

Island Business



April
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of the Island's shop windows

The Interview
Colin Ringer
ICR Touch

Company Profile
Betapak

COMPANY PROFILE

Business Essentials

KEVIN WILSON FINDS OUT HOW BETAPAK IS KEEPING THE ISLAND SUPPLIED

Supplying other businesses with the basics is anything but basic, as Island company Betapak has discovered.

It experienced swift growth when Peter Tomlinson acquired it five years ago, but the growth presented its own problems.

Peter explained: "It quickly became clear that our business customers wanted to be able to get everything from one supplier instead of shopping around.

"We responded to that and were fortunate that a series of other businesses were available for acquisition over the next two or three years - including Total Hygiene Supplies, Bailey Polythene, Island Tea and Coffee and Island Packaging.

"It was great that we could grow in this way and meet our customers' needs, and it was strategically the right thing to do. But the timing was awful. We had to take the opportunity to grow but it presented us with huge logistical problems and we know that our standards of service suffered as a result."

Now, though, Peter believes Betapak is delivering. And while its customers think in terms of bin liners, coffee supplies, paper and cleaning products, Peter thinks people.

"We are here to save our customers time and effort," he said. "With one phone call, we can supply all their needs. Our relationship with the customer is the key, and everyone who works for Betapak must match my personal ethos. We recruit people who have honesty and integrity, first and foremost.

"When we advertise for staff, we make it clear in the advertisement what we are looking for. We examine the skills needed to be successful and scan the CV and letters people send in for evidence they have those skills. I suppose we need to find a match between skills and attitude.

"Around a quarter of our staff are either apprentices or have come in through that route and it is wonderful to see how they have developed to deliver the high levels of customer service we expect. We are always on the look-out for excellent apprentices. It gives us all such a buzz when we see them giving top level customer service, and we get good feedback about them from our customers.

"Our motto is to do the right thing right, and we want our staff to be proud of what they do. I admit that I made mistakes early on, because we grew faster than we had actually planned to.



"But the opportunity to acquire the right business on a small island like this doesn't come around very often. We got in a right mess when we took over Island Tea and Coffee, for example, but we worked our way through it, and hopefully our customers are satisfied now."

Betapak is proud of the fact that it now has computerised systems in place that make it possible to offer close to 100 per cent availability to 2,000 Island customers on a staggering 115,000 product lines. The catalogue is still expanding, too. Betapak now has a wide range of lighting products, and first aid equipment.

Peter worked for Proctor and Gamble for 16 years, and took very early retirement at the age of 37 because he couldn't travel the world on business and raise a family at the same time.

"We looked at the whole world, trying to decide where we would live, and we came to live on the Isle of Wight," he said. "Within a year of retirement, I was looking for a business to get involved in, and formed a property development company, which I still manage.

"I quickly realised I would be working forever. I will probably die in harness!" said Peter.

The day to day management of Betapak is now in the hands of Jon Carter, who was recruited as a telesales person, progressed to sales manager, and was then appointed General Manager in 2009.

"One of our main messages is that we free businesses from the time and resources that are spent on doing such basic things as purchasing everyday materials," said Jon. "It's amazing that so many can spend hours on the phone or the internet looking for the cheapest toilet rolls. Our customers trust us to

shop round for them to get the best quality product at a competitive price."

Peter says Jon's progress is a good example of what Betapak is all about. "Our commitment is to youth and development," he said. "I have five children of my own, and as a landlord, I've seen a lot of kids wasting away in bedsits. Basically, they are bright and energetic kids who just need a chance.

"We put in a fair amount of time into spreading the message to young people that, with effort, you can succeed. We go into schools, we support Young Chamber, and we take work placements."

Betapak is now a multi-million pound business, having grown from four employees to 24.



COMPANY PROFILE



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BETAPAK IN 30 SECONDS

- 400 + orders a week
- 1,400 different product lines delivered a week
- 99.9% availability on stock lines
- 115,000 product lines
- 100 + deliveries every day to everywhere on the Island
- 2000 active Island customers in accommodation, agriculture, beauty, catering, education, health, care homes, industrial and manufacturing, institutions, motor, places of interest, professional services, retail, sport and leisure, trades, transport and wholesale

Its growth by acquisition makes impressive reading... within a few weeks of Peter's purchase of the original Betapak, Medina Office Supplies became available.

Six months later, Peter bought Total Hygiene Supplies, followed soon after by Bailey Polythene. In 2009, the company took over Island Tea and Coffee, which opened up a marketplace in the catering sector; and Island Packaging.

Peter said: "All of it happened because customers kept telling us they preferred a single supplier, and the businesses became available. I just had to take the opportunity when it was there.

"None of the companies were computerised, so there was a lot of work to do to set up and manage databases, and that meant that in the early days, we did have problems while we were catching up with all that.

"All the time since then has been devoted to building up excellent customer service.

"Our clients know they can phone us with a small order for just about anything, and we will deliver it quickly.

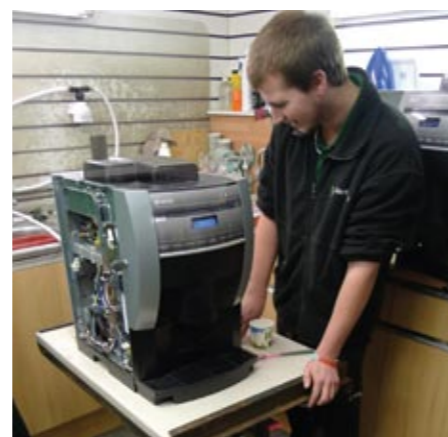
"We even had a request from one customer for the supply and installation of a flat screen television, and we helped them out."

Peter's energy and vision continues to drive the company forward. He has a number of other business interests - including JR Zone - and says when the time is right he will pursue other projects.

Peter established the Landlords Forum on the Island; chairs the St Thomas of Canterbury Church Parish Council; and is also a main Board Director at the Isle of Wight Chamber of Commerce, Tourism and Industry.

"My mission here is to apply what I've learned," he said. "I know I have made mistakes, and learned from them. I hope that in 10 years' time, the same customers are still coming back to us because they trust us to do the right thing by them.

"We try to run our business the right way, and we are always reminding ourselves that good enough just isn't."



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