

SHIP SHAPE: Since becoming part of Bristol Street Motors Seat Derby has benefitted from investment

Nicely balanced

Vertu Motors' Seat Derby showroom has been refurbished in time for the brand's new product roll-out

Andrew Charman

Seat Derby was acquired by Vertu Motors in 2010 and earlier this year completed a £250,000 refurbishment ahead of the brand debuting the Ateca, its first SUV.

In April Mark Currie was appointed as general manager having accrued plenty of experience with the brand, having previously been at the group's Seat Barnsley site for five years, prior to which he worked with the brand for Pentagon Group.

Here he talks about the transformation of Seat Derby and its business fortunes, the challenge of recruiting and retaining the right staff, the impact of the Volkswagen emissions scandal on the dealership and the growing importance of aftersales.

How did the transformation of this business come about?

Vertu's philosophy is to take over under-performing dealerships and put processes in place in each department to encourage growth.

We consider creating a good work and life balance as very important. The motor trade in the past has been very labour-intensive, with staff working long

hours and having less family time as a result.

We've introduced a five-day working week for all our sales colleagues and we've increased basic salaries while retaining the commission structure to encourage sales. The core factor, however, is colleague training. All our new recruits are taken off-site on a four-day residential course as part of Vertu's in-house training programme. And once that initial sales training is complete they come back on site and the training continues on a daily basis.

Each sales colleague gets at least 10 minutes per day with a manager, looking at areas that may need improvement, or aspects that need addressing.

We invest in colleagues and this helps to reduce staff turnover. The industry is known for high staff turnover particularly in sales and we are focused on improving this.

Is it difficult to recruit the right calibre of employee?

Yes. One reason behind our increasing basic salaries is to encourage new people into the industry, perhaps from areas such as banking where standards of customer service are to the level we are looking for. Inside the industry you get a lot of people on the

merry-go-round, going from one dealer to the next so we are trying to encourage people in from outside of the industry. I don't think it is appreciated just what opportunities the retail motor industry offers as a career and also the technology in use in dealerships.

How do you maintain your levels of customer throughput? We focus very heavily on repeat

FACTFILE

Bristol Street Seat Derby

Established: 2010

Brand: Seat

Location: Derby

Staff: 22 (10 in aftersales)

Ramps: 5 (plus 1 MoT)



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business. Every customer coming into contact with our service department will get a follow-up phone call from our central contact centre to analyse their level of satisfaction, and the responses are emailed directly to us on site.

In sales everyone who buys a used car will receive a follow-up call, which we use on site to analyse the way we carried out the sales process. Good honest feedback from customers is essential, particularly when we may not have delivered what they expected.

On new car sales we focus very heavily on CSS scores. They are right at the top of our agenda and a priority for every department across the business. Happy customers will refer friends and family to us as well as coming back themselves.

How has the Volkswagen emissions scandal affected your business? We have had good communication throughout with Seat. We had a few customers phone up wanting information on the subject. There was not a major impact on us at all.

Seat has had a challenging past. What future does it have? For years Seat was effectively a two-car franchise with Ibiza and Leon. Since then the Mii has come on board. The new Leon is a fantastic product, bringing a new set of customers to us and that's even more the case with the new Ateca SUV. You can feel the buzz about the place, particularly

amongst the sales team waiting for the arrival of this car. The number of customers that have already walked through the door asking to see it has been really positive. We are told it will open up another 25% of the market to us.

Seat is a good brand, particularly when you consider the technology customers get and the price they pay. It's true that for a long time it was necessary to explain to customers what Seat was, but the easiest way, notwithstanding the recent difficulties that Volkswagen has experienced, has always been to lift the bonnet of a Seat and to show customers the VW-branded technology underneath.

How do you utilise social media? We update our Twitter page directly with local good news stories and information from the brand and we have a centrally controlled Facebook site, on which we can make use of the marketing team here. We find it very successful.

Social media is a good thing for the retail motor industry but it has to be administered closely. It may be easy to put your good news on social media but it's just as easy for an unhappy customer to put their problem out there, so it comes back again to achieving those levels of customer satisfaction.

How important is aftersales? It is all about vehicle health checks, ensuring every customer has a VHC recorded on their car, and ensuring that every process is explained to the customer, advising them on any amber work that might need doing.

We back up such checks with technology so customers are provided with videos that clearly show any issues there may be with their car, and of course we are 100% honest in our reports. It's all down to trust, getting the reporting right and informing customers correctly.

Our company mission statement is "To deliver an outstanding customer motoring experience through honesty and trust" and our staff all carry cards with them with the mission statement and our company values. These are taught to colleagues very early on along with the simple message: 'If it feels wrong it is wrong.'

What's in store for you in 2016? The year has been very good so far. We've seen month-on-month increases, which is very positive. And we haven't seen any noticeable effect from the Brexit vote.

The market may be levelling off now but it is a very exciting time for Seat with the launch of the Ateca.

Giving support to a motivated workforce



Mike Macaulay National Sales and Development Manager, AutoProtect

Good processes, a high level of training and a motivated workforce. No matter what the product, these are the fundamentals of any successful business. Add in products that inspire confidence internally and with the target audience and a clear business mission, the result will invariably be a high performing organisation. This is exactly what Vertu's Seat operation in Derby has achieved. It is an easy formula to write, but often more challenging to deliver.

What Mark Currie and his team at Seat Derby have established is that all-important factor; positive momentum. In our wide experience at AutoProtect, dealers with this attitude challenge themselves continuously and encourage us as their expert partners in added-value services to be part of their team. They welcome our training support, embrace performance reviews and appreciate our insights on the industry and our views on technology and regulation. They also challenge us to develop our support to help them and their customers. It is a pleasure to be part of such a relationship and as a team, we are happy to be kept on-our-toes with our dealer partners.

Arguably, our marketplace has never been more dynamic. The pace of change and the ensuing opportunities and threats are all around us. There is no time to sit still and no place for complacency. Processes need to evolve and training should be a daily event, as Mark and his team recognise. We are proud to be a business that shares this same ethos, helping our dealers to be fresh, relevant and in touch with today's demanding customers.

In the Seat product range we now have a car for just about every customer, from the Mii small city car right up to the Alhambra MPV. As a dealership we are very confident going forward. **MT**

PERSONALFILE

Mark Currie

Position: General manager, Bristol Street Seat Derby

First job: Management trainee, Co-Operative Retail

First car: Ford Fiesta Mk1

Current car: Seat Leon ST

Newspaper: "Don't read one"

Film: James Bond movies

Book: Dan Brown's Robert Langdon books

Downtime: Family and football

Gadget: iPhone/iPad

Best business decision: "Switching from sports retail to the motor trade"

Worst business decision: "Rushing to hire instead of waiting for the right candidate to come along"



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