

Leading light for the future

A J Hurst's **Lisa Kitchen** says the company's diversification into the energy efficiency market proved a shrewd move

How long has AJ Hurst been operating in Northern Ireland? Is it a family company?

The company was established in 1936 in Northern Ireland. It has been owned by my family since then.

My brother Mark Goldsbrough and I are the third generation of the family to have the responsibility of running the business.

Do you have any plans for expansion?

In the past two years we have developed an extensive customer base in England and Scotland, primarily for our energy efficient lighting products.

We have recruited three sales engineers specifically to cover this territory and to develop this business.



The economy has had a difficult period in recent years — how has that impacted on business?

The year 2009 saw a decline in our core business and it was a challenging year.

The downturn in construction has also impacted our business significantly as a substantial part of our customer base is made up of electrical contractors. However, our diversification into

the energy efficiency market has proved very successful for the company and has provided us with the opportunity to expand into the UK.

Have you launched any new initiatives to combat the current challenges?

We have introduced an energy efficient lighting range which is aimed at reducing energy costs and carbon emissions in commercial, manufacturing and retail environments. We provide the customer with a total solution from the initial energy survey which details savings and return on investment through to the supply, installation and commissioning of the products. In 2009 the energy efficient lighting brought us in excess of £1.5m new business and we will exceed this target in 2010.

In a competitive marketplace with plenty of choice for customers, how do you win business?

I believe our company stands out in the marketplace for our depth of expertise, range of products and for our commitment to truly excellent customer service.

We have several customers who have been with us for more than 30 years.

Our priority is to provide exemplary customer service and we are committed to ensuring we give our customers value for money.

How do your latest sales figures compare to last year? What do you attribute the upturn/downturn to?

Our figures for the first six months of 2010 are significantly up on the same period in 2009.

We have seen a slight upturn in our core business of industrial components but most of the increase is due to the sales of energy efficient lights and other associated products.

Energy management and cost savings are key factors for the implementation of these projects and the savings we can provide customers through these schemes directly impact their bottom line.

Our focus on this market has led to the significant growth in sales.



Lisa Kitchen and Mark Goldsbrough from A J Hurst

You recently opened new headquarters in Belfast — what influenced the timing of opening your new HQ?

While the industry is still going through a very challenging period due to the economic downturn we felt it was important to prepare ourselves for the post-recession period and the anticipated uplift in demand.

The move represents a significant investment for the company and is designed to help us drive further growth in the UK.

How do you think the upcoming public sector cuts will impact on Northern Ireland's economy and on your business?

Public sector cuts will have a serious impact on the economy and on businesses in the private sector.

Although AJ Hurst is not directly reliant on public sector contracts it will impact on some of our customers.

It will be even more important for us to continue to widen our customer base.

factfile

Personal CV

Name: Lisa Kitchen

Title: Managing director, AJ Hurst

Age: 40

Qualifications: HND business and finance,

Pg Dip human resource

management

Membership of professional bodies:

Institute of Directors

Company CV

Name:

Alfred J Hurst Ltd

Location: Dargan Crescent Belfast

Sector:

Electrical, lighting and power systems distributor

Trading since: 1936

Workforce: 22

Turnover: £5m

~~1956~~ Desks

1387 left

~~2137~~ Chairs

1665 left

~~378~~ Filing Cabinets

279 left

~~116~~ Workstations

82 left

~~37~~ Safes

33 left

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Airport and airline win customers' approval

BY HEATHER MCGARRIGLE

BELFAST International Airport and Aer Lingus have scooped a gong each at the Holiday Extras customers' awards 2010.

Belfast International Airport was named gold winner in the best UK airport category and Aer Lingus has been voted the best airline.

More than 24,000 HolidayExtras.com customers cast their votes in the website's second annual customers' awards.

Travellers rated their air travel experience across 12 categories, voting for 112 airlines, 28 UK airports and hundreds of airport hotels, lounges and car parks.

Deborah Harris, PR executive for Belfast International Airport, said: "We are really delighted to receive this award and would like to extend our thanks to all the Holiday Extras customers who took the time to vote. This award is in recognition of all the staff who work at the airport and give 110% every day to provide exceptional customer services to all our passengers."

Declan Kearney of Aer Lingus said: "This is a great achievement for everyone at Aer Lingus and something we are all very proud of."

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