

the Business

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Dean Westmoreland

“You must have the right strategy... and then constantly review the market.” →

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Forum details and booking form



50%

Omar's
growth rate in
year five

262

People
employed by
Omar

13.5

Aces covered
by Omar's
Suffolk site

The policy is 'no passengers' on the Omar express

On LinkedIn, Dean's profile says he 'is an experienced hands-on business leader with a track record of business improvement'. But when he joined Omar, his experience – while broad – was a long way from the world of park homes. Yet, scarcely five years later, Omar is looking good – strong accounts, a healthy order book from a growing customer base, and committed staff.

While some might consider the company has come a long way in a comparatively short time, Dean says: "It doesn't feel like a rapid recovery from where I'm sitting. There was no miracle cure. With some companies,

there is an obvious quick fix and they can be turned around in 18 months. But this one was a lot of work!

"First you need to understand the competitive environment, and the market dynamics. We regularly undertake competitor analysis to see how the market is segmented. Once the market is understood, you need a clear vision. If you don't have a clear strategy on one sheet of paper that you can articulate, then you can't roll it out to the business and get buy-in.

"In broad terms, the objective was to grow in a controlled manner. When I joined in 2010, the company was

overtrading. It was producing too much product – more than the market wanted. And it wasn't getting it right.

"We turned down production, so we were making the right quantity of units with less discounting. The core market has grown at around six per cent per annum in recent years – very modest growth. For the first three years, we were growing around 12–14 per cent, but by year five, it was up by 50 per cent... Omar's core business has more than doubled in five years."

There is no getting away from it, this is impressive growth in difficult times. Without doubt, Omar has taken



The Business meets Dean Westmoreland, group chief executive of Omar Homes.

Omar designs, manufactures and sells park homes and luxury lodges under the Omar and Wessex brands, from a 180,000 sq ft facility and showground on a 13.5 acre site in Brandon, Suffolk.

The company employs over 250 people and is a leading manufacturer of BS3632 products in the UK.

market share from some competitors. In addition, some manufacturers were less able to deal with the trading difficulties that the credit crisis, and the subsequent fall in consumer confidence, threw at them.

Dean continues: “The brand is key – and the Omar brand was tarnished by financial difficulties. It is all about reputation and perceptions and, of course, it is hard to offer ‘best in class’ customer service when finances are tight.

“As a company, we set out not to let people down, to be honest and ethical and to do what we say we will do.

Customer service is at the heart of what we do and it is our aim to be the best in terms of design, quality, final finish and aftersales. And aftersales is the *bête noire* of our industry. If you get that right you have a clear differentiator. Previously we had two full time aftersales staff and now we have seven full-time engineers plus three subcontractors. Experience has taught me that if you have the best product, the best team and the best customer service, then you should have the best outcome – profit!

“As of last Monday we had 262 staff – but this is a moving feast as we grow the business – we will go through the

300 mark before year end. And you have got to have a strategy the team know and understand. Too many businesses do a strategic plan and shut it in a desk drawer. Instead you have to push down into individual and departmental objectives and make sure it is joined-up thinking. It is critical to have the right team in place. And to do that, you have to be willing to make tough decisions. We have a ‘no passengers’ policy – my belief is that a lot of businesses are not well enough led. You have to make those hard decisions to save the jobs of the people you have left.

No passengers on the Omar express

“You have to keep the business scalable, particularly in an uncertain market. Do fewer things better... And if you have underpinned your business with the right people and the right strategy, then you need the right processes. You have to have the right processes and the management information systems to monitor them, and you need to constantly review the market.

“When I was working for Waterford Wedgwood,” where he took over as Financial Controller, “they had been underperforming. We turned it around and tripled profit and achieved a big rise in share price. After I left, the market dynamics changed. The dining room moved into the kitchen and casual dining arrived. It is very hard to beat a fundamental shift in the market.

“Caravan manufacturers entering our marketplace was regarded by some as a threat. For us, it was an opportunity. It brought holiday parks looking at the lower-VAT rated BS 3632 products. And they saw our products and saw that they were high quality – and with a bespoke facility. Consequently our lodge business has grown more quickly than our park home business.”

In 2013, the West Country-based Wessex Park Homes announced it was to close. Before the end of the year, Omar announced it had bought the business – something that raised a few eyebrows in the industry.

“Wessex has a strong brand with a clear brand identity,” Dean explains. “We liked their designs – they were different and they had loyal customers. Wessex was clearly differentiated in design style from Omar with different customers, so the two brands were not competing against each other. Of course, I am a businessman and I looked at the bottom line, and yes it was about gaining market share and, yes, the price was right. It’s all about the numbers ...”

Omar now produces park homes, luxury lodges and bespoke homes. *The Business* asks which of the three product areas is the most profitable. “You need all three – they are each key strands to the business. Being able to provide bespoke items to a



Right: Omar's Heritage which won Park Home of The Year



customer is what sets us apart from many, but as it is more complicated, it is likely there will be more customer service issues. So while the bespoke side is possibly the least profitable, it needs to be there. We are looking for differentiators. We had to imitate what traditional home developers were doing – properly displayed units on a park, dressed like show homes.

“Park homes sell higher pound for pound – they are primary residences and not a discretionary purchase. Lodges can be more expensive to make – cladding, for example, is more expensive than render and huge

bi-fold doors look great but there is a significant cost.”

Recently Omar chose to diversify into subsidiary services such as Omar Park Development Services (OPDS). Dean believes this has been successful because “people like to buy from experts. We offer a value-added service – again a differentiator. Frankly, we were dealing with some new entrants to the parks market and some experienced players are making fundamental mistakes. We saw an opportunity with turnkey solutions – so some major groups now take our turnkey option – the lodge is there, sited, decked, connected to services



Above: the Gite by Wessex combines French rustic style with a contemporary twist. It is built to have the feel of a Brittany longhouse, featuring shutters and large bespoke French casement style windows. It is designed with light panelled walls and vaulted ceilings



Who is...?

Dean Westmoreland
BA (Hons) FCMA



Dean has a degree in Geography and originally trained as a management accountant, before becoming Financial Controller of a £160M FMCG business aged just 28.

His background is broadly in manufacturing operations – from high tech to luxury goods. He has worked in a plc environment, and for Permira, the successful private equity house.

In January 2010 he joined Omar and became controlling shareholder in March that year.

His passion is rugby.



and ready to sell or let. Added to that, we wanted to encourage more parks to the market at a time when there were not many coming through, and stimulate demand for our own products.”

Dean is uncharacteristically coy about future plans, except to say that 2015 is an important year for Omar. The first Omar-branded home was produced in 1965 – 50 years ago – and an anniversary home is planned in celebration. He is keeping plans close to his chest – perhaps because Omar’s success is something many would like to imitate. And you can’t help wondering if part of the reason for

buying Wessex was to make sure that others didn’t profit from their designs.

He is less coy about the upcoming election and future economic growth. “I am a liberal businessman and 100 per cent behind the welfare state and a state educational system. But it must be paid for and while I am pleased to see recovery, I am concerned it may be fragile. So we are now trained to be fleet of foot and the business is built to be scalable.”

“You must have the right team, the right strategy, processes and systems and then constantly review the market.” Sounds simple but it takes some doing...