

New base for international growth

Loyal as ever to its North-West English roots Lancaster Fastener has spread its wings remarkably over recent years, and is aiming to further extend its international customer base from new, custom-built warehouse and offices in Morecambe.

Over some 27 years Lancaster has honed a fastener brand that has become synonymous, above all, with integrity. Its sourcing team take meticulous care in selecting the factories that supply a range, which has rapidly expanded over recent years – from self tapping and trilobular thread forming screws to an extensive programme of self drilling screws, machine screws, fasteners for sheet metal, A2 and A4 stainless steel products and capacitor discharge weld studs. Lancaster, incidentally, has recently pointed out to customers that its ranges are not and will not be affected by the application of anti-dumping tariffs against fasteners from China.

The real key to Lancaster has long been the reliability of its services, backed by a commitment to in-depth and across-range stockholding. Its development across the European market, from a base that is, let's face it, a good few 100 kilometres from the English Channel, has been built on characteristic attention to detail. A now well-established relationship with a reputed logistics operator has allowed the company to develop a highly effective delivery network throughout Europe. Daily collections from Lancaster are forwarded to a central hub in the Netherlands within 24 hours and then on through a delivery network to distribution customers throughout Europe.

Effective communication with its customers is vital to an organisation that understandably prides itself on its service commitment. A network of European sales representatives calls on customers personally and is supported by a multilingual sales office team at Lancaster – comprising German, French, Spanish, Italian and Polish speakers.

With success comes inevitable growing pains

– additional ranges and higher sales volumes meant Lancaster outgrew its longstanding warehouse in Morecambe and was forced to hold stocks in additional, albeit close-by, storage locations. In autumn last year the company successfully moved to a custom-built facility a kilometre or so from its previous location. “We were extremely fortunate in having a developer who was really hands on and completely committed to meeting our requirements, however detailed,” says managing director, Sam Wilson. “The result is an outstanding building that gives us immediate improvements in capacity and efficiency, as well as having carefully designed-in options to expand both warehouse and offices to accommodate future growth.”

Work on the new building started on a greenfield site in April 2008 with a tight schedule focused on completion by November. “There were,” Sam Wilson says, “a few interesting moments, however with the support of the developer the completion date was successfully achieved on time.”

The new warehouse, slightly less than 2,000 square metres in area, utilises intensive high-rise racking to provide 5,000 pallet spaces improving the efficiency and dynamics of the operation. The racking design and layout permits a picking system precisely suited to Lancaster's highly customer-oriented service model.

A total of 2,000 tonnes of inventory was moved through the night over a two week period – while maintaining a full customer service each day. “The whole team did an outstanding job under the pressure, keeping track of where items of stock were at any time and picking it accurately to meet our delivery schedules to customers.” By the first week of November Lancaster was fully



operational from the new premises, with hardly any customer noticing the change.

Barely taking a breath, Lancaster has now launched a new delivery service to the North American market. “We are approaching the market in the same service-focused way,” explains Sam Wilson. “Key to Lancaster's approach is being able to support our customer with often quite niche product quickly from stock. We have secured an excellent service agreement with FedEx Express that means orders received before 08:30am GMT are despatched the same day and delivered to any destination in the United States before 10:30am two days later. For Canadian destinations it takes just 90 minutes longer. Our customers will also benefit from the excellent freight rates we have been able to negotiate.”

