

INTERVIEW WITH...

James Matthews-Paul speaks to Janice Fairfield, Marketing Manager of Fairfield Signs, as her company celebrates a full and dynamic 30 years in the sign and display industry

Alongside husband Geoff, Fairfield's Managing Director, Janice Fairfield has been instrumental in driving the signage company over the past three decades. Interviewing her, I wanted to find out where the company began and how it had expanded to become both an international and innovative presence in the sector.

How did you start out in the sign industry?

We started the company in September 1979 when we were initially selling into the retail market with a range of glass cubes and show-cases. Following that we started to import, and then develop, cable and rod display systems which were, at the time, a totally new concept for the UK. We also developed a range of sign supports and it was at this point that we started marketing to the sign industry. Many of our clients have been working with us well over 20 years.

How has your company expanded since?

The company has grown slowly and steadily over the years, seeing the transition from a small family operation to larger company with people responsible for different aspects of the business. From the beginning, we sold throughout the UK, done in the early days through half a dozen distributors and a branch office was opened later in Shrewsbury.

From 1995 we focussed on developing our export markets and opened up an office in Holland, the USA and then Germany. This all happened over a period of four years which was very ambitious. Steady product development in low-voltage lighting for our existing cable systems, floating light boxes, e-motion, rotating poster systems and, in more recent years, digital signage has helped to develop the company.

What has been your most important investment in the last thirty years?

We invested in lots of different projects over the years but two things really stand out



Janice Fairfield

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in our minds. Firstly there was the purchase of our 8,500 square foot property, at Fleet, Hants in 1989, which was a huge step. At that time the team, including Geoff and myself, was only seven people.

The other investment - which some may not think of as an investment - is that we have always spent resources on training ourselves in all aspects of business development. My favourite quote is my 'university on wheels'; both Geoff and I have been listening to training material in the car on all sorts of topics since our early twenties. Just think how much you can learn, even if you listen to only 15 minutes a day over 30 years! Fairfield has believed in investing in both internal and external training and we now run up to eight training seminars a year.

How do you think traditional sign-making will be challenged by digital signage?

I think there is a place for both digital signage and traditional sign-makers, including large-format printers. What we are finding is that the two are being merged together. Branding and, often, a call to action can be in a printed format, while the constantly changing message is in the digital format. To attract attention, a shaped sign in conjunction with a digital screen can often out-perform a simple screen. Sign-makers need to be comfortable selling both and this is a big learning curve for many, as digital technology needs to have an after-sales service which is very different from fixing a sign and walking away.

What would you do differently, if you were doing it all again?

As a business grows there are so many things to think about. You need to be incredibly focussed so that you are spending your time on what is really important. I think it would have been fun spending more time travelling and growing the export side.

We're sure there's still time! Thank you for coming to talk to Sign-Link.