

Building trust in the UK preform & closures market

With the UK plastic packaging market annually contributing around £11bn [1] to the national economy and employing over 85,000 people, it is clearly an important industry, representing around 3% of GDP. Global plastic packaging producer RETAL has recently made the strategic decision to expand its salesforce in the UK and Eire, bringing in experienced negotiator Steve Harvey to help navigate its journey. Emma-Jane Batey reports.

An interesting collision of macro-trends sees increased globalisation and a focus on sustainability at the same time as a renewed appreciation for personal recommendations and honest communication. While it is possible to work with manufacturers on price or volume, or with smaller producers that deliver the personal touch, global brands and smaller brands that think big want it all. For brands that value all these at the same time, it can be hard to find a plastic packaging partner that ticks all the boxes.

RETAL serves customers in over 60 countries thanks to 19 production facilities worldwide and it has recently made the decision to expand its sales network to include the UK and Eire. Logistically-close production means that standard and custom preforms and closures can be delivered in volume in a matter of days, with just in time service and a dedicated single point of contact. RETAL Lithuania Sales Director Rimvydas Bazinys shares how the company plans to utilise its close contacts and ability to deliver agile solutions to food and beverage brands in the UK. "For many years we focused on each specific geographical area or a special performance such as multilayer properties, but as we have been increasingly working with global players and successfully delivering their orders to locations where we do not have production facilities, we realised that it is our portfolio, our people, and our production capabilities that matter the most."

Rimvydas notes that 'we can quickly deliver from RETAL plants to the UK; from Lithuania we can deliver to the UK in just four or five days', so clearly the physical location of the production site is not the most crucial element of a mutually-beneficial situation. He continues, "Closures in particular are especially small, light and easy to transport, and we work with a large number of global food and beverage brands to create closures for products including juice, carbonated drinks, mineral water and milk. Our proven experience of working closely with global brands across local, national and international markets means we know how to respond to demand for increased standardisation within a specific market."

Experienced UK sales manager

In order to ensure it is dancing to the beat of the UK and Eire plastic packaging market, RETAL has brought highly experienced sales manager Steve Harvey into its fold. Steve has considerable experience in packaging sales, gained over three decades in the European, Russian and Baltic regions and a warm, friendly character and an open sales style. Steve explains, "I started my career in packaging 30 years ago, after I left the RAF, and I've continually progressed as technology has developed. Paper and print moved to polythene sacks, then to stretch and laminated films and foil containers. In recent years I've specialised in industrial packaging and closures, then I was made redundant at the end of 2019. It gave me a chance to reassess my career and decide what area I wanted to focus on and the type of company I wanted to be a part of. I realised that the most important thing was to find a role that allowed me to be myself; to bring my many years of packaging sales experience alongside my personality, my need to communicate honestly."

With a mutual connection on LinkedIn suggesting that Steve should contact Rimvydas, strategy met synchronicity. Steve says, "It all moved pretty quickly once we realised we were both looking for the same thing and valued a very similar way of working. 2020 has shown everyone that we have to be open-minded about how we work; I'm very results driven, but only if the approach is one I can be proud of. Speaking with Rimvydas highlighted to me that people connect with people; there can often be a few companies that could provide the service that is needed, so it's about that personal connection, an understanding of how doing business must be a win-win situation with people that you like communicating with."

Steve is not the only RETAL face based in the UK, as closures stalwart Karl Everett is a much-respected familiar face across Europe and is located in Telford, Shropshire, from where he can quickly get to a number of airports and motoways to reach any RETAL customer in a matter of hours. Karl has over 30 years of experience in the service and maintenance of packaging machinery, and if there's anything he doesn't know, he makes sure he learns it! Karl says, "I know that the UK will get great service from RETAL; I take a great pride in my job and have the support of my sales engineering team. I'm used to going wherever I am needed to quickly deal with any machinery issues. I know that customers need to be running smoothly, so I arrive quickly and I fix problems calmly."

As Steve, Rimvydas, Karl and the whole RETAL team agree, the opportunity of expanding into the UK and Eire market is ideally suited to the infrastructure that RETAL has to offer. Rimvydas notes that many companies are reticent about the changing post-Brexit regulations, so by working with a European network that is used to rapid deliveries of high volumes, Rimvydas and his multi-lingual team are well prepared. Rimvydas concludes, "Steve is a great fit for us; his experience and his calm, upbeat character means that he's quickly found a place in our team. Steve knows and understands the UK market so well and, at a time when many companies are looking for reliable alternatives, RETAL is well positioned to be visible in the UK. We are here to show that we are immediately ready to partner with high volume producers as well as mid- to small-sized companies that value a packaging partner they can be honest with. We thrive on our recommendations across our active markets and we're sure that the UK and Eire will be now different with Steve as our local sales manager."

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