpack needs to know its customers' markets too.

"A high proportion of our customers are food producers; however, we also offer equipment to the non-food, pharmaceutical and other sectors. We manufactured a range of machines to help support during the pandemic too, covering items like wipes, masks, tests etc" Gary says. "We have to understand what our customer's customer will do, and their customers will be entities like supermarkets and consumers. We are trying to gauge what the end-user will be, three or even four steps away."

Across Redpack's markets, a recurring theme is a growing priority given to sustainability.

"Removing, reducing, and recycling plastics is a big issue now. Our machines will pack with a variety of film types, recyclable, bio-degradable, compostable, and also with paper. Our newest machines are capable of achieving this and with minor upgrades, we can convert a high proportion of our existing equipment," Gary points out. "We have to speculate what the consumer is going to do, so being close to the consumers and media is vital. As a company and trusted management team, we are able to react very, very quickly. We make decisions fast, based on the situation and circumstances, we believe in our team. You don't have to go through three levels of approval. If you want something done then you make the decisions and do it."



As well as the issues around sustainability, the demands around what packaging will have to endure are also changing- particularly with the explosion in e-commerce and home delivery.

"One of the other areas we do see challenges in future is in what they call the final metre," Gary admits. "Currently if you put a pack of six apples in a package the final metre is as far as the supermarket shelves, or the packhouse. When our customer delivers the product into the shop, the job is done. As the industry moves towards home delivery, the final metre is right to the consumers' door. We have to think about the presentation, protection, and longevity. All these things are going in the back of our mind on a daily basis."

To meet these needs Redpack listens to its customers, building relationships long after the machine is installed. Redpack's people also pay close attention to the market at large.

"Our marketing executive will spend a portion of her time literally shopping, looking at anything new coming in," Gary tells us. "We're happy to be first to market, making suggestions to people. Being the explorer, going out and finding the next big thing rather than waiting for it to come along, makes us an influencer in the marketplace. We have machines and equipment in Research and Development that are really cutting edge, where we're proving the concept, and sometimes the concept will work the first time but isn't appropriate timing, or the marketplace isn't ready; but we keep pushing."

Between Covid and Brexit, Redpack has pushed through an eventful year, but as things return to normal it is clear Gary is excited about the future.

"We're looking at 20% growth each year. What we're now going to be doing is strengthening Redpack Europe, and the USA is 100% back on our radar," Gary

insists. "We're also looking at other sectors as well. We're strong in fresh produce and are the strongest in the UK for produce. We also perform well in the snacks sector. We do not grow just to grow; we grow so it is sustainable and keeps people gainfully employed so we can invest further in the business and our people. There are no vanity trophies in our cabinet." ☺

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