Wolfgang Gorner opinion piece
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Final

Who would have predicted that!

Wolfgang Gorner, MD of Hörmann UK, reflects on the past year and discusses the challenges still facing business as we look forward to 2021.

When I joined Hörmann in 2019 I inherited a successful business which was split roughly two-thirds domestic and one-third industrial, however to bring a more balanced approached to the business we adopted a clear strategy that will ultimately lead to a split more 50/50. This coincided with a substantial growth in warehouses being built across the UK in readiness for Brexit and the continued growth in on-line shopping, ideal for our Industrial Doors and Loading Technology. However, little did we know that 2020 would see the arrival of a Pandemic, which is still creating major disruption to business throughout the UK and Europe.

Whilst not wanting to paint too austere a picture, COVID-19 has certainly made us all reflect on how we work and introduced a level of flexibility and creatively that we would not have considered before. Going into lockdown, we furloughed two thirds of our workforce, keeping just skeleton cover in both the domestic and industrial sides of the business. The service department, however, was very much open for business as we recognised the importance of keeping vital food and equipment distribution centres up and running.

With all of the Hörmann Group manufacturing plants remaining open during the lockdown there was a steady stream of product being shipped into our Coalville headquarters, with a very clear commitment to supply from our German colleagues - a reflection of the strategic importance the Group places on the UK market.
Keeping in close and regular contact with our customers was also a key objective for us during the lockdown period. During this time we remained in constant communication with our customers letting them know that we were still very much open for business and we introduced the use of Twitter (a first for the Hörmann Group) which has proven to be a very positive means of keeping in touch. I am extremely proud of the way we worked with our customers, providing them with reassurance and practical information in a difficult time, so that they could work safely on site and we were one the first in the market back to full scale production.

Since the easing of the lockdown we have gradually brought all our staff back to full time employment, albeit we now work a mixture of time split between the office and homeworking. Our sales and service teams are all fully back visiting and assisting customers, whilst taking all the necessary precautions to ensure safe working practices and keeping everyone healthy.

We have seen a considerable bounce back in our business, with demand for our domestic products seeing an unprecedented 20% upswing from this time last year. It appears that the domestic refurbishment market is being driven by people having more disposable income because of being unable to travel and wanting to spend money and invest in their homes. This is coupled with increasing demand in the housing market, which is being driven by the freeze in stamp duty and still low interest rates. Refurbishment markets throughout Europe are seeing similar growth and Hörmann is in an ideal position to supply these.

Many parts of the UK Building and Construction market are under considerable strain with a shortage of materials and equipment and this is starting to hold some markets back. Through careful planning and access to a multi-national manufacturing Group we are consistently able to show our customers healthy stock levels and lead times. With the final play of the Brexit negotiations now underway and the transition period finishing at the end of December, we have also invested in additional stock holdings both here in Coalville and at a satellite warehouse. Our customers can be well assured that our supply chain is robust and multi-channeled and that we have invested heavily in ensuring that our processes will work whatever the outcome.
With so much emphasis being placed on keeping our business running through the pandemic it would have been only too easy to forgo plans to introduce new initiatives and products to the market. Since coming out of lockdown we have continued to develop our Hörmann Partner Standard initiative, which was launched in September. The Partner Standard has been created to reward and recognise official Hörmann dealers that continuously provide customers with first class service when supplying, installing and servicing Hörmann’s range of products. So far, interest and enthusiasm amongst our customers has been exceptional and we are busy planning further enhancements to the scheme over the coming months.

On the product side, October saw the launch of a new roller garage door to the market – the RollMatic T which complements the existing RollMatic range, offering installers a quick and easy product to install with the Hörmann badge of quality.

Service and training continue to remain high on our list of priorities and we are currently looking at innovative ways of re-introducing our Academy training sessions for 2021 using the wonders of virtual media – watch this space!

No doubt, 2021 will bring its own surprises and challenges. However, I am confident that even during the difficult times we have faced this year we have continued to provide unrivalled product and service to our customers. After all, it is all about our customers who have proven to be resilient, innovative and great fun to deal with and I hope that they can see the improvements we have made and how we are moving the business forward.

However, as is always the case, an organisation is only as good as the people who work for it. I am still relatively new to Hörmann, but this year has shown everyone in my team what they are capable of and I am extremely proud of the way they have all responded and kept smiling even when things looked bleak.

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