

WHEN HORISING AROUND IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS...

VICTORIA POOLMAN VISITS DAN DENNIS OF EQUESTRIAN FENCING IN SOUTHAMPTON

Dan Dennis has two passions in his life: horses and fences. So it's lucky for him that by combining the two, he has built a business which in just five years has a turnover exceeding £1million.

However, it hasn't come easy; working an eighty hour week as well as fitting in a tough exercise programme in preparation for this year's point-to-point season, Dan's now awaiting the arrival of his fiancé from Sussex, who will be moving to the area to help Dan with the business. And it's not a moment too soon...

Having been a contractor for twenty years, at the age of thirty Dan had to undergo a second shoulder operation (which also came about as a result of his two passions). He realised that another six months off work to recover meant he could no longer rely upon contracting to earn a living. So, using the money he had earned, he chose to go down the supply route instead, developing his yard into a one-acre timber haven, which opened for trade in 2003.

With his eight employees, several of which have been with Dan for years, the company's initial timber range soon expanded and he now holds 350k worth of stock, catering for any fencing request and offering a same-day bespoke service.

He tells me, "Most of our work has been repeat custom or through word of mouth, which I put down to our flexibility and ability to provide what people need quickly. We live in an age now where everything has to

be fast and generally speaking, if someone wants something and you have it all ready, they'll end up buying it instead of waiting."

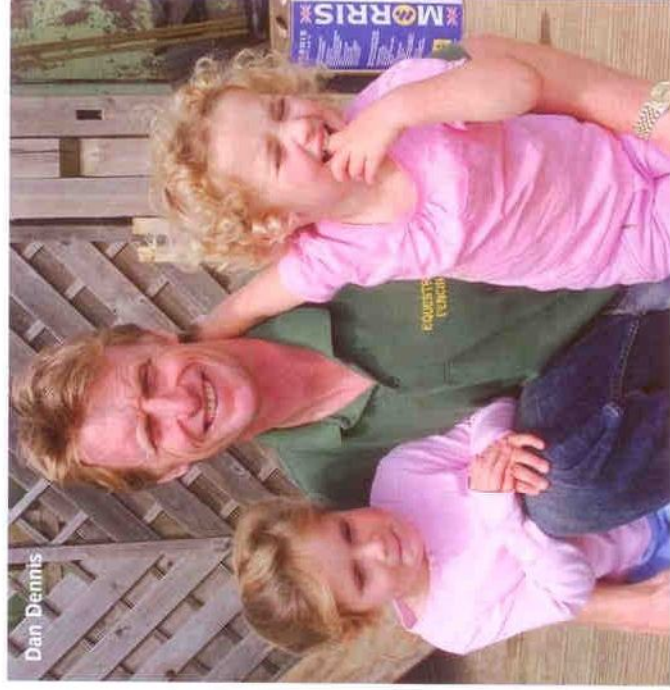
That's where having such a vast range and an abundance of stock comes in handy; Dan is ready for anything. And due to some good advice at a crucial point in his business' growth, he's managed to uphold this practice during the most difficult of times:

"Thanks to having friends in the right places, the timber shortage of 2007 was the best thing that ever happened to us. We were warned by Will of Trojan Timber Supplies about what was happening so we bought in 25 loads just as the tide was turning. I owe both Will and Sue Crane of Trojan a lot - we wouldn't have got to where we have without their help and expertise."

Although everywhere was short of timber and the lifeblood of contractors nationwide was at such a low, Dan didn't take advantage of the situation to make a quick buck - instead seizing the opportunity to get his name in the marketplace and keep it there.

"Though so many companies with timber inflated their prices beyond reason, we kept ours fair - we didn't rip anyone off. Throughout the whole year we only had one week where we were a bit short of stock, and by passing on the good turn done to us, new customers came and stayed with us.

"That's why we stick with suppliers like Trojan and Westbank. I consider



Dan Dennis

flexibility, good service and quality products important, and I only work with people I both know and like." It's for precisely this reason that Dan has been a customer of Trojan for eight years, with the two having a great relationship. Indeed, when I met Dan he was preparing to fly over to Ireland with Will to see U2 play: The pair have been on various jollies together over the last few years and have also owned shares on the same racehorse.

Which brings us to Dan's other passion... His site consists of 12

acres and with the timber yard taking up just one of those, the rest is occupied by a livery and paddocks, which is currently home to 28 thoroughbred horses. Having ridden more than thirty point-to-point winners in his time, Dan even graded the front cover of Horse and Hound back in 1999.

"So much of our work has come through the horses, but equestrian fencing is just a small part of what we do now", he tells me. Indeed, despite the company name, Dan also supplies and sub-contracts out

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