

# Great success

Andrew Charman

## Marshall Volkswagen Bridgwater is a van dealership that is setting high standards

**W**inning the Sales Team of the Year prize in the 2018 Motor Trader awards was just the latest in a string of awards for Marshall Group's Bridgwater Volkswagen outlet, selling new and used vans and used cars.

In the past three years the centre has been turned from a loss-making business into one posting record performances each year, selling more than 700 vans in 2017 and named 87<sup>th</sup> most influential automotive retailer on social media.

The centre has just undergone a major refit to make better use of its cramped roadside location, reversing the emphasis space-wise from used cars to vans. The changes were described to Motor Trader Matt Robertshaw who has been head of business at the centre since September 2017.

### How has this business changed since 2015?

This was predominantly a full Volkswagen passenger car outlet until the end of 2014 when it was decided not to invest in a new centre to the



latest CI, Marshall's Taunton VW site located only 15 miles away.

The van centre had been opened two years' previously alongside the car side. I arrived in 2015 at the same time as a new head of business and we found a centre that was substantially loss-making. It soon became clear we had the makings of a good business that just needed focus, direction and strategy.

We outlined our vision, some staff left and some came with us. By the end of 2015 we had broken even and we had come second on VW's used car scorecard. We had stabilised the staff, everyone knew what the vision was, their targets and accountability.

On this site we now have a full new and used van centre, Das Welt Auto used car sales and an authorised car repairer. There are two workshops, two sales rooms, two sales teams but one service reception. Until the refit the van side was crammed into the smaller space, and we have turned that around.

### How did you grow the sales?

I knew nothing about vans when I came here, I was a car man through and through with a particular skill for selling used. In year one I resuscitated the used car side, and in 2016 I looked at the van side.

I was told that van people and the way vans were sold was different, which I dismissed. We had reasonable volume but poor retention so I rebuilt our processes, quickly learning that there was a substantial retail van opportunity which no-one else was really looking at.

The sales team were shocked when I decided to open on a Sunday

### PERSONAL FILE – Matt Robertshaw

**Position:** Head of business, Marshall VW Bridgwater

**First job:** Petrol pump attendant

**First car:** Mini

**Current car:** Volkswagen Amarok

**Newspaper:** Autosport

**Film:** Snatch

**Worst business decision:** Leaving Marshall Group

**Best business decision:** Coming back and taking on LCVs



**Downtime:** Family, friends, watching motorsport

**Gadget:** iPhone



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**FACT FILE****Marshall Volkswagen Bridgwater****Established:**  
As Marshall, 2013**Brand:** Volkswagen**Location:**  
Bridgwater, Somerset**Staff:** 38/20**Ramps:** 11**CUSTOMER CENTRIC:** Cars and vans are different but customers' requirements are similar

## Convenience and expertise has a value

**Mike Macaulay**National Sales and Development Manager | **AutoProtect**

I am delighted to see a business targeting the UK's SME as positively and effectively as Marshall Volkswagen Bridgwater. The SME market has grown strongly in recent years, especially micro-businesses and I've regularly championed the opportunity for dealers to look at this area, distinct from traditional fleet sales because they are very different.

The Federation of Small Business reports that there were 5.7 million private sector businesses at the start of 2017; 2.2 million more than in 2002. Small businesses accounted for 99.3% of all private sector businesses at the start of 2017. Of these, 76% did not employ anyone aside from the owner(s). Yet all too often, motor retailers still think of business users as being 'fleet', which is a very different type of customer.

For me, Matt Robertshaw's approach to LCV sale is entirely appropriate. Opening on a Sunday is exactly what

an owner/operator business needs and by backing this up with LCV product expertise and suitable business user finance options, he is making it easier for small businesses to seek out Marshall Volkswagen's help. This convenience and expertise has a value and it seems that this smart strategy has been a key factor in the business' turnaround.

As well as an LCV opportunity, the SME market is an added-value service opportunity. Extended warranties can keep a small business on the road and aid cash flow and GAP/RTI cover is arguably at least as important to a small business owner for the same reason; while both represent a viable business expense. To add a little extra to the benefit column, small business people talk to one another, so the potential for referrals is a very real one.

So well done Matt and his team for seizing the opportunity, I wish you continuing success.

because they mainly dealt with a fleet market they thought no-one would buy on a Sunday.

However much of the retail market, single-user tradesmen and such, spend Monday to Saturday earning their money and only have Sunday to spend it.

We changed the opening hours, doubled our van sales team to five and added two mobile execs, alongside our four car sales execs. They don't cross-pollinate, purely for product knowledge reasons. Vans are complex items, from engine sizes, weight carrying ability to five different designs of rear door.

All three of the last years have seen record performances and this year we will deliver a substantial improvement in volume and profitability over 2017.

**Are the car and van markets different?**

The products are different but the expectation and demand from the customer are very similar. We roll out the red carpet to all of our customers. They are the lifeblood of the business and our staff at the heart of it. We respond to enquiries in exactly the same way and we respond quickly. Our sales team are all in a WhatsApp group and if we get an enquiry in the evening we use this to nominate someone to take the lead.

**How do you market your stock?**

We ensure our used ads look right, with video where possible, and that our attention-grabbing vehicles work best for us. This is quite difficult

with commercial vehicles due to the wide-ranging options.

We like to dominate market spaces, and we constantly review our pricing. No matter what options are fitted, there is a finite price for a particular vehicle. But if we have something a bit different it's vital to emphasise that when we take it to market.

**What are the advantages of being part Marshall?**

Information is transparent and readily available. We have a group-wide management information tool that generates every report that could ever be needed. I can see stock profiles from other centres across the group in minutes, and we get really useful market intelligence as part of that.

**What's the outlook for the next six months?**

We can't ignore the possible effects of Brexit, but I am an eternal optimist. No-one knows what is going to happen, and we could too easily talk ourselves down. But no matter what happens there will be opportunities and we can capitalise on them. 

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